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**SERMONS BY**

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**Volume 10**

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## **THE UNCTION OF THE HOLY ONE**

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, Lord's Day Afternoon,  
June 8th, 1845

"But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" 1 John 2:20

The life of John, the beloved disciple, was prolonged to a very late period; and we see the wisdom and goodness of God in thus prolonging his life, that he might be a standing bulwark against the errors and heresies which overflowed the primitive church. When the Lord of life and glory was upon earth, all the bent of Satan's malice was against him; but when, according to God's elect purpose and counsel, Satan had put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ into the hands of the Jews, and the Son of God was nailed to the accursed tree (for Satan was outwitted by his own invention and out-shot by his own bow); then when Jesus had ascended into heaven, all the power of Satan was turned against his disciples. When he could not touch the Head, he aimed his arrows at the members; and no sooner did the Lord pour out upon the church the gift of the Holy Ghost in great measure on the day of Pentecost, than Satan immediately introduced all manner of error and heresy to harass the church. Now, through the kind providence of God, the life of John was prolonged to bear testimony against these errors and heresies; and thus this blessed apostle was a standing testimony against the errors that came in like a flood. In the chapter from which the text is taken, John addresses himself to the church of God as divided into three distinct classes. There are the weak and young, whom he calls "little children." There are those who are established in the divine life through exercises, trials, temptations, and through corresponding blessings; these he calls "young men." And there are those whose lives are verging upon eternity, who have received many testimonies of God's goodness and lovingkindness, and have thus become "fathers."

Speaking, then, to the church of God as thus composed, he puts them in mind of those seducers and heretics who had crept into the church. He says, "Little children, it is the last time" (that is the last dispensation): "and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists." They had heard of "antichrist," and they supposed that "antichrist" was some single person; the man of sin that was to rise. "No," says the apostle, "There are many antichrists." All that are opposed to Christ, all that deny the story of his Person, the efficacy of his work, and the power of his blood, these are antichrists, because they are all against Christ. Now these antichrists were formerly among them, members of their churches, walking, apparently, in Christian fellowship. The apostle therefore says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us." They could not receive the love of the truth because their hearts secretly loathed it. They could not endure Christian experience, because they possessed it not, nor could they submit to gospel precepts and Christian discipline, because their affections went out after the world. The truth of God, the pure truth, did not suit their impure, corrupt minds; so they went out from the church, they separated themselves, and thus abandoned the communion and community of the faithful; for "if they had been of us," in heart and soul, knit together in the bonds of the Spirit, in real spiritual union and communion, if they had thus "been of us, they would no doubt. have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." Separating from the company of God's people is a testimony that such are not of God's people, and they make it manifest that they never were in heart and soul united with the family of God when they withdraw themselves from them. But the apostle would here rather infer, "How came it to be otherwise with you?" What has preserved you faithful when others have proved unfaithful? What has kept you still leaning on and looking unto a crucified Immanuel when others have trampled on his blood and turned after idols? Was it your own wisdom, your own ability, your own righteousness, your own strength? No; not so! "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." This is what he implies, "ye have an unction from the Holy One." It is that which has kept you, it is

that which has taught you. "Ye little children, young men, and fathers, ye have an unction from the Holy One," and by that unction "ye know all things."

With God's blessing, then, this afternoon I shall endeavour to take up the words of the text as they lie before me, and show,

I. What it is to have an unction from the Holy One.

II. How by virtue of this unction from the Holy One we know all things.

I. Let us look at the simple figure contained in the text. Unction signifies literally anointing. It is indeed the same word, and is so rendered a little lower down: "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him" (verse 27). It has probably some reference to the oil or ointment which in those hot countries was employed to anoint the body, and keep it in health. But besides this there is a reference to what we read in Exod.30:22-33, where God commanded Moses to make a holy anointing oil by which the tabernacle and every vessel in it was to be consecrated; prefiguring the special anointing of the Holy Ghost on the hearts and consciences of God's people. So that as no vessel in the tabernacle was holy until it had been anointed with the consecrating oil, so no soul is holy till it has received the unction from the Holy One. No prayer, no praise, no service no sacrifice, no ordinance can be holy unless it be touched with this pure unction and divine anointing of the Holy Ghost. Now there is a divine suitability and peculiar figure here made use of:

i. Oil is of a *softening, suppling nature*. It is applied to the body to soften and supple it. So spiritually, the unction, or anointing of the oil of the Holy Ghost makes the conscience tender. Wherever that unction comes, it takes away the heart of stone, and gives a heart of flesh. It removes impenitence, unbelief, waywardness,

perverseness, self-righteousness, and self-conceit; it softens and supple and makes tender the heart and conscience, so as to fall under the power of the truth. Until the Blessed Spirit by his sacred operations upon a man's heart supple it and softens it in this way, the truth never falls with any weight or power on it. And this is the reason why hundreds hear truth without any effect; not being anointed with this unction from above, the heart of stone is not taken away, that evil heart of unbelief which rejects the solemn truth of God. But when the Blessed Spirit brings the secret, mysterious, and invisible, yet powerful anointing oil of grace into the heart, it receives the truth as from God; and truth thus coming from God penetrates into the soul. The law sounds its curses; but they never touch the conscience till the unction of the Spirit attends it. The gospel holds forth its blessings; but without this unction they never come with savour and power into the soul. Christ is spoken of in Scripture as being to some "a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Isa.53:2). And why so, but for the want of this unction of the Holy Spirit. Wherever the unction is in a man's conscience it will always make that conscience tender. So that if you see any man, whatever profession he may make, who is bold, presumptuous, daring, and self-confident, be assured that the unction of the Holy Ghost has never yet touched his heart; he has but a name to live whilst dead. Now do you watch for this in professing men and women, and in the ministers whom you hear, whether you see in them this soft, tender and meek spirit. If totally absent the unction of the Holy Ghost has not yet come upon them.

ii. Again, unction or anointing oil is of a *penetrating nature*. When ointment or oil is rubbed on anything it penetrates into the substance beneath. It does not lie on the surface; it penetrates below the surface into the very substance of that to which it is applied. So it is spiritually with respect to the unction of the Holy One on the heart and conscience. In the case of most persons who have truth in the understanding, but it is not brought into the heart by divine power, the effect is superficial. There is no depth of vital experience in their hearts; thus they resemble the

stony ground hearers of whom we read in the parable of the sower: "Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away" (Matt.13:5,6). In their case the Word has not, as a two-edged sword, pierced even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, of the joints and marrow, nor has it so sunk into their consciences as to be a discerner of the thoughts and intents of their heart. But the unction of the Holy One, the internal teaching and operation of the Spirit penetrates into every heart to which it comes. It does not merely lie on the surface; it does not merely change the creed; it does not merely alter the life. It goes deeper than creed, lip, or life; it sinks into the very roots of the conscience. If your religion has never penetrated below the surface, it lacks this grand test of having come from God. The religion of God consists in the unction of the Holy One which goes beneath the shell and the skin; which works down to the very bottom of man's heart and opens it up and lays it bare before the eyes of him with whom he has to do. It is by virtue of this unction that our secret motives are discovered, and the pride, self-righteousness, presumption, self-seeking, and all that depravity that ferments in a man's heart are laid open. It is by the penetrating effects of this divine light and life in a man's soul that all the secret workings and inward movement of his heart are discovered and laid bare. A man can never loathe himself in dust and ashes, never abhor himself as the vilest of the vile until this secret anointing oil touches his heart. He will be satisfied with a name to live, with an empty profession, till this teaching of God the Spirit goes through every mantle and veil, and searches into the very vitals, so as to sink into the secret depths of a man's spirit before God. He is never thoroughly honest to God or himself till the unction from the Holy One makes him see light in God's light.

iii. Again, unction, or oil is of a *spreading nature*. It diffuses itself, as it is termed. It is not confined to the little spot where it falls, but it extends itself in all directions. So it is with the unctuous

teaching of the Blessed Spirit in a man's heart. It spreads itself through the soul. The Lord therefore compares it to leaven (Matt.13:33). How does leaven act? It is very small in itself, a little lump; but when put into the large mass of meal, it diffuses itself through every portion of it; so that not a single crumb of the loaf is unaffected by it. Thus wherever the unction of the Holy One touches a man's heart it spreads itself, widening and extending its operations. It thus communicates divine gifts and graces wherever it comes. It bestows and draws out faith and gives repentance and godly sorrow, causes secret self-loathing, separation from the world, draws the affections upwards, makes sin hated, and Jesus and his salvation loved. Now if you had a child, and were very anxious for its growth, you would not like to see the child's arm and leg grow, and the other members remain as they were. You would not like to see its head growing much faster than the body; you would soon be afraid lest, the child die of water on the brain. And yet you will find some professors that grow only in one thing; they never grow in simplicity, prayerfulness, spirituality, watchfulness, and heavenly-mindedness. Their faith, if we are to believe their own statements, grows very much, but we never see the other graces and fruits of the Spirit grow with it. But such a monstrous growth as this is not the growth of the new man of grace. That grows equally in all its parts, and every member bears a harmonious proportion to the rest. If faith increase, hope and love grow, and when faith, hope, and love grow, humility, spirituality, and simplicity, deadness to the world, and every other grace and every other fruit of the Spirit grow in the same proportion. Wherever the unction of the Holy Spirit touches a man's heart it diffuses itself through his whole soul, and makes him wholly a new creature. It gives new motives and communicates new feelings; it enlarges and melts the heart, it spiritualises and draws the affections upwards, and brings about what the apostle declares as the effects of union with Christ: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor.5:17). Of this sacred anointing John says that it teacheth of all things, and is truth, and is no lie. Without it all our religion is a bubble, and all our



profession a lie; without it all our hopes will end in despair. See to it, then, you that fear the Lord, or desire to fear him, whether you can find any of this unction from the Holy One resting on your heart; any secret melting down of your spirit before the Lord, any breathings of affection into the bosom of Jesus, any overpowering and overwhelming sense of that love which passeth knowledge; any inward longing to enjoy him and delight yourself wholly and solely in him?

Now this unction of the Holy One will be felt only as the Lord the Spirit is pleased to bring it into your soul. It may be but once a year, once a month, or once a week. There is no fixed time for it to be given; but just at such a season and in such a manner as God sees fit. But whenever it comes into the heart, its operations and effects will be the same, the feelings it creates and the fruits it produces will be the same. O what a mercy to have one drop of this heavenly unction! To enjoy one heavenly feeling! To taste the least measure of Christ's love shed abroad in the heart! What an unspeakable mercy to have one touch, one glimpse, one glance, one communication out of the fulness of him who filleth all in all! This sanctifies all our prayers; this sanctifies the preaching, this sanctifies the ordinances, this sanctifies our public worship, this sanctifies the persons, the sacrifices, the offerings of all spiritual worshippers; as we read: "That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost" (Rom.15:16). It is the sweet unction of the Holy One that knits the hearts of the people of God together in indissoluble bonds of love and affection. By this unction from the Holy One we know the truth, believe the truth, love the truth, and are kept in the truth day by day and hour by hour. Is this the grand thing that your soul is longing after and pressing forward to enjoy? In the secret sinkings or in the secret risings of your spirit in the inmost sensations of your heart towards God, is the unction of the Holy One, the divine anointing of the Holy Ghost the chief thing you are looking for? Without this unction of the Holy One we have no tender feelings towards Jesus, no spiritual desires to know him and the power of his resurrection, without

this unction we have not a single breath of prayer, nor one spiritual panting or longing in our soul. The Lord's people have often to walk in a state of darkness; by this unction from the Holy One they are brought out of it. By this unction from the Holy One they are supported under afflictions, perplexities, and sorrows. By this unction from the Holy One when they are reviled they revile not again. By this unction from the Holy One they see the hand of God in every chastisement, in every providence, in every trial, in every grief, and in every burden. By this unction from the Holy One they can bear chastisement with meekness, and put their mouth in the dust, humbling themselves under the mighty hand of God. Every good word, every good work, every gracious thought, holy desire, and spiritual feeling do we owe to this one thing: the unction of the Holy One.

It is a solemn thing to have an unction from the Holy One, and it is a solemn thing not to have it. It is a solemn thing to live under this sweet anointing; but what a solemn thing to have a profession of religion and to know nothing of this sweet anointing! If in the great day those only will be saved who have had this unction of the Holy One, where will thousands be who have had but a name to live? If this be true, as it is, where will thousands be in the last day, when the Judge will sit upon the great white throne? But if the unction of the Holy One be upon a man he is a consecrated vessel of mercy; wrath, justice and the law cannot touch him; the anointing oil is upon him, the blessing of God rests on his soul, and he is safely hid in the hollow of God's hand from the wrath that is coming upon the world.

II. "And ye know all things." What does the apostle mean by that? Does he mean that they actually know all things, all the realms of science; all the varied departments of art? O no; the Lord's people are a very poor people, and usually a very ignorant people in matters of human knowledge. Nay; they are ignorant for the most part of the various branches of human knowledge. It is not their province to know what the learned men of this world pore over, and rack their brains about; such knowledge is not for their comfort or spiritual profit. It is a mercy to be ignorant of

what the wise men of this world consider the only things worth knowing. Nor does it mean that they know all gospel mysteries. Many of God's people are ignorant of nice points in divinity, and many a professor dead in sin and living after the course of this world is much clearer in the letter of Scripture and in the grand scheme of salvation than some of God's poor, brokenhearted family.

But by this expression we may understand that they know all things profitable, all things needful, as the apostle Peter says: "All things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Pet.1:3). What are, then, some of these all things?

(i) *They know themselves.* A knowledge of oneself is indispensable to salvation. If a man does not know himself he cannot know God; if a man does not know himself he cannot know the Son of God. To know and see oneself in one's true colours as poor, miserable, filthy, guilty sinners, lost, undone children of Adam, with a heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, with a nature thoroughly depraved, helpless, and hopeless, thus to know ourselves would stop all boasting. It would stop all thinking himself better than others, and effectually pull down all creature-righteousness, if a man once had the unction of the Holy One upon his heart and conscience, making himself known to himself.

By this unction from the Holy One we know our sinfulness, our awful, desperate, abominable sinfulness; by this unction from the Holy One we know our hypocrisy, our awful, desperate hypocrisy; by this unction from the Holy One we know our obstinacy, our perverseness, our alienation from God, our proneness to evil, and our horrible aversion to good; by this unction from the Holy One we know that we deserve the eternal wrath of God, that by nature we are at an infinite distance from his purity; that we are altogether as an unclean thing, and that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. If a man is not rooted and grounded in the knowledge of self, he never can be rooted and grounded in a knowledge of Christ as a Saviour: "The Son of man is come to

seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Therefore if a person does not know himself lost, nor groan, nor sigh on account of being lost, all that Jesus is, and all that Jesus has for poor lost sinners is hidden from his eyes. This is the reason of there being so much profession without possession; so much of the letter without the Spirit, so much doctrine without the power. But when we are taught by the Blessed Spirit to know ourselves to be lost, ruined, and undone, then we want to know there is a Saviour, and such a Saviour as alone can save us out of our lost condition. No wonder that men despise the Person of Christ, no wonder that they deny his eternal, underived deity; no wonder that they deny the eternal Sonship of Jesus and the personality and operations of God the Spirit; no wonder they trample underfoot the divine mystery of the Trinity. They have never seen themselves; they have never groaned under a burden of sin; never had a knowledge of self in its ruin and depravity.

(ii) Nor can we *know the purity and spirituality of God's holy law*, but by this unction from the Holy One.

(iii) Nor can we *know that the Scriptures are true*, or that God has revealed his mind and will in them except by virtue of this unction from the Holy One (iv) Nor can we *know there is a Jesus, a divine Mediator, an Immanuel, God with us*, but by virtue of this unction from the Holy One. We may have correct views and sound notions; we may have speculations floating on the brain; but humbling meltings and dissolving views of the Son of God in his sufferings, and agonies we cannot have but by an unction from the Holy One. To see the stream of atoning blood from his sacred body, to see his glorious robe of righteousness, justifying and covering the sins of his people, to see the Holy Mediator interceding at the right hand of the Father, and to have the soul dissolved under the sight and feeling of the mystery of Christ as a God and Saviour, nothing but an unction from the Holy One, the anointing oil of the blessed Spirit upon the heart, can give us this knowledge of him whom to know is life eternal.

(v) Nor can we *know the pardon of our sins*, but by virtue of this

unction from the Holy One. We cannot know that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin, but by virtue of the unction from the Holy One.

(vi) Nor can we *know the liberty of the gospel* or the sweet manifestations of the Lord of life and glory, nor can we walk at large, as David speaks in Psalm 119:45 (margin), nor can we enjoy the sweetness and blessedness of a gospel deliverance but by this anointing. We cannot come out of darkness into light, bondage into liberty, coldness into warmth, but by the unction from the Holy One. Nor can we know what the favour of God is, nor this loving-kindness of a tender Father, nor his watchfulness over his children as a most affectionate Parent, nor the shedding abroad of his love in the heart, nor the inward witness of the Spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry, Abba, Father, but by virtue of the unction of the Holy One.

(vii) Nor can we *know what it is to have a heavenly home*, a harbour of rest and peace, a blessed mansion above where tears are wiped from off all faces, but by virtue of this unction. How needful, then, it is, how indispensable for a soul that stands on the brink of eternity, that is exercised and troubled at the sight of death and judgment, to know whether he has any unction from the Holy One resting on his heart and conscience! But if he has the unction from the Holy One, there will be fruits and effects, there will be holy panting and desires; the heart will not be always barren, dark, and unfruitful; it will not be always grasping after the things of time and sense. There will be something in the soul as distinct from these things as light from darkness, and heaven from earth. There will be a humility, a brokenness, a tenderness, a contrition, a spirituality of affection as different from the spirit of the world as Christ from Belial. This unction of the Holy One touching a man's heart and conscience will make him more or less manifest as a new creature; it will make spiritual religion more or less the element in which his soul lives and moves; it will transform him, as the apostle speaks, "in the renewing of his mind;" old things will pass away; yea, all things will become new; with it he is happy; without it he is a wretch.

With this unction from the Holy One all is plain, blessed, and clear; without it all is dark, perplexed, and confused; with it there will be a savour in reading the Scriptures, and they will be sweeter to the soul than honey and the honeycomb; without it the Scriptures are nothing but a riddle, a weariness, and a burden. With it prayer is sweet and delightful to the soul, and prayer, and preaching, and hearing are, alike, blessed; without it all is dark and embarrassed; we feel not the importance of the things we are hearing and speaking. With this unction from the Holy One the ordinances of God are blessed; we see a grandeur and a beauty in the ordinance of baptism, and a sweetness in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. With this unction from the Holy One the people of God are highly prized as our chief companions; without it we care not for them, and feel as though we would rather go out of their company than get into it; with it eternal things are weighty and precious, the only things worth seeking or having, without it eternal things fade away, and the things of time and sense occupy the mind; it is engaged in the world, and eternal realities are out of view. O what a difference in a man's soul when he has this unction and when he has it not! When the unction rests upon a man's heart it makes as great a change as when the sun rises and night disappears; as when the spring comes and winter rolls away with its cutting blasts.

Now do you think you know the difference? Does this find out your religion? Have you these inward changes, these alternations, darkness and light, summer and winter, day and night, seed time and harvest, cold and heat; these are figures of the work of God on the soul. We need both. The corn needs the winter as well as the spring and summer. We need night as much as day; the sun as much as the absence of it. So spiritually; we need unction, and sometimes we need the withdrawing of the unction, because we should get proud, as Hart speaks:

"The heart uplifts with God's own gifts  
And makes e'en grace a snare."

Now if you have ever felt in your soul the least drop of this

unction you are saved. The little children to whom the apostle wrote, saying, "their sins are forgiven," were but weak and feeble, but with that unction everything had come to cover their sins. The feeblest, therefore, the most trembling, most doubting and fearing, the most exercised, the most self-condemned, if they have but the least drop of this unction from the Holy One on their souls, are pardoned sinners, and shall be with Christ in glory. When Moses consecrated the vessels in the tabernacle, it was not the quantity of the anointing oil that he put on which sanctified them; if he dipped his little finger in the oil and just touched the vessel it was as much consecrated as if he put both his hands in the anointing oil, and rubbed it all over. So spiritually, the least touch of this unction from God the Holy Ghost upon the conscience, the least drop of this holy oil falling from the Spirit on the heart, sanctifies, and fits it for heaven.

## **UNION WITH CHRIST IN DEATH AND LIFE**

A Sermon Preached on Lord's Day Morning, June 27, 1841, at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street

"It is a faithful saying: for if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us: if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." 2 Tim. 2:11-13

We live in a peculiar day, one in which there is a widely spread profession of religion; but it seems that in proportion to the width of the surface is the shallowness of the water. In the days of our forefathers the profession of vital godliness was like a river hemmed in by banks; persecution, and opposition on each side restrained to a narrow channel the river of profession. But these banks have been in a measure broken down; or at least considerable breaches have been made in them. The spirit of the age in which we live has taken what is called a liberal cast, and the removal of the banks has suffered the water, which was once penned in a narrow channel, to extend itself widely over the level fields. And what has been the consequence? Instead of flowing on, the river has now become stagnant; instead of being deep, it has now become shallow; instead of being scarcely visible, as being hidden by high banks, it has now so widely spread, as to arrest the eye in every direction. But vitality and depth are wanting in this wide-spread sea of water. However men may take up a profession of religion, the real work of God upon the soul will be confined to a few. The strait gate and narrow way are not to be widened by men endeavouring to force down the bars and door-posts. The words of the Lord will still stand, that "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." The real family of God are therefore in this day exposed to temptations that our ancestors knew but little of. We are so apt to learn the "way of the Gentiles;" "evil communications" so easily "corrupt good manners;" the coldness of the churches when brought into near contact is so apt to



communicate the same chillness and torpor to the living family of God. And thus one temptation of God's children in these days in which we live, is, to be satisfied with the superficial, thin, flimsy religion which is so current, instead of the deep, massive, solid, weighty religion which we find traced out in the Scriptures of truth, and which the Holy Ghost works in the hearts of God's living family.

The beginning and the end of all vital godliness consists in a union with Christ. It is the beginning, because if a man has no eternal union with Christ, he never will be brought into communion with him. And it is the end **if end it can be called, for eternity knows neither end nor beginning** of all religion, because this union will be consummated in eternal bliss. The Scriptures of the New Testament are continually setting forth the nature of the union betwixt Christ and his church. Every act of Christ upon earth—that is, every marked act, is set forth in the Scriptures of truth as being, in some way, connected with his union with the church. When he was circumcised, it is said, "we are circumcised in him" **Col 2:11**; when he was crucified, we are said to be "crucified with him" **Ga 2:20**; when he died, we are still said to have died with him **Ro 6:8**; when he was interred in the sepulchre, we are said to be "buried with him" **Ro 6:4**; when he was raised up from the tomb, we are said to have "risen with him" **Col 2:12**; and when he ascended to sit in glory, it is said still, "God has made us sit together in heavenly places in him" **Eph 2:6**. The Scriptures of truth then trace out this union of Christ and his members, in well nigh every action and suffering during his transitory abode upon earth; and thus they set forth in the most prominent light, that in all that he did and suffered, there was a union, an eternal union with his beloved people.

In the words, from which I hope, with God's blessing, to speak this morning, we have this union with Christ very experimentally and sweetly set forth. And depend upon it, friends, unless we know something in our souls of the solemn realities that are set forth in these words of Scripture, there is no evidence that the God of all grace has begun his work upon our hearts. We will

then, with God's blessing, endeavour, so far as the Lord shall enable us, to trace out, how this union with Christ is manifested in the way of experience, that the Lord may encourage us to believe, that we have felt and known something of the fruits of an eternal union with the Lord of life and glory.

"It is a faithful saying." This expression occurs more than once in the epistles of Paul; and the meaning of the words seems to be this, it is a saying in every way to be depended upon; it is a truth demanding implicit credence; it is a solemn verity which every believer is called upon to receive; it is no "cunningly devised fable;" no forged lie; but a matter pregnant with importance, a subject of deep and vital import, one which deserves to be enshrined in the conscience of every living soul, and one to which we are called to pay the utmost heed. Thus the apostle says, **1Ti 1:15**, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Whenever, then, you find a passage thus prefaced, "it is a faithful saying," it seems as though special attention was intended to be called to it.

What then is this "faithful saying" that now lies before us? It includes several branches, and yet all these branches connected with a vital union with Christ.

I. The first branch of this "faithful saying" is, "if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him." Then there is such a thing as being dead with Christ; and this death with Christ is made, so to say, a condition, or, to speak more correctly, an evidence of our being alive with Christ. The way in which God works, is one that contradicts all the reason of man; one that baffles all the plans and ideas of the creature. The way of God is to bring life out of death, faith out of unbelief, hope out of despondency. Not that the one is the parent of the other; but the Lord the Spirit, by his internal operations, brings the soul into certain states; and then, when he has brought the soul into those states, he communicates a grace which is in perfect contrast with those states, and is precisely adapted to them. Before, then, we can have a manifestation of "living with Christ," we must have some experience in our souls what it is to be "dead with Christ;"

because the apostle makes the one an evidence of the other, and not merely an evidence, but a precursor or forerunner of the other. "If we be dead with Christ, we shall also live with him."

There seem to be two ways chiefly in which the soul is "dead with Christ." If we look at the operation of the law as a manifestation of the justice of God, the law was the cause of the death of Christ—that is to say, the law being broken by the church in whose place Christ stood, he, as a substitute and a surety, stood under its curse, and that curse was death. The original penalty was, "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shall surely die;" and therefore, Jesus, when he stood forth as the surety and substitute of his people, had to endure that penalty, and die under that broken law. "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts." "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." If, then, we are to die with Christ **and if we die not with Christ, we shall not live with Christ**, if we are to die with Christ, then we must die under the law just as Jesus died under the law, or else there is no union with Christ in his death. There is no dying with Christ, unless we die in the same manner that Christ died; for unless we die experimentally as Christ died actually, we cannot be said, according to the Scriptures Of truth, to be "dead with Christ." Every one, then, that shall live with Christ, must die under the sentence of God's holy law; he must have the sentence of death in his soul, and be as effectually slain experimentally in his conscience, as ever Christ died under the weight of the law upon the cross of Calvary.

But if we look at what it is to die under the law, we are not to set up one rigorous standard of experience, and to say, that the death inflicted by the law must be a death of a uniform kind, or that the stroke of death must be inflicted in the same manner. All that are assembled here will die naturally; but perhaps there are not two persons in this chapel who shall die precisely the same death, or shall be brought by the same road into that dark valley. Some of us may die of lingering diseases; some of us may be cut down by a fever in a few days; some may gradually drop through

old age into the tomb; and some, like one of your number who has been taken away since I have been among you, some may die after an illness of a few hours. And yet all die. And were the corpses to be laid out in the same gloomy chamber, we should see no distinction between him whose death had been after the lingering illness of years, or him who had died of a rapid disease in a few days. Each would lie cold, rigid, and motionless; each would wear the same pallid features of death in his countenance. So, spiritually, all the quickened family of God must die under the law—that is, they must, by a sentence of condemnation in their souls, be reduced to that state, that the law cannot save them from "the wrath to come," that righteousness is not to be obtained from it to please God, that they are utterly lost unless Christ steps forward in their behalf, and comes into their souls as their Saviour. If a man, then, has not experienced in his conscience a sense of this inward death, he is not "dead with Christ;" and if he is not "dead with Christ," he has at present no evidence that he will live with Christ.

But further, Christ died under the weight of sin and transgression. "The Lord made to meet upon him the iniquities of us all;" "he made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." He died, therefore, under the weight of sin. The iniquities of his chosen people met upon his head, and sunk him first into death, and then into the tomb. Every living soul, then, that shall die with Christ spiritually and experimentally, must die too under the weight of sin—that is, he must know what it is so to experience the power and presence of sin in his carnal mind, so to feel the burden of his iniquities upon his guilty head, and to be so overcome and overpowered by inward transgression, as to be utterly helpless, and thoroughly unable to deliver himself from the dominion and rule of it in his heart. Now, there are some children of God, who seem, in a measure, unable to trace clearly in themselves that death under the law which I have been just speaking of. They have never been brought so powerfully under the law as others of God's children. And it is often a matter of questioning with them, and anxious questioning, too, whether they have ever had the

sentence of death in their consciences, because they have not been plunged so deep into convictions as others, whose experience they have heard and read of. But, I believe, there is a spot to which every living child of God can come, however he may question whether he has experienced the curse of the law in his conscience because he has not felt such pangs of distress as others of God's children have undergone—and that is, that he feels the power of sin in his carnal mind, bringing guilt and distress upon his conscience; that he experiences a burden upon his shoulders, which, unless removed, will sink him down into eternal perdition; and that he is deeply convinced that he has no power to subdue that sin which is continually striving and working in his carnal mind to bring him into guilt and bondage. Now, if you have never been brought to know the power of sin in your carnal mind, and to grieve and groan and sigh under the burden of it, you have no evidence that you are "dead with Christ."

But there is another way in which the soul dies with Christ. Christ not only died **under** the law and died **under** sin, but he died **unto** the law, and he died **unto** sin. As Paul speaks, "death" **which is the penalty of the law** "hath no more dominion over him;" for "in that he died, **he died unto sin once**,"—that is, Christ by fulfilling the requisitions of the law, died to the law, and when he was thus dead, the law was dead to him, and he was dead to it. When the law had killed him, it had done its utmost; when it had spent its curses upon his head, the law became a dead letter; it could do no more. It is the same with human laws: when the murderer has died upon the gallows, all the fury and vengeance of the law has been spent upon his head; the law is a dead letter to him, and he is dead to the law. So in a child of God there is not merely a dying **under** the law, but there is a dying **to** the law—that is, he being brought to a state, where he is slaughtered by the sentence of condemnation in his soul, and being utterly dead as to any expectation of righteousness from that source, he becomes dead to the law, as much dead to it, as though the law was not in existence, as much dead to it as the criminal that is taken down from the gallows and laid in his coffin, is dead to the statute against murder. Then if the Lord has killed

you by his law, and brought you to a state of absolute death, so that the law cannot bring to you one atom of righteousness in which you can stand before God accepted, by dying under the law, you are dead to the law; it is become a dead letter to you, and has no longer any power. Now, this is a point of experience, which it is one of the hardest things in the world to believe. And, in fact, no man can believe it until the Lord gives him faith to receive it, and until he can feelingly enter into the meaning of those words, "ye also are **dead to the law** by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." "But now we are delivered from the law, **that being dead** wherein we were held," **Ro 7:4,6**. We dead to it; it dead to us.

In the same way, there is a dying; **unto** sin. When a man is brought to this spot, that he cannot restrain the power of sin, that he is a poor, guilty, burdened wretch, in whose carnal mind sin will work and will reign, whether he will or not, and he then falls beneath the burden of sin in his soul, and prostrates himself at the foot of the cross without any help or without any hope in himself, then when there is some divine apprehension in his soul, through vital faith, of the substitution of Christ in his place; when there is some spiritual realisation of the death of Jesus upon the cross, and some drops of atoning blood fall from Christ's bleeding body into his heart, so as to "sprinkle it from an evil conscience," then that kindles, or rather manifests, that secret life which is received out of Christ; and having first died with Christ, then he begins manifestly to "live with Christ." But it was all along life in the soul, which really was the cause of the man's death; it was through life he felt the curses of the law; it was through life he groaned under the weight of sin; it was through life that he was enabled, in some measure, to apprehend and lay hold of the satisfaction and death of Jesus, so as to raise him up to a hope in God's mercy, and to kindle some degree of affection toward his dying Lord. He begins now to live with Christ, and to derive supplies of strength out of Christ, of which he never knew anything before, and to receive life out of Jesus, whereby he is enabled to grapple with that death which is continually working in

his carnal mind. When a man is led into any believing apprehension of a crucified Jesus, he then becomes delivered from and dead to the law. The union between the soul and the law, her first husband, is utterly broken, and Jesus, the Lord of life and glory, becomes enthroned in her affections; the second husband takes his bride, and manifests to her the riches of his dying love; and then the bride begins to live with Christ.

But in living with Christ, there will be, if I may use the expression, a dying life, or a living death, running parallel with all the experience of a child of God, who is brought to some acquaintance with the Lord Jesus. For instance, the apostle says, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." And again, he says, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Again, "I die daily." There is, then, in the life of a child of God a dying with Christ, as a matter of personal and continual experience; and just so far as we are continually dying with Christ, are we continually living with Christ. A daily death in life, and a daily life in death; and death being, as it were, that out of which life comes. For instance, there is the world, with all its charms, its attractions, its habits, and its temptations. We feel it to be a continual snare to us. Our eyes are caught with every passing vanity. The glare and blaze of the things of time and sense attract our eyes. And as the moth flits round the candle till it burns its wings, so are we continually flitting round the glare and blaze of the world, and get often sadly singed thereby. We ask the Lord, then, that he would separate us from the world, deliver us from these snares, lead us up into some sweet communion with himself, bring us out of this carnal frame, that he would frame and favour us with some blessed enlargement of soul; enabling us to look to him, embrace him in our affections, and love him with a pure heart fervently. The Lord condescends to answer the prayer, but in a way that we little dream of. Instead of answering it by bringing in some sweet manifestation of Christ, he lays guilt upon our consciences; instead of coming to us in some easy, gentle way, so as to fill our hearts with love and praise, he withdraws himself to a greater

distance than before. Fresh temptations bring us into a state of conflict, until we are forced to cast ourselves at the foot of the cross, as guilty, filthy rebels. Now, when the Lord has brought the soul there, and enables it by faith to get sight of a crucified Saviour, and by the Spirit's operation, it realises in some measure his substitution and sacrifice, there is a power communicated which separates the heart from this world and all its vanities; and getting separated in affection from the world, there is a new and inexpressible pleasure, sweetness, and blessedness felt, in pouring out the heart before him, which the world with all its vain charms never can produce within.

So with respect to sin, and the temptations to which we are continually exposed from the workings of our base heart. We may strive and struggle and resist and endeavour to overcome these temptations; but our own attempts are all ineffectual. A child might as well try to stop with his hands the coming up tide of the Thames, as a man to restrain sin by his own strength. He must be carried away by the flood of his sins, if he has no better standing; than the creature can give him. But when he is, in any measure, indulged with a sight of a dying Lord, when he gets, by faith a view of Christ's cross, and faith, hope, and love, with tenderness, sorrow, and contrition begin to rise up in his bosom, sin becomes hated, temptation is weakened, and spirituality of mind produced; and the carnal mind for a while is deadened to those base desires which before were uppermost. In this way only does the soul get withdrawn from the power of sin, and led out of the temptations that sin is continually presenting.

Thus, too, with all those worldly plans that spring from the pride of our hearts the vain ambition whereby we would seek to raise ourselves in the scale of life, and sill that hankering after respectability which so carnalises many of the family of God; when there is some entrance, by faith, into the humility of Christ, of what he was on earth, and the soul is enabled in some measure to apprehend him and his lowly image is, in some degree, stamped on the soul—what a poor, vain, wretched thing does all worldly ambition and respectability appear! We are, then,



ready to say, "Lord, if thou wilt but give me thy smile, and indulge me with the light of thy countenance, if thou wilt but drop thy lovingkindness into my heart let me be anything. Oh! let me not be seeking after great things, but let me be seeking after the light of thy countenance, and the life of thy favour, and the sweet visitation of thy dying love." These spiritual feelings deaden the pride of life; and when the soul is really brought here, it says: "Oh! let me have Christ in my heart, and I am willing to part with all that the world esteems great and fair; and all that my carnal heart is continually craving." I do not say that these feelings last long; but in this way, and in this way only, does the soul ever get really separated from the pride of life, the ambition of rising in the scale of society, and the going out after vain things, which we are continually hankering after, and yet which never have profited us, but have always issued in disappointment, if not in wounds and guilt.

II. But we go on to consider another branch of this vital union with Christ. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." There can be no suffering with Christ, until there is a vital union with Christ; and no realization of it, until the Holy Ghost manifests this vital union by making Christ known, and raising up faith in our hearts, whereby he is embraced and laid hold of. And there is no "reigning with Christ," except there first be a "suffering with Christ." I believe that reigning, not only signifies a reigning with him in glory hereafter, but also a measure of reigning with him now, by his enthroning himself in our hearts. Christ reigns now in glory. "The Father has given all things into his hands;" "he must reign until he has put all enemies under his footstool." He has now "the keys of hell and of death." This "reigning" therefore, not merely sets forth his glorious reign in the realms of bliss above, but also the manifestation of the kingdom of Christ to the soul, whereby he reigns as Lord in the heart, enthrones himself in the affections, and "brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" **2Co 10:5**. "Suffering then with Christ" is the evidence and forerunner of "reigning with him."

But whence arose Christ's sufferings? One cause of them was the temptations with which he was exercised. For though he was not circumstanced as we are, in having a nature that could fall in with the temptation, he was exercised by having his holy soul tortured, grieved, and pained by those temptations which were presented to him. It is not our carnal mind that is grieved by temptation; it loves it, it is closely allied to it, it has a sensual communion with it; but it is the new nature that is tormented and grieved and pained by temptation. So, when Satan presented his temptations to the Lord of life and glory **though there was no corrupt nature in Jesus as in us, so as to fall in with temptation, for he was perfectly holy in body and soul, nor was there any speck or spot or slightest taint of impurity in him**, yet these temptations presented to his spotless soul, created torture and grief and anguish. If the children of God, then, are "to suffer with Christ," they must suffer under temptation as Christ suffered. If we are the Lord's, we never can escape temptation—for if we are not in the path of temptation, we are out of the path that leadeth to glory. If we are not suffering, or have never suffered temptation with Christ, we shall not reign with Christ here or hereafter. Every living soul, then, must suffer temptation, for "blessed is the man that endureth temptations" **Jas 1:12**. Temptation in a living soul will produce suffering. When a child of God is tempted to infidelity, to inward blasphemy, or even to curse that which he most reverences and loves, to deny the Lord that bought him, or to commit sins which grieve the Spirit of God; these temptations must produce suffering in a tender conscience, they must be the cause of trouble in every quickened soul. We want, then, to escape these temptations, we cannot bear to have those dreadful thoughts work in our minds, those awful imaginations that are pent up and struggling to burst forth, so as to plunge us into perdition or despair. We should like to walk in some shady, quiet, secluded path, where the hot sun of temptation would never look upon and blacken us **So 1:6**; but if so, we should not suffer with Christ. The proof of our suffering with Christ is to suffer as he suffered, and therefore, as he "himself suffered, being tempted," so we must suffer being tempted too; as he had things of every kind

brought before him, which would have been snares to him, had he had a nature that could have fallen in with them **for "he was in all points tempted like as we are"**, so must we have the same snares presented to us, and suffer as he suffered, by the temptations paining our new nature, and "vexing our righteous soul" **2Pe 2:8**.

Christ also suffered from the persecutions of men. How hated, despised, and reproached he was! So no living soul can escape a measure of persecution. Though now protected by law and the usages of society from open persecution, "the scourge of the tongue" will fall upon every living child of God. They can never long escape the enmity of the world, the opposition of professors, the malicious shafts of slander, and the envenomed arrows of calumny. A living soul can never escape having his fair name and idolised character tarnished by reproach, for he is a follower of Him who was said "to have a devil and to be mad;" and "if they called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household!"

But the Lord himself upon earth, though never free from suffering, seems to have had an occasional respite from the temptations which Satan brought against him; for we read, that "when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season." His temptation, then, only ceased "for a season." So, we have perhaps had a similar experience; we have had temptations, and, through God's mercy, these temptations have not prevailed, but "when the enemy came in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifted up a standard against him." These attacks, then, have perhaps ceased for a while—we are not exposed now, it may be, to the same powerful and violent temptations that once assaulted us, and we think, that as the cannons cease to roar, we are got out of the reach of gunshot; and because this malicious enemy has not for some little season hurled his blasphemous darts into our carnal minds, we think he has exhausted the arrows of his quiver; we are inclined to hope that the Lord will ever effectually repel him, and build up a permanent hedge, as Job thought **Job 1:10**, that Satan cannot shoot

through. But the archer bides his time; he awaits the opportunity, and lurks amid the thickets in "the places of drawing water," and will perhaps come with tenfold more malice, and shoot again his fiery darts into our souls. Again, then, we must suffer, and it is the mark of a tender conscience, that it does suffer. If these fiery darts kindled no sorrow, brought no grief, produced no anguish, it would show, that there was no spiritual conscience, no new nature, no holy and living principle within that recoiled from these horrible temptations. So that the very suffering of the soul under them, is an evidence that there is life; the very recoiling and shrinking with horror from the powerful temptations of this enemy, is an evidence that we have in us a nature which is foreign to them, which sides with God against them, and therefore, being on God's side is born of God, and abhors them, because God's image is stamped upon it.

In proportion, then, as we suffer with Christ in these things, shall we reign with him, that is, his powerful reign and government and authority are made manifest by means of, and amidst the suffering. It is impossible to know anything of the reign of Christ in the soul, as Lord of all might and power, unless we are placed in circumstances where that reign is needed. What a flimsy, scanty, superficial thing is modern Calvinistic religion! I do not mean what is called "moderate Calvinism," but what is often called "high Calvinism," such as most of my hearers here profess. What a flimsy, superficial thing this for the most part is! Men take certain truths out of the word of God, and they hammer this pure gold upon the anvil of hard hearts and seared consciences, until it becomes as thin and as light as gold leaf. This gold leaf they spread over their hearers, and they go forth in all the gilded glare of gospel truth; But how different is this outside gilding, these plates from Uphaz, from the massive, weighty gold which the Spirit inwardly communicates! But those that preach and those that profess this flimsy, superficial religion, if they are of God's family, will be thrown into the furnace with their book of gold-leaf in their hands, that the fire may burn up the ochred pages, and melt the gold-leaf down into one solid ingot. If any of you have a work of grace in your hearts, and yet are gilded over by doctrinal

truth beyond your experience, you will be thrown into the furnace of affliction and of fiery temptation; and this furnace will burn away everything but the gold that is within you, though it may melt into the gilding that is without you. But depend upon it that the furnace will bring your religion into a very small compass, as the gold-leaf, which covers such an extent of surface, would make but a very small piece when reduced to a solid shape.

But I pass on to show how those that suffer with Christ reign with him. Perhaps, then, we have been suffering some persecution from the world. In the season of this persecution the Lord may pay us a visit. It was so when the man whom Jesus restored to sight was cast out of the synagogue; the Lord found him, and said unto him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" **Joh 9:35** So, when we are cast out in the world, cut off by professing churches, and begin to feel the weight of persecution, the Lord will sometimes come and drop a word into our souls, so as to bring us into his blessed presence. In times past, when I knew more of open persecution from the world, I have found the Lord in those seasons make himself precious to me, and to give me some visitation of his presence, so that I could rejoice in being counted worthy to suffer shame for his name's sake. So also when Satan has been shooting his fiery darts of temptation into the mind, and the soul has been grieving and groaning under the weight of temptations, the Lord will sometimes come and comfort it. Just as when Satan departed, angels came and ministered unto the Lord Jesus, and as in his garden of agony an angel strengthened him, so will he himself come and strengthen the soul that has been passing through this conflict, and drop some word of sweet consolation into the heart that has been grappling with all the powers of hell. As the soul, then, has been suffering with Christ, it reigns with him, or, rather, he reigns in it, by communicating his power, and shedding abroad and manifesting the strength of his grace and love in it. So, after a long conflict with sin, when a child of God has been utterly unable to overcome the raging passions of his carnal mind, when it seems as though all hope were gone, and there was no longer any strength left to fight against the power of sin within, then the

Lord will sometimes begin "to reign;" he will keep back, as it were, the temptation from coming with its former power; he will soften the conscience and melt it down, so as to hate sin; he will bring a feeling of self-loathing into the soul, so that it shall abhor itself for being so carried away, and will afford some sweet relief by dropping some testimony of his favour into the heart. This, then, is a reigning with Christ; but there can be no such reigning, unless there has been previous suffering. If the inward power of sin had never been felt, nor the weight of Satan's temptations been experienced; if the world had never shot its malicious arrows against us, there would be no desiring to be taken up into the sanctuary to enjoy communion with Christ; there would be no retiring from this persecuting world, so as to be desirous to be embraced by the arms of Jesus; there would be no separation from the professors of religion who have slandered our names, no simple desire to be satisfied with the Lord's own testimony alone, unless we had felt pained and grieved with their accusations. So that just in proportion as the soul suffers with Christ, and walks in his footsteps, is as he was, and is led into some conformity to his image—just so, and in that measure only, does it reign with Christ. And he that reigns with Christ, by having the kingdom of God set up in his heart here, will reign with Christ hereafter in the realms of never-ending day. See, then, what an empty, vain, unscriptural doctrine that is, that we are always to stand in what they call the liberty of the Gospel, always to be posted upon some lofty mountain, away from sin, away from the world, away from temptation, and away from the devil. Why, the word of God stamps the lie upon such a religion; God the Holy Ghost never revealed such a religion as that. The religion of the Bible has two sides to it. But the profession that I am speaking against is like a portrait that you may see in a picture-shop. There is one side pretty enough; it seems almost like life; but look behind the picture, there is nothing there but some dirty canvas; there is no **body**—no substance. So it is with that pretty looking religion which a man may take from one text and another. He puts the colours upon his palette, and sketches out a portrait, which at first sight seems a living man. But turn it, and look at the back; why, it is nothing but a piece of canvas; there is no life, no body,

no form, no reality—it is an imitation, a picture, and that is all. The religion of the Holy Ghost has a life in it, a substance **for the saints "inherit substance"**; a power, for it has two sides to it. It has not a half religion, but a whole religion, one which comes down from the Father of lights, all whose works are stamped with perfection and unity. But this one-sided religion talks of living with Christ, without any dying with him, of reigning with Christ, without suffering with him; soaring I know not where above doubts and fears, temptations and soul trouble. Why, the Scriptures of truth testify in every page against such a religion. The word of God stamps it as the religion of a hypocrite, that "his excellency mounts up to the heavens, and his head reaches unto the clouds" **Job 20:6**. The highest attainment here below is suffering with Christ; and therefore the apostle prays that "he might know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the **fellowship of his sufferings**." It was the cry of his soul to know, feel, and enter into Christ's sufferings, and have communion with Christ in them, that he, by knowing what it was to walk in the footsteps of the tempted, tried, distressed, and suffering Jesus, might enter into the glory of Christ, which glory is only made known by walking in this path.

If we would reign, then, with Christ here and hereafter, we must first suffer with him. I appeal to your consciences, whether you ever had a single drop of enjoyment in your soul, a single look of love from Jesus, or a single testimony from God that you were his, except by walking in this path. A tender conscience will give an honest verdict, for it is an unbribable jury; and conscience will say, that when you are unexercised, untried, untempted, there is no sweet visit from the Lord, no melting of heart, no inward testimony; your judgment may remain firm in the doctrines, but as to a feeling realization of truth in the soul, and blessed communion with the Lord of life and glory, you know, and conscience will bear its testimony to my words, you know that you have no vital apprehension of divine realities but in the path of trial, temptation, and difficulty. In this path alone is there any vital enjoyment of the Lord Jesus Christ. And all knowledge of Christ that is not a living realisation of his grace in the soul, is but

a name, a profession, a theory, a standing in the letter not in the Spirit, in the form not in the power.

III. "If we deny him, he also will deny us," that is the next branch. As I have already occupied so much time, I must not detain you long, and therefore I shall but briefly allude to it. The apostle here seems partly to speak, as the Scriptures do sometimes, upon the broad basis of profession. The words have a twofold meaning; they apply to professors and they apply to possessors. "If we deny him"—he speaks as a member of the visible church, in which there are always wheat and tares, sheep and goats. As he speaks in the Epistle to the Hebrews **Heb 4:11**; "Let **us** labour, therefore, to enter into that rest." "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" **Heb 2:3** Not that there was any doubt whether he had entered into rest, or that there was any risk of his neglecting Christ's salvation; but he expresses himself as one of a number, some of whom would neglect it. Thus, the expression, "if we deny him, he will deny us," seems to have a twofold meaning. There were those in the Church who would deny him, for there were those who never knew him experimentally, and when the trial came, they would act as Judas acted. And then there were those who were real followers of him, but when put to the test, might act as Peter acted. Judas denied him; but Judas was a reprobate. Peter denied him; but Peter was a chosen vessel. Those that deny him, as Judas denied him, he will deny before the angels of God.

But then there is a denying him in our experience; and as we deny him in experience, he will deny us in manifestation. Sometimes we deny him our affections. The world gets hold of us; those whom we love in the flesh twine themselves round our hearts; the things of time and sense begin to be pleasant and sweet to us; we gradually get carnal; cold, and dead. This is a denying of Christ inwardly. Then he will deny us; that is, he will not drop his love into a soul that is pre-occupied by an idol. If we are cold to him, he will be shy with us; and if we are negligent of his favour and his grace, he will requite us by withholding them.



Again, if we deny him by refusing to confess him before men, he will deny his testimony to our souls that we are his. If we turn aside through the fear of man, and deny Christ, we go home with a guilty conscience, and he denies us every token for good. Thus, as we deny Christ in the various branches of inward experience or outward conduct, he denies us—denies us his love, denies us the sweet visitations of his favour, denies us the testimony of his grace, denies us every thing which we want to have given to us, and denies us access when we desire to come near him.

But then comes the saving clause, "If we believe not, he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself." If a child of God goes on so, and he is cold to Christ, and Christ is shy with him and denies his manifestations, how will the matter end? Shall they go on like two friends who have formerly been united? one gets cold, and the other becomes shy, separation comes on and alienates the one from the other, till they become altogether enemies. No. Here is the saving clause, "If we believe not, he abideth faithful." "We believe not;" we get shut up in unbelief, become so carnalised as altogether to doubt whether anything we have felt was from him; unable to realise, unable to feel any power, or any faith. "But he abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself"—he will deny **us**, but "he cannot deny **himself**"—he will deny us, but "he cannot deny" that love which is in his bosom; he will deny the manifestation, but "he cannot deny" the reality; he will deny the taste of love, but "he cannot deny" the existence of love in his own bosom; he will deny the favours, but "he cannot deny" his own tender heart from which all those favours come. He is like a tender parent: when the child offends him, the parent denies him those things which he would otherwise give him, those little testimonies of affection which otherwise he would grant; but he cannot deny **himself**—he is still a father, he has still the love of a father, he has still the feelings of a father. So the Lord of life and glory "abideth faithful;" "he cannot deny himself." He will not deny his own perfections; he will not deny his own work upon the cross; he will not deny his own glory, nor that blessed satisfaction which he feels in bringing his people to the enjoyment of himself. "He

abideth faithful," however unbelieving their hearts may be. And why? because his elect have an eternal union with him.

Then, friends, so far as we have a union with Christ, we shall know these things in our experience. If, then, you know nothing of these things, if you have never realized these things, I ask you, I appeal to conscience, where is your evidence that you are partakers of the life of God in your soul? And if not partakers of divine life, let honest conscience testify in what spot you stand, and what you are before the eyes of a heart-searching God.

## The Valley of Achor for a Door of Hope

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, April 14, 1861

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." Hosea 2:14, 15

The prophetic books of the Old Testament contain, stored up in them, a rich mine of instruction and edification for the Church of God. But though the mine is so rich, it is proportionately deep; though the ore is so precious, it is locked up in its darkest recesses. Thus we may say of this mine, as Job speaks of another no less deep and valuable, "The stones of it are the place of sapphires: and it hath dust of gold." But we may add, with him, "There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen; seeing that it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air." (Job 28:6, 7, 21.) But, besides these inherent difficulties of the prophetic scriptures, an additional hindrance arises to the right understanding of them from this circumstance, that persons either do not know, or do not bear sufficiently in mind, that they are susceptible of various kinds of interpretation. To explain my meaning more distinctly, let me observe that the interpretation of the prophetic books of the Old Testament is frequently, if not universally, of a three-fold nature:—First, there is the *literal and historical* interpretation, which was suitable to the time, place, and circumstances under which the prophecy was first and originally delivered. Secondly, there is the *spiritual and experimental* interpretation, which the Holy Ghost has couched in the letter for the edification of the Church of God in all time. And, thirdly, there is the *future or prophetic interpretation*, when these prophecies shall be accomplished in their full meaning, and every jot and tittle of

them receive a complete fulfilment. Until, therefore, that period arrive, very much of the prophetic scriptures must lie buried in obscurity. This full accomplishment will take place in those times of which the apostle Peter speaks in the Acts of the Apostles, as, "The times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:21.) Take, as an instance to illustrate more fully my meaning, this second chapter of Hosea: it is very difficult to understand, but let us see whether we can bring to bear upon it the modes of interpretation which I have just mentioned.

View it first, then, as the language *originally* addressed by the mouth of God through Hosea to the ten tribes of Israel who had separated from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, broken off their allegiance to the house of David, and dissolved their connection with the temple and the sacrifices of God at Jerusalem. See how it bears upon their case, where the Lord says, for instance, "Their mother hath played the harlot: she that hath conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink." Here the Lord declares how Israel had sinned against him in the times of Jeroboam; and how that false church which had been set up had "played the harlot and done shamefully" in forsaking the true service of God to worship the golden calves at Dan and Bethel; and that this was done from worldly motives and covetous desires, for "bread and water, wool and flax, oil and drink." But, threatening her with future judgments, he adds, "I will also cause her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts:" which prediction was literally accomplished when, first Hazael, and afterwards Tiglath-pileser invaded the land, carried away the people into captivity, and broke them up so completely as a nation that they never held up their head as a people or a church again.

But now view it in a *spiritual and experimental* sense, and see how the whole chapter bears upon the experience of the saint of God. In his forsaking the God of all his mercies, in his leaving the

Fountain of living waters, and hewing out cisterns that hold no water, does he not resemble backsliding Israel of old? To him, therefore, the words apply in an experimental sense, as I shall presently more fully show.

But cast your eyes *forward* into futurity, if the Lord is pleased to touch the lids with his anointing eye-salve, and see how this chapter, at least as regards the promises contained in it, will be fully and perfectly accomplished in those glorious days when the Lord shall restore his ancient people Israel, and graft them into the true olive tree so as to partake of its root and fatness. (Rom. 11:23.)

But as the spiritual and experimental interpretation is that which chiefly concerns the Church of God, and that from which we are to draw our supplies of instruction and consolation, I shall this morning chiefly confine myself to that signification; and, in so doing, I shall, with God's help and blessing, bring before you the Lord's words in our text, and thus divide them by showing you:

I.—*First*, the way in which God *allures* his people, *by the drawings of his grace*.

II.—*Secondly*, where he brings them by means of these allurements: *"into the wilderness."*

III.—*Thirdly*, what he does to them when he has brought them there: *he speaks comfortably unto them; gives them their vineyards from thence; and opens in the valley of Achor a door of hope*.

IV.—*Fourthly*, what is the blessed *fruit and effect* of these gracious dealings of God with them in the wilderness: that *"they sing there as in the days of their youth, and as in the day when they came up out of the land of Egypt."*

We cannot, however, well understand these dealings of God with the souls of his people unless we first cast our eye upon the preceding part of the chapter. The Lord there lays open the sins

that a soul, even a gracious soul, is capable of committing; what it does and ever will do when not restrained by his powerful grace. "Their mother," he says, "hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that gave me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink. Here is the opening up of what we are by nature, what our carnal mind is ever bent upon, what we do or are capable of doing, except as held back by the watchful providence or unceasing grace and goodness of the Lord. These "lovers" of ours are ancient sins and former lusts that still crave for gratification. To these sometimes the carnal mind looks back and says, "Where are my lovers that gave me my bread and my water? Where are those former delights that so pleased my vile passions, and so gratified my base desires?" These lovers, then, are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, all which, except as subdued by sovereign grace, still work in our depraved nature, and seek to regain their ancient sway. But the Lord here, for the most part, mercifully interposes, nor will he usually let his children do what they fain would do, or be what they fain would be. He says, therefore, "Behold, I will hedge all thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths." The Lord, in his providence or in his grace, prevents the carnal mind from carrying out its base desires; hedges up the way with thorns, by which we may spiritually understand prickings of conscience, stings of remorse, pangs of compunction, which are so many thorny and briery hedges that fence up the way of transgression, and thus prevent the carnal mind from breaking forth into its old paths, and going after these ancient lovers to renew its ungodly alliance with them. A hedge of thorns being set up by the grace of God, the soul is unable to break through this strong fence, because the moment that it seeks to get through it or over it, every part of it presents a pricking brier or a sharp and strong thorn, which wound and pierce the conscience. What infinite mercy, what surpassing grace, are hereby manifested! Were the conscience not made thus tender so as to feel the pricking brier, we can hardly tell what might be the fearful consequence, or into what a miserable abyss of sin and transgression the soul would not fall. But these

lacerating briars produce compunction of soul before God; for finding, as the Lord speaks, that she "shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them," there comes a longing in her mind for purer pleasures and holier delights than her adulterous lovers could give her; and thus a change in her feelings is produced, a revolution in her desires. "Then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now." The idea is of an adulterous wife contrasting the innocent enjoyments of her first wedded love with the state of misery into which she had been betrayed by base seducers; and thus the soul spiritually contrasts its former enjoyment of the Lord's presence and power with its present state of darkness and desertion. "Where," she would say, "are my former delights, my ancient joys, and the sweetness I had in days now passed in knowing, serving, and worshipping the Lord? Ah! he was a kind and loving husband to me in those days. I will return to him if he will graciously permit me, for it was better with me when I could walk in the light of his countenance than since I have been seeking for my lovers, and reaping nothing but guilt, death, and condemnation." The Lord then goes on to say, "Now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of my hand. I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees." By this is intimated the Lord's chastising hand; that as literally he punished backsliding Israel by sending her into captivity, so will he put into bondage his backsliding people, and will cause their mirth, their feast days, their new moons, and their sabbaths to cease; meaning thereby that he will deprive them of the enjoyment of his presence and of his manifested favour.

But not to detain you too long upon the introduction to our subject, this work which I have thus hastily run through is all preparatory to those gracious dealings which are more especially and particularly unfolded in the words of our text.

I.—We would, therefore, now come to the first point, "*Behold, I*

*will allure her.*" There is a gracious word in the prophet Jeremiah, the application of which has been blessed to many a soul that truly fears God. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." (Jer. 31:3.) We need not only to be driven by the law, but to be drawn by the gospel; we want not only the thunders of Mount Sinai, but the dew and rain that fall upon Mount Sion; to enjoy the smile of God's love as well as experience the frown of his anger; for there are the "cords of a man and the bands of love" whereby the Lord draws the soul near unto himself, as well as those terrors of the Lord whereby it is distracted. (Hosea 11:4; Psa1. 88:15.) But how does God fulfil this word in the soul's happy experience, "*Behold, I will allure her?*"

1. First, he often *sets before the eyes* of the understanding and *reveals* with grace and power to the heart the Son of his love, Jesus, the Christ of God. But wherever there is a view of Jesus by faith, there is an attractive influence attending the sight, according to the words of our blessed Lord, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." (John 12:32.) Wherever, then, Jesus is graciously and experimentally manifested to the soul, and made known by any sweet revelation of his glorious Person, atoning blood, and finished work, a secret yet sacred power is put forth, whereby we are drawn unto him, and every grace of the Spirit flows toward him as towards its attractive centre. Thus Jeremiah speaks of the saints of God as coming and singing in the height of Zion, and *flowing* together to the goodness of the Lord. (Jer. 31:12.) And thus Isaiah speaks to the church of God, "Then thou shalt see and *flow* together, and thine heart shall fear [or, as the word rather means, shall "palpitate" with love and joy], and be enlarged." (Isaiah 60:5.) This view of Christ by faith is what the apostle speaks of to the Galatians, as Jesus evidently set forth before their eyes. (Gal. 3:1.) As thus set before our eyes, he becomes the object of our faith to look at; ("Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth;") "the altogether lovely," to whom love flows; and the Intercessor within the veil in whom hope effectually anchors. As, then, the blessed Lord is revealed to the soul by the power of



God, his glorious Person held up before the eyes of the spiritual understanding, his blood and righteousness discovered to the conscience, and his suitability to all our wants and woes experimentally manifested, the blessed Spirit raises up a living faith whereby he is looked unto and laid hold of, and thus he becomes precious to all that believe in his name. Is not all this in strict accordance with the scriptures? for does not our Lord say, "It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God. Every man, therefore, that hath heard and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me?" (John 6:45.) And how true it is that without this heavenly teaching and this divine drawing no one can really and effectually come unto Jesus; for he himself says, "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." (John 6:41.)

2. But besides this—for all are not favoured and blessed with very clear manifestations of the Son of God to their souls—sometimes the Lord allures by *sending his word with power into the heart*. Thus the apostle speaks of his gospel coming to the Thessalonians, "Not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." (1 Thess. 1:5.) Paul came and preached the gospel to them; he set forth salvation through the blood of the Lamb; the Holy Ghost attended the word with power; it came to their heart with much assurance that it was the very truth of God; and they received it as the very voice of God speaking to them through the apostle's lips. What was the effect? "They turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." Was not this the fruit of his all-victorious grace, and were they not thus allured into his service by the power of God?

3. But again: sometimes the Lord, without applying his word with any great and distinguishing power to the heart, makes *his truth to drop* with a measure of sweetness into the soul. This is as rain or dew, according to his own gracious declaration, "My doctrine shall drop like the rain; my speech shall distil as the dew." (Deut. 32:2.) Thus the precious ointment upon the head of Aaron is compared to "the dew of Hermon and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, for there the Lord commanded the

blessing, even life for evermore." (Psal. 133:2, 3.) The dropping, then, of his doctrine, or, as the word means, his "teaching," as rain, and the distilling of his gracious speech as dew, kindle in the soul a love of the truth, and wherever this is felt there is salvation, for we read of those who perish that they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. (2 Thess. 2:10.) There is a receiving of the truth, and a receiving of the love of the truth. These two things widely differ. To receive the truth will not necessarily save; for many receive the truth who never receive the love of the truth. Professors by thousands receive the truth into their judgment, and adopt the plan of salvation as their creed; but are neither saved nor sanctified thereby. But to receive the love of the truth by the truth as it is in Jesus being made sweet and precious to the soul, is to receive salvation itself. It is in this way that the gospel is made the power of God unto salvation; and therefore the apostle, speaking of "the preaching of the cross," says that "it is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." Now it is impossible that this power should be felt without its having an alluring effect upon the soul, whereby it comes out from every evil thing and cleaves to the Lord with purpose of heart.

4. But sometimes the Lord allures by *applying a promise*, an invitation, a sweet encouragement, an unfolding for a moment of his lovely face, and giving a transient glimpse of his grace and glory. Whenever he puts forth this sacred power it has a drawing influence. This made the spouse say, "Draw me, we will run after thee;" feeling her need of this drawing power which God puts forth by the operations of his Spirit and grace upon a willing heart. We, therefore, read of God's people being "made willing in the day of his power" (Psl. 110:3); and to this points the ancient promise made to Japheth. "God shall enlarge [or, as it is in the margin, "persuade"] Japheth." (Gen. 9:27.) The word "enlarge" means literally to "open," and thus persuade or entice, or, as it is rendered in our text, "allure," for it is the same word in the original in both Genesis and Hosea. In these, then, and various other ways the Lord allures his people, and by giving them a taste of his beauty and blessedness, with some sense of his dying

love, allures them into the wilderness, according to his own words by the prophet Jeremiah, "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thy espousals, when then wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." (Jer. 2:2.)

II.—But, to come to our second point, *where* does the Lord by these dealings with their consciences bring his people?—for these allurings are to bring them to a certain point. "*Into the wilderness.*" They would not go there voluntarily: it is a place too desert for them to enter except as allured in a special manner by the grace and led by the power of God. Nor do they for the most part know where the Lord is taking them to. They follow his drawings; they are led by his allurings; they listen to his persuading voice, trusting to him as to an unerring Guide. But they know not the scene of desolation into which he is bringing them: this the Lord usually conceals from their eyes. He allures and they follow, but he does not tell them what he is going to do with them, or where he intends to take them. He hides his gracious purposes, that he may afterwards bring them more clearly to light. Was not this true in a literal sense of the children of Israel in coming up out of Egypt? Were not they, in a sense, allured into the wilderness by eating the paschal lamb, by passing through the Red Sea, and being baptised in the cloud and in the sea, and especially by the cloudy pillar that went before them and led them into the wilderness? Thus the literal Israel was a type and figure of the spiritual Israel.

But look at the place whither he brings his people—*the wilderness*. This is a type and figure much used by the Holy Spirit, and conveys to us much deep and profitable instruction. Let us see if we can penetrate, with God's help and blessing, into the meaning of the emblem.

1. First, then, the wilderness is an *isolated, solitary spot*, far, far away from cities, and towns, and other busy haunts of men; a remote and often dreary abode, where there is no intruding eye to mark the wanderer's steps, where there is no listening ear to hear his sighs and cries. Adopting this idea, we may see from it

how the Lord, when he puts forth his sacred power upon the heart to allure his people into the wilderness, brings them into a spot where in solitude and silence they may be separated from every one but himself. The church is spoken of in this chapter as "following after her lovers," but "she could not overtake them;" as she could not find them, they would not seek for her. No inclination have they to follow her into the wilderness: if attracted by her charms they should seek again to entangle her in their embrace, they would immediately leave her upon the edge of the desert. No earthly lover follows her into the wilderness: such cannot bear its solitude. Religion is dull work to the carnal mind; to be alone leaves it too much open to the stings of conscience. To drive dull care away by company and amusements, and shut out all thoughts of death and judgment well suits the natural mind of man. The wilderness, therefore, we take as an emblem of being alone with God, coming out of the world, away from sin and worldly company, out of everything carnal, sensual, and earthly, and being brought into that solemn spot where there are secret, sacred, and solitary dealings with God. Thus, our blessed Lord was in the wilderness forty days, and was with wild beasts. (Mark 1:13.) Far away from the haunts of men, tempted of Satan, ministered unto by angels, in the wilderness our adorable Mediator held holy fellowship with his heavenly Father. So John the Baptist, his forerunner, was in the wilderness with his "raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loin: and his meat was locusts and wild honey." (Matt. 3:4.) All this was indicative of separation from the world, and a living in solitude, having no intercourse with any but God. Until then we are brought into the wilderness, we have no withdrawal from the creature, no solitary dealings with the heart-searching Jehovah; nor are we separated in heart and spirit from the world without, or the world within, so as to have any real spiritual intercourse with the God of heaven.

2. But look at the wilderness under another character: it is represented throughout the word of God as a *place of trial and affliction*. It was so in an especial manner to the children of Israel of old. No sooner did they enter into the wilderness than their

trials began: they had no water to drink, no food to eat; a burning sun above, a parched sand below, dried up, as they complained, their very soul. They remembered the "fish which they ate in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic; but now, said they, our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all besides this manna before our eyes." (Num. 11:5, 6.) So it is in grace. The wilderness is a place of trial and affliction; but when the Lord is alluring the soul into it by his teachings and manifestations, it little dreams of the trials and afflictions into which the Lord is bringing it. In the case of the children of Israel, we see how their faith was tried by the perils and hardships of the wilderness; we also see what rebellion and murmuring and fretfulness were manifested by them under it. They were not in themselves worse than other people; but the wilderness brought to light the sins of their heart. So it is with the people of God; wilderness trials bring to light the rebellion, unbelief, and fretfulness of the carnal mind; and it is this discovery of the evils of the heart under affliction that makes the wilderness a place of such deep and continual trial.

3. But take another idea: the wilderness *a place of temptation*. It was so with the children of Israel. The wilderness brought out the lusts of their heart; and therefore we read that "they lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert." (Psal 106:14.) God tempted them and they tempted God: that is, God tried their faith and obedience, and they tried God's faithfulness and patience. Sometimes they were tempted by hunger; then they were tempted by thirst; hot burning winds; fiery flying serpents; wandering Arabs; pursuing enemies, such as Amalek and Edom; a mixed multitude always lusting to return into Egypt; and at last the wrath of God wearing them out till their carcasses fell in the wilderness; all these things tempted them to unbelief and rebellion. Nay, more, the curse of a fiery law; the judgments of God against transgressors; the strictness of the legal ordinances, and the condemnation and bondage of the covenant under which they were, all made the wilderness a place of temptation, so that none came out of it unharmed but the preserved of God. In a similar way the wilderness is a place of

temptation to all who are brought into it. Nay, our blessed Lord himself was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, there to endure temptation, there to meet Satan face to face, and there to undergo those fiery trials by which he himself "having suffered, being tempted, is able to succour them that are tempted."

4. But take another idea, equally scriptural, which is, that the wilderness is a place in which *there is neither house nor home*. It is called "a land not sown" (Jer. 2:2); that is, not cultivated like other lands; in which therefore there is no farm or homestead, no green field or waving corn, but a place in itself so destitute of food that the traveller must perish unless supplied from some other source. In this sense, the wilderness may spiritually represent those spots in soul experience, where there is no help, strength, or refuge in the creature; in which but for some supply, I might say some miraculous supply from heaven, we must perish. What edge this gave to the complaints of the children of Israel, "Ye have brought us forth into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." (Ex. 16:3.) Were they not naturally in a pitiable spot when they thus first came into the wilderness? But even afterwards there was no water for them but what came from the rock, no food but the manna which fell from heaven; so that even amidst their very supply, they were ever reminded that they were dependent upon God every day. So when we are taken into the wilderness, we learn through its trials and temptations, that we have neither strength nor wisdom nor righteousness; in fact, that we have nothing and are nothing, and are thus made spiritually and experimentally the neediest of all paupers, and most abject of all dependents upon the sovereign bounty of God.

You little thought, when the Lord was graciously dealing with your soul and giving you to taste something of the sweetness of manifested mercy and the blessings of his grace, that this was all intended to allure you into the wilderness where God might speak with you face to face, and there teach you lessons which are to be learnt in no other spot. It is there we learn the evils of the heart; the darkness of our understanding; the alienation of our affections; the wretched unbelief, infidelity, murmuring and

fretfulness of our fallen nature; and there also we learn the wondrous long-suffering, patience, and forbearance of God.

III. But to pass on to our third point, when we come into the wilderness under these alluring drawings of God, then the Lord *carries on a certain work*, of which he has spoken in the text as threefold, and which I shall therefore, adopting that division, now bring before you.

i. The first promise is that he will "*speak comfortably unto her.*" It is in the margin "*to her heart;*" and I shall adopt that reading as my first explanation of the meaning of the word "*comfortably.*" God speaks to the heart: that is the special characteristic of his voice. Men may speak to the ear, and they can do no more; but God speaks to the heart, for it is there that his voice alone is heard. All religion first and last lies in a man's heart. He may have his head well furnished with notions, yet a heart destitute of grace. But not so with the vessels of mercy, for they "*believe with the heart unto righteousness;*" and it is by the voice of God heard in the heart that a saving faith is raised up in the soul. There God must speak if there is to be any heart religion, any sound or saving experience, any knowledge of the truth so as to be blessed and saved thereby. But in the wilderness we learn the deep necessity there is that God should speak to our heart. We want the Lord himself to speak and the Lord alone; and to speak such words as shall reach our heart and enter with a divine power into our conscience. When you are in the wilderness, you have no friend, no creature help, no worldly comfort: these have all abandoned you. God has led you into the wilderness to bereave you of these earthly ties, of these creature refuges and vain hopes, that he may himself speak to your soul. If, then, you are separated from the world by being brought into the wilderness; if you are passing through trials and afflictions; if you are exercised with a variety of temptations, and are brought into that spot where the creature yields neither help nor hope, then you are made to see and feel that nothing but God's voice speaking with power to your soul can give you any solid ground of rest or peace. Thus in the wilderness we learn not only the most painful,

but the most profitable lessons that God can teach us. There we are stripped of all our own righteousness; there we see the end of all our own wisdom; and there all our native strength and creature confidence fail, give way, and come to nought. But as these fail, they teach us the necessity, the indispensable necessity of looking to the Lord that he may be our all in all. The thirst in the wilderness taught the children of Israel the necessity and blessedness of water out of the rock; the hunger of the wilderness taught them the necessity and the blessedness of manna from heaven. As, then, in the wilderness by every trial and temptation, our heart is more laid open to our view; as trials more deeply perplex, as afflictions more heavily press, and temptations more continually annoy, we come to this spot in our own conscience: "God himself must be my all in all: it is he and he alone that must save me; from him my hope must come; from him all my strength, happiness, and consolation; I have nothing but what he gives and am nothing but what he makes." Is not this the language of the way-worn pilgrim in the wilderness? Thus, by these teachings and operations of the Spirit of God upon your heart, you come to this point, that God himself must speak to your heart or you have nothing on which you can hang; nothing to which you can look. Is not this profitable? It may be painful; it *is* painful; but it is profitable, because by it we learn to look to the Lord and the Lord alone, and this must ever be a blessed lesson to learn for every child of God.

But take the words as they stand, "I will *speak comfortably* unto her." We have almost the same words in Isaiah 40:1, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem." It is in the margin as it is also in our text, "Speak *to the heart* of Jerusalem." But what are these comfortable tidings which are to be announced to her, spoken to her very heart? What are those things which alone can give her true comfort? "Tell her," first says the Lord, "that her *warfare is accomplished*;" that is, that peace is now her happy portion, for her warfare is ceased, her foes defeated, her battles won, her long, hard, toilsome "appointed time" of military service [margin] fulfilled, and that now she may, at least for a season, rest in the



Lord as the all-victorious Captain of her salvation. But is there no other comfortable message for her? Yes. Tell her secondly, says the Lord, "that *her iniquity is pardoned.*" These are the best of all possible tidings, the most blessed as the most suitable of all good news. The manifested pardon of sin is the best gift of God's grace that can reach a sinner's heart; and indeed without it true comfort there is none. But is there no other message to Zion's heart? Yes. The Lord, thirdly, assures her that "she *hath received* of the Lord's hand *double for all her sins.*" What means this "double?" I understand by it the rich superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of sin; that is, the Lord is not content simply to pardon, simply to bless with mercy and peace, but will give them so superaboundingly that they shall be double of all her past guilt and sorrow.

2. But again, the Lord speaks comfortably when he assures the soul of *its interest in the atoning blood* and justifying obedience of his dear Son. Many of the dear saints of God are often very much tried as to their interest in these precious realities. They cannot give up their hope; they cannot altogether deny what God has done for their souls; and yet many anxious doubts and fears distress their mind as to their real interest in the atoning blood and finished work of the Son of God. Satan often takes great advantage of this state of doubt and uncertainty to harass and perplex their mind, and they are thus brought to this point that the Lord alone can satisfy them, that indeed he died for them. When, then, he speaks comfortably unto them, he drops a sweet promise or a gracious word into their heart, and thus makes their interest in atoning blood and dying love plain and clear. This may seem to fall short of a full manifestation of pardoning love, for it does not come exactly in that way; and yet it is in fact the same, for wherever there is a clear discovery of interest in atoning blood there pardon is virtually manifested, for if they have a place in the heart of Jesus and an interest in the work of Jesus, "there is no condemnation" to them as being thus manifestly "in him" (Rom. 8:1); and if no condemnation there must be justification, and, if justification, pardon and peace. (Rom. 5:1.)

3. But as the Lord's people after they have received manifested mercy are brought into the wilderness, and indeed are allured into it by the drawings of everlasting love, and as their trials and afflictions in it are usually very great, they want *words from God's own mouth* to support and comfort them under their various and severe afflictions. We have seen already that the Lord brings them into the wilderness, that in that secluded, solitary spot he may himself speak to their heart. Little was spoken by the Lord to his people when in Egypt, except to kill and eat the paschal lamb. He reserved his voice till he had got them into the wilderness, and could talk with them face to face, sometimes "in the mount out of the midst of the fire" (Deut. 5:4), and sometimes "in the cloudy pillar." (Psal. 99:7.) Thus also he speaks in Ezekiel, "And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord God." When, then, the Lord is pleased to apply some gracious word or sweet promise to their mind, or to bring home a precious portion of his truth to their heart, he speaks comfortably unto them, and by thus assuring them of their interest in his love and mercy, he raises up their drooping spirit and gives them power and strength to bear the weight of every cross laid upon their shoulders.

4. But again, as another instance of speaking comfortably unto them, the Lord from time to time *opens up his past dealings* with his people, casts a ray of light on the way that he has led them in the wilderness, renews and ratifies his former work upon their souls, and thus gives them a sweet testimony that what they experienced in times past was really wrought by his gracious hand in the depths of their conscience.

ii. But to pass on to a second wilderness blessing, he adds, "I will give her her vineyards from thence." What is it that causes many of the Lord's family to go heavily, being burdened? Their want of fruit: that they cannot live as they earnestly desire to the glory of God. They desire to walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long; to be fruitful in heart, in lip, and life. They would be spiritually

minded, which they know is life and peace; they would ever be enjoying the presence of the Lord; they would glorify him in all that they say and do. But alas! they cannot be what they would, for they find evil continually working in their heart. The deep-seated corruptions of their fallen nature defile and pollute everything they think, say, and do; and this feeling sense of their innate depravity, and of their total contrariety to all that purity and holiness which they would desire to possess as followers of Christ, casts them down at times into great trouble and distress as well as bondage and confusion of mind. But the Lord still means to make them fruitful in every good word and work, to grant them the desires of their heart, and enable them to live to his praise. How, then, does he effect this? He allures them into the wilderness; thus draws them away from everything that entangles their mind and captivates their affections; brings them into that secret spot where all without and within is a barren waste; shows them the world in its true colours as filled with thorns and briers; and that vanity and vexation of spirit are all it can give. The experience of these things makes them grieve and mourn under the workings of sin in themselves, and as touched with sympathising affections, under a view of the miseries whereby they are surrounded as the lot of all the children of God. This, then, is the fitting spot where the Lord is pleased to speak to the heart of his mourners in Zion, and reveal comforting words to their soul; and as it is under the gracious feelings thus produced, that fruit is borne to the praise and glory of God, it may be truly said that he gives them their vineyards from thence. But is not this a contradiction, or if not a contradiction, a miracle? A contradiction it is not, for it is in the fullest harmony with God's word and work; but a miracle it is, for indeed such is the nature of all God's dealings with his people. They are all miracles of mercy and grace. It may indeed be justly asked, Can we expect to find vineyards in a wilderness? Does the vine grow there naturally, or can it be made to grow there by artificial cultivation? Is not this the very character of a wilderness, that in it is neither vine nor fig-tree, field nor pasture? How, then, can vineyards be found in the rocky desert? By the same miracle that water was brought out of the flinty rock. No less a miracle is it that the place

where fruit is found, is the last place where fruit would naturally or artificially grow. And yet how this enhances God's grace, and displays the greatness of his power.

But let us now see the Lord giving Zion her vineyards in the wilderness. It is by causing the fruits of his Spirit to spring up in her heart, for that is the wilderness to which our text points. Look at her then in the wilderness, bowed down by grief and trouble. *Patience* is given her to bear her afflictions with submission to the will of God. Is not this a gospel fruit? *Godly sorrow* on account of her sins and backslidings is graciously communicated: there is another cluster of grapes on this fruitful branch. *Gratitude* to the Lord for his patience, long-suffering, and tender forbearance: is not this another cluster of rich and ripe fruit in this vineyard in the wilderness? *Giving up everything* to his gracious disposal with a sincere and earnest desire, that he would fulfil all his wise purposes, in perfect harmony with his own sovereign will: this is another cluster of grapes on this vine of the desert. *Blessing and praising* God even for his afflicting hand, thanking him for the furnace, for the trials and temptations which have been so mercifully and wisely overruled for the soul's spiritual benefit. Lift up the leaf which has hidden it from view, and see if you cannot find this rich and ripe cluster hanging upon the vine in the wilderness. *Separation from the world*; deadness to the things of time and sense; spirituality of mind; holy and heavenly affections fixed upon things above; here are more grapes that grow upon this vine, planted by the hand of God in the strong desert. *Walking in godly fear*; abstaining from even the appearance of evil; setting the Lord ever before our eyes; living to him and not to ourselves; doing his will from the heart, and walking before him in the light of his countenance; look under the green leaves of a consistent profession and see how these ripe grapes grow in the wilderness into which God allures his people, that he may give them vineyards from thence. How different is nature and grace! In nature the vine grows upon the sunny bank, or in our climate in the rich border, and needs much care and cultivation of human hands to bring the fruit to perfection. But in grace we do not get the vine with its clustering grapes from the rich bed, or

the sunny bank; from digging, hoeing, and weeding the native soil of our own heart; but by the Lord's alluring its by his Spirit and grace into the wilderness, where nature withers and dies, but where he causes the spiritual vine to grow and bear fruit, and the vineyards of his right hand planting, the churches of his experimental truth, to flourish and abound. Have you not often desired to live more to God's glory; to walk more in his fear; to be more spiritually minded; to have the Scriptures more deeply and experimentally opened up to you: and to enjoy more heavenly fellowship with the Father and his dear Son? Sure I am from my own experience, that such is the desire of a gracious heart. But you little thought how the Lord would work in you to will and to do of his good pleasure, and to make you fruitful in every good word and work. You did not think it would be by his alluring you into the wilderness of trial and affliction, temptation and sorrow, and that *there* he would cause the vine of his grace to take deeper root in your breast and cause the fruits of righteousness so earnestly longed for to grow upon the bough, drooping and trailing from weakness, and yet running over the wall, as was said of Joseph. (Gen. 49:22.) But can you not now see the wisdom and mercy of God in this? If we had not been previously brought down into the wilderness we should be ascribing the fruit to our own exertions, to the natural goodness of the soil, or to our skill in cultivation; but it being so purely and I may say so miraculously the especial gift and grace of God, we must acknowledge him to be the sole author of it, and confess before God and man, "From thee and thee only is our fruit found."

iii. But there is another thing which the Lord promises to do for his church in the wilderness: he will give her there "*the valley of Achor for a door of hope.*" This carries us back to ancient days when a very solemn scene took place in the valley of Achor. You recollect that before Jericho was taken, God pronounced a solemn curse upon any man that should take of "the accursed thing"—the spoil of Jericho, which was "devoted" to destruction (Josh. 6:17), as lying under the curse of God; and you will remember that a man named Achan, despising God's command, and seduced by a

spirit of greedy covetousness, took a Babylonish garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of 50 shekels weight, and hid them in his tent. You will also call to mind how the eye of God marked it all: how when the lot was cast it fell upon the guilty man; how he was taken into the valley of Achor with all that he had, and how "all Israel stoned him with stones and burnt them with fire. Wherefore the name of that place was called the valley of Achor, unto this day." (Josh. 7:26.) To this solemn transaction, therefore, the Holy Spirit makes allusion in the words of our text, where he speaks of "the valley of Achor" as a "door of hope." Achor means "confusion," and as Achan was stoned to death in it for taking the accursed thing, it may also signify "destruction." "The valley of Achor," then, is spiritually the same place as the wilderness, for that to a child of God often is the valley of confusion where his mouth is stopped through guilt and shame, as was Achan's when the lot fell upon him, and he was obliged to confess his sins before God and man. It is also often to the saint of God the valley of "destruction;" for when the accursed thing, the spoil of this doomed and devoted world, is found in his possession as loved and delighted in, a sense of God's anger falls upon him, and by this all his legal hope and fleshly righteousness are destroyed—stoned as it were with stones and burnt with fire, as a just judgment from God for loving the world which is God's enemy. Have you not sometimes feared lest the judgments of God should fall openly upon you, as having sinned against him as covetously and as wickedly as Achan sinned by taking of the accursed thing, and that your lot might be the same, to be a monument of God's wrath even before the face of man? Have you not even feared lest the people of God should rise up against you on account of your sins and backslidings, and in a spiritual sense stone you out of the camp with stones or burn you with the fire of just condemnation? I believe that the valley of Achor is at times as needful a spot as the wilderness for a child of God: for as all must be brought into the wilderness there to have their vineyards given, so must they come down into the valley of Achor, the place of stopping of mouths, the low and humble spot of confusion and trouble, that there the door of hope may be opened up with a divine hand in their soul. As there is no

fruit to be found in heart, lip, or life till God gives it in the wilderness, so till we come into the valley, the low and humble vale of confusion and destruction, there is no good hope through grace communicated. Here, then, is another miracle, for it is in this valley that God opens a door of hope. When the saint of God is sometimes almost in despair through the pressure of sin, the curse of the law, and the condemnation of an accusing conscience, the Lord in this very valley, where all legal hope sinks and dies, opens a door of hope in his desponding heart. But how does he affect this? He sends down a ray of mercy, a beam of grace, gives a view of atoning blood and dying love, or grants a gracious manifestation of his dear Son, and thus revealing the Lord of life and glory as the way, the truth, and the life, opens a door of hope, whereby the soul enters into his gracious presence by the power of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. As holy John "looked, and behold a door was opened in heaven," so there is a door of hope opened to the soul even when expecting Achan's fate in the gloomy valley of Achor. How blessed this is! As Hart says of himself,

"I looked for hell: he brought me heaven."

When you expected wrath, then to find mercy; fearing judgment, to obtain pardon; dreading punishment, to receive the declaration, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Is not this an opening in the valley of Achor of a door of hope?

IV.—But let me come now to our last point—*the effect* of these gracious dealings of God in the wilderness, the gracious fruit of *praise and thankfulness* for his speaking comfortably to the heart, giving the vineyards, and opening a door of hope in this gloomy valley. "She shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt."

I have already alluded to the prophetic aspect of this chapter, and that I believe it will be literally and spiritually accomplished in times still to come, when the children of Israel will be restored to the land of their fathers; and then as they sang upon the banks

of the Red Sea, so will they again sing unto the Lord a new song, for they will be able to say in every sense of the word, "The Lord is my strength and song, and he has become my salvation." But we will give it a spiritual and experimental sense as now fulfilled in the hearts of God's saints. I have already shown you how God allures them into the wilderness. By these allurements he espouses them to himself. When, then, he speaks comfortably to them in the wilderness, gives them there gracious fruits, and opens a door of hope, he revives and renews those former days of chaste, virgin love. These days God himself remembers, for he says, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." (Jer. 2:2.) Had you not once a day of espousals when the Lord was first pleased to reveal a sense of his mercy and goodness to your soul, and thus espoused you as a chaste virgin to the Son of his love? Those were the days of early love, when we tasted that the Lord was gracious, and having a view of his beauty and blessedness, fell deeply in love with him who is "altogether lovely." But, after the days of our espousals, we had to go into the wilderness, there to learn what we are by nature; there to have the deep secrets of the heart opened up; there to have a long succession of trials and temptations, afflictions and sorrows, that we might learn experimentally what this world is, and what we are as sinners in it. Yet the Lord is gracious still even in the wilderness, and brings his people there that he may communicate unto them the blessings of which I have spoken. Under the enjoyment of them, Zion begins to sing; and what is her song? A new song, according to those words, "O sing unto the Lord a new song" (Psal. 96:1); and yet not new, for it is the same song which she sang "in the days of her youth." Singing, in scripture, is always connected with joy and gladness, and especially after a turning of captivity; for to sing his praise is the instinctive feeling of the soul when experimentally blessed. But Zion in the wilderness had forgotten her ancient song, nor could she sing it again until the Lord spake comfortably to her heart. She could sigh and groan, weep and lament, but no joyful song could she raise, for her harp was hung upon the willows, and in that strange land she could not sing the Lord's song. (Psal.



137:2, 4.) But no sooner does the Lord begin to speak comfortably to her in the wilderness, give her her vineyards from thence, and open the door of hope in the valley of Achor, than a new song is put into her mouth, even a song of praise and thanksgiving to her God. Have you not sometimes been obliged to burst forth into a song of praise to the God of all your mercies for an unexpected visit of his gracious presence, or for some discovery of his goodness, mercy, and love? This is singing as in the days of your youth—those youthful days not only in nature but also in grace, when the Lord made himself very near, dear, and precious to your soul, and the world and sin were put under your feet. Many changes may we have seen since then; many lusts and corruptions may have been brought to light; much unbelief discovered; many backslidings and departings from the Lord have been committed, over the painful recollection of we may have still to sigh and mourn. But the Lord, who has begun his gracious work upon the sinner's heart, never leaves or forsakes the operation of his own hands; for whom he loves he loves unto the end, and from that love not "things present nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature" shall be able to separate its favoured object. "I will see you again," was our Lord's gracious promise to his disciples, "and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh it from you." When, then, the Lord comes again in mercy and love, he enables the soul to sing once more the song of Moses and the Lamb, "as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." It is as it were a revival and more than a revival of the blessed days of old. Under this sweet influence, the soul can say, "What have I to do any more with idols?" Then it can leave the world professing and profane, being separated from both by wilderness trials as well as by wilderness mercies. These dealings of the Lord make a deep and lasting impression upon the mind, for his teachings are to profit, and the fruit of them is to be seen in a clearer and fuller separation from all evil and all error; in greater simplicity and sincerity of spirit; in a deeper conviction of the exceeding sinfulness of sin; in increased tenderness of conscience; and in a walk before God and man in closer consistency with the precepts of the Gospel and the example of

the Son of God when tabernacling here below.

Can you find anything in your heart and conscience that bears any resemblance to these gracious dealings, these divine teachings? Are you in any one part of the path which I have cast up? Is the Lord alluring you; or are you in the wilderness; or is the Lord speaking to your heart; or is he opening in the valley of Achor a door of hope; or is he putting a new song into your mouth? Compare what you hope and believe the Lord has wrought in your soul with these marks of divine teaching as traced out by the pen of the Holy Ghost in the passage before us, and if you can find any one of these gracious evidences, bless the Lord for his distinguishing mercy.

## The Valley of Baca

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie street, London, on Lord's Day Evening, July 28, 1846

"Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee, in whose heart are the ways of them, who passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength: every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." Psalm 84:5, 6, 7

The time and circumstances under which this Psalm was written we may fairly gather from the internal evidences of the Psalm itself. *First*, then, this Psalm was composed whilst "the ark of God dwelt within curtains," and therefore whilst the tabernacle was yet standing, *before* Solomon's temple was erected. This we gather from verse 1: "How amiable are thy tabernacles," (or tents) "O Lord of hosts!" *Secondly*, it was written *after* the ark of God had been brought to Mount Zion, the city of David, of which we have a full account given us in 2 Samuel 6; this we gather from the 7th verse, "They go from strength to strength; every one of them *in Zion* appeareth before God." *Thirdly*, the Psalm was composed during the time of David's flight from Jerusalem: for it is the language of one who was sighing after the courts of the Lord, and yet was debarred from approaching them. By this internal evidence, therefore, the time is strictly fixed to the flight and exile of David from Jerusalem on account of Absalom's rebellion.

David, then, in his exile, was mourning after the blessings and privileges of those true believers who were going up to the house of the Lord, according to his command, to worship at Jerusalem. *We* cannot enter into the feelings of a true Israelite upon these occasions. The Lord has ordained that three times in the year all their males should appear before him. They came up from different parts of the land, according to this command; and *there*, from time to time, the Lord met with and blessed their souls. *There* they had a glimpse of the glory of the Lord dwelling between the cherubim; *there* they had their prayers answered, and their souls refreshed; and *there* they

beheld, typically and figuratively foreshadowed, "the true tabernacle," the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, "which God pitched, and not man."

But David was debarred from going up to the house of the Lord. He was sitting solitary, and mourning, not only on account of the deep mortification of being driven from his throne, but also at not being able to come before the Lord, as in times of old. He envied therefore the very sparrow and the swallow that could fly through the air, and take up their happy abode beneath those altars which his soul so longed to approach. And doubtless, there was one feeling which pressed very hard on David's soul: *that his sins had driven him into exile*. The finger of scorn throughout Israel was pointed at him as an open adulterer and convicted murderer. Thus, he had not only the melancholy feeling of being debarred from approaching God's sanctuary; but this feeling was deeply increased by the guilt and shame that he had brought upon his own head.

Now while he was thus solitarily musing upon these pilgrims going upward to Jerusalem to worship the Lord in his earthly courts in Zion, his soul seems to have fallen into a train of holy and spiritual meditation. This earthly pilgrimage foreshadowed to him the pilgrimage of a saint heavenward; and thus, viewing all the circumstances of their journey, his thoughts turned upon what this pilgrimage spiritually typified; and he breaks out into this blessing upon God's worshipping people : *"Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will still be praising thee."*

But are these the only persons blessed? No. He adds *"Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee;"* who has something more than the mere outward privilege of drawing near these courts; whose inward strength is in God, and who draws his supplies out of his fulness of grace and mercy. "Blessed is the man," he further adds, "in whose heart," that is, in whose experience, through divine teaching and divine testimony, "are the ways of them, who passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well."

In considering the words of the text this evening, I shall view

them as the Holy Ghost has given us the spiritual clue to their import. There is a *true* spiritualization of God's word, and there is a *false* spiritualization of it. Some men can see deep mysteries in the "nine-and-twenty knives" that came from Babylon; in the oak beneath which Deborah was buried; and I dare say, some would find unfathomable depths in "Appii Forum, and the Three Taverns." (Acts 28:15.) But we cannot build up a spiritual interpretation except the Holy Ghost has laid a foundation, nor track out a path unless he has given us a clue. But as the blessed Spirit, by the mouth and pen of David, has here given us a spiritual clue, we may follow these pilgrims in their journey up to the earthly Jerusalem, and see in it a lively representation of the true pilgrims journeying to heaven, their happy home.

We will then, as the Lord may enable, endeavour severally to unfold the distinct clauses of our text. Observe, then,

I.—*First*, the blessing that David pronounces upon the man whose strength is in God. "*Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee.*" But where shall we find that man? Where are we to look for him? In what corner does he dwell? I am bold to say, that no man ever had his strength in God until he had lost all his own. I am bold to say, from Scripture and from experience, that no man ever felt or ever knew, spiritually and experimentally, what it was to put his trust and confidence in God, who had not been thoroughly weaned and emptied from putting all trust and confidence in himself. Therefore, when David pronounces this spiritual blessing, "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee," his eye was fixed upon a certain gracious character, one who had been deeply emptied, one whose strength had been turned into weakness, his wisdom into folly, and his comeliness into corruption. How are you, how am I, to put our trust in an invisible God? Can I see him? And can I put my trust in an invisible being? It is impossible, unless I have faith to see God, who is invisible. Two distinct things must therefore meet in my heart, under the Spirit's secret operations, before I can come in for any share of this blessing. I must, first, by a work of grace upon my soul be weakened; as we read, "He weakened my strength in the way." "He brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was

none to help." I must be weakened by being experimentally taught that all my natural strength in divine things is but impotency and helplessness. And how can I learn this, but through a series of trials? I must have temptations; and find my strength against these temptations utterly powerless. I must have trials; and find these trials so great, that my own strength is insufficient to bear them. I must have a discovery of God's majesty, purity, and holiness, that all my strength may wither at the glance of the eye of God in my conscience. I must sink down into creature ruin, hopelessness, and helplessness, before I can ever give up the fancied idea of strength in myself. Man is born an independent creature. It is the very breath of a natural man. "Independence" was once my boasted motto. It suits the proud heart to rest upon itself. And our rebellious nature will always rest upon self, until self has received its death-blow from the slaughter-weapon that the man clothed with linen carries in his hand. (Ezek. 9.)

Now this in most cases will take a series of trials to produce. We are not stripped in a day; we are not emptied in a day; we are not ruined and brought to beggary and rags in a day. Many of the Lord's people are years learning that they have nothing and are nothing. They have to pass through trial after trial, temptation after temptation, affliction after affliction, before they learn the secret of creature weakness, creature helplessness, and creature hopelessness.

But there is another requisite. It is not sufficient for me to know my poverty, my ruin, my wretchedness; I must have something more than this revealed in my heart. I must have another lesson unfolded to my soul by the power of God the Spirit. I must learn this sacred truth, "I have laid help upon One that is mighty." I must be taught to say, "God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." I must know what the Lord Jesus so sweetly unfolded to the Apostle Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9.)

Have you found out these two things in your heart? How many years have some here made a profession, have come to hear the truth preached, have approved of the testimony of God's

servants, and have read the writings of gracious men! But have you learnt these two lessons yet? *first*, creature weakness, helplessness, and hopelessness; to sink down into your miserable self; to be filled with confusion; to have nothing in yourselves but rags and ruin? And then, has the Spirit opened up, brought down into your heart, and unfolded to your soul that precious Mediator between God and man, "the Hope of Israel," the blessed Jesus, whose strength is made perfect in weakness, that on him you may lean, in him you may trust, and upon whom you may rely to bring you safely through all? If you have learnt experimentally in your conscience those two lessons,—creature weakness and Creator might—the helplessness of man and the power of God—*then* you come in for the blessing, "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee."

II.—"*In whose heart are the ways of them, who passeth through the valley of Baca, make it a well.*" David casts a glimpse here at those pilgrims who were travelling their upward journey to worship God in Zion. He marks their road, and takes occasion to spiritualize it; for he says, "*In whose heart,*" in whose experience, in whose soul, "are the ways" of these pilgrims Zionward.

What are these "*ways?*" It is this, that "passing through the valley of Baca, they make it a well." This valley of Baca appears to have been a very perilous pass, through which pilgrims journeyed toward Jerusalem: and on account of the difficulties, dangers, and sufferings that they met with, it was named "the valley of Baca," or 'the valley of weeping,' 'the vale of tears.'

And is not this very emblematical and figurative of the vale of tears through which God's people journey in their course heavenward? There are many circumstances which draw tears from their weeping eyes. Depend upon it, if, in the course of your profession, you have never known anything of this valley of Baca, you have mistaken the road; you are not travelling through the true valley to reach Zion; you are taking another route which leads not heavenward, but to eternal destruction. Many are the circumstances in providence that draw tears from

the eyes, and cause poignant sorrow to be felt in the heart of the true child of God. Men naturally have many sorrows in their course through life. But the Lord's people seem to have a double portion allotted to them. They have the cares of life like their fellow-mortals; they have sources of temporal sorrow in common with their fellow-sinners. But, in addition to these providential afflictions, they have that which is peculiar to themselves—spiritual grief, burdens, and sorrows. Some of the Lord's people are deeply sunk in poverty; others, have an almost daily cross from a suffering and weakly tabernacle; others, have to endure persecutions, and to receive many severe blows from sinners and severer from saints; others, have family afflictions; others are mourning over their blighted schemes, and the disappointment of all their temporal expectations. But, added to these temporal trials that the Lord's people have to pass through in common with their fellow-men, they have spiritual trials that far outweigh any of a temporal nature. Sharp and cutting temptations; the workings of a heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; the hidings of the Lord's countenance; the doubts and alarms that work in their minds whether their feet are upon the rock; the fear of death, and the prospect of eternity; the harassing darts of the Wicked One; inward guilt and grief on account of an idolatrous, adulterous, and backsliding nature—these are but a small portion of those sorrows that draw tears from the true pilgrim's eye. It is indeed a vale of tears for the Lord's family, a "valley of Baca," which they have to pass through to reach the heavenly Zion.

But the Psalmist says, "Blessed is the man in whose heart are the ways of them, who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well." Here is the distinctive character of the true pilgrim. Not that he is journeying merely through the "valley of Baca;" not that his eyes are drowned in tears; not that his heart is filled with sorrows; not that his soul is cut with temptations; not that his mind is tried by suffering. But this is his distinctive feature—he "makes it a well." This the ungodly know nothing of; this the professing world, for the most part, are entirely unacquainted with; but this is the "secret which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen."



One feature of the "valley of Baca" was, that the burning sun above, and the parched ground beneath, at the time of year when the pilgrims travelled, made the whole valley arid and dry. But "they made it a well." There were wells dug in this valley of Baca for the pilgrims to slake their thirst at. And David, looking at these wells dug for the pilgrims, applies them spiritually to the refreshment that the Lord's people meet with in their course Zionward.

"Make it a well;" that is, there are from time to time sweet refreshments in this valley of tears; there are bubblings up of divine consolation; there are fountains of living waters, streams of heavenly pleasures. And when the sun-burnt, weary pilgrims, all parched and dry, are journeying through this valley, and their tongues cleave to the roof of their mouths with thirst, the Lord from time to time opens up in this valley a well; as we read, Isa. 41:17, 18, "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water." Some manifestation of his gracious presence, some promise coming with power to the soul, some testimony of interest in the love and blood of Jesus, some smile from his countenance, some word from his lips, some encouraging testimony that the feet are upon the Rock, is given. This is a well at which his thirst is slaked; his parched tongue no longer cleaves to his palate; he drinks of the water that bubbles up from the thirsty soil to refresh the weary Pilgrim.

By this you may know whether you are a pilgrim Zionward. You all find this fallen world a vale of tears; you have burdens, sorrows, and afflictions of various kinds. But have you nothing more? If there be nothing more, are you a pilgrim? This is their distinctive feature—they "make it a well." What! no refreshments from the divine presence? no sweet encouragements from time to time in prayer? no blessing under the preached word? no melting of heart from a sense of the Lord's kindness to your soul? no glimpses and glances of a precious Jesus? no bubblings up of life and feeling to soften a hard heart? It will not do to call yourself a pilgrim merely

because you have trials, and are journeying through a vale of tears. We must have something more than this to prove that we are pilgrims; we must have wells—"a well of water," as the Lord speaks, "springing up into everlasting life"—divine refreshments, gracious manifestations, heavenly testimonies—something from God that comforts, that blesses, that waters the soul, and makes it like a watered garden. And is it not the vale of tears, the dry, the parched, the arid, the sun-burnt valley, that makes the well so acceptable? I remember a friend of mine telling me, that once journeying through one of the deserts in Asia, they came to a well; and the disappointment of the company when they found the well was dry, he said, no language could depict; their grief and trouble when, after hours' travelling, they came at night to encamp by the well, and found that the sun had dried it up, were indeed most acute. As therefore, none but pilgrims through the dry and parched valley could adequately feel the sweetness of the natural well; so none but spiritual pilgrims, afflicted, exercised, and harassed, can feel the sweetness of the "pure water of life" that the Lord at times refreshes the soul with.

When David therefore blesses the pilgrims, he does not bless them on account of their travelling through the "valley of Baca;" he does not bless them for the tears that fall from their eyes, for the sorrows that fill their hearts, for the afflictions and perplexities that they are tried with; but because they make it a well. Because it is not all darkness, but there is sometimes a ray of light; because it is not all despondency, but sometimes beams of hope; because it is not all unbelief, but sometimes the actings of faith; because it is not all temptations, trials, and afflictions, but sometimes the sweet refreshings and revivings of God's gracious presence.

III.—"*The rain also filleth the pools.*" It appears that there were "pools," or tanks, which were built for the use of the pilgrims as they journeyed through this valley. The wells of springing water were not their only resource; lest they should fail, there were tanks or pools constructed; and these derived their supplies of water from the rain that fell into them. And may we not give this a spiritual interpretation? I think we justly may, without violating the mind and meaning of the Spirit. These

pools, then, seem to represent what are called the means of grace, the ordinances of the Lord's house, and those various helps that God himself has appointed; but which are in themselves as desolate and dry as the pool or tank, and want the rain of heaven to fill them with sweet and refreshing water for the use of the weary pilgrims.

1. For instance—*prayer and supplication*, waiting upon the Lord, going to his footstool, begging him to appear on our behalf—this is a pool which the Lord has appointed. "Call unto me; I will answer thee." "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." "For all these things will I be enquired of by the house of Israel, that I may do it." "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." Here are pools; but do we not want the rain to fill them? What is prayer, unless the Lord inspire the petition? What is prayer, unless the Lord give an answer? I remember, many years ago, seeing in Canterbury Cathedral, the shrine of Thomas a Beckett; and—would you believe it?—the pavement is actually worn into hollows by the pilgrims who used to kneel there in the superstitious days of Popery. How many true prayers were offered at that idolatrous shrine? Prayers! Abominations in the sight of a holy God! Yet they could wear the pavement hollow with their knees. But have not you and I offered prayers equally unacceptable to the Lord God of hosts as the prayers that were offered at the shrine of Thomas a Beckett? Yes, thousands. But when "the rain filleth the pools," it is different. When the Lord draws, the soul runs; when the Lord inspires, the soul breathes; when the Lord smiles, the soul melts; when the Lord invites, the soul follows; when he says, "Call unto me," we come, beg, and pray. When "the rain filleth the pools," we are like Hannah of old, who when she had poured out her heart before the Lord, and got the answer of peace from Eli's mouth, went her way and was no more sad; she had drunk a draught of the pool.

2. Are not God's *promises* pools? How they are strewed up and down God's word, like the pools or tanks in "the valley of Baca!" But have you not sometimes come to the promises, and found them as dry as the brooks spoken of in the 6th chapter

of Job, which so disappointed the companies of Sheba. I read the promises—can they refresh my soul? I may come to the pool; but if the pool is dry, will coming to the dry pool refresh my parched palate? No. The rain must fill it. When the rain has filled the pool, I can then bow down, and slake my thirst. The rain of God's grace, and the dew of heaven, must drop into the promise, and fill the pool that you and I may come to it, feel a sweetness in it, and have our souls refreshed and strengthened by it.

3. And is not *preaching* a pool? Has not God appointed "by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe?" But have not you and I often found it a dry pool? How many sermons have you heard during the past year that really blessed, comforted, and strengthened your soul? Has one in ten, one in twenty, one in a hundred, really brought a blessing into your heart by the power of God? How often these pools are dry! *I* find them so; *you* find them so, who know the difference between letter and spirit, between "bodily exercise which profiteth little," and the power of vital godliness that is profitable unto all things. The Lord will teach his people this; and he will teach it his ministers also. They may construct a pool: in their parlours at home they may build a very pretty tank; it may be divided and sub divided; a cell here, and a compartment there: and they may come with their pools to chapel; but unless the rain fill it from above, all their ingenuity will be thrown away, and they had better have left it high and dry at home.

4. Are not *the ordinances* of God's house pools? And have we not had continual experience how barren, how dry these pools sometimes are? Have we not sometimes sat at the table of the Lord, and blasphemous thoughts, filthy imaginations, horrible workings filled our minds? Have we not felt carnality, deadness, bondage, darkness? no rain filling the pool? And have we not looked upon the baptismal pool, and though filled with rain from the roof, it never profited unless the rain from heaven filled the spiritual ordinance, as well as the rain from above has filled the natural baptistery.

So we might travel through the various means of grace which God has spoken of in his word; and we should find alike in all,

that unless God fill the pools, they cannot slake our spiritual thirst.

But this is the blessedness of the pilgrims, that the rain does sometimes fill the pools. It is not with them all deadness in prayer, all coldness in reading, or all darkness in hearing. There are sometimes heavenly manifestations, diving refreshments, and breakings in of the Lord's presence and favour; this is the rain filling the pools. And when the rain fills the pools, then it is, and then only, that they afford any life or feeling to our souls.

IV.—*"They go from strength to strength."* It is in the margin, "from company to company." I rather think, that the meaning implied is, "they go from halting place to halting place." There were certain fixed spots where the whole company rested at night; as we read, when the infant Jesus tarried in Jerusalem, his parents knew it not: they supposed that he was "in the company;" that is, had gone on with the travelling pilgrims: but when night came, and they looked for him, he was not there. (Luke 2:44.)

These halting places were certain spots where the caravan of the travelling pilgrims rested at night; by these successive haltings their strength was recruited, and they were enabled to bear the long journey, rising in the morning refreshed with their night's rest.

The Psalmist viewing it spiritually, says, "They go from strength to strength." At each halting place they received fresh strength to pursue their journey onward. And is not this true in grace? There are halting places in the divine life, spots of rest, where the true pilgrims renew their strength. For instance; every manifestation of the Lord is a communication of divine strength, a recruiting place, where the soul renews its strength to travel onward. Every promise that comes with sweet power is another halting place where the traveller may rest. Every discovery of interest in Christ; every glimpse of the grace and glory of Jesus; every word from the Lord's lips; every smile from the Lord's face; every token for good; everything that encourages, supports, blesses, and comforts the soul, enabling

it to go onwards towards its heavenly home—is a halting place, where the pilgrim rests, and where he recruits his weary limbs. And where can we rest, except where God rests? But does not God "rest in his love?" And can we rest anywhere short of God's love shed abroad in our heart? Does not God rest in his dear Son? Did not this voice come from the excellent glory, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased?" All the satisfaction of God centres in Jesus; all the delight of the Father rests in the Son of his love. "Behold my servant; whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth!" (Isa. 42:1.) Can we then rest anywhere but where God rests? Is it not spiritually with us as with the Israelites of old? When the cloud tarried, they tarried; when the cloud went, they went; when the cloud moved onward they followed it; and when the cloud stopped, they halted, and rested beneath its shadow. What rest can I have in my troubles, afflictions, exercises, and temptations? Can I rest in *them*? I might just as well think of trying to rest myself on the bottom of the Thames; I might just as well try to lie down on some deep slough, and there recline my weary bones. As to resting on doubts and fears, trials and temptations, griefs and sorrows, exercises and perplexities, the troubled bosom of the sea is as much a bed for the storm-tossed mariner, as exercises and troubles are for the weary pilgrim. I cannot, I must not rest short of that rest which "remaineth for the people of God." What is that? Christ—the true Sabbath. I can only rest in his finished work, in his atoning blood, in his dying love, in his imputed righteousness. He, and he only, can be the rest of my restless soul. And when I can do that, I am like the weary caravan of pilgrims travelling Zionward; they halted for the night; they sweetly slept, for the shadow of God's everlasting love was over them; and thus they recruited their strength for the next day's journey. But mark, they were not always resting. They had alternate journeyings by day, and restings by night; the thorns of the valley often lacerated their tender feet; the burning sun beat upon their aching heads; the wild beasts of the valley howled and shrieked through the bushes; banditti perhaps hovered upon the rocks, waiting to cut off a straggling passenger; the trackless wilderness was behind, the wild desert before, and Zion to them at a boundless distance. Yet on they journeyed, and never went back. They had a certain goal in view; Zion,

Zion, their eyes were fixed upon; and the thought of reaching this cheered them as they went on.

Is it not so with spiritual pilgrims? Is it always rest with you? Are you always satisfied that you are a child of God? Are you always certain that heaven is your home? Can you always rest in God's love to your soul? Can you always find Christ precious to your heart? I cannot; if you can. We have to journey onward; another day of sorrow, another day of trial, another day of temptation, another day of exercise—each day bringing a new trial. Yet we journey onward; not driven from truth, not driven from Zion, not driven from God, not driven from Jesus—onward, onward, onward we go; our faces set Zionward, our backs towards the world. These poor weary pilgrims would often march staggering and fainting on under their burdens, burnt by the rays of the sun, scarce able to move one foot before another. But the halting place is reached; the signal is given; they draw up on the sand; once more they rest, and their strength is recruited. It is so spiritually. God gives a little rest to the soul; some manifestation, some evidence, some testimony; a word, a look, a smile, a glimpse, a glance. "They go from strength to strength." Is not this strength? There is no other. "Blessed is the man whose strength is in *thee*." Therefore it is "from strength to strength." It must be God's strength he goes forward in, not his own. If it were his own, he would not come under the blessing; "whose strength is in *thee*." If he could rest when he would, eat when he would, drink when he would, he would not want the Lord to be the "strength of his heart and his portion for ever." This puts sweetness into the pilgrimage: "they go from strength to strength," from halting place to halting place, from refreshment to refreshment. For it was at these halting places the wells were dug; at these pools they tarried for the night, and sometimes found them filled with the rain of heaven. Thus they not only rested their weary limbs upon the desert, but they slaked their thirst at the well, or pool, and ate of the palm that overshadowed their head. And is it not so spiritually? Where we rest, there we find water, refreshment, and strength. We do not find the pool when we are journeying onward; but when we are weary, exhausted, and faint, the Lord opens rivers in the wilderness, and waters in the desert; and when we come there,

we are allowed to tarry for a night, as the children of Israel encamped by the waters of Elim.

V.—And then, what comes as the glorious consequence? O sweet winding-up of this heavenly subject! O blessed crown that the Lord puts upon it all! *"Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God."* None perished by the way, none were devoured by the wild beasts, none cut off by the wandering banditti, none fainted on the road; some perhaps, straggling in the rear, and others coming in late and lagged. But when the company is counted, none are missing; old men and young children, tender women and stout youth—all the company of the pilgrim caravan—when they are counted, one by one, all answer to their names. "Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God."

And is not this true spiritually of God's own family? What did the Lord say? "Those thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition." And when he presents his innumerable host of redeemed souls before the throne of the Almighty, will not this be the language of his lips to his Father? "Behold me, and the children whom thou hast given me." "Thine they were; for all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them." And will not this be the theme of every spiritual pilgrim? "Kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." As the Lord is true, no spiritual pilgrim will ever fall and die in the valley of Baca. Some may fear that through temptation, their strong passions or boiling lusts will one day break out and destroy them. No, not if they are pilgrims. "Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." Others may think they never shall have a testimony; they never shall read their name clearly in the Book of Life; the Lord will never appear in their heart or bless their soul; they never shall be able to say, "Abba, Father." If Jesus is theirs, they shall. But are they spiritual pilgrims? Do they find it a vale of tears? Are their faces Zionward? Have they come out of the world? Do they sometimes make the valley of Baca a well? And does the rain fill the pools? And have they ever had strength made perfect in weakness? Then every one of them will appear before God in Zion. Blessed end! Sweet accomplishment of the



pilgrim's hopes, desires, and expectations! The crowning blessing of all that God has to bestow! "Every one of them appeareth before God," washed in the Saviour's blood, clothed in the Redeemer's righteousness, adorned with all the graces of the Spirit, and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. No weeping then! The valley of Baca is passed, and tears wiped from off all faces. No thorns to lacerate the weary feet there; no prowling wild beasts to seize the unwary traveller there; no roving banditti to surprise stragglers there; no doubts and fears and cutting sorrows to grieve, perplex, and burden them there. Safe in Zion, safe in the Redeemer's bosom, safe in their Husband's arms, safe before the throne, every one of them appeareth before God in glory.

Pilgrim of Zion, take a glimpse at your spiritual life. Do see if you can find the features of the spiritual pilgrimage in it. How does it begin? "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee." Is *your* strength in God? Have you learnt your weakness, feebleness, helplessness, hopelessness, and been enabled to cast anchor within the veil, and lean your weary soul upon the strength of Jesus? You are a blessed man; you have set out Zionward; your feet are in the road that leads to glory. How have you found the road? Very easy to your feet? A green, grassy, flowery garden? a smooth meadow, with primroses and violets in the hedges, and you every now and then sitting on a stile, inhaling the breath of the May morn? or sometimes reclining on the grass, listening to the nightingale? This is not the way to heaven; you have mistaken the road. The way to heaven is through "the valley of Baca!" the vale of tears—a dry, parched, and burnt up valley, with thorns lacerating the passenger's feet; the wild beasts lurking in the covert; and Satan and his host, as armed prowlers, seeking to destroy. Depend upon it, if we find the way very smooth, very easy, very pleasing, and very agreeable, we have made a grand mistake; we have not got into the right road yet. God bring those in the road who are his people, that have at present mistaken it!

But you, traveller and pilgrim Zionward, have you not found it a valley of tears, have you not had cutting things in providence, heavy trials, harassing temptations, fiery darts,

persecutions, sufferings from men, and above all from yourselves? But have you not sometimes found a well open? Have you not sometimes found the Lord to be, what he says he is, "a Fountain of living waters?" And have you not sometimes come to the blessed Jesus all dry, all parched, all languid, and all sinking; and found some glimpses, glances, and testimonies? These have refreshed, strengthened, comforted, and blessed you. Then you are a pilgrim! though you have found the way that leads to Zion a vale of tears; yet in that tearful valley you have every now and then found a well. Then you are a pilgrim! Let the devil, let unbelief, let men, let persecutors, let the world, let your heart say to the contrary, God has blessed you in his word as a spiritual pilgrim.

And have you not found also that rain has filled the pools? It has not been always dry with you; it has not been always a barren land; there has been a melting, a softening, a breaking down, a something that has watered your heart; you have felt blessed from time to time under the preaching of the truth, in reading the word, in secret prayer, in the pouring out of your soul before God. You are a pilgrim!—another mark for you! And have you not sometimes found strength? You have had temptations, but you have had strength to bear them; you have had trials, but you have had grace to endure them; you have had persecutions, but you have had support under them; you have had heart-rending afflictions, but the Lord has not suffered you to be destroyed by them; there has been some secret strength communicated to your soul; you have leant upon an unseen arm, and have found support in invisible realities. Another mark that you are a pilgrim!

And then, sweetest, crowning mercy, that "every one"—(O what there is in these words? doubting, fearing, tried, tempted, distressed, exercised, and sorrowing pilgrim)—"every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." So that when the Redeemer counts his sheep, and they shall again pass under the hand of him that telleth them, not one of the ransomed will be missing, but all will be present to sing for ever the glory and praise of a Three-One God.

## The Valley Exalted, and the Mountain Laid Low

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Afternoon, April 4, 1858

"Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be laid low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Isaiah 40:4, 5

We can have no doubt as to the primary and original meaning of these words, for the Holy Ghost himself, in the New Testament, is their divine interpreter. We read thus, Matthew 3:1-3:—"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

The language of the text is, of course, highly figurative, and is an illusion to a practice in ancient times of Oriental monarchs. There being in those days no highways nor beaten roads in most parts of their dominions, when they intended to visit some of their distant provinces, they were accustomed not only to send messengers beforehand to announce their approach, but pioneers also to remove all impediments to their progress. There were often deep valleys and morasses, which had to be filled up; hills and mountains to be laid low; crooked paths and intricate roads amidst woods and forests, to be straightened; and rough places, overgrown with thorns, thickets, and briars, and overspread with loose rocks and stumbling stones, which had to be smoothed and taken away. As the king travelled in great state, it was necessary to make room for the royal chariot—for the approach of majesty with all its splendour; and as the monarch never journeyed unattended, the road was to be made wide enough for his suite of retainers and numerous cavalcade as well as for himself. The Holy Ghost, adopting this Eastern practice as a scriptural figure, represents thereby the obstacles that were to be removed for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords; for it is of him that the text speaks. As regards his first coming in the flesh, which is the primary meaning of the text,

there were many obstacles in providence to be removed. Many barbarous and warlike tribes had to be subdued by the Romans and moulded into one universal, united Empire, that there might be a free intercourse by sea and land; one language—the Greek tongue—had to be generally spoken, that there might be a ready means of communicating the mind and will of God to the Gentile world. The Jews had to be subdued and brought under the Roman yoke, that Christ might appear in the flesh and die upon the cross—a purely Roman punishment. Roads had to be made, bridges built, ships constructed and navigated, towns and cities and colonies spread far and wide, general civilization advanced, and laws enacted and put in force, that the gospel might be preached to all nations. All the obstacles of barbarism, war, bloodshed, anarchy, and violence had to be removed, that the Prince of Peace might come and establish his kingdom upon earth. But besides the removal of these outward obstacles, the words have a special application to the ministry of John the Baptist, who, by his preaching in the wilderness, prepared a way for the manifestation of the Lord Jesus as the promised Messiah.

But the words of the text are applicable not only to the first manifestation of the Son of God in the flesh, and the preparations made for it by the preaching of John in the wilderness, but to the removal also of those obstacles which precede the inward revelation of Christ to the soul; and it is in this latter point of view that I shall, with God's blessing, now consider them. In doing this, I shall

I.—*First*, direct your attention to the spiritual and experimental *exalting of every valley, the making low of every mountain and hill, the straightening of that which is crooked, and the making plain of that which is rough.*

II.—*Secondly*, dwell upon the inward revelation of Christ, as intimated by the words—*"The glory of the Lord shall be revealed."*

III.—*Thirdly*, open the gracious *promise*, that *"all flesh shall see it together."*

IV.—And *fourthly*, unfold God's own solemn *ratification*, that these things shall surely come to pass: *"The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."*

I.—I have just hinted that the figurative language of our text represents the removal of obstacles; but looking at the figures one by one, I shall, with God's blessing, attempt to show how they severally bear upon the experience of a Christian. In this sense, what valleys have to be raised, what mountains and hills to be levelled, what, crooked things to be straightened, what rough places to be made plain, in order that the glory of God may be revealed! Everything in sense and nature is opposed to the revelation of Christ to the soul. Everything within us, everything without us, is opposed to his grace and his love, and to the manifestation of these blessings to the heart.

i. "*Every valley shall be exalted.*" By the "valley" we may understand those deep *depressions* in providence or in grace that have, so to speak, to be filled up, and thus a firm and solid way made for the chariot of the King of kings, which is "paved with love for the daughters of Jerusalem" (Song Sol. 3:10) to enter the heart. You will find that the work of God usually begins with affliction, and very often in some deep providential trial. The Thessalonians received the word in much affliction (1 Thess. 1:6), whereas the stony ground hearers receive the word with joy (Matt. 13:20.) These afflictions make a deep and hidden valley in the heart, which nothing but the presence and love of Christ can fill up.

1. How many young people have been *disappointed* in their tenderest and warmest affections! And however old people whose hearts are dried up, and money grubbers of both sexes and all ages who never had a heart to dry up at all, may slight and ridicule these disappointments that the young so deeply and acutely feel, those who have experienced them know that there is nothing that so touches the heart's tenderest core, no wound more piercing, no grief more lacerating than the poignant stroke that falls upon young and strong affections. And yet how often has the death of natural love been the life of the soul, and out of the grave of the heart's buried hopes has there been a resurrection into the kingdom of God and the hope of the gospel! Many a young person has dated the beginning of a work of grace from some cruel disappointment that seemed at the time to cut the very heart-strings of life. But for this crushing, overwhelming stroke, there would have been no room for Christ and his love.

This is "a valley."

2. How many also have felt it in the *taking down of some dear idol* out of its niche, in some heavy family stroke, such deep depressions of mind, such a sense of heart-rending distress, that it seemed at the time as if nothing upon earth could ever heal the wound—nothing that even God himself could give could ever compensate so irreparable a loss! How many a widow has wept bitter, bitter tears night and day over the memory of a departed husband! How many a husband has mourned over the wife of his youth, snatched by cruel disease from his bosom! How many a parent has wept over a beloved child, the very pride of the family, the fairest and most promising of them all, and as such engrossing perhaps the greatest share of their affections! These are "valleys" which in many cases are sunk beforehand in mercy that they may be exalted by the manifestation of Christ.

3. Others again have had great *losses* of property; nay, some, through sudden and most unexpected reverses, have been brought down from comparative comfort, to become dependent upon friends and relatives for their daily bread. Others have had all their worldly schemes withered—everything they set their hand to so blighted, as with the east wind, that nothing prospered with them, until they were reduced to the greatest poverty and distress. By these providential strokes, depressing both body and mind, the Lord sometimes makes a way for his grace to visit the heart. These disappointments, bereavements, losses, and afflictions are not grace, nor do they procure it, deserve it, produce, or even necessarily lead to it. How many have drunk the deepest, bitterest draughts of sorrow to whom it was but "the sorrow of the world that worketh death." Men gnaw their tongues for pain, and yet so far from repenting of their deeds, may only the more blaspheme the God of heaven for their pains and their sores (Rev. 16:10, 12). But in the case of many of the Lord's people, he often does send these afflictions and bereavements as harbingers of his appearance, to make a valley, which his love and grace may in due time fill up.

But there are *spiritual* valleys as well as providential, and these are much the more important. The Lord, by his grace, has to prepare a place for himself in the heart, by scooping out (if I may use the expression) that pride and self-righteousness of which, by

nature, our mind is so full. But in order to do this, *what deep wounds he often makes by his holy law!* What pangs of guilt, cutting convictions, and severe distress does he produce by its spiritual application to the conscience! But why this except to produce a valley that only he can fill up by his blood and love? What depression of mind—what a giving way of cheerfulness and high spirits—what a dragging down both of body and soul, of health and strength, is there in many a partaker of grace under those dealings of God with his conscience that brings his sins to view! These depressing feelings, these inward sinkings, these falling down of body and soul under the hand of God, are so many chasms and valleys that are to be filled up.

But in natural valleys stagnant water continually settles which makes the whole of the sunken ground a morass. Thus there are *deep pools of discovered sin* in our heart, stagnant marshes, foul morasses of filth and slime, from which there is constantly exhaling a noisome effluvium of everything to make body and soul alike sicken and languish. These are the "miry places" and "marshes" that are "given to salt" (Ezek. 47:11); "the pools of water" where the bittern booms (Isaiah 14:23); the lower grounds of the soul where mists and fogs brood and settle. How are these valleys to be filled up? They must be filled up that the King of kings may come in his chariot of love. These "valleys," then, are to be "exalted;" that is, to be raised up from their depressed condition. These holes and pits have to be filled up; these morasses to be drained; these deep sinkings of soil and soul to be made firm ground, that a solid road may be built upon them. As in the formation of a railway, the valley has to be filled up as well as the hill cut through: so in the figure before us the valley is to be exalted, as well as the mountain and hill made low. Now grace, in the manifestations of Christ, exalts the valley. The wound in your affections that you thought never could be healed; the distressing bereavement in your family; the painful trial and heavy loss in providence; and not only these temporal griefs and sorrows, but the mournful feelings in grace, the bitter pangs that you may have experienced from the weight and burden of guilt laid upon your conscience, your doubts and fears and sinkings of heart,—all these deep depressions and hollows have to be filled up; all have to be brought out of their quaking condition. That marshy state of soul; that "miry clay" in which the feet are fixed (Psalm 40:2); that "deep mire where there is no standing" (Psalm

69:2); that Slough of Despond into which the Pilgrim sinks, have all to be drained, that there may be firm, solid ground. This firm and solid ground is the manifested love and blood of Christ; the revelation (to which I shall come presently) of the glory of God to the soul, in the person and works of Immanuel, God with us. This exalts the valley, for it fills the aching void, heals the wound, drains the morass, and makes the ground firm and solid by manifesting salvation as a divine reality, as an unshaken and irremovable foundation. But before Christ thus comes to fill up every void, there is a preparing of the way for him by the promises and invitations of the gospel, and by the solid truths of divine revelation, which, cast, as it were, into the sinking soul, raise it up to a firm hope, and thus make way for a clearer and fuller manifestation of the Lord himself.

ii. But there are "*mountains and hills,*" and these are to be "*made low;*" because the road is to be perfectly level as well as perfectly straight. "Mountains and hills," as figures, represent obstacles and difficulties that stand in the path. As we read in Zechariah, "Who art thou, O great mountain? (that is O great obstacle.) Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain"—thou shalt be levelled and removed. And who has not found, in the first approaches of God to his soul, in the first dealings of the blessed Spirit with his conscience, great mountains and hills in the way? Some of these are from *natural*, but not for that less trying quarters. How our relatives and friends oppose, perhaps persecute us; how our temporal interests often stand in the way of our conscience; and how, as was particularly my own case, all our worldly prospects and all our long and deeply cherished plans stand as a mountain in the way of taking up the cross and following Christ. My first stroke was the cutting down of all my worldly prospects, for those who could and would have advanced me to emolument and honour were deadly enemies to the truths of the gospel which I had embraced. The second was sharper still, for it took away my all, and almost stripped me to the last penny. When I was in the Church of England, I thought nothing could bring me out, for I dreaded the prospect of poverty and sickness, as I was at that time in a bad state of health. Oh, what a mountain this was before my eyes! The very thought of leaving, how it worked in my mind, until conscience knocked at the door again and again; and the voice of conscience at last obliged me to listen and obey. But so different was the prospect from reality,



that the day after I left was one of the most comfortable I ever had in my life; and truly wonderful for more than twenty-three years since have been the Lord's providential dealings with me. You, perhaps, have had similar trials. Religion might have cost you the dearest friend you had in the world. You might have been attached, perhaps, to some carnal person, whom you loved almost to distraction, and yet were obliged to break off the connection for the sake of religion. Or you might have been in a situation of trust and emolument which you were compelled to relinquish, because the grace of God so wrought in your conscience that you felt you could not keep it and be a consistent follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are no common trials; but if saved from them, there was still the disgrace and shame that attend the public profession of the truth, and which your proud heart could hardly bear. Oh, if you could only have the gospel preached in your own parish church, or lived in London where nobody knew who you were or where you went! But to come to chapel and profess before a despising world a religion that would make you hated and scorned—that seemed an obstacle that never could be got over.

But these after all are but "hills," and to some mere hillocks. There are "mountains" behind, which come into view as the "hills" are laid low: by which we may understand *spiritual* and *inward*, as distinct from *temporal* and *outward* obstacles.

1. There is, for instance, the hard heart—"the heart of stone," as the Scripture calls it, which you never feel till you want to repent and cannot. Repentance and godly sorrow for sin, you are led to see are necessary to salvation; but they are Christ's gift, who is exalted to give both repentance and remission of sins. This hard heart, then, that you cannot remove or dissolve, stands as a mountain between heaven and your soul.

2. Again: *unbelief* with its workings; perhaps *infidelity*, with its dreadful suggestions; perhaps *blasphemy*, with its vile imaginations; perhaps *Satan*, with his fiery darts, discharging the artillery of hell against you;—all these were so many mountains that seemed to stand in your way, to intercept the light of heaven from your soul. You desired pardon and peace, but they would not come into your heart.

3. But the chief mountain of a quickened soul is *its sins*. Was not this your case when eternal things first pressed with weight upon your conscience? Under guilt and fear, at intervals by night and day you cried—"Oh, my sins! my sins! Oh, the guilt and bondage that I feel! Oh, the misery and wretchedness I have procured to myself by following the vile inclinations of my wicked heart!" All your sins were brought to light by the holy law of God and set before your eyes till you thought you would sink into hell. And as all these one after another rose to your view, they seemed mountains between you and God, so that you could scarcely hope that ever mercy would reach your case—could scarcely believe it possible that the grace of God itself could save you. You thought perhaps you had sinned against the Holy Ghost; said and done things that God neither would nor could forgive; been guilty of such horrid heart-wickedness and such contempt of God and godliness that even the mercy that reached the dying thief could not reach you. All these various and perplexing exercises of mind were so many mountains that stood day and night before your soul. I shall show by and by how those hills and mountains are laid low.

iii. But there are *crooked things* which are to be made straight. This figure casts a sweet light upon the exercises of many a saint of God, and the way in which the Lord removes them. Whenever the Lord begins a work of grace upon the heart, he always makes it sincere before him. Sincerity is the groundwork of all true religion. If a man be not sincere, he is nothing. The light of God searching his heart makes him see, and the life of God quickening his conscience makes him feel, that he has to do with One whom he dare not mock and cannot deceive. This makes him sincere before God and man. As, then, light is given to see and light to feel, he begins to find what crooked things there are in his carnal mind: what deceit, hypocrisy, malice, and animosity; what workings up against everything holy and godly. These are crooked things, for they are opposed to that sincerity and godly fear which have been implanted by grace in his heart. His path, too, in providence may be very crooked. He may be linked to a very crooked partner, whose wretched temper daily tries his mind; or have crooked children, whom he can neither control by kindness nor persuade by counsel. He may himself have a very crooked temper, continually manifesting itself, if not in words, yet in the rising up of angry thoughts and feelings which he cannot

prevent or subdue. His daily lot may be cast with persons who are, to use a familiar term, extremely aggravating—whose delight and pleasure are to put him off his guard, and to provoke him to anger, and thus bring guilt upon his conscience. His very position may expose him to peculiar temptations. He may, for months be placed in a situation where there is a daily snare; where his eyes are continually wandering after evil, and where Satan, as in the case of Joseph, is ever thrusting some temptation into his path, that might, but for God's grace, prove his utter downfall. These are some of the crooked things which have to be made straight. Or he may have sinned in a peculiar way. Under circumstances of peculiar and powerful temptation, he may have been overcome, and thus have brought great distress upon his conscience. And this sad fall has made everything else so crooked without and within that they seem almost to defy the very power and love of God to straighten.

iv. But there are "*rough places* to be made plain." In providence, his path may be rough; many thorns may grow in the road; he may have many domestic trials that are to him constant sources of vexation and pain. He may have poverty and sickness—a heavy debt owing to his baker and a long bill with his doctor, an afflicted wife, and little children who cannot work and must be fed. If in business he may be continually in difficulties from scanty capital and frequent losses. These are "rough places" in providence; but he may have rougher in grace. Wherever he goes, whatever he does, there may be a stumbling block set in his path; his road may become more and more perplexing; thorns and briars may grow thicker and denser, so that every step he takes he treads upon a thorn, and every time he moves his feet he lacerates them with a briar. In dark nights he may stumble over rough stumbling-stones; and only now and then, as the sun shines, does he tread the road heavenward with pleasure.

Now all these valleys, mountains, crooked things, and rough places are in the sovereign appointment and by the special direction of God; and it is their removal that proves the greatness of his power and love. If in your road heavenward, no valley never sank before you; if no mountain and hill never rose up in sight; if you encountered no crooked path through the dense wood; and no rough places, with many a rolling stone and many a thorny briar in the tangled forest, it would not seem that you

were treading the way which the saints of God have ever trod, nor would it appear as if you needed special help from the sanctuary, or any peculiar power to be put forth for your help and deliverance. But being in this path, and that by God's own appointment, and finding right before your eyes valleys of deep depression which you cannot raise up; mountains and hills of difficulties that you cannot lay low; crooked things which you cannot straighten; and rough places which you cannot make smooth, you are compelled, from felt necessity, to look for help from above. These perplexing difficulties, then, are the very things that make yours a case for the gospel, yours a state of mind to which salvation by grace is thoroughly adapted, yours the very condition of soul to which the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is altogether suitable. So that if you could at the present moment view these trials with spiritual eyes, and feel that they were all appointed by unerring wisdom and eternal love, and were designed for the good of your soul, you would rather bless God that your pathway was so cast in providence and grace that you had now a valley, now a mountain, now a crook, and now a thorn. And even as regards the present experience of your soul, you would feel that these very difficulties in the road were all productive of so many errands to the throne—that they all called upon you, as with so many speaking voices, to beg of the Lord that he would manifest himself in love to your heart. We all want ease; we love a smooth path. We should like to be carried to heaven in a palanquin; to enjoy every comfort that earth can give or heart desire, and then, dying without a pang of body or mind, find ourselves safe in heaven. But this is not God's way. The word of truth, the sufferings of Christ, and the universal experience of the saints, all testify against the path of ease; all testify for the path of trial; they all proclaim, as with one united voice, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction"—and this is the way of ease and of that prosperity which destroys fools (Prov. 1:32); but "strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life"—and this is the path of suffering and sorrow.

II.—But I pass on to show how all this is necessary *for the revelation of the glory of the Lord*; and how, when the glory of the Lord is revealed, it exalts the valley, lays low the mountain, makes the crooked straight, and every rough place plain.

The revelation of the glory of the Lord was primarily and especially seen in the coming of Christ in the flesh. When Jesus came "in the likeness of sinful flesh," it was a manifestation of the glory of God. As we read in the gospel of John (1:18), "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." God being essentially invisible, for not only hath no man seen, but no man can see him (1 Tim. 6:16), his glory can only be made known in the person of a Mediator who, as his only begotten Son, is "the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person." (Heb. 1:3.) It was the view of this glory which drew his disciples to his feet, as holy John speaks, "And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." This glory, it is true, the world never saw, as the Apostle declares—"Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8); for it was a spiritual glory, only revealed to the saints of God. The glory of Christ in his first appearance in the flesh was to be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." His humiliation veiled his glory; but his Person was in itself unspeakably glorious as God-Man; his work was infinitely glorious, as the perfect obedience of a Son; his sufferings were glorious, as endured in conformity to the will of God; his death was glorious, though in outward aspect so ignominious, as thereby destroying death and him who had the power of it, that is the devil (Heb. 2:14); his resurrection was glorious, as he was thereby declared to be the Son of God with power (Rom. 1:4); his ascension and sitting at the right hand of the Father was glorious, for there he entered into his glory (Luke 24:26); and his second coming will be glorious, for then he and his saints will appear together in glory. (Col. 3:4.)

But not only was the revelation of Christ in the flesh in itself unutterably glorious, but there is—what I am especially aiming at—the revelation of this glory in its measure to the soul. And this is when Christ is spiritually and inwardly revealed by the power of God; as Paul speaks, in his own case—"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me." (Gal. 1:15, 16.) And again, as the experience of all believers—"For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus

Christ." (2 Cor. 4:6.) When, then, we have some manifestation of the beauty and blessedness, the blood, love, and salvation of the great and glorious incarnate God, then "the glory of the Lord" is revealed inwardly in the soul, as well as outwardly in the Person of Christ and the word of his grace. Now it is this, and this only, which fully and thoroughly exalts the valley, lays low the mountain and hill, makes every crooked place straight, and every rough place plain.

Let us, then, now see, one by one, how it accomplishes those blessed effects.

1. You, or at least some of you, as I before endeavoured to open up have had many things in times past, or it may be at the present moment, very deeply to try your mind. Your bereavements and family afflictions have been or are very distressing; your losses in providence have very much exercised your mind; your sins at times have been or still are a great burden to your conscience; your doubts and fears have sorely harassed you; and you have had many painful exercises, and may still have them, whether you are a child of God at all. Now you want something to come from the Lord himself into your soul to relieve you from this depression, from this pain and exercise, this grief and sorrow, this sinking of heart; that shall do for you what is spoken of in our text—*"exalt the valley."* You want this bereavement filled up; this wound in your conscience healed; this painful exercise of mind removed; and something given to you that shall be firm and solid—a path in which you may walk without doubt or fear, guilt or bondage. These troubles and trials in themselves give you no evidence of sonship; you cannot build a hope for eternity upon doubts and fears, guilt of conscience, and distress of soul. It is with the heart as with the natural soul: the marsh and the morass, the filthy ditch and the slimy pool lodge in the depression of the valley, but do not make the ground solid, or fill it up with firm, sound material. You saw, you felt, you still see and feel, that your troubles, trials, sorrows, losses, bereavements, do not bring into your soul the grace of God; on the contrary, that they produce or foster peevishness, murmuring, rebellion, unbelief, infidelity. This scum and filth of our depraved nature settled, worked, heaved, and fermented in the lower grounds of your soul. In all this there was nothing solid. What wise man builds a house in a morass or a quaking bog?

What godly man can build for eternity on doubt and fear? You wanted, therefore, something solid that you could rest upon, as satisfying you that your sins were pardoned, and that the Lord was your everlasting portion. Now when the glory of the Lord is revealed—when Christ is made spiritually and experimentally known—when his Person is viewed by the eye of faith, his blood seen, his obedience looked unto, and a measure of his love and mercy felt, these divine and solid realities fill every aching void, supply every deficiency, make up every loss, remove guilt and bondage, and thus give solid ground for rest, and peace, and happiness.

2. Again: this "*mountain*," that stood perhaps for months before you, and which you thought never could be lowered; those amazing *outward difficulties* that surrounded you when you first began to make a profession; that contempt of the world that you felt you could hardly bear; those fears lest if you went on in this religion, you would have to sacrifice all your respectability, your position in life, and perhaps the little money you had got together: this mountain and hill that stood so long in your way, why, what was it, where is it when you experience any discovery of the beauty and blessedness of the Lord Jesus Christ? It falls in a moment of itself; and you wonder that you could ever have made a mountain of it. "Every mountain and hill shall be laid low."

So with your *hard heart*—your stony, rocky, unfeeling soul. Let there be only some discovery of Christ—some revelation of the glory of God—some manifestation of his love, and grace, and blood: down goes the hard heart! The rock is removed out of its place (Job 14:18); the stone is rolled away from the door of the sepulchre; the mountain flows down at his presence, and melts like the snow-wreath in spring before the Sun of righteousness. Every difficulty, outward and inward, is now removed. You can now bear reproach, endure persecution, submit to every trial in providence and in grace. You can feel a solemn pleasure in casting your lot amongst the saints of God, for you now esteem them as the excellent of the earth. Having Christ, in him you have a basis of peace—a solid foundation on which to stand in life and death, time and eternity. And thus you find every mountain and hill blessedly laid low.

3. And *your crooked path!* That crook in your lot—that dispensation so peculiarly trying which has grieved you over and over again; those painful and perplexing circumstances, which have given such a colour to your whole life, that you would have prevented or altered at any sacrifice, but cannot; those crooked things which every day lie in your path, and which are so awry that the more you try to straighten them, the more crooked they become;—let there be a revelation of the glory of the Lord to your soul; let there be a sweet testimony in your conscience that you are accepted in the Beloved, that your sins are cast behind his back, and that you are an "heir of God and a joint heir with Christ:" where are your crooks then? Your crooked temper itself, that crookedest of all crooks, becomes straightened; everything is now right; you would not have a single thing altered; the whole way in which you have been led is a way of wisdom and mercy from beginning to end; and you would not have a single thing different to what it has been and now is. The trial was very painful at the time; it was a heavy cross, and you sometimes thought you could never live through it. But now you can say—"Bless God for it! He supported me under it, brought me through it, and I would not have one thing different from what it has been either in providence or in grace." But you cannot truly and honestly say this except you have been, or are now favoured with a revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. What is the mind of man—of any man—of your mind, my mind, under affliction? Let him be tried with pain of body, poverty of circumstances, sickness in his family, guilt of conscience, hard bondage in his own soul, without any beam of divine light upon his path, and what is he? A murmuring, rebellious wretch, without a grain of resignation, without a particle of contentment or submission to the will of God. But let the glory of the Lord be revealed; let him have a view by faith of a suffering Jesus; let some ray of light shine upon his path; let there be some breaking in of the exceeding weight of glory that is to be manifested at Christ's appearing: where are all his crooked things now? All made straight. But how? By his crooked will—crooked because it did not lie level with the Lord's—being made to harmonise with the promise and precept, the footsteps and example of the blessed Jesus. The crook is not taken out of the lot, but straightened in the lot; the cross is not removed from the shoulder, but strength—that strength which is "made perfect in weakness"—is given to bear it. So it was with Christ himself in



the garden and on the cross; so it is with the believing followers of the crucified One.

4. But how does the Lord "make the *rough places* plain?" That rough and rugged road, where stumbling-blocks were so thickly strewn; the unbelief and infidelity of your heart; the suggestions of Satan and the workings of your own reasoning mind, which entangled you in such a maze; the briars and thorns which so lacerated your feet,—what becomes of these rough places when the glory of the Lord is revealed? All these stumbling-blocks are removed in a moment; unbelief is silenced; infidelity is put to flight; Satan slinks discomfited away; the reasoning mind bows to the force of the Spirit's inward witness; what was difficult to understand becomes easy to believe; and the intricate mazes where reason was lost are made plain to a childlike spirit. Nothing can stand the Lord's presence and power. When these are felt, what obstacle will not give way? what valley will then not be exalted? what mountain and hill not then be made low? what crooked path not then be made straight; and what rough place not then be made plain? But it is only the revelation of the glory of the Lord that does this; and without it the valley will still be a valley, the mountain still be a mountain, the crooked place still be crooked, and the rough place still rough. What need have we, then, to be looking up to the Lord, that he would manifest Himself in love to our soul!

III.—Now comes the solemn declaration from the Lord's own mouth—"And *all flesh shall see it together.*" I take the word "flesh" in two senses. "All flesh," in its widest signification, comprehends all who are in the flesh; that is, all the sons and daughters of Adam. "God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). In this sense, "all flesh" shall see the glory of God; that is, at the day of judgment, the great day of account, they shall see the glory of God in his justice, who do not see the glory of God in his mercy. "Shall not the Judge of the whole earth do right?" When the glory of the Lord shall be revealed—when Christ shall come with all his saints—when he shall sit upon the great white throne, and gather all nations before him, shall not all flesh then see him? As we read—"Every eye shall see him and they also which pierced him."

When the dead, small and great, stand before God—when the books are opened, and the dead are "judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works" (Rev. 20:12), the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it. An incarnate God shall sit upon the throne of judgment; and those who have lived and died in their sins shall call upon the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, and hide them from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. But they shall call in vain; for the indignant Majesty of heaven shall blaze forth in a million flashes of lightning, and they shall hear their sentence pealed in the tones of a million thunders. And thus "all flesh shall see the glory of the Lord," some to their eternal joy, and others to their everlasting sorrow.

But we may also understand the words "all flesh" as embracing, in a more limited sense, all the people of God in the flesh—the saints of the Most High now in their mortal bodies, who are still encompassed with all the sins and sorrows and infirmities of the flesh. The apostle, therefore, speaks of "living in the flesh," and "abiding in the flesh" (Phil. 1:22, 24), as expressing his continuance in the body. In this sense, the saints of God in their present time-state, in their mortal condition, before they pass from time into eternity, shall all see the glory of the Lord; there shall be a revelation of the glory of Christ to their souls, which they shall see below by faith, before they see it above by sight face to face. Now is not this what your soul is seeking after? And do you not find that without this you can get no solid rest nor peace? Is not your eye from time to time looking upward for some discovery of the glory of Christ to your soul? Is not your heart every now and then stretching itself up to the everlasting hills, that there may be some breaking in of heavenly light, some gracious discovery of the power and presence of the Lord Jesus? Are you not longing for some believing view of the Son of God—for some application of his atoning blood to your conscience—for some shedding abroad of his love to your soul—for some visitation of his Spirit and grace to your heart? Is all dark and dreary without the presence of Christ? Is all cold and lifeless unless you feel your heart in some measure, touched and softened by the word of his grace? If you have ever seen anything of the glory of the Lord, you will want to see it again; if you have ever felt the presence of Christ, you will want to feel it again; and if you have ever known what his power can do, what

his blood can save from, and what his Spirit can in a moment produce, you will want again and again a renewal of this heavenly blessing, that you may have a firm and solid evidence of your interest in the love and blood of the Lamb, have every guilty doubt and fear chased away, and your whole soul filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

IV.—But I now come to my last point, *the ratification* that God has given that all these things shall most surely come to pass: "*The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*" More than seven hundred years before Christ came into the world, God spake these words by his servant Isaiah, and he fulfilled what he spake. The son of God *did* come in the flesh; the glory of the Lord was revealed; and all flesh *did* see it together by the miracles that he wrought, the gracious words that he spake, the holy life that he lived, and the suffering death which, according to the clear language of prophecy, he died. But in a more special manner did those behold his glory "who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Not one jot or one tittle of God's word can pass away. The word that is gone out of his mouth in righteousness shall not return void. And this word the mouth of the Lord hath spoken for your consolation, ye saints of God, ye children of the Most High. You are waiting for the Lord to appear to your soul "more than they that watch for the morning." Often in the night season are you looking up to his blessed Majesty, that he would himself speak a healing, reconciling, comforting word with power to your heart. Many an inward sigh, cry, and groan come up to him whose ears are ever open, and many a secret prayer is spread out before these holy and gracious eyes which neither slumber nor sleep. You may often, left to yourselves, have to grope in darkness—thick, Egyptian darkness, that may be felt; but that very darkness makes you feel your need of light. The cry of the Church has always been—"Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us." You may often feel as if immersed in the very shadow of death, and say with Heman—"I am counted with them that go down into the pit; I am a man that has no strength" (Psalm 88:4); but the very feelings of death—the chill at your heart, and the cold sweat upon your brow—make you long for the appearance of him who is the Resurrection and the Life; and who can in one moment whisper—"Fear not; I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and death." You may be pressed down at times with the power of

unbelief, and think and say there never was a heart like yours, so unable to believe, so doubting at every step; but this deep conviction of your wretched unbelief, which is the Spirit's work to show (John 16:9), only makes you long for that living faith of which Christ himself is not only the Object, but the Author and Finisher. You may be sunk at times in despondency, as to both your present and future state; but that makes you the more desire to have a good hope through grace, as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast. You may feel at times the guilt, and not only the guilt, but the dreaded power and prevalence of sin; but that only makes you long the more earnestly for manifestations of pardon and peace, and that no sin may have dominion over you. "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it," that sooner or later you shall have every needful blessing. The valley you now feel shall be exalted; the mountain and hill shall be made low: the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain, and your eyes shall see the glory of the Lord Christ shall be made precious to your heart; he will come sooner or later into your soul; and then when he comes he will manifest himself as your Lord and your God. And so you keep hanging, and hoping, and looking up until he appears; for your heart is still ever saying,

"None but Jesus  
Can do helpless sinners good."

Here, then, we must leave it in his gracious hands who hath not said unto the seed of Jacob—"Seek ye me in vain." "Hath he said, and shall he not do it; hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"

## The Veil Taken Away

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening, July 28, 1844

"Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away." 2 Cor. 3:16

The Apostle, in this chapter, is drawing a comparison between the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai, or the covenant of works; the other from Mount Zion, or the covenant of grace. The former he terms the "ministration of death," and of "condemnation;" and the other, "the ministration of life," "of the Spirit," and "of righteousness." And he shews that though great was the glory of the covenant given from Mount Sinai, yet far greater is the glory of the covenant given from Mount Zion. The glory of the one being transient; and the glory of the other abiding. The glory of the one being that of killing; and the glory of the other that of making alive. The glory of the one consisting in condemning; and the glory of the other in justifying. So that, just as much as righteousness exceeds condemnation, as life excels death, and as the Spirit surpasses the letter; so does the glory of the covenant given from Mount Zion exceed the glory of the covenant given from Mount Sinai.

Speaking of himself, the Apostle says, "Seeing then that we have such hope" (a hope founded upon this better covenant of life and peace), "we use great plainness" (or "boldness," *margin*) "of speech. And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not look steadfastly to the end of that which is abolished;" that is, they could not look to the gospel, which is the end of the law as being perfectly fulfilled, because there was a veil over the face of Moses. Paul here alludes to what we read Exod. 34:29-35, that when Moses came down from the Mount, the children of Israel could not bear to look upon the glory that shone upon his countenance; and therefore, "he put a veil on his face till he had done speaking with them." This the Apostle

shews was a typical and figurative act, and sets forth the veil which is over the heart: that as the veil over the face of Moses hid the glory of his countenance, so the veil upon the heart of man, in his state of nature, hides from him all the glory of God that shines forth in the gospel. He therefore adds, speaking of the Jews in his time, "When Moses is read," that is, the law and the testimony contained in the books of Moses, "the veil is upon their hearts," just in the same way as the veil was upon Moses' forehead. From this he takes occasion to utter the words of the text; which contains a promise to Israel, and also bears an experimental signification. "Nevertheless when it" (that is, Israel literally and spiritually) "shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away."

In looking, then, at this portion of Holy Writ, I shall endeavour, with God's blessing, to show—what the veil is—what it is for Israel to turn to the Lord—and what it is to have the veil taken away. And may God the Spirit own his word with power to our consciences.

I.—There is, then a veil upon the human heart. And what is meant by the expression? We are not to understand by the word "veil" such as are now worn by women, which do not hide, so much as show off the features. The ancient veil worn by the Eastern women (and the same, I believe, is worn to this day), completely obscured the countenance. It was a thick covering which they wore over their face when they went abroad; it being considered to this day in the East highly indelicate that a single feature of a female's countenance should be seen. Thus Judah did not know Tamar, though she was his own daughter-in-law, and of course he had often seen her, because "she covered herself with a veil." (Gen. 38:14, 15.)

Thus also, we find, that the veil of the tabernacle, which separated the holy of holies from the holy place, was very thick; for it consisted of four distinct coverings, as we read (Exod. 36:35), "And he made a veil of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen." These four distinct pieces seem to have been

quilted together with needlework, which we know was the case with the hanging for the tabernacle door (v. 37); and all these put together into one piece formed a thick, dense, impenetrable covering. The veil of the tabernacle was then more a curtain, or rather four curtains sewed one over the other, than what we understand by the word veil. And thus, by the veil upon the heart, we are to understand a covering, or curtain, so dense, thick, and close, as to exclude all light from penetrating through it; not merely shutting out the person from seeing, but also shutting out the person from being seen.

In looking, then, at the veil upon the heart of man by nature, we must take with us this idea of a dense, impenetrable covering, to understand what the Spirit of God means by the expression.

If we look, then, at the veil over man's heart by nature, we shall find it to consist of covering upon covering. For instance:

1. There is the veil of *ignorance*. What a thick, dense, impenetrable covering is that! If we look back to the days of darkness and unregeneracy, in what dense ignorance did we walk. The very doctrines of grace, and the whole scheme of salvation, were hidden from our eyes, and we understood not a single truth of the gospel aright. Our minds were wrapped up in such thick clouds of ignorance, that we knew neither God nor ourselves, neither our state here or hereafter. This veil of ignorance spread over the heart seems spoken of, Isaiah 25:7, "He will destroy in this mountain *the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations.*" And again, "Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people." (Isaiah 60:2.) And thus Paul testifies that the Gentiles walk, "*Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.*" (Eph. 4:18.)

2. But this is not the only covering that goes to make up this thick, dense, impenetrable veil. There is the veil of *unbelief*. So that could man by the dint of his natural faculties overcome his

ignorance, and thus strip off one part of the veil, the other part, that of unbelief, would still remain. Look at the scribes and Pharisees; the Lord wrought such amazing and undeniable miracles, as we should think must have convinced them that he was the Messiah: as, for instance, the raising up of Lazarus from the dead. They saw him come out of the sepulchre with their bodily eyes at the word of Jesus; but it had no effect on their minds. They saw the blind restored to sight, the lame walk, and the deaf receive hearing; but it never wrought faith in their consciences. They were, as the Apostle says, "shut up in unbelief." (Rom. 11:32, *margin.*) This is just our state by nature; unbelief has such possession of our hearts that we cannot believe the things of God till they are made known to us by divine revelation.

3. But again; there is the covering of *self righteousness*. What a motley monster is man in his natural state! Full of evil, continually committing sin, daring God to his face by a thousand crimes, and yet setting up his own righteousness! We might just as well expect that a felon in Newgate, who is there awaiting in the condemned cell the merited punishment of his aggravated crimes, of his murders, robberies, and continued outrage against all human laws, should hope to come out of prison by his good deeds and obedience to the laws of his country, as expect such a vile wretch as man to hope to clamber up to heaven by the ladder of his good words, good thoughts, good works, and good intentions. But the veil upon his heart prevents him from seeing that by anything he can do he cannot please God. Self-righteousness in all its forms is so interlaced with every thought of our heart, so intertwined with every fibre of our natural mind, that though we know ourselves to be sinners, yet self-applause and self-complacency bid us do something to gain God's favour.

4. But again; there is the veil of *superstition*. What a hold has superstition over the minds of men! If we go into any country parish, what superstition universally reigns over the minds of those dead in sin! How church and churchyard, surplice and gown, font and altar, are well nigh worshipped! And in town, as



well as country, in dissenter as well as in churchman, what superstitious feeling prevails; and how much passes off for religion and piety that was never wrought in the heart and conscience by God the Spirit! I believe there are many persons who cannot sin comfortably till they have said their prayers, and cannot launch out with an easy conscience into the pleasures of the world till they have gone to church or chapel. They must needs attend upon the ceremonies and forms of religion to get a license for sin, as a school-boy learns his task to obtain a holiday.

5. And then, there is the veil of *prejudice*. How deeply prejudiced are men's minds against the truth, and against all who profess or preach it! Have we ourselves not in time past walked in this path? What deep prejudice have our minds been steeped in against the truths of God's word! And have we not looked upon the people who held and preached them rather as monsters than men! When I walk through the streets of the town in which I live, I can see sometimes prejudice staring out from the very eyes of the people, especially the well-dressed and respectable, whom I meet; and though they cannot, through mercy, bring anything against my life and conduct, so great is their prejudice because I hold and preach the truth, that I believe they look upon me as a worse character than an adulterer, a swearer, or a drunkard. The prejudice painted in their very features sometimes almost amuses, and sometimes annoys me; sometimes stirs up my pride, and sometimes makes me thankful that I differ from them, and suffer reproach for the Lord's sake.

6. And then, there is the veil of *enmity*. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." What bitter enmity there is in man against the humbling truths of the gospel, against all who live godly in Christ Jesus, and against everything spiritual and heavenly, or that breathes the Spirit of the Lord!

7. Then, there is the covering of *pride*. And O, what a dense veil is that, which, like an unclean bird, spreads its baneful wings over a man's heart, that he will not submit to the humbling truths of the gospel!

8. And then, there is the veil of *hypocrisy*, in which man is so deeply sunk, prompting him to every hypocritical word and action.

All these coverings, one upon another, are so spread over the heart of man by nature, that the truth of God, of itself, cannot reach him; so that he has no eyes to see, no ears to hear, no heart to feel, no conscience to submit to the power of truth. O, in what a sunken state man is! We never can abase man too much. O the gulph of misery and ruin into which he has fallen through the transgressions of our first parents! O the depths of depravity into which he has been hurled! O the bottomless abyss of destruction and guilt into which, when Adam fell, he cast himself and all his race! But though so awful is man's state, yet, "the veil" upon his heart prevents him from seeing the depths of his own fall. This is one of the worst features of man's ruin, *that it is hidden from him*, and that he knows nothing of it till, through a miracle of grace, he is plucked out of the pit of horror, and saved from going down to the abyss of hell, with all his sins and crimes upon his head. Ministers, therefore, can never abase man too much, nor point out too clearly the awful abyss of ruin and degradation into which he has fallen; and the more they point it out, the more witness have they in the consciences of those who know something of these things by painful experience. But the veil on man's heart hides from him his own ruin; and till the veil in a measure is removed, he never knows, never sees, never feels one truth aright.

II.—Now the first work, (and this leads me to the second branch of the subject) of the Spirit of God on the heart, is, not to remove the veil, that is a second work, but to discover it. If I may use such an expression, the Spirit of God breathing on a man's heart, blows away a little corner of the veil spread over it; and then we begin for the first time to see and feel that there is a veil there. The beginning of knowledge is to learn our foolishness; the beginning of mercy is to feel our misery; the beginning of salvation is to know our condemnation; and the beginning of

eternal life is to pass under the sentence of everlasting death. It is thus that the Lord, in his overflowing love to the objects of his choice, begins to deal with their consciences. *The conscience* is the place where God always begins, as the Apostle says in his own ministry, "Commending ourselves *to every man's conscience* in the sight of God:" He begins to deal with a man's conscience, when, by the secret light and life of his Spirit, he makes him see and feel something of his lost and undone state before God. Eternal realities thus are made to lie upon his conscience; the truths of God to come into his soul; and the entrance of God's word to give light to his heart.

Now where did your religion begin? It is a grand point to know where your religion began; for if the beginning be all right, all is right; and if the beginning be wrong, is it not to be feared that all the rest is wrong? Did your religion begin with conscience, for that is the place where God begins? Were eternal realities laid upon your mind? Did a sense of your sinfulness come upon your soul? Did you feel what a ruined wretch you were in the sight of a holy God? Did you see what a veil by nature there was upon your heart? As a man begins to see these things, the veil is in a measure beginning to be removed; he begins to see eternal things in a clearer light, and as the veil thins away, to feel them with a more powerful life.

Now this leads him to "turn to the Lord." When God's truth comes into the conscience, and eternal realities lie close upon the mind, and we thus see and feel that there is a veil upon our hearts, we begin to turn to the Lord that the veil may be taken away. And there is no true turning to the Lord until these things are spiritually and experimentally felt.

But what does turning to the Lord imply? It implies a turning away from everything else. We never knew our need of a Saviour till conviction of sin was brought into the conscience; we thought we could be saved by a covenant of works till we knew something of the purity and spirituality of God's law. We thought ourselves wise in our own generation, yea, that "wisdom would almost die

with us," until we felt our ignorance and blindness, and that there was a thick veil spread over our hearts.

Now, as the Lord the Spirit enables a poor sinner to turn to the Lord (for it is the Spirit's work to turn to the stronghold the "prisoners of hope,") *he begins to unfold to him who the Lord is.* This is the grand turning point, the Spirit fulfilling his covenant office in shewing a condemned sinner who the Lord is. This is the first discovery that there is a refuge; the first ray of gospel light whereby the way of escape is made known; the first dawn of hope in the soul; the first setting the feet in the way of peace. After the Lord has quickened our souls, for a time we often go, shall I say, blundering on, not knowing there is a Jesus. We think that the way of life is to keep God's commandments, obey the law, cleanse ourselves from sin, reform our lives, and cultivate universal holiness in thought, word, and action and so we go, blundering and stumbling on in darkness; and all the while never get a single step forward. But when the Lord has suffered us to weary ourselves to find the door, and let us sink lower and lower into the pit of guilt and ruin, from feeling that all our attempts to extricate ourselves have only plunged us deeper and deeper, and the Spirit of God opens up to the understanding and brings in the soul some spiritual discovery of Jesus, and thus makes known that there is a Saviour, a Mediator, and a way of escape—this is the grand turning point in our lives, the first opening in the valley of Achor of the door of hope. And when the soul has once seen that there is a Jesus, and once felt a measure of the power of his resurrection, it never goes to any other quarter for pardon, justification, and salvation. We may compare the soul in this state to a mariner shipwrecked by night on a reef of rocks, and seeing the first dawn of light in the horizon. Does he not instinctively turn to the point where the sun is to rise? Are not his eyes anxiously fixed upon the dawning day? He does not look to the North for the sun to appear; he does not turn to the South, or to the West, but to the East, for there the dawn breaks, and there he keeps his eyes fixed till the sun rises. So with the poor shipwrecked soul cast away upon the shoals of despondency, and washed up on those rocks, where he fears he must starve or die.

When the Spirit of God begins to open up with power in his conscience that there is a Jesus, that he is the only Mediator, that the Son of God has come down and taken a holy human nature into union with himself, and is now at the right hand of the Father, it is the first break of day, the first dawn of hope; and upon that bright spot does the shipwrecked soul fix his longing eyes till the Sun of Righteousness arises upon it with healing in his wings. It is a great step in a man's experience to turn wholly and solely to the Lord, and renounce all creature righteousness, all forms and ceremonies as a way of salvation. It is a great mercy to turn away from them, as the shipwrecked mariner turns away from his sinking ship, and looks to the rising sun to shew him some way of escape, and thus afford him some gleam of hope.

But, as the soul turns to the Lord, it is with earnest prayer and supplication. As we read, Jer. 31:9, "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them." This is the way in which the Lord always leads the people of his choice;—he creates the want, raises up the power to ask in prayer, and then graciously answers the request. "I will yet, for this," he says, "be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." (Ezek. 36:37.) "Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." (Jer. 29:12, 13.)

III.—And this leads us to the third branch of the subject—*the taking of the veil away*. There are three steps in experience connected with the veil upon the heart. 1. The knowledge of the veil being there. 2. The turning to the Lord, that he would take the veil away. 3. The removal of it; as the Apostle speaks in the text, and also intimates a little lower down: "We all, with *open*," or, as it is literally, "with *unveiled* face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord." The veil is taken away when the soul turns to the Lord. The light of his countenance, the beams of his grace, and the sheddings abroad of his mercy, dissolve and melt the veil away, just as the sun thaws away the winter snows.

1. And what does the soul see when the veil is removed? Till this dense covering was taken away, it saw nothing aright, heard nothing aright, felt nothing aright, but stumbled on in thick darkness. But when the soul turned to the Lord, and gave itself wholly and solely unto him, there was *a discovery to faith of the glorious Person of Jesus*, divine realities became manifested in the Spirit's light, and sealed upon the conscience by a measure of the Spirit's teaching. And this is what the Apostle speaks of in the next chapter, where he says, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 4:6.) Till the veil is taken away, we do not see the glory of God shining forth in the Person of Jesus.

But what is it to see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God thus shining? It is to see all the perfections of God shine forth in the glorious Person of Jesus. We cannot know God out of Christ. He is "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; *whom no man hath seen nor can see.*" (1 Tim. 6:15, 16.) "Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me, and live." (Exod. 33:20.) But the invisible God having sent his only begotten Son into the world, who is "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his Person;" and he having taken into union with himself a holy human nature, it is thus, as the Spirit of God gives us light to see by faith the Person of Immanuel, that we view the glory of God shining forth in the face of the God-Man Mediator. The Lord, therefore, gently chided Philip, when he said, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" (John 14:8, 9.)

2. But what do we see in the person of Jesus, when the veil is removed? We see in him all the perfections of God harmonize, and specially behold "justice and mercy meeting together,

righteousness and peace kissing each other." And we see in this great truth, which is all the comfort of a believing soul, how that "*God can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.*" We see that God can pardon the sinner, and yet condemn the sin; that all the attributes of Jehovah shine forth in the face of Jesus, without clashing, without collision, and that the love, mercy, and grace of a Three-One God beam forth in the Person of Christ. We see that a propitiation has been made for sin; that atoning blood has been shed to satisfy all law-claims, "to make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness;" that a sacrifice has been offered up which God has accepted; and a ransom paid which the Father has received as a complete acquittance of the debt due to divine and inflexible justice. When we see and feel this, the veil is removed. We may have been wearying ourselves, and we should have gone on wearying ourselves to the end of our lives, trying to make ourselves righteous, to put away our sins, to purge our consciences, and reconcile our guilty souls to God. We might go on heaping up prayer upon prayer, tear upon tear, sacrament upon sacrament, and mass upon mass, and yet after all sink down into a deserved hell. And there all will sink who are not experimentally acquainted with the propitiation made for sin through the sacrifice of the only begotten Son of God. Into that pit of horror will all sink, who put confidence in any other way of salvation than the meritorious sacrifice offered up on Calvary, or look to any other way of salvation than that propitiation which the Son of God has made by his obedience and blood. What virtue and efficacy there is in his blood to purge the guilty conscience! God the Spirit lead us deeply into it!

There is a great deal of cavilling in some men's minds about the expression, "the blood of God!" 'How,' say they, 'could the Godhead bleed? How could the Godhead suffer?' But if it is not the blood of him who was God, I might just as well rely for salvation on the blood of one of the thieves that were crucified with him. What is Christ's human nature? That is the rock on which many gallant ships have struck. It is not a *person* having a distinct existence apart from the Deity of Christ; but it is a

*nature*: what the Holy Ghost calls a "Holy thing," (Luke 1:35); "a body that God had prepared for him," (Heb. 10:5) taken into intimate, mysterious, and inexplicable union with the Person of the Son of God. So that, whatever that human nature did and suffered, from its intimacy and union with the Son of God, the Son of God did and suffered. Did that nature bleed? It bled as having union with Deity; it being, so to speak, the instrument that Deity made use of. To use an illustration: as my soul touches an object through my hand, or speaks its thoughts by my tongue; so Deity not being itself able to bleed, bled through the humanity. Did that nature suffer? It was not the mere suffering of a human person, as a man might suffer; but it was the suffering of a holy nature in intimate union with the Person of the Son of God. And did that nature obey? The Son of God obeyed through and with that nature. So that, to cavil at the expression, "the blood of God," is nothing less than to strike a blow at a great fundamental truth. We might object, on the same ground, to the expression, "God our righteousness," as the Prophet speaks, "And this is the name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our righteousness," that is "Jehovah our Righteousness." (Jer. 23:6). Who is our righteousness but the Son of God? And what was that righteousness but the obedience of his human nature? for Godhead could no more obey than suffer and bleed; and yet Jehovah is our righteousness. And if we do not object to the expression, "the righteousness of God," why should we cavil at the expression, "the blood of God?"

Now this is the grand mystery which faith embraces, and which is dear to the heart of every God-taught soul. What a power and efficacy, as the veil is taken off the heart, does faith see in that sacrifice! What a propitiation does it see made for sin by the blood of the Son of God! Faith does not view it as the blood of man! Can the blood of man put away sin? But when we see it as the blood of the Son of God, O what a value, efficacy, power, and glory shine forth in it! But till the veil is taken off the heart we cannot see it; nor can we, till the Spirit makes it experimentally known, learn what a divine reality there is in this blood to purge the guilty conscience.



3. So with respect to *Christ's obedience to the law*; if his obedience were merely the obedience of man, it could not justify all the persons of his elect; but being the obedience of the Son of God, who "being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"—it becomes a justifying robe for every soul to whom it is imputed, and who, by the removing of the veil, takes a happy and blessed shelter under it.

4. Again. As the veil is taken off the heart, we begin to see and feel *what a power there is in true religion*, what a reality in divine teaching, and what a sweetness there is in the inward testimonies of God. Most men's religion is nothing else but a round of forms. Some have their doings, some their doctrines, and others their duties; and when the one has performed his doings, the other learnt his doctrines, and the third discharged his duties, why, he is as good a Christian, he thinks, as any body; whilst all the time, the poor deceived creature is thoroughly ignorant of the kingdom of God, which stands not in word, but in power. But as the veil of ignorance and unbelief is taken off the heart, we begin to see and feel that there is a power in vital godliness, a reality in the teachings of the Spirit; that religion is not to be put on and put off as a man puts on and off his Sunday clothes; but when we come away from chapel we cannot take off our religion, fold it up, and put it away into the drawer, and there let it lie safe and quiet all the week. Where vital godliness is wrought with divine power in a man's heart, and preached by the Holy Ghost into his conscience, it mingles, daily and often hourly, with his thoughts, entwines itself with his feelings and becomes the very meat and drink of his soul. But till the veil was taken away, we could put our religion on and off at pleasure; and were often glad to take off the tight Sunday coat, and slip on the easy week-day clothes.

As then we begin to see and feel the reality and power of vital godliness, it separates us from those who have only a name to live while they are dead; it makes us manifest as one of "the peculiar people;" and our friends and companions, nay, the only

persons whose society we really love, are those who have felt divine realities by divine teaching. We can no more do with a dead profession of truth, than with a dead profession of error. We can no more make friends and companions of presumptuous professors, than of swearers, adulterers, or drunkards. And feeling, or at least desiring to feel, in our hearts, light, life, savour, dew, and power for ourselves, we look out for those who have experienced these things themselves; and in whom we can read, if we have a discerning eye, the legible lines of God's Spirit written upon their conscience, or towards whom we can feel a sweet knitting of soul, as taught by the same Spirit the same realities which we believe the Holy Ghost has taught us.

Now when a man comes to this spot, to see and feel what a reality there is in the things of God made manifest in the conscience by the power of the Holy Ghost, it effectually takes him out of dead churches, cuts him off from false ministers, winnows the chaff from the wheat, and brings him into close communion with the broken-hearted family of God.

5. But as the veil is removed, the soul also begins to see and feel the *workings of inward sin that it was previously ignorant of*. The removal of the veil not merely shows us the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, but every thing contrary to that glory. The pride of our heart, the power of our unbelief, the enmity of our carnal mind, the awful hypocrisy, the daring presumption, the abominable treachery, the fleshy lusts, and all the obscene imaginations of our depraved nature, that will work in us in spite of all our groans and cries to the contrary—all this, as the veil is taken off the soul, becomes more and more manifested, and we have (and O, what a sight it is!) a sight of ourselves. Did ever a man see so filthy a sight as himself? When he looks down into the sewer of his own nature, does he not see every thing there, creeping and crawling, like tadpoles in a ditch, to disgust him?

But even this works together for good; for as a man feels a measure of light and life in his conscience, and sees and feels too more and more of the workings of his depraved nature, and the

breakings forth of the hypocrisy of a treacherous heart, he is brought to look more simply and more singly to the glorious Person of the Son of God, and cast himself more sincerely and unreservedly upon that blood which cleanseth from all sin.

And thus, as the veil is removed from off the heart, he begins to drink more deeply into the spirit of the gospel, into the mind of Christ, into the reality of the things of God, into union and communion with Jesus, into the solemn renunciation of himself, into an abhorrence of evil, and separation from the world, and learns to live a life of faith upon the Son of God.

But the veil is continually (if I may use the expression) flapping back again over the heart; it is not so taken away that no more darkness is felt, no more ignorance known, no more self-righteousness, and no more of its accompanying fruits perceived. It is removed as long as the Spirit shines, as long as the soul sees light in God's light. But the veil at times seems to come back over our hearts as much as if it never had been removed. We have to walk in darkness, and have no light; and frequently have to grope for the wall like the blind, and grope as if we had no eyes. We can see no beauty in Jesus, and can scarcely believe there is a Jesus. We can see none of our evidences; all seem clean swept away, and scarcely a landmark left; we can find no more cries and groans in our soul than in the emptiest professor, and can feel no more godly sensations or spiritual movements in our hearts than if we were deceived altogether. Now we fear that there has never been a single spark of grace in our hearts; for the word of God is hid from our view, the promises buried in impenetrable darkness, and past experiences covered with a thick, black cloud. This makes a man feel more of the veil on his heart than before. The feelings of darkness, when light does not shine; the sensation of misery, when mercy is not manifested; the sense of helplessness, when strength is not given; the experience of absence, when presence is denied; all these teach us what the veil is. But O, what profitable lessons are learnt in this dark valley of humiliation, in these trials, exercises, and temptations! How, by this experience, we learn more in what vital

godliness consists! How the marrow of religion is more opened up in our conscience! How we learn more to cease from our own works! How we see more what a barren wilderness there is in our own hearts! And feeling how deceitful and hypocritical it is, we learn to place less confidence in it.

And when the Lord sees fit to bring the soul out of darkness, will it not make the light more precious? The gloom that hung over the soul, will it not make God's countenance more sweet when it comes? And the unbelief, the coldness, the deadness, the depravity, the hardness, and the apparent searedness of conscience which the soul has to grapple with, will it not make it prize more and more the teachings, leadings, and guidings of God the Spirit? And thus, by these various dispensations of God, we learn more to cease from man, to cease from ourselves, to cease from our own wisdom, to look more simply, more singly, more solely and wholly unto the Lord of life and glory, and to depend more upon the Spirit to work in us that which is well pleasing in his sight.

Let me just, in a few words, sum up the whole. Look at the three steps. *The veil felt; the turning to the Lord; and the removal of the veil.* These are the three steps in the divine life, commencing when it is first communicated to the soul.

Now, if you are a child of God, taught by the Spirit, you will know one or more of these branches. You will have learnt, *first*, what it is to have the *veil over your hearts*, under which you will groan and sigh: you will experience the darkness, hardness, deadness, depravity, hypocrisy, unbelief, and presumption of your carnal mind; and under it you may groan for months, and sometimes for years, before light, life, and power manifestly come to melt the veil away.

The *next* step is, to *turn to the Lord* with all our heart and all our soul; to see and feel that there is a Saviour; I do not mean in the judgment, but in the heart and conscience. This will produce a springing up out of ourselves to lie at the feet of the Lord; that

we may receive divine life out of his fulness, and feel its powerful operations in the soul. To him will flow our desires, our supplications, our pantings, and our longings to know him and him only. This is the grand turning point.

And then comes the *third step, the taking of the veil from off the heart*; a discovery to the soul, by the Spirit, of the glory of God in the face of Jesus; the inward reception into the heart and conscience of the Son of God with power; of his blood to cleanse the guilty conscience, of his righteousness to justify the naked soul, of his love as balm for every wound, and of all his attributes as God-Man, as suited to every want, every misery, and every sense of our wretchedness and ruin.

And this path of the just, as the light, shineth more and more unto the perfect day; so that the soul, as the Lord leads it on, becomes more and more acquainted with its vileness and his goodness, its worthlessness and his infinite worth, its guiltiness and his blood as purging from sin, its nakedness and filthy rags and his glorious robe of righteousness. And thus, as we sink into a deeper knowledge of ourselves, we rise higher into a knowledge of Christ; and as we are brought into the wilderness, God is more glorified by leading us in it. So that, while we sink to our right spot, a sinner saved by grace, we learn to put the crown of glory upon the head of him to whom alone it belongs, yielding the praise and thanksgiving to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, as one undivided, glorious, and ever-living Jehovah, both now and for ever.

## The Vine and its Branches

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening, June 20, 1841

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." John 15:1, 2

What a solemn season the evening of that night was, when the Lord of life and glory was delivered into the hands of wicked men! when before Judas came to betray him with a kiss, he opened as it were all his heart, and told out the secrets of his loving bosom into the ears of his disciples; when he said to them—"Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you *friends*, for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you."

He was at this solemn season setting before them every thing that could comfort their drooping spirit. "Let not your heart," he says, "be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me." And if there ever was a special season, wherein the Lord, during his abode upon earth, administered spiritual consolation to those who were eternally his, we must fix this as the period, of all others, wherein that consolation was administered by him to their disconsolate souls.

But we see that the Lord did not merely administer *consolation* to them at this trying hour, when he was about to be taken from them and nailed to the cross, when he was going to leave them, and withdraw from them his bodily presence. He did not confine himself to topics of consolation; but he added topics of solemn instruction, and topics of deep warning. Now this shows to us, that however solemn a season of Divine consolation a child of God may be favoured with from the lips of the Most High, the Lord will take care to administer instruction, reproof, and warning

with it. So that the ministration of the Gospel is not one pure unmixed ministration of consolation; but fully corresponds with the character that the Holy Ghost has given of the Scriptures,—that they are "profitable for doctrine," (that is, teaching) "for *reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*" And this coincides with the character that the Apostle Paul gives of his own preaching, where he says—"Commending ourselves to every man's *conscience* in the sight of God." It is, then, a thorough mistake of what the ministration of the gospel is, to think that the only gospel topics are those of consolation for God's people. That is a short-sighted, misdirected view of what the ministration of the Spirit is. We find, that the Lord, at the very moment when he was pouring consolation into the hearts of his troubled followers, lays before them a fearful warning; "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." And if the Lord of life and glory laid before his followers instruction and warning at this solemn season, it evidently proves that it is a part of the ministration of the Spirit to employ such topics, and so to "rightly divide the word of truth," to "take forth the precious from the vile," and to separate the clean from the unclean.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." Without making any formal divisions of the text, I will, with God's blessing, endeavour to travel through the topics which are there lodged for the instruction of God's people, so far as the Lord the Spirit has led me into any acquaintance with them, and so far as he shall give unto me "a door of utterance" to set forth their meaning before you.

I.—"I am the *true* vine." It appears from other parts of Scripture, that there were in the land of Judea plants, which wore the appearance of the vine, but were of a poisonous, deleterious nature. We have a striking instance of this in the second book of

Kings (4:39), where "one of the sons of the prophets went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds, and shred them into the pottage," which he did not appear to know were poisonous and injurious; but those who were better acquainted with the plant cried out, "There is death in the pot." Here, then, was a plant, which bore a great similarity to the true vine; so great a similarity as to deceive this son of the prophets. There is much, therefore, couched in the words, "I am the *true* vine," as opposed to false vines, poisonous and deleterious vines. We have an allusion to this in the Book of Deuteronomy, where we read—"Their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter" (Deut. 32:32)—no doubt alluding to this poisonous vine, which grew in the land of Judea. We find also the Lord, in Isaiah (5:2), remonstrating with his people, that he had "planted a vineyard with the choicest vine," but when "he looked that it should bring forth grapes, it brought forth wild grapes;" that is, instead of bringing forth clusters of the true fruit, it brought forth clusters of such fruit as I have been describing—"the vine of Sodom" and "grapes of gall." It had, as Jeremiah says (2:21), "turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto him." There is much meaning, then, couched in the words, "I am the *true* vine," implying that however near any false Christs may approach in appearance to the Christ of God, yet that he, and he only, is "the *true* vine," out of whom all the living branches grow, and is the only vine which the right hand of God himself hath planted.

Now this "true vine" is said to have "branches." And there are two descriptions of branches, which are said to be in it. One kind is in it by profession; another set of branches is in it by reality. We must not for a moment suppose, that those branches which the husbandman "taketh away," were living branches of the true vine,—that they ever had an eternal union with Christ, that they were ever redeemed by the blood of Christ, or ever came forth out of Christ, as being in Christ before all worlds; but they were in him nominally—in him by profession. And the Lord seems to take (as I was observing the other Lord's day) this broad basis of



their profession, adopts their own language, and speaks of them, not as they really were in his heart-searching presence, but as they professed to be; and thus frames his language, not according to the reality, but to the appearance of things. So that there are branches in Christ professedly, that have a mere nominal union with him; that claim to belong to him, and yet bear no fruit; and as bearing no fruit, the husbandman "taketh them away," removes them from their standing, plucks them out of that position in which they have placed themselves, and casts them away, that all men may see their shame.

But what are these "*fruits*" that some branches bear, and others bear not? Before we can describe the state of those branches that bear not fruit, we must have a little insight into what those fruits are, the deficiency of which causes the husbandman to stretch forth his hand, and to take them away.

These "fruits," then, appear for the most part to be *inward* fruits; and we have a catalogue of some of them in the epistle to the Galatians (5:22), where we read, that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace," and so on. It is the absence, then, chiefly of these *inward* fruits, that the husbandman finds in these nominal branches; and the absence of these fruits causes him to take these branches away.

1. Now of these fruits, *sincerity, uprightness, and integrity of heart before God*, is one inward fruit, that the Lord looks to find in the branches, that profess to grow out of this spiritual vine. Where there is no principle of spiritual uprightness implanted in the soul, there we must say that the man is radically wrong. I am not speaking here of worldly uprightness, of natural integrity, of moral honesty, of carnal sincerity; but I am speaking of a principle of spiritual integrity, whereby the heart is made right before the Lord, whereby there "is some good thing" (as the Scripture speaks) "toward the Lord God of Israel." Now where this principle of spiritual integrity is absent in the eyes of the heart-searching God, it demonstrates death in the branch. But how is a man to know whether he possesses this "fruit" of

spiritual integrity? If he possesses it, it will be manifested in his dealings with God, and it will be manifested in his dealings with man. He that has a principle of spiritual integrity and uprightness of heart before God, will come before him as a God that is not to be mocked, and will lay open his whole soul before him as a Jehovah that tries his reins and searches his heart, that knows every secret movement and working of his soul before him, and the chambers of whose bosom lie outstretched before his piercing eye. Then he that has spiritual integrity, will have those feelings which the Psalmist had in the 139th Psalm, when he said—"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." This spiritual integrity and uprightness before God is much connected with godly fear; and therefore I believe, that a principle of spiritual uprightness lies at the root of all true religion, so that where *that* is deficient, life is deficient; where the soul is wrong *there*, it is wrong altogether. And as it will be manifested in our approaches to God, so it will be also manifested in our intercourse with the family of God, and in our dealings with the world at large. There will be no taking a high room, when we feel that the lowest place is too good for us; there will be no endeavouring to elevate ourselves in the eyes of God's people, when we feel our heart to be "a nest of unclean birds;" there will be no walking upon the stilts of another man's experience, nor standing upon some high doctrinal tower, in one whose heart is really made upright and sincere before God. He will stand before the children of God in his true colours, telling them simply what he feels himself to be, and hating not only hypocrisy, but the appearance of hypocrisy; finding doubtless the workings of it in his carnal mind, but still brought to the apostle's experience—"The evil that *I would not*, that I do."

2. Again: *humility, spiritual humility* is a fruit that grows only in the heavenly garden, the garden of the Lord, the planting of his right hand; and where spiritual humility is deficient in a man, the absence of that fruit stamps him as but a nominal branch. Pride was man's ruin; and pride, cursed pride, has so interwoven its roots with the fibres of man's heart, that nothing but the tearing

up, the pulling up of the tree altogether, will ever totally eradicate that cursed principle; but there is a great difference between the inbeing of pride and the prevalence of pride. Sin will always dwell in us; but sin will not reign and rule in a child of God: "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." Now wherever there is the absence of spiritual humility, there is the absence of spiritual life. But what makes a man humble? It is not gathering the language of humility from the word of God, nor from the mouths of saints; but it springs from having humbling views of one's self, "from seeing light in God's light," from beholding the purity and perfection of him "with whom we have to do," from having a spiritual discovery of what sin is, and feeling the burden and weight of guilt laid upon our conscience, from being led by the Spirit into the chambers of imagery to see the tracing upon the wall, and so to "abhor ourselves in dust and ashes" before God.

3. The principle of *living faith* is another "fruit," an internal fruit, the absence of which stamps a man as a nominal branch. He that has no faith, is evidently dead in sin; for the communication of life to his soul is cotemporaneous, is at the same moment, with the implantation of faith; and faith is raised up in the soul by some manifestation of God. For faith is the eye of the soul which sees God, the ear of the soul which hears the voice of God, and the hand of the soul which takes hold of those manifestations which are given to it by God himself. Therefore, if faith, divine faith, living faith, spiritual and supernatural faith be wanting in a man, divine fruit is wanting, and he is stamped by the absence of this fruit as a mere dead branch, one that is only nominally in the living vine. But one shall say, "Are there not dear children of God, who are full of unbelief, who are exercised with many doubts and fears, who cannot read their interest clear, and who cannot say, 'My Lord, and my God?'" Doubtless, there are many living souls, who have no sweet testimony of their interest in the beloved, but still they have faith. Not faith in Jesus, so as to realise their interest in him; but they have faith in the perfections of God, they have faith in the spirituality of God's law, they have faith in the threatenings which God has pronounced against the ungodly,

they have faith in the authority and certainty of God's word, and they have faith to believe that there is no Saviour but Jesus, and that that Saviour must be revealed with power to their souls. And, therefore, though they have not the joy of faith, nor the assurance of faith, nor the triumph of faith, yet still they have the existence and reality of faith, in acting upon things which are eternal realities, though not of such a nature as to bring peace and consolation to their hearts. Faith deals with realities; it is "*the evidence of things not seen*;" and, therefore, dealing with realities, it will be according to the reality that it deals with. It is like a man looking through a glass; the things that he looks at will be tinted with the colour of the glass. Everything will wear the aspect which is presented to his eye through the medium whereby he looks at it. And so faith, exercised upon the perfections, the tremendous attributes, the holiness, the justice, the majesty, the glory, the heart-searching presence of Jehovah,—faith viewing God through that medium receives no consolation, nor any blessed testimony, nor deliverance of the soul from bondage. And yet it views eternal realities, apprehends eternal realities, and is spiritually affected by those realities which are brought home by the Spirit to the conscience.

4. Again: *hope* is a "fruit" of the Spirit; and the absence of hope, the thorough, complete absence of hope, stamps death upon that nominal branch, in which the absence of all hope is found. But some will say, "Are not the children of God often plunged into despair?" No; not into despair. They are often very near it, they are on the borders of it, they go to the very brink of it; the gusts from that pestiferous land may so blow their blasts upon them, that in their feelings they shall be in despair; yet no living soul ever set his foot beyond the brink, no child of God ever stepped beyond the border, so as to get into the regions of despair. If he got there, he would no longer be in "the land of the living;" if ever he set his foot over the border that separates the land of hope from the land of despair, he would be no longer calling upon the Lord to save his soul from the lowest hell, but he would be at once overwhelmed by those torrents, which would sweep him away into endless perdition. Hell is the place of despair, and the

conscience of the reprobate, before they are cast into those devouring flames; and, therefore, unless you know what the very feelings of the damned in hell are (which you can never be certain you do, however you may think you know them), or unless you have gone into the very feelings of despair in the conscience of the reprobate before hell opens its jaws to receive him for ever, however near you have been to the borders of that dreadful land, you never can say your foot has crossed the threshold. No; there is a "who can tell?"—a secret support of "the everlasting arms;" there is a band, a tie, wreathed round the soul by the God of all grace; there is a golden chain let down by God himself from the everlasting throne of mercy and truth, which keeps the soul from ever being drawn into that whirlpool, going down those tremendous cataracts, and being swallowed up in the boiling abyss below. There is an invisible arm that preserves the soul from being swept away by the water-floods; and this secret help is manifested by a lifting up of the heart oftentimes in prayer, and the relief sometimes experienced in pouring forth the soul in fervent cries, upholding all who feel it from being overwhelmed in the torrent of despair, when the sluices of God's wrath seem pulled up to hurry it into eternal misery. And therefore there is no child of God that has been quickened by the Spirit, but has some degree of hope, which keeps him from making shipwreck altogether. So that we do not go too far in saying, that the absence of hope altogether stamps death upon a man.

3. *Spirituality and heavenly-mindedness* are "fruits" that the Lord finds,—or, rather, that the Lord works, and when he has worked he finds, in living branches. That is, there is at times a drawing up, and a going forth of the soul unto him from whom all grace comes. The things of time and sense are not a living man's true element; and though he has a nature which is akin to them—aye, a base nature which (were it permitted), would wallow in the mire as the filthy swine does in the puddle, yet there is a new nature in him communicated by the Holy Ghost, which is at home only in heavenly things, and finds a congeniality only in spiritual things, when the Lord draws it into exercise, and brings the two

together. Then the utter absence of spirituality—the total want of a nature that can receive, realise, taste, feel, and handle the things of God, demonstrates a man to be "dead in trespasses and sins." I know I am drawing a very narrow line here, because you will say (and there is something in me saying it all the while), "Think of those poor children of God that are in their first convictions; think of those who are passing under the rod of God's law; and do not forget those who are exercised with terrors and fears, and are cut up in their souls with deep pangs of guilt." Oh! no, friends, I would not lay the weight of my little finger to harass them; no, not the weight of a hair of my head; but rather, if the Lord is pleased, be used as an instrument to lift them up, and not to wound their tender consciences, nor bring one pang of distress into their afflicted minds. But I appeal to you that are in trouble of mind, have you never anything which feels a communion and a sympathy with spiritual things? Is there no feeling in your soul nor affection in your heart, that, could you only enjoy it, could you only have a blessed manifestation of it, would bring peace to you? Then, if the manifestation of God's mercy would bring peace to your soul, you must have a new nature to receive those manifestations, because they cannot bring peace except to a man who has a nature to understand them, a nature to embrace them, and a nature to enjoy them. Therefore say not, however low you are sinking in misery, say not there is never at any time, on any occasion, at any moment, any one spark of this hidden life. Do not give the lie to your own feelings altogether; let not the devil blind you to everything that is passing in your heart; write not this "bitter thing" against yourself, that there never has been one single moment, since the Lord first quickened you into life,—*not one moment* when there was a spiritual going up of your soul to the Lord of life and glory, nor any one panting of heart after his blessed presence, nor any "hungering and thirsting after righteousness," nor any one desire after the manifestation of his grace and glory. If you say, "No, I have never experienced one longing after the manifestation of Christ; I have never poured forth one fervent prayer nor groaning cry that he would reveal himself to me; I have never known one single breathing of heart, nor panting desire to feel him precious

to my soul," say that, and I will say you are dead in sin, or wrapped up in the grave-clothes of a nominal profession; say that, and I will say, "Your conscience is seared as with a hot iron." No; I am convinced from soul feeling, that however deep a man may sink in conviction, yet there is at the bottom of it all, rising in the midst of that sea of trouble, a breathing, living, unquenchable principle, which cannot be satisfied without Christ, which goes forth in longing petitions after Christ, which hungers after his righteousness, and can only be satisfied with his favour. And the total absence of that stamps a man as dead in sin.

II.—Now, then, here are the branches that "bear not fruit." I dare say you have often observed a vine, that perhaps covered a large space of wall; and have you never observed, (it is a fact whether you have observed it or not,) that the more the vine spreads, the less it bears? The vines which bear the greatest quantity of fruit are those which are most *cut in*, and those which cover the least space. And thus these dead "branches" shall look very green, shall have a very large quantity of leaves, shall appear far superior to the fruit-bearing branches; but they are stamped with this mark—that they bear no fruit.

The figure will not hold altogether; no metaphor will hold in every part; it is a mistake to think that any type is complete in all points. The barren branches in a natural tree *do* come out of the stem; but it is not so with the barren branches in Christ's visible church. The figure does not hold there. They are merely in him by profession,—tied on, as it were, by the string, or fastened by the wire of profession, without having an inward being.

Now, these branches that bear no fruit "the husbandman taketh away;" that is, he removes them from the place which they were occupying. And how does he remove them? Why, some he removes by the sudden stroke of death; when the time of vengeance is come, when they have "filled up the measure of their iniquities," the Lord removes them by cutting them down at a stroke. And this has often been the case with persecutors and oppressors of God's truth. Some have put an end to their own

lives by the halter, the razor, or the pond; others have been cut down by raging fevers; others have ended their days in a madhouse; and others have been so manifestly pointed out by the arrows of God sticking in them as the enemies of his truth, that their death has even been horrible to those who have no religion to know what the deathbed of a saint is. Thus the Lord "takes them away," by some putting forth of the hand of his vengeance against them. With others the Lord deals in a different way. As I was speaking last Lord's day, he "dries up the green tree;" the branch becomes withered. There never was any spiritual sap in it; but even natural zeal dries up, and all fervour is lost. Thus the branch becomes withered and dead, and it drops off; that is, it no longer keeps its nominal place in the vine, it no longer maintains even an outward profession, but it drops off as a rotten branch. You that have experience of churches, have you not seen this take place in yours? Cannot you at this moment call to mind such and such a member, who once flourished in zeal, with great gifts in prayer, and was forward on every occasion to speak his mind; and has he not dropped off? If you have watched him, he has dropped perhaps into Arminianism, into Socinianism, into Infidelity, or dropped into open sin, and either taken himself away from you, or you have been forced to separate him on account of his bad conduct. Well, then, the branch is "taken away." And the husbandman, the Father, takes others away by ceasing to restrain them from the lusts of their hearts by providential barriers, by giving them over to a reprobate mind, so that they commit all uncleanness with greediness; and then in a fit of passionate disgust they throw aside all religion. The deep backwater of sin in their hearts bursts through the flood-gates, which hitherto have pent it back; and they rush headlong into the pleasures of the world and the lusts of the flesh. Satan finds the chambers of the palace "swept and garnished;" and "he takes seven devils, and enters in, and dwells there, and that last state of the man is worse than the first." And thus in way of judgment the Father "takes them away." But some may go on even to a deathbed; aye, and be thought highly of in a church; aye, and be received as gracious men and women, and go on flattering themselves they are the children of God, building upon vain



props, resting upon rotten confidences, and when they come to die, the Lord takes the veil off his angry countenance, and frowns them into a never-ending perdition. Or more than that; the Lord may "take them away" at the very moment that the soul leaves the body; they may seem to die in peace, and the Lord reserves his "taking them away" until that moment, when the soul quits its earthly tabernacle, and it is cast into the place where hope never comes.

These, then, are the branches, in the vine nominally, whom the husbandman "taketh away."

III.—We come now to the branches, whom the Father "purgeth, that they may bring forth more fruit." These living branches, then, that bear true fruit are apt to become weak and sickly, and thus need the cleansing hand of the husbandman. The word "purge" signifies to purify or cleanse. And there are various ways of cleansing or purifying the vine.

Sometimes the branch gets encrusted with moss, and what are called *lichens*. It gets run over with these adventitious foreign incumbrances, which seem by preventing the sap having free course, and excluding the influence of the atmosphere, to make the branch sickly and diseased. How covetousness and worldliness and the cares of this life and anxiety after the poor perishing things of time and sense,—how this *moss* creeps round a man's heart! and as it creeps round his heart, how it binds it and contracts it! The apostle truly said, "The love of money is the root of all evil; which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." We might expect that when the Lord blessed a man with prosperity, it would open his heart; but do we see it so? No, almost always it contracts his heart. When this *moss* gets round him, it seems to bind the bark; and as it nips and contracts the bark, the sap seems to be stopped in its circulation, so as not to flow into it, to make it "fruitful in every good word and work." Now the Lord sees that some of his people are getting this moss round them; they do not bear fruit; the branches are becoming

sickly; they look withered and wizened. The husbandman watches this, for he wants to see how his vine is going on; "the beloved comes into his garden to eat his pleasant fruits." And he stretches forth his hand, and takes the moss away. There is no other remedy. It was binding the bark, and stopping the vital juice. He takes away, then, the property; removes the worldly prosperity; mars the man's prospects in life; and thus removes that which was prejudicial.

Sometimes, if we look at a branch, we shall see one part of it beginning to swell; a knot is forming there; and as it swells, and a knot forms, that also stops the circulation of the sap, and makes the branch sickly and the fruit to wither. Now, here is pride in a man's heart, which makes it swell with ambition and presumption and self-exaltation and a desire to be somewhat. And when this pride begins to rise and swell, it not only swells outwardly, but it swells inwardly; and as it swells inwardly, of course there is less passage for the sap to flow. Pride is not merely such as may be visible in a man's outward gesture and demeanour; it is inward, and when it is in a man's heart, it contracts it, and it seems (so to speak) to stop the circulation of living sap in his soul. And what is the cure for that? Why, the knife must come to pare down this knot—to remove this swelling. Are you gifted in prayer? The knife must come, and cut your pretty gift. Have you a good memory of the Scriptures? You must find your recollection of texts and passages fail. Have you a good judgment of the doctrines of grace? You must come to the spot of Ephraim, and "be broken in judgment." Are you in any way secretly exalting yourself amongst the people of God? You must have the knife of piercing convictions passed through this pride of yours, so as to go through it inwardly, as well as pare it and clip it outwardly, and cut you down to your right measure. And thus there is a purging of the branch, "that it may bring forth more fruit."

The branch sometimes gets too luxuriant; all its strength goes into leaves and shoots, and the juice is not so condensed as to produce fruit. Then the husbandman must take out the pruning

knife, and cut the ends of the branches off. Oh! to have the pruning knife, friends! to have our religion, or what we thought to be religion, pruned and cut down to a stump; to have all that we thought in ourselves was of God, so cut in by the hand of this heavenly husbandman, that its very existence seems gone, and what we prized lies at our feet, cut off from that branch on which we once looked with pleasure! You that are exercised in your souls, you that have felt the hand of God in you and upon you, have you never had much pruned off and cut in, that you thought was true religion? Have you not often been resting upon notions and opinions, and by painful exercises found these pruned off and you cut in? Have you not often been resting upon some fleshly excitement, some carnal imagination, some airy vision, some good opinion of others concerning you, and found in solemn moments, when pangs of distress and guilt laid hold upon you, that these things were cut off, so that you could take no comfort from them; and you look at them, and see them bleeding away in the dust, and at last withered, so that you yourself say, "They are only fit for the dunghill, to be thrown away with the loppings of the vine?" You know little of what it is to be a fruit-bearing branch, if you have not had the pruning knife often to cut you in. It is not merely one pruning season, and then all pruning done with for ever. The vine, of all trees, needs pruning most; it never will bear, until it is well cut in and thoroughly pruned. And so a living soul is continually pushing forth those luxuriant shoots, that need to be cut off and pruned away by the hand of the heavenly husbandman.

Now what is God's object in these sharp exercises, these powerful temptations, these distressing convictions? It is to make the branches bring forth more fruit. "Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it," not to destroy it, but "that it may bring forth more fruit." Then afflictions, and distress, and convictions, and solemn and deep exercises of soul before God, and the weight and burden of harassing temptations, in the hand of God cause the branch to bear more fruit. They, in the hand of the Spirit, cause greater *humility*; for if a man has a deeper sight and sense of self, he will be humbled, broken, laid low. The Spirit working by

them will cause also in a man more *integrity* and uprightness of heart before God. Feeling how much of his religion has been "weighed in the balances, and found wanting," and how much has been cut off by the (apparently) ruthless, unmerciful knife of the Husbandman, he becomes exercised as to the remainder. "Is knowledge nothing? is the opinion of others nothing? is church membership nothing? is my having seen Christ in this passage and Christ in that, nothing?" says he to himself: "Why, I have proved it is nothing to raise up my soul in hours of temptation, and to comfort me in bitter seasons of distress; what, then, is it *all* a delusion? is the whole of my religion wrong to the very bottom? is it radically deficient? is it nothing else but the joy of the hypocrite, that is for a moment?" These anxious inquiries produce sighs and cries and groans and fervent prayers and wrestlings that the Lord would not suffer us to be hypocrites, but would make us sincere and honest before his heart-searching presence. So again, the loss of all this fleshly religion by the pruning knife of God, produces fruit not only before God, but before man. For it works in this way; the man begins now to be more faithful to the members of the church with whom he is connected,—more honest to all with whom he has to do in spiritual matters. He says, "Oh! I have been so deceived; I thought I was such a Christian, I deemed myself so far advanced in the divine life, but oh! how differently I feel now. Oh! the sufferings I have experienced under a sense of guilt and wrath! Oh! how little I feel to have been spiritually taught of God!" And then, being weighed up in his own feelings, he will begin to put other people into the same scale. "Did you ever feel so?" he begins to ask. "Were you ever exercised thus? has the Lord ever brought you down?" He now can no longer mask everything under a cloak of amiability and taking things for granted, but begins to search and try whether others are under the same solemn teaching. This cutting in, then, makes him not only honest before God, but faithful to his fellow-sinners and his fellow-members.

Again: the pruning knife is often made the means, in the hand of the Lord, of kindling in him a spirit of fervent pouring out of soul

before God. My friends, I appeal to your consciences. Where are your prayers in seasons of prosperity? Where are the sighs and groans of your spirit, when all things are flourishing in temporals, and all things are smooth in spirituals? Let conscience speak. Are not your prayers cold, lifeless, short, and formal? But when do you groan and sigh and cry to the Lord? when do you seek blessed communion with him, and feel that nothing but his presence can satisfy, nothing but his blood can atone, and nothing but his dying love shed abroad in your heart can sweetly lift up your soul into "the peace of God that passeth all understanding?" When? where? how? Why, it is when you are under solemn exercises, deep soul trials, passing under the rod of God's covenant, walking through the fires of temptation, wading through the waters of trouble. Oh! it is not just dropping down upon one's knees, and complimenting the Lord with a few words, however fluently uttered; but it is what is passing in the chambers of the heart—it is the pouring out of the very soul before him. *That* is prayer, and the rest is all delusion. And thus these exercises are, in the hands of the Spirit, the means of kindling in us earnest intercession at a throne of grace, for the blessings that we spiritually want.

Again: they are made useful also, in the hand of the Spirit, to make us spiritual and heavenly minded. Where are you (let honest conscience speak)—where are you, when business flourishes, when customers increase, when worldly things smile, and everything wears a pleasing aspect? Are you spiritual? are you heavenly-minded? are you crying to the Lord in some secret corner? No; you are turning over your books, calculating the interest of your money; your eyes are here and there, looking after some new fashion to attract customers to your shop, or, in some way or other, speculating with your imagination upon those things that shall feast your carnal appetite. Is it not so? Let honest conscience speak in your bosom. Now when all things are against you, when the cutting winds of adversity blow upon your face, when everything seems to frown, and God adds his frown too, lowering, as it were, from behind temporal things, showing his reproofing face behind the rebuking aspect of temporal events,

is there not a going upward of heart after something that shall not pass away? Is there not the stretching forth of your hand to lay hold of the substance, when shadows are fast vanishing? Is there not some breathing forth of your soul after spiritual things, when temporal things are all cut away from under your feet, and that vision of peace and happiness which you were forming in your carnal mind is all swept away, like the delusive appearance of water in the desert, and leaves not a trace behind? Then you become spiritual and heavenly-minded.

Again: the Lord working by these exercises—for they themselves cannot do it—often strengthens and draws faith into exercise. We read of "the trial of our faith, which is much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire." Then faith must be tried; if it be gold bought of the Lord, it must be "gold tried in the fire." Now these exercises, temptations, distresses, the powerful cuttings-in by the hand of the heavenly Husbandman—try the faith that the Lord gives; and faith being tried and put to its utmost strength, a man begins to find what faith really is. What a wonderful grace is faith! The heavier the load put upon it, the stronger the back of faith is to bear it. No one knows the power of faith, till he is brought into circumstances of difficulty and trial, which press and bear down this living principle. But this living principle upheaves itself, like the "leaven hid in three measures of meal;" "it lives," as Hart says, "under load; though damped, it never dies." And thus it is drawn out and called forth under powerful temptations, and becomes strengthened thereby, brought forth into all its activity and living vigour, and thus bears the stamp of being the supernatural, living "faith of God's elect."

The "purging" then, of these fruit-bearing branches makes them bear more fruit. Not indeed often in our feelings; but we are very poor judges of this matter. As the branch is more loaded with fruit, the more it droops to the earth. It is the tree that bears no fruit, the barren poplar—that shoots aloft into the sky. The vine, loaded with fruit, cannot raise itself up into the clouds; it needs support. We are very imperfect judges what fruit is. Those who

bear most, think they bear least; those who bear least, think they bear most. Where shall we find one that boasts so much of fruit as a self-righteous Pharisee—an Arminian wrapped up in the rags of his own righteousness? Why, he is always prating about fruit, and never bears one single particle of it to the glory of God. But the poor, burdened, exercised, tried soul, that is stooping (as it were) under the weight of the temptations he is exercised with,—this drooping branch is loaded with fruit, and the more he is loaded, the more he will bend to the ground. But it is the eyes of others, and not his own,—and they must be discerning eyes too,—that can distinguish that these are "the fruits of the Spirit," to the glory of God, who "works in him to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Now which are *you*? You that profess the doctrines of grace, which are you? *There* is your doom; not from my poor, weak, perishing lips, but from the word of the living God. Read your sentence—hear your destiny. If you are a branch nominally in the living Vine, that bears no inward and outward fruit, there is your sentence recorded. The Husbandman will "take you away," cast you upon the dunghill, and from the dunghill into the flames of endless perdition. But if you are a branch that is bearing fruit to his honour and praise and glory, he will "purge you, that you may bring forth more fruit;" and you shall shine in the realms of a never-ending day.

## **The Vine and the Branches, or Union and Communion with the Lord Jesus**

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Morning, July 22, 1866

"Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me, ye can do nothing." John 15:4, 5

Union and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ are the source and fountain of all our salvation and of all our sanctification; the very spring-head of all our holiness and all our happiness for time and eternity. You will observe that I have put together salvation and sanctification, holiness and happiness; for as these are inseparable in their nature and in their end, so do they flow out of the same fountain and run in the same channel. As, then, union and communion with the Lord of life embrace and imply blessings so great and ends so glorious, the Holy Ghost has set forth this grand truth very largely and blessedly in the Scriptures of the New Testament. Figures, I need not inform you, are much used in the word of truth, as indeed they were by the Lord himself in the days of his flesh, to set forth and illustrate heavenly doctrines; and they have this great advantage attending them, that they lie level with the capacity of most minds. Many can understand and remember a figure who can neither comprehend nor retain an argument; and as divine truths are rather to be believed than reasoned about, a comparison may help faith when an argument might but hinder it. The Holy Spirit, therefore, has in this instance, as in so many others, made use of several very striking figures, which no doubt you are familiar with, but which, as conveying the nature of this union and communion more vividly than any other way that could have been employed, I will briefly touch upon before I proceed to my text.

1. One figure then which the Holy Ghost has made choice of to



show us the nature of the union which exists between Christ and his people is that of a *building*. The main force of this figure lies in the connection between the foundation or the corner stone and the superstructure; the Lord Jesus being the foundation or corner stone and his people the stones built up upon him. "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." By the foundation of the apostles and prophets is meant not that they are the foundation, but that it was instrumentally laid by them, as Paul speaks: "As a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation." (1 Cor. 3:10.) But it is God himself who really and truly lays it, as we read: "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." (Isa. 28:16.) As Christ is here spoken of as both "the foundation" and "the corner stone," the question perhaps may rise in your mind, What is the difference between the two? There is no real difference between them, they being one and the same; but the expression, "corner stone," implies that the foundation stone laid is so broad and wide that every corner of the whole building rests upon it, and thus each side wall has the same strength and the same security, Jew and Gentile equally resting upon Christ as the only true foundation. Is not this a beautiful representation of the union which subsists between Christ and his people? Take away the foundation, the whole building falls into ruin. Let the foundation stand, every stone built upon the foundation remains firm in its place. Every child of God is taught and brought by grace to rest upon the Lord Jesus Christ, his Person and work, his blood and righteousness, as the only foundation of his hope; for well he knows the truth of those words: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Whilst then he stands upon that foundation, he stands secure; for upon that rock the church is built, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

2. But the Holy Ghost has chosen another figure also to set forth the union and communion which subsist between Christ and his

saints—the figure of the *human body*, as consisting of head and members. You will recollect that passage in the Colossians where the apostle says, "Not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." And so in the Ephesians: "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ. From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Eph. 4:15, 16.) In these almost similar passages, the blessed Lord is represented as the Head of his body, the church, and all his saints in personal and immediate union and communion with him as his members. As, then, the members of our natural body are in union with our natural head, and receive from it those supplies of strength and direction which are needful for the being and well being of the whole frame, so the members of Christ's mystical body live, act, and move by virtue of their union with him.

3. Another figure is that of *man and wife*—that most intimate, close, and affectionate of all possible unions. Strong is the union of father and daughter; strong the union of mother and son; strong the union of brother and sister; strong the union of friend and friend. But what are these bonds of union compared with the union which binds together as one flesh man and wife? So in the mystical body, Christ is represented as the husband, and the Church as his bride. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it." "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church: and he is the Saviour of the body."

But there is no part of Scripture in which this union in its nature and effects is more blessedly set forth than by our gracious Lord himself in those solemn discourses which he held with his disciples previous to his sufferings, bloodshedding, and death. It was then that he who taught so much by figure, chose that now before us to represent, first to his disciples and then to us

through them, in the clearest and most beautiful way, the union and communion which subsists between him and his people—I mean that of *the vine and the branches*.

But the meaning, force, and beauty of this figure will, I trust, be more evident, if the Lord enable me to open up the language of our text with any degree of clearness. We may observe, I think, in it these three distinguishing features:—

I.—*First*, the Lord's positive *testimony to man's inability* and helplessness: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." "Without me ye can do nothing."

II.—*Secondly*, the Lord's gracious *charge*, "Abide in me, and I in you."

III.—*Thirdly*, the Lord's unerring *test* of abiding union, "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."

These three points I shall, as the Lord may enable, endeavour to bring before you this morning. The Lord the Spirit open my heart and mouth to speak and your ears to hear, and crown both with the blessing which maketh rich.

I.—The Lord's people in some points widely differ, in other points closely agree. In external circumstances, such as rank, station, property, ability, circumstances in life they widely differ. How varied, for instance, are the cases, states, and circumstances of those now before me, as regards outward conditions of life. Nor do they differ only in these merely external points: even in their inward experience of the power of the word they widely differ. They are not all cast in the same exact mould of divine teaching, are not all led in the same precise path of exercise and temptation, do not sink equally deep in soul trouble, nor rise equally high in sweet enjoyment. And yet with all this evident disagreement, there is a solid body of real agreement, so close and strong, as if not actually to nullify, yet to render insignificant

all minor differences. It is in grace as in nature. The features of our face may widely differ to the spectator's eye, and yet there is a unity stamped upon them all, which makes their resemblance far closer than their difference. As a proof of this, if we ever meet with a person, any one of whose features is distorted or exaggerated, different in form or size, or out of proportion to the rest of the countenance, how sensible we are in a moment of it, as if it were a caricature of the human face. So in grace. In many features of their experience the Lord's people widely differ; but if any one be wanting, or distorted from the right shape, or exaggerated so as to be out of proportion, we are at once struck with it, as if it were a caricature of a true and living experience; and almost the first glance seems to arouse some suspicion of its truth and reality. Admitting, then, that in minor points the people of God may differ as regards their Christian experience, yet there is one in which all of them will agree, from the least to the greatest, from the babe in grace, just beginning to lisp his first broken accents in the language of Canaan to the most advanced saint, who, after many years of painful struggles in the wilderness, is listening to hear the call, "Come up higher." This, then, is the feature so universally stamped upon them all: *a sense of creature helplessness*. And does not this voice of conscience in them all within re-echo the Lord's words in our text? "Without me ye can do nothing." No Pharisee or legalist, no formalist or Ritualist, no advocate for faith as a natural duty and for repentance as a moral obligation, no wholehearted, unhumbled, unwounded, unexercised professor of religion will ever truly and sincerely use that language as the expression of his inmost experience, though it may issue from his lips as a formal confession. And why? Because a thorough sense and deep feeling of his miserable helplessness and inability to all that is good has never been wrought in his conscience by a divine power. Now, until this is the case, there is always a latent persuasion in his mind that he can do something toward his own salvation; and whatever failures, aye, repeated failures, he may be conscious of; whatever amount of sin his conscience may testify against; whatever dislike he may feel to the strictness of religion and the separation it calls for from everything which his

heart most fondly loves, he still cleaves with all the strength of a drowning man to this point as his last hope, that he both must and can do something whereby to please God, and avert destruction from his guilty head. It is true that he never has begun, seriously begun, even to satisfy himself that he is in a right way, or if he has made an attempt to do so, he has never persevered even according to his own knowledge of right and wrong. And yet with desperate strength he will ever continue to hold a lie in his right hand, even to, and often on his dying bed; for he thinks if he part with that one only hope he is lost without remedy. But now take as a contrast to all such as he, alike deceiving and deceived, the quickened family of God—aye, begin at the lowest state or stage in the work of the Holy Ghost upon the soul—and you will not find any one amongst the partakers of grace but who will fully agree with our Lord's testimony that he can do nothing. Now why is this? Because a ray of divine light has shone into his soul, by which he sees not only that which is to be done but that he has no power of doing it.

What then is intended by the expression of our gracious Lord? "Without me ye can do nothing." Does the Lord mean to exclude thereby such things as natural conscience may recognise as right and wrong, or that a man may be induced to do by the effect of moral persuasion? Does he exclude thereby all the duties which we owe to society, to our friends and relatives, or those acts of kindness and affection which we owe to all, as far as lies in our power? No, surely; though I ought to add that even these things cannot be done as God would have them done except by the power of his grace. But what the Lord means is, nothing to satisfy God, nothing to put away sin, nothing to draw down the approbation of heaven, and I may well add, nothing to satisfy a man's own enlightened and living conscience. For you will observe that I am speaking now not of one dead in a profession, and therefore satisfied with mere formal lip service, but of one who is enlightened by the light of the living. Such a one sees light in God's light; is taught of God to know the length and breadth of his holy law, and is thus made to see and feel what alone will satisfy God; and as his conscience moves in strict accordance

with the word of God, the light he has from it and the life he feels in it, he is fully and clearly brought to this point, that nothing can or will satisfy his enlightened and quickened conscience but that which satisfies God. I want you well and thoroughly to understand this point; and you will do so if God be your teacher, for it is a grand turning point between a dead profession and a living faith, between knowledge in the head and the life of God in the soul, betwixt the teaching of men and the teaching which cometh from God only, betwixt a religion which leaves a man under the power of sin and Satan and a religion which saves the soul from sin in its guilt, its dominion, and its consequences. In the case, then, of which I am speaking, there is light in the understanding, life in the conscience, faith in the heart, and feeling in the soul; and as all these things spring from the inward teaching of God and the express work of the Spirit, they accurately and intimately correspond with God's written testimony in the word. When therefore our Lord says, "Without me ye can do nothing," he means "nothing to put away sin; nothing to reconcile yourself to God; nothing to fulfil the demands of his righteous law; nothing to atone for your aggravated crimes; nothing to deliver you from curse and condemnation; nothing to shut the gate of hell or open the door of heaven; nothing to allay your doubts and fears, or remove the guilt of sin from off your conscience; nothing to take away the sting of death, or fit and qualify your soul for the inheritance of the saints in light."

Now, there is nothing more easy to learn as a doctrine than that of man's helplessness, and yet nothing more dreadful to feel as a matter of soul experience. It is one thing to look on a deathbed and there to lie oneself. It is one thing to stand in a court of justice and hear a man condemned to death, and another to stand oneself a guilty criminal in the dock. It is one thing to read of a shipwreck, and another to be a storm-tossed mariner on a rocky shore; it is one thing to hear about a holy, just, and righteous God, and another to stand trembling and guilty at his bar. In fact, there are few feelings more terrible than of helplessness, when we know that unless help come we must

perish. Picture one man standing under a tall precipitous cliff, or upon a rock on which the tide of the sea is gradually gaining, and who knows he must be drowned unless a boat come to save him. Fancy a titan about to fall into the hands of a banditti all watching for him, unless timely aid rescue him. Picture one left on a desert island, or wandering in an Australian wilderness, with neither food nor water, and ready to perish of hunger and thirst. This is to be able to do nothing, when life itself depends on doing something ourselves, or another doing it for us. Now, until a man is in some degree brought here as one ready to perish, he does not know the meaning of the words, able to do nothing. A real knowledge and a living feeling of it is, I repeat, a most terrible experience—one of the sorest, sharpest, most cutting, and slaughtering which the soul passes through under the strong hand of God. And yet, how you will hear ministers telling people one minute in word how helpless they are, and then the next exhorting or bidding them in deed come to Jesus and take hold of his promises. How contradictory is all this; for if they can do nothing, how can they come to Jesus, or how can they lay hold of a promise given by him?

But you have probably observed that our Lord here is speaking not so much of men generally—that is, of men dead in sin, and therefore emphatically, as the apostle speaks, "without strength" (Rom. 5:6), as of his own disciples, who were possessed of divine life and in union with himself. What do we gather from this fact? This grand truth, that God's people are in themselves as helpless in divine things after they are called by grace as they were before. It is a very common idea among both preachers and professors that those who are possessed of faith can always make use of it. But our Lord's words effectually dispose of a doctrine so contrary to Scripture and experience: "Without me ye"—ye my disciples, ye who are members of my mystical body, ye who are branches in me the true vine, even ye without me can do nothing; that is, as I have explained it, nothing spiritual, nothing to satisfy either God or conscience, nothing worthy of the name of gospel fruit. If you will refer to the margin, you will find it rendered "severed from me," the idea being that of a branch

cut off from the main stock, and thus practically incapable of bringing forth fruit. A branch severed from the stem necessarily withers and dies, because the supply of sap is cut off which, flowing through stem and branch, has clothed it with leaves, flowers, and fruit. The word means, literally, "apart from me," in a state of separation from me, and, as it were, outside me. Our Lord does not mean thereby to say that a branch once in living union with him can be severed and cut off, but that assuming it could be, such would be the case. He purposely uses this strong language to show them, not only the source of all their fruitfulness, but that separation from him would bring with it an immediate drying up of every grace. In fact, it is a fuller opening up as well as a more condensed declaration of what he had said in the preceding verse: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me." There is a natural impossibility for the branch to bear fruit of itself under such circumstances. Did you ever see a vine branch bearing fruit which did not issue out of the stem? If it do bear fruit—and all its beauty as well as all its usefulness consists in it, it only bears fruit by virtue of its union with the stem. We may not be able to explain how this fruitfulness is effected; nor need we be botanists and naturalists to penetrate into the hidden mysteries of vegetable life; but we see with our unlearned eyes certain natural facts, and from them we can gather certain undeniable truths. A branch must be in union with the stem, to produce, under the influence of light and heat, anything worthy of the name of fruit. So it is in grace. Without Christ, without union and communion with Christ, without the flowing in of his influence into the soul, without the communication of his Spirit and grace to the heart, without the light, without the warmth of the Sun of righteousness, there is no bearing fruit to the honour and praise of God. There is no real faith, no true hope, no heavenly love, no genuine repentance, no godly sorrow for sin, no effectual prayer, no spiritual praise. Without Christ and a union with him, all our religion is but a name to live, and all our service of God is but a round of legal duties and vain ceremonies, beginning and ending in death.



II.—But we will now pass on to the Lord's *gracious charge*: "Abide in me, and I in you." He speaks to his disciples as possessing, already possessing, union with him; for this union was to be maintained. He does not say, "Get into union with me; procure by your repeated exertions of faith and repentance union with myself, and then secure that union which you have thus procured by a steady course of unwavering obedience." But he assumes it as a possession which they already enjoyed. "I *am* the vine, ye *are* the branches." This language is clear and positive, not hesitating or doubtful. No contingency is expressed or implied; but the whole stands forth in the clear light of positive assertion as a blessing present, not future, then and there enjoyed, not to be attained unto by and by. It is as if the Lord had said, "Ye are as much now the branches as I am now the stem." Actually, at the moment when he spake to them, with all their weakness—and we know how weak they were—they were as much in him as ever they would be. They might expand and grow into larger measures of strength and fruitfulness, but they never could be more in the vine than they were then; for it is in grace as in nature. The young bud does not insert itself into the vine, having previously had an independent self-existence apart from it; but is developed out of the stem by the innate power and energy of the tree. It does not raise itself from the ground by an act of voluntary exertion, and fixing itself upon or in the vine by a self-emanating, self-sustaining life and power, become a branch by its own activity and energy; but issues by a natural, living process out of the body of the vine. So it is spiritually. If we are branches of the living Vine, we are so by virtue of an eternal and internal union with Christ. We did not make ourselves either buds or branches, but were developed out of the stem by the power and energy of the Vine itself. As then a bud is developed out of the stem of the natural vine from a previous in-being in it, so it is in a higher and spiritual sense. There is an in-being in Christ by original union before there is a coming out of Christ by visible manifestation. And as there is an analogy between the natural and the spiritual vine as regards the original in-being of the bud, so there is a similarity in the formation of the bud into a branch. As then in spring, under the united influence of light and heat,

the hitherto dormant bud becomes as if awakened into a new and active life by the flowing in of sap out of the stem, so the dormant buds in the mystical Vine, those who till this time were without any visible manifestation or evidence of union with Christ, are roused into divine life by the inflow of his grace at the appointed season. Feeling then the movements of the living sap flowing into them out of the fulness of a covenant Head, they burst through the old coat of darkness and ignorance which has bound them up in its folding leaves, and push forth into a new and surprising activity. They can no longer tarry as before, shut up as in a prison-house of unbelief, but called forth by the light and warmth of the Sun break out into open manifestation as living branches of the only true Vine. I want you to look at this in the light of your own experience, that you may have some confirming testimony to the truth of my words. Look back then for a few moments to the time, the memorable time, when your soul was quickened from its death in sin. Was there not a free flowing in of the grace of God, communicating to it a new and hidden life? You may not be able exactly to trace the how and the why, the when and the where. The work, though genuine, might have been feeble in its first movements; the process, though real, might have been but gradual. It is so in nature. The bud usually does not make at first any sudden or extraordinary start. It begins to swell, as if there were some secret movement of life going on within. In this state it may continue for some little time; and if the weather be cold and the skies dark and gloomy, it may continue for a season swelling without bursting. But on some warm and bright day the sun shines directly upon it, and all at once, under the influence of this light and heat, it bursts forth. It was a bud; now it is a shoot; it will soon be a branch. But whether bud, shoot, or branch, it is still in union with the vine, and only moves and grows as sap flows into it; nay, the very sap itself moves only under the influence of the light and warmth of the sun. Now was there not, I will not say an exact, but still some kind of similarity to all this in the first movements of divine life in your soul? Was there not, for instance, a sensible movement of divine life in your heart analogous to the movement of sap in the spring in the natural vine; and as a fruit of those internal

sensations and movements, was there not as if a swelling of soul, a sense of oppression under the closely folded leaves of darkness and bondage, out of which you longed to find, but could not realise any sensible deliverance? But one blessed day, when the light of the Sun of righteousness shone into your soul, it enabled you to burst forth out of the prison-house of unbelief, symbolised, according to my figure, by the leaves closed over the bud. Then you who were once a bud became a shoot; and though for a long time you might remain very weak and tender, yet were thus manifested to yourself and others as a living branch.

It is in this way that we come into some experimental knowledge of our union with Christ; for wherever there is this union there will be more or less a measure of communion. Now it is to such living branches in union and communion with himself that our Lord speaks. If then we have any inward testimony of our union with Christ, and have been brought to that vital point of all true godliness that we know something experimentally of communion with him, we shall see and feel the need and importance as well as the blessedness of his gracious charge: "Abide in me." This point, then, I shall now endeavour to examine in the light of the word of truth and the experience of God's people.

You will observe that our Lord's charge runs in a preceptive form. We must not infer from this that we possess any natural power to fulfil this or any other similar injunction; but we should view it as a gracious charge laid before us by the Lord himself, presented to us by his own lips, and enforced upon our willing mind by every constraining motive of his bleeding, dying love. And we should also carefully bear in mind that if, under the teachings and operations of the blessed Spirit, we attend to and act upon our Lord's gracious injunction, we shall most certainly find the benefit and blessedness of so doing. When then he says, "Abide in me," we are bound by every godly motive to listen to his voice, to seek to know his mind and will therein, to attend to and obey it to the utmost of our power, and feeling our own inability, to beg of him to give us grace to do so.

i. But to make this point clear, let me endeavour to show you *how* we abide in him; for if I am enabled to show this gracious mystery aright, it may be not only to you a word of instruction but of direction and encouragement; and you may be able to see from it not merely what and where you are in the divine life, but may be warned from attempting a wrong course and strengthened to walk in a right one. Let me then show you *how* we abide in Christ, and thus fulfil his charge.

1. We abide in him first by *faith*. It is only as we believe in the Son of God that we can sensibly trace out the union which our soul possesses with him. If I am in a state of unbelief, or even, though a believer, under its power and influence, there is no receiving out of Christ's fulness; there is no spiritual dealing or heavenly trading on my part with him. There is no movement of my soul in such a way towards him as my Head of influence, as my life and my all, that he honours it and manifests himself to me in answer to it. But if the Lord, by the power of his grace, be pleased to raise up and draw forth a measure of faith in my soul upon himself; if he enable me, by the teaching and influence of the blessed Spirit, to come unto him as he invites, to look to him as he bids, to hang upon him and trust in him as he draws, then there is a sensible, or if not a sensible, there is a real communication of light, life, power, and influence out of his blessed fulness, which revives, strengthens, cheers, and encourages my heart. This is abiding in him. Directly we cease to believe—and when I say cease to believe, I mean in the actings of faith—we seem to get, if I may use the expression, out of him, not virtually, not actually, but feelingly. Ministers often speak as if we were first united to Christ by faith, and maintain that union in the same way. I do not hold this doctrine. I believe that the union of the church, and consequently of every member of the church, with Christ is an eternal union, as the apostle speaks: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." (Eph. 1:4.) As then chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, the elect of God have an eternal union in and with him as their covenant Head. It is true that this union is not made manifest until they believe in him, or rather until they

are quickened into divine life, and like the bud of which I have spoken, come forth in visible manifestation. But when they believe in him by a living faith, then they know and realise their union with him; and as this sensible union is only maintained by faith, it is by faith we also sensibly abide in him.

2. Again, we abide in him by *hope*. Do we not read that "we are saved by hope?" (Rom. 8:24.) What is the meaning of being saved by hope? It does not mean saved actually, but instrumentally; not saved as regards our eternal security, but as regards our experience of salvation. By hope we are instrumentally saved from despair, saved from turning our backs upon Christ and the gospel, saved from looking to any other Saviour, or any other salvation; and especially saved from making this world and this life our happiness and home, as "waiting patiently for what we see not," even "the redemption of our body." Now it is by hope that we hang upon and cleave to the Lord Jesus, and thus by this grace we abide in him. It is therefore spoken of as an "anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that which is within the veil." What holds the ship firm in the storm and prevents it falling upon the rocks? The anchor. The ship abides firm as long as the anchor holds. So by hope the soul abides in Christ. He is within the veil; we are without, and it may be tossed up and down on a sea of doubt and fear, distress and anxiety; and yet there is a bond of union between him and us firmer than the Atlantic cable.

3. We also abide in him by *love*. We know naturally what an abiding bond love is. When we cleave to our wives or our children, or our friends, how close and firm is that union, because cemented by love; and so when we cleave to the saints of God in love and affection, it forms one of the strongest bonds that can knit soul to soul. But how much more does the bond of love strengthen and cement union and communion with Christ. His love revealed to the soul and shed abroad in the heart, drawing out love to him in return, forms the strongest of all ties and the closest of all bonds.

4. We abide in him also by the *fear of God*, for the fear of God is a blessed covenant grace, of which the Lord himself has said, "I will plant my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Thus, as the fear of God springs up in a believing soul, and is maintained and kept alive by the influences which come out of Christ as a covenant Head, it produces, as its effects, an abiding in him. We cannot depart from him through the fear of God. It is therefore called "a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death." If a fountain of life, it must be fed out of him who is the life; and as it departs from the snares of death, it cleaves more fully and closely to him as these snares are broken to pieces and left behind. If we examine the movements of godly fear in our hearts, we shall see that all tendencies are toward life and the Source of life; toward hatred of sin and love of holiness; toward a desire after the enjoyment of heavenly realities, and a deadness to the things of time and sense; toward a knowledge of Christ in the manifestation of himself, and a longing to live more to his praise, to walk more in his footsteps, and to be more conformed to his suffering image. Now, as none of these things can be produced but by union with Christ and abiding in him, we see how the fear of God helps forward and is needful to this abiding. For directly that the fear of God burns low in the soul, there is a gradual withdrawing from, and a sensible declining of this abiding in Christ.

5. But we abide in him also by *patience*, or, as the word more strictly means, "endurance." How we see this grace of patience or endurance manifested in the saints of God, whose experience is recorded in the word of truth. How firmly, through patience, Abraham abode by the promise that he should have a son by Sarah: "And so after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise." (Heb. 6:15.) James tells us, "Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord." (James 5:11.) He patiently endured all his trials and afflictions, and found in the end how blessed it was to abide by his hope in the Lord. So, we, in our measure, abide in union with the Lord by the grace of patience, for by this heavenly grace, and the strength communicated by it,

we are preserved from giving way to unbelief, or sinking under the weight and pressure of our trials and afflictions. "Tribulation," we read, "worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope;" and thus, as patiently bearing what the Lord may lay upon us, we are not beaten out of our faith or beaten down by despair, but are enabled to stand firm to our post, and keep our ground, not fearing the wrath of our adversaries, nor giving way to all the opposition which may be arrayed against us from without and from within, in order that we may still, in spite of all, maintain union and communion with our gracious Lord.

ii. But there are certain *means* which the Lord has kindly afforded, whereby our faith, and hope, and love, our godly fear and patience, these divine graces the power and effects of which I have just shown, may be all strengthened, watered, and kept alive. Let me name some of these means of grace.

1. First, there is the diligent and prayerful *reading of the word*. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." (Col. 3:16.) Now this surely means something more than merely reading the word in a careless, formal manner. It is "to dwell in us," that is, take up its firm and lasting abode in our heart, and that "richly;" not poorly and niggardly, but copiously and abundantly, unfolding to us and putting us into possession of the wealth of its treasures; and that in "all wisdom," making us wise to salvation, opening up to us the manifold wisdom of God, and how it displays itself in the great mystery of godliness. Now, we shall not attain to this rich and heavenly wisdom unless we search and study the Scriptures with prayer and supplication to understand what the Holy Ghost has revealed therein, and what he is pleased to unfold therefrom of the will and way of God for our own personal instruction and consolation. We very easily fall off from abiding in Christ; nor can we expect to keep up sensible union and communion with the Lord Jesus, if we neglect those means of grace which the Holy Ghost has provided for the sustentation of the life of God in the soul. When we get cold, sluggish, and dead, to read the word of God is a task and a burden; but not so, when the life of God is warm and gushing in

the soul. Then, to read his holy word with prayer and supplication, entering by faith into its hidden treasures, and drinking into the mind of Christ as revealed therein, is a blessed means of maintaining the life of God in the heart, and keeping up that union and communion with Christ which we hope we have from time to time enjoyed. Never, perhaps, was the Bible more read, and never, perhaps, less understood, less felt, less tasted, less handled, less enjoyed, and above all, less acted on than in our day.

But if reading the word under divine influence is so blessed, how much more is it when the Holy Spirit applies it to the heart; when there is some sweet breaking up of the word of truth in some gracious promise, or the application of some part that speaks of Jesus, or that holds forth some encouragement to our languid faith.

2. *Prayer and supplication*, I need not mention, is also another special means of grace to enable us to abide in Christ. Indeed, I may say, that without it it is impossible sensibly to abide in him. When the breath of prayer is faint and languid in the soul, when there are few desires after the Lord, there is no sensible abiding in him as a branch in the Vine, so as to receive out of his fulness.

3. Another means of grace is *assembling* ourselves with the people of God at the seasons of public worship. The ordinance of preaching and united prayer should never be neglected by any who fear God. It is indeed a precious privilege to join with the ransomed family in hearing the word, singing his praises, and meeting together as a family in his house. Nor can we hope to abide in union and communion with the Lord and his people, if we neglect the house of prayer and make lazy excuses why we should not come up to worship in his courts. In fact, to very many of the family of God, who are toiling and labouring all through the week to earn the bread which perisheth, there is no sweeter or more suitable means of grace than the preached word on the Lord's day; and to some it seems almost the only one fully available.



4. The *ordinances* of God's house were also instituted by our most gracious Lord as a means of maintaining the life of God in the soul, and thus keeping up union and communion with himself. Baptism is an ordinance which God has much blessed, not only to those who, in obedience to his revealed will, have gone through it, but to those who have witnessed its celebration. How beautifully and blessedly it sets forth the union of the church with her covenant Head in his death, burial, and resurrection, in his sufferings and sorrows, when he could of a truth say, "All thy billows and thy waves have gone over me." The Lord's Supper, in which figuratively we eat his flesh and drink his blood, is a blessed means also of keeping up and maintaining the life of God in the soul, and cementing our union with the Lord and his people.

5. *Associating* ourselves in spiritual intercourse with the dear family of God, making them our choice friends and bosom companions, and taking sweet converse together in speaking of the Lord's word and the Lord's work, is a blessed means of keeping up and maintaining in vigorous exercise the life of God in the soul. How often are we strengthened and encouraged, cheered and comforted by our intercourse with the spiritually minded, of whom, alas! there are few, of the family of God. From them we get sometimes a word to help us in the path of temptation, as finding them no strangers to it; and at others, the example of their liberality, consistency, self-denial, and practical godliness, whilst it may cast us down at our own dissimilarity, may yet stir us up to walk more closely with God as we see them to walk.

6. Private *meditation*, close and frequent self-examination, leading a life of separation from the world, being much alone with the Lord and ourselves, in searching his word for direction, and often looking up to the God of all our mercies for the support that he is able to communicate; this path, though sadly neglected, for in our day as in the days of Jael, "this high way of holiness is much unoccupied, and travellers now walk through by-ways"

(Judges 5:6), yet, is, when persevered in, a most blessed means of abiding in Christ.

These are the Lord's appointed means of maintaining his own life in our breast; and if you will search the Scriptures you will see how continually they are spoken of either in the form of precept or that of example. Compare, for instance, with what I have laid down, the Psalms, and especially Psalm 119, and the precepts and directions of our Lord in the gospels, and of his inspired apostles in the epistles, and I think you will find I have traced out a scriptural path. And O the blessedness of abiding in Christ, in sensible union and communion with him so as to talk with Jesus, hold intercourse with him, receive his gracious promises as he has revealed them, sit under his shadow with some measure of delight, and find his fruit sweet to our taste. But we cannot attain to all this by sloth, carelessness, and indifference; by that easy, loose, slipshod profession so rife in the present day, just as if all religion consists in believing a few doctrines, and adopting a few set phrases without any vital operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. One thing, at least, is very evident, that the Lord would not have said to his people, "Abide in me," unless there were an abiding in him on our part as well as an abiding of him in us on his. You will perceive how he unites them together. "Abide in me, and I in you," as if he should say, "My charge is, Abide in me; but do not think it remains with you to do it, or that you possess any such power, except as I work it in you by Spirit and grace." The Lord guards us well against any self-righteous idea, that without him we can do it; for he tells us implicitly, "Without me, ye can do nothing." "The branch can not bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine." When, therefore, he says, "Abide in me," he immediately adds, "And I in you." Why do ye abide in me? Because I abide in you. How are ye able to abide in me? By my abiding in you. He therefore puts them together: "Abide in me, and I in you."

iii. But *how* does the Lord abide in us? I have shown you or endeavoured to show you how we abide in him; I must now take up the other side of the question, and show how he abides in us.

As we must be in him before we can abide in him, so he must be in us before he can abide in us. He therefore must first come to us before he can take up his abode in our hearts. Till the Lord has given us some visitation of his presence, some manifestation of his Person and work, and some discovery of himself in the word that we may see him by the eye of faith, receive him into our heart as the Son and Christ of God, and find and feel him precious as revealed to us by the power of the Holy Ghost, there is no coming of the Lord into our souls; and, therefore, he cannot abide where he is not come. Many of the dear children of God are tossed up and down on a sea of great uncertainty, doubt, and fear, because they have not had these sensible manifestations of Christ to their soul. He has not come into them in the power of his love; still they often say, "When wilt thou come unto me? O visit me with thy salvation; speak a word to my soul; it is thyself, and thyself alone, I want to hear, to see, and to know." Now these are drawings of the gracious Lord, the secret beginnings of his coming, the heralds of his approach, the dawning of the day before the morning star arises and the sun follows upon his track. But when the Lord does come in any sweet manifestation of his presence or of his power, then he will abide where he has come, for he never leaves or forsakes a soul which he has once visited. He may seem to do so; he may withdraw himself; and then who can behold him? But he never really leaves the temple which he has once adorned and sanctified with his presence. Christ is formed in the hearts of his people the hope of glory; their body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and Christ dwells in them by faith. Though we often mourn over his absence and do not feel his gracious presence as we would, still he is there, if he has once come. But he is to abide; and how he does this I shall now endeavour to show you.

1. First, then, he abides in his people by that wherein he came: viz., *by his presence*. Whenever the Lord is pleased to manifest his presence to any of his dear family, there he abides as long as his presence lasts; and as he never will withdraw himself from any of them fully or finally, he now and then shows his presence. It is almost like the court of an earthly sovereign. The sovereign

has apartments of his own, where he keeps himself sequestered and retired from his court. They may inhabit the same palace, but only—especially in eastern countries—only at rare times does he come and visit them. So it is in divine things. The Lord is never out of the palace, but he sequesters himself and lives in his own, so to speak, private apartments, in those glorious heavens which he fills with the blaze of his divine Majesty. But now and then he will glance through the lattice, and give a passing visit to those who resort to his earthly courts, and thus cheer and gladden their hearts.

2. He abides in us also by *his word*: "Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you." He therefore says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will." Thus, by the power of his word upon the conscience, by the application of his truth to the heart, by the promises, the invitations, the glorious truths, and the sweet declarations with which he has filled the Scriptures, the Lord first comes to, and then abides with his people. When we can believe the promise, there is a fulfilment of it by taking hold of Jesus as the great promiser. When there is an invitation which falls sweetly upon the soul, and we can avail ourselves of it and make use of it, that is a renewed pledge that he is abiding in us. When there is a gracious belief of any word, any declaration, any scriptural truth, which seems to fall with a measure of sweetness and savour upon the heart, Christ abides in the soul by virtue of that sweetness and savour which he communicates through the word.

3. But Christ abides in his people chiefly by his *Spirit*, according to John's testimony: "And hereby we know that he abideth in us by the Spirit which he hath given us." He, therefore, dwells in us mainly by his Spirit; for the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ as coming from him and testifying of him. Paul, therefore, puts them together, "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. And if Christ be in you" (Rom. 8:9, 10), clearly showing that where the Spirit of God dwells, there Christ is.

III.—But what is the sure and unerring *test* of our abiding in Christ and his abiding in us? The production of *fruit*. "He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." Fruit is that which God expects to see in every one who names the name of Christ, for fruit is that whereby we are manifested as living branches. Solemn is the warning which the Lord gives in this chapter to fruitless, graceless professors: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away." Every branch, therefore, that bears not fruit, is under the solemn sentence of excision. Of course, the Lord does not mean that those branches which are unfruitful were really in him by living union; but they were in him by their own profession of it. He therefore takes them on their own ground; he speaks to them as occupying in their own eyes and others a certain visible position. If you take the name of Christ into your lips, if you call yourself a Christian, if you say "Lord, Lord," if you are a member of a Christian church, the Lord takes you on that assumption, and speaks of you as a branch in himself—the result proving whether in him vitally or in him nominally. So that as to bear no fruit is a certain work of excision, so to bear fruit is a certain mark of union and communion. Now there is no bearing fruit to his honour, praise, and glory, except by our abiding in him and by his abiding in us.

But what is it to bear fruit? Here we are often mistaken. There is inward fruit and there is outward fruit. We must look at the inward before the outward; for the apostle in recounting the fruits of the Spirit in the Epistle to the Galatians gives us a long catalogue of them; and you will find they are nearly all internal. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Only two out of the fruits named are outward, and even they are partly inward—"meekness and temperance."

The first in this catalogue is "*love*." This love we may consider as embracing the whole of our love to the Lord, to his ways, to his people, and to his truth; mainly and chiefly however to the Lord, because he is so worthy of all our love; and, secondarily, to his

dear people, because they carry about a resemblance to him. The next fruit is "*joy*," as rejoicing in the Lord for what he is in himself and what he has done for our soul, which we only can do by abiding in him, and maintaining union and communion in the way that I have spoken of. The third is "*peace*," as flowing into the soul through the blood of the Lamb, which peace can only be kept up by virtue of abiding in him in faith, and hope, and love. The next is "*long-suffering*," bearing patiently injuries, oppression, and all that the malice of men and Satan may devise against us or lay upon us, as knowing it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong, and better to suffer affliction with Christ than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. The fifth is "*gentleness*," as being melted, softened, and humbled by a sense of his undeserved grace and the riches of his mercy, and putting away from us all wrath and clamour, violence of temper, peevish and passionate words, and everything inconsistent with the meekness and gentleness of Christ. "*Goodness*," also, is another fruit by which is meant kindness, tenderness, and a loving spirit to the family of God and doing them what good we can. "*Faith*" stands next on the list into which I need not enter, as having spoken so much upon it already; and then come the closing fruits of "*meekness and temperance*."

Now with all these internal fruits, and in proportion to them, there will be the *external* fruits of a consistent, godly, and upright life, living separate from the world, and adorning the doctrine by bringing forth those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and honour of God.

Now look at these things in the way that I have endeavoured to bring them this morning before you. You know, all of you that have received any measure of divine teaching, that without Christ you can do nothing. You are deeply and painfully convinced you can no more bear fruit of yourself than a branch can bear fruit except it abide in the vine. But this has been, and ever will be, a difficulty in your way—the secret of abiding in Christ; for you find, as we all find, so many things to draw you away from this abiding in him. The whole spirit, the whole tendency of the flesh is to

draw us from Christ into the world and into self. We have therefore to maintain such a continual battle without and within against the world, against Satan, against sin and self, in any way to abide in Christ, in any way to keep up and maintain the life of God in the soul, and to be receiving out of his gracious fulness those supplies without which we can bear no fruit to his honour and glory. And yet we feel the misery of not abiding in him; the strength which it gives to sin and temptation; the power which it seems to put against us into the hands of Satan; the guilt which it lays upon the conscience; the occasion it furnishes to the adversary; the leanness which it brings into our own soul; the state of poverty and death which we are reduced to by it. All these things testify to the misery of not abiding in Christ, and to urge and stimulate us to seek more earnestly to abide continually in him.

But in the depths of his infinite mercy, in the tenderness of his love, the Lord is graciously pleased from time to time to revive his work upon our heart in answer to our lamentations and complaints of our poverty. He has a tender, sympathising, affectionate heart, and he comes to the rescue when all is gone but himself. He drops in a kind word, or gives a gracious touch; he affords some renewal or revival of faith, hope, and love, and thus he teaches us again the blessedness of abiding in him by his abiding in us. Still, however, he graciously charges us, "Abide in me. Do not leave me, as I will not leave you. Do not forsake me, as I will never forsake you. Keep close to my wounded side, hang upon me, look unto me, cleave unto me with purpose of heart, and lay aside all those hindrances which keep thee from abiding in me, whatever they be. Be it a right hand, be it a right eye, cut it off, pluck it out, part with anything and everything which hinders abiding in me.

Thus we learn, after a long struggle it may be with sin, self, and the world, the blessedness of abiding in Christ, the firmness of every word which he has spoken, and his faithfulness to his own promises, the end of which is to see ourselves the vilest of the vile, and him the chiefest among ten thousand and altogether

lovely—to see ourselves less and worse than nothing, and him,  
God over all, blessed for ever.



## THE WAITING EYE AND THE BOUNTEOUS HAND

A Sermon Preached on Thursday Evening, July 1, 1841, at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, Whitechapel

"The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." Psalm 145:15, 16

The Scriptures are a perfect rule of doctrine, experience, and practice. This is a truth which most will admit in words; but what they allow in word they often deny in deed. Men may differ indeed as to the way in which they deny it; for we generally find it depends much on the natural bias of the individual; and that there is a tendency, according to the different constitution of men's minds, either to introduce doctrines which are not in the word of God, or to set up an experience which is not in the Scriptures of truth; or to enforce a line which is not contained in the precepts of the Gospel. Those, for instance, who are heady and high-minded, are fond of setting up some new doctrine, or bringing forward some novel idea, under the pretext of superior light in the Scriptures of truth; those who are of a visionary, and what is termed enthusiastic turn, are desirous of putting forward some wild dream, or airy flight, which is nothing but the fruit of their heated imagination or some delusion of Satan, as genuine experience; and those who have naturally a Pharisaical bias, and are leaning upon a covenant of works, are apt highly to value self-imposed rules of abstinence "**Touch not, taste not, handle not**", and to enforce these self-devised rules as equivalent with the precepts of the Gospel. Now no doctrine, no experience, and no practice will stand, except that which is in perfect accordance with the Scriptures of truth; and God will bring all his people, sooner or later to discard every doctrine, which they do not receive of the Spirit through the channel of God's word to look with suspicion upon, and utterly to reject every experience, which is not to be traced out in the Scriptures of truth; and to cast aside, as the working of self-righteous Pharisaic leaven, every

ordinance of man, which is not to be found laid down by the Holy Ghost in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If our experience, then, such as it is, does not tally with the word of God, if it is not to be found in the Scriptures of truth, if it does not coincide and perfectly agree with the experience that God himself has left upon record as a pattern for ours to be conformed to, however high, however low, however wonderful in our own eyes, however marvellous it may appear in the eyes of others, it must all be set aside as delusion, and discarded as erroneous.

But it does not follow, because you cannot see your experience in all points traced out in the word of God, that it is not agreeable to the Scriptures. This often tries the living soul. He has temptations, and those temptations he cannot find in the word of God; and he has exercises, and he cannot see that any Bible saint was exercised in the same manner; and he has feelings, and he can find no feelings akin to them in the Scriptures; and he is tried and perplexed, because he cannot find anything in the word of God, which tallies and fits in with those things that are passing in his own bosom. But at times and seasons the Lord is pleased to cast a light upon some text of Scripture, the meaning of which we never saw before; or he condescends to show us that our temptation is included under general declaration—such, for instance, as "tempted in **all** points like as we are," or, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man." The Lord opens our eyes to see, whatever have been the exercises of our mind, that there is some passage of Scripture, under which, when the Lord leads us into it, we may hide ourselves; and thus feel, that though the particular exercise is not in the word of God or at least we cannot find it, it is contained in some comprehensive passage of Scripture, which includes that, because it includes all. But as distinct from peculiar exercises and peculiar temptations, there are certain features which are common to the whole family of God, certain feelings which every child of God is more or less acquainted with; and these stand out in more legible characters, in bolder relief, and are more visibly traced out in the word of God than the others. And therefore, it should be the aim of every minister who desires "rightly to divide

the word of truth," to trace out such a way as the generality of God's people walk in, and so to open up the work of grace in the soul, that every living child, when the Spirit of the Lord enables him, may see his features reflected in the mirror which he holds up before them.

I think we find something of this kind in the words of the text. There is nothing very deep here,—so deep that some children of God cannot go into the depths; there is nothing very high here—so that the weak cannot raise up their heads to get at the enjoyment of it; but the experience traced out in these words seems level with the teachings of God's Spirit in the souls of God's family generally, the average experience of a child of God—that which meets most cases, and is suitable to the teachings of the Spirit in most quickened hearts. And therefore from these words, I hope, with God's blessing, to point out a little of the feelings of a living soul this evening.

"The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfies the desire of every living thing."

1. We find the word "all," and the word "every," used in the text: "the eyes of **all** wait upon thee,"—"the desire of **every** living thing." That word, then, "**all**" must include every quickened soul, the expression "**every** living thing" must comprehend every one that is under divine teaching; for though the words have no doubt a literal signification, expressive of the universality of God's providence and implying that the whole animate creation are looking up unto God for the daily provision that he gives unto them, yet they are doubtless to be explained in a far higher sense, and to be interpreted in a spiritual manner, so as to describe the effect of the teachings of God's Spirit in the soul. "The eyes of all wait upon thee:" all the living family, all the quickened children of God, all in whose hearts he has planted his fear, all whom he has brought to some knowledge of him, and to some knowledge of themselves.

2. These are said to have "**eyes**." "The eyes of all wait upon thee." Clearly, then, they are not dead in sin; clearly they are not dead in a form of godliness. They have "**eyes**," that is, they have a spiritual faculty, whereby they can see God. They are not buried in the grave of death; but possess a new and hidden life, whereby they are enabled to realize the things of God, they are made known to them by the Spirit of God. The expression, "The eyes of all wait upon thee," implies that these persons who thus wait upon God must have eyes whereby they see him, for had they no eyes to see him, they would not know where to wait upon him, they would not know where he was to be found, they would not know what it was that they were to receive from his hands. It implies, therefore, in the persons of whom it is spoken, that they have a spiritual knowledge of Jehovah; that the veil has been taken from off their carnal minds, and they have seen light in God's light; that the Lord has in a measure manifested himself unto them as he has not manifested himself to the world; that he has opened their eyes, "and turned them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God," and thus has given to them eyes to see him, whom to know "is life eternal." And not merely opened their eyes to see him, but opened their hearts to feel his presence, to recognise his power, and to fall down before his footstool.

3. For the posture assigned to them is one of "waiting:" "The eyes of all wait upon thee." No arrogant confidence, no rushing forward with daring boldness as though they would snatch the blessing from God, whether he means to give it or not—no standing upon the lofty mountains of presumption, those mountains of Gilboa where there is "no dew nor rain," do these words sanction; but the posture intimated in them is that of a suppliant, of a petitioner, of one who has a favour to receive, and has nothing in himself, which he can put forward, to draw forth that favour out of the bosom of Him who alone can bestow it. But the expression also implies, that the blessing is not communicated just when the suppliants want to have it, but that there is a time allotted for that blessing to be given. The way in which the Lord acts upon the souls of his children, is to raise up

first a deep sense of their poverty, emptiness, destitution, and beggary and then to set before their eyes those blessings which are precisely suitable to that state into a which he brings them. And this he does by enlightening the eyes of their understanding, whereby they see certain blessings, revealed in the word of God as stored up in Christ. As the Lord presents these blessings before their eyes, He kindles certain desires, and longings, and thirstings and pantings, after them, that they may be individually realized, personally enjoyed, and spiritually and supernaturally manifested. I believe, that the Lord, before ever he communicate, a real blessing to the souls of his poor and needy children, not merely convinces them by his Spirit of the depth of their poverty, of their truly ruined and lost state by nature, of the destitution of everything good in them; but he opens their eyes in a mysterious manner to see certain blessings which are stored up in Christ,—for instance, righteousness to cover their nakedness, blood to atone for their transgressions, grace to superabound over all the aboundings of sin, faith to be the evidence of things not seen, hope to anchor within the veil, and love to be a foretaste of eternal bliss. These and similar blessings the Lord presents before their eyes, and gives them a spiritual understanding that these mercies are stored up in Christ; and as he gives them this perception of what the blessing is, and shows them that these blessings are not in the creature, but in Christ, by the mysterious attractions of his

Spirit he draws forth the desires and sighs and ardent affections of their souls after these blessings, so that nothing but these special mercies can really satisfy them, ease their minds, assuage their troubles, bind up their wounds, and pour oil and wine into their consciences. And thus he brings them to be suppliants; he lays them at his feet as beggars. He will not allow any one to come into his presence, who rushes forward with bold presumption and daring familiarity. He will not suffer his children to make any claim upon him, as if they had a right to the blessings that are in Christ; but he brings them, as the vilest of the vile, and the basest of the base, and the neediest of the needy, into that posture, wherein they feel that there is not in

their hearts a grain of that which they long to experience, not an atom of that which they want to enjoy, and that they have nothing in themselves whereby they can merit or draw down that favour from God's hands, which they long to receive. And yet, base though they feel themselves to be, black though they know that they are, there is that mysterious attraction of the Spirit, as well as that mysterious fitting together of their poverty and Christ's righteousness, their nakedness and Christ's justifying robe, their helplessness and his almighty strength, that they never can be satisfied, unless an experienced and enjoyed union of the two takes place in their conscience. Thus the Lord makes them "wait upon him;" "the eyes of all wait upon thee." The Lord makes them "wait upon him with many sighs and groans, with many fervent petitions, with many wrestlings of spirit before the throne of grace."

But the object of the Lord is to keep them there. He does not bring his poor and needy children to a throne of grace, and send them away immediately that they have come. But his purpose is, to show them deeply what they are, to make them value his favours, to sink them lower and lower in self, that they may rise higher and higher in Christ, to "teach them to profit" **as the Scripture speaks**, to write his laws upon their hearts in lines of the Spirit's drawing, in deep lines, "graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever;" not characters traced out in the sand, to be washed out by the rising tide, or effaced by the wind, but in characters as permanent as the soul itself. The work of the Spirit in the hearts of the redeemed, is radical work, work that goes to the very bottom; nothing flimsy, nothing superficial, nothing which can be effaced and obliterated springs from Him, but that which shall have an abiding effect, that which shall last for eternity. The Lord is fitting his people for eternity, and therefore his work in them is thorough work; it goes right through them; it leaves nothing covered up and masked over, but turns all up from the very bottom, "discovering the foundation to the neck" **Hab 3:13**, and doing in a man spiritually what the Lord threatened to do in Jerusalem literally, "I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and **turning it upside down**" **2Ki 21:13**.

Therefore he does not answer the prayers of his children immediately when they come to his throne of mercy and grace, but rather he deepens those convictions that he has implanted; he makes the burdens heavier, that he has put upon their back; he hides himself instead of discovering himself, and draws back further instead of coming nearer. Now, this is intended to make them wait with greater earnestness, with more unreserved simplicity, with more absolute dependence upon him and him alone to communicate the blessing, with greater separation of heart from all the strength of the creature, with a firmer resolution in the soul to cast away all its own righteousness, and to hang solely and wholly upon the Spirit's teachings, and Jesus' sweet revelation of himself.

But there are many difficulties and exercises, that attend the soul when it is in this waiting posture. Sometimes the length of season before the Lord manifests himself, daunts and baffles the living soul, that is sighing after Gospel blessings. He reasons thus with himself: "Surely if I were a child of God, I should have had the blessing sooner; my prayers cannot be acceptable in his eyes; I must be a hypocrite; I fear I have only the feelings of one, who has a conscience in some measure naturally more susceptible of impressions than others; but not one which has been spiritually touched with the finger of God. It cannot be a real work of the Spirit, for I find others have been delivered before me; I know several who have received deliverances, and manifestations, and here I am, as poor and needy and naked and empty, as the very first day I came." Satan, too, will often set in upon the soul when it is in this posture, and say, "It is all true; the work never was real; the fear of God never was in your soul; if it had been, you would not have been entangled in such and such sins. See what a base wretch you were on that occasion; recollect how you have backslidden from God on the other occasion; is it not evident that you are a hypocrite!" Under these accusations, which so dovetail in with conscience, the soul is ready to sink into despair. But the Lord makes use of these very buffetings of Satan, and these sore exercises of the soul, to bring about his own intentions; that is, he implants a sigh and a cry, that we may not be hypocrites, that

there may be reality in us, that he would make our hearts all that he would have them to be, and would himself work in us that which is well pleasing in his sight, would give us that simplicity of heart and tenderness of conscience and godly fear, which are his own divine workmanship. And thus the Lord often baffles Satan, and as it were outwits him by the very things which Satan employs to harass and distress the soul. The Lord will keep the soul "waiting" upon him. Sometimes these sore exercises and temptations are made the means of driving us nearer to the throne. Sometimes the Lord himself bestows a "spirit of grace and of supplications;" and that enables us to wrestle more fervently with him. Sometimes he lays upon the conscience pangs and convictions of distress; and that makes the soul cry more earnestly for the blessing. And sometimes he draws forth the unutterable desires and affections of the renewed spirit after the blessing, and after himself who gives the blessing; as though nothing else would satisfy the soul but he must come, and come immediately,—he must bless, and bless immediately—he must even now reveal himself to the soul, and fill it with "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

Again: the Lord keeps the soul waiting upon him, sometimes by allowing us a little to depart; by suffering us to go to the utmost length of the tether, and then making us feel the bitterness of departing from him. He allows us, in his secret and mysterious purposes, to get into a carnal, dark, stupid, careless, unfeeling frame; he allows us to backslide inwardly from him, and to depart in heart and affection from the fountain of living waters; and then he takes occasion from this very inward departure to bring troubles into the soul, that "the backslider in heart may be filled with his own ways." He makes use of this very truant-playing to inflict chastisement; and the very means that Satan has been employing to drive the soul from him, he uses as means to bring the soul near unto him. By dark and trying ways, too, in providence does the Lord sometimes teach his people to wait upon him. They shall often be beggars for their daily bread literally, as well as spiritually, and their eyes shall wait upon the Lord for every supply in temporals as much as in spirituals. But



whether so or not, the Lord will take care that all his children, without exception, shall be beggars in spiritual things. Now, this often much tries their minds. We are for being independent in grace, as we are for being independent in providence. It is a mortifying position to be always a beggar; that a man should never have any strength of his own—that he should never have any store in hand—that he should never have any power to draw upon the bank—that he should be always a poor, needy, naked, helpless wretch—that he should never have anything, upon which he can look with satisfaction, and say, "It is mine;" but, day after day, be dependent upon the Lord for every prayer to put up, for every sigh, for every groan, for every promise, for every chapter of the Bible, for everything to be given to him, just as the Lord sees fit, from time to time—this dependent position so mortifies man's pride, and so baffles his reason, that he cannot, and will not submit to it, until God brings him to it by soul necessity. And, therefore, some of God's children, upon whom he does not see fit to keep a tight hand, break the tether; and instead of being poor, needy, dependent, broken-hearted suppliants at the foot of the cross, like the wild ass they "snuff up the wind at their pleasure" **Jer 2:24**, taking "the range of the mountains as their pasture, and searching after every green thing" **Job 39:8**. Or, they encircle themselves within the doctrines of grace, and rest at ease within these entrenchments, standing in their own strength, and resting upon the letter of truth, without any feeling application or savoury unction of it in their souls.

But the Lord will bring all his children, sooner or later, each in their measure, to "wait upon him." Whatever trouble they are in, "the eyes of all wait upon thee;" whatever temptations they have to pass through, "the eyes of all wait upon thee" whatever difficulty in temporal things, whatever conflict in spiritual things whatever strait in providence, whatever exercise in grace be their lot the Lord will bring all his children at one time or another into this experience, "the eyes of all wait upon thee." "Wait upon thee" for deliverance; "wait upon thee" for a manifestation; "wait upon thee" for the lifting up the light of thy countenance; "wait upon thee" for one soft word spoken by thy mouth to the soul;

"wait upon thee" for one smile of thine approving countenance; "wait upon thee" for one testimony of thine everlasting favour. And he that knows not what it is to wait upon God in this manner—wait upon him by night and by day as the Lord works it in him, wait upon him on his bed, wait upon him behind his counter, wait upon him in the solitary fields, wait upon him in the crowded streets—he lacks that evidence, he wants that divine feature, which the Holy Ghost has stamped here upon all the living family.

4. "And thou givest them their meat in due season." There is "meat," then, that they are waiting upon God for, to receive at his hands. And it is called "their meat." It belongs to them. All the elect of God have provision laid up for them in Christ; for "it hath pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." "I will abundantly bless her provision" **Ps 132:15**. Though none of God's quickened family ever dare to **claim** the blessing at God's hands, yet the Lord has so stored up blessings in Christ, that they are actually and eternally theirs; for, as the apostle says, "all things are yours." It is **their** meat then; that is the meat peculiar to the elect. Blood shed for their sins, and for their sins only; righteousness brought in for them, and for them only; love bestowed upon them, and upon them only; promises revealed for their comfort, and for their comfort only; an eternal inheritance, "incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them," and for them only. It is "their meat," because it is theirs in Christ, being lodged in Christ for their benefit. But it is theirs in another sense; and that is, they are the only people who hunger after it, who have an appetite for it, who have a mouth to feed upon it, who have a stomach to digest it. They are the only people whose eyes are really open to see what "meat" is. Others feed upon shadows; they know nothing of the savoury food of the Gospel. As the Lord said to his disciples, "I have meat to eat which ye know not of." His meat was the hidden communications of God's love, the visitations of his Father's presence, the divine communion that he enjoyed with his Father while the disciples were gone away, "to do the will of him that sent him and to finish his work." So, for the children of God,

there is meat in Christ; and this meat the Lord gives them a hunger after. He not only sets before their eyes what the meat is but he kindles inexpressible longings in their soul to be fed therewith. God's people cannot feed upon husks, nor upon ashes, nor upon chaff, nor upon the east wind, nor upon grapes of gall and the bitter clusters of Gomorrah **De 32:32** . They must have "meat" "savoury meat, such as their soul loveth"—that which God himself communicates, and which his hand alone can bring down, and give unto them, so that they may receive it from him as their soul-satisfying portion.

The "meat" which God's children long after, is to have "the truth as it is in Jesus" in its various branches, revealed with power to their heart. Not merely to see a certain truth in God's word; that is, like a hungry beggar, looking at savoury provision through a window, from which he is barred out: such a sight whets his appetite rather than satisfies it. The meat that God's people are longing after and the only thing which can assuage their spiritual hunger, is "the truth as it is in Jesus" manifested, revealed, discovered, and applied with power to their souls: dew, unction, savour, sweetness, life, light, liberty accompanying the word so that truth falls as heavenly manna into their hearts. It is not sufficient that the Holy Ghost should create the appetite, but he must overshadow the soul with his divine influences, breathe abroad a heavenly savour, and fill it with some sensations of his presence, with some meltings of heart at the feet of Christ, with some drawing forth of affection to God; and thus communicate an inward reception of the truth, and an enjoyment of its sweetness and savour. A child of God never can be deceived long together. He may get under presumptuous ministers, drink for a while into their spirit, and feed his fleshly mind at their table; but there is a something in his heart that keeps him from being satisfied with their light and airy food. He may store his head with knowledge and doctrines, but still there is a voice in him, an honest irrepressible tongue which bears from time to time a solemn testimony that he is not in a right spot, that he is not living under heavenly teaching, that he has no sweet communion of soul with the Three-one Jehovah; but that he is lifted up out of his real

standing in the divine life, and that his knowledge is but a shadowy dream, confused, indistinct, vague, destitute of vitality and power. And though he may struggle against such a self-condemning monitor, he still, in spite of himself, carries in his bosom an internal evidence, a testimony not to be denied, a witness which will make itself heard, that he is not living under the anointings of the Holy Ghost, and that the Heavenly Comforter does not put his seal upon his religion. I believe, there are children of God, who sit under presumptuous ministers; but God will never let them live and die in resumption. He will bring them out sooner or later; he will cut them up with piercing convictions, and lay them at the feet of Christ, hating themselves as the vilest of transgressors, for being drawn aside into that worst of sins. Oh! when the Lord lays judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet, it will make a living conscience bleed; it will cut a man with such convictions, that he will hardly know how to stand before God. If anything can sink a living soul **except it is being ensnared by the flesh**, it is being entangled in presumption, intruding into the things of God, without the Lord the Spirit leading him into them. The Lord's people are seeking after meat; but that meat is never given to one in presumption; it is never given but to a poor broken-down and contrite sinner. The Lord never bestowed meat upon a self-satisfied soul; he never gave a broken-hearted Christ to a whole-hearted sinner; he never sprinkled atoning blood on a reckless conscience. The Lord never throws away his blessings. He bestows them upon a heart which he has prepared to receive them,—a heart made soft, tender, and contrite, so as to feel itself utterly unworthy of the blessing, and yet unable to take anything short of it, dissatisfied with everything else, and yet feeling itself unworthy of one glimpse of love or one token of favour. Still it is "**their** meat;" and nothing but that meat ever will satisfy them.

5. "Thou **givest** them." It is not to be taken out of the Bible, because it may be read; not to be caught up, as the minister throws it forth, because it may be heard; not to be got out of books; but to be bestowed by the holy hand of Jehovah himself, and received in the posture of a penitent, in the attitude of a

suppliant, a sinner prostrate at the foot of the cross, without anything in self but wounds, condemnation, and guilt.

6. But there is a due season: "Thou givest them their meat in due season." There are many living souls, who are hungering after divine blessings, but the "due season" has not come. "The times and the seasons the Father hath put in his own power." You are not yet fit for it; the Lord has to bring you lower; you will have to travel through darker paths, to pass through sorer exercises.— There is a "due season" for the manifestation of Gospel blessings; there is a fitting time, which the Searcher of hearts knows. And that Searcher of hearts knows that many of the true Church of God are at this present time in that state, that he will not manifest to them his greatest and richest blessings. There is a "due season," in which they are revealed and manifested to the soul; and that season will be as suitable to all its wants, as it will be most glorious to God. That "due season" will most probably be when the soul will least expect to receive it. The promise having been so long delayed, it seems as though it would never come; the blessing having been so long withheld, it appears as though the Lord would never bestow it; having denied his countenance so long, it seems as though he had drawn a black cloud over the throne, and through that cloud the rays of the sun would never shine. But it is a "due season;" it will surely come; "though the vision tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry." There is a "set time to favour Zion," and when that set time arrives, the Lord will build up Zion and appear in his glory, for he will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer **Ps 102:16,17.**

7. "Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." There is something very sweet in this expression, "Thou openest thine hand;" implying that the Lord holds the blessing in his own hand, and that it is the opening of the hand, the unclosing of the heavenly palm, whereby the blessing is communicated. I have thought sometimes from the words, that there is some intimation of the way in which the Lord communicates his blessings. It is something like an earthly

father, when he comes home at night. Perhaps he has purchased something for his child, some toy or sweetmeat, during the day, which he holds in his hand, and just opens it for a few moments, and lets the child see what he has brought him; this is to kindle the desire of the child after the thing which the father intends him to have. But no sooner has the father opened his hand for a few moments, than he closes it again, in order to whet still more the desire of the child, and make it run to him, to try to obtain possession of it. So, the heavenly Father often for a moment uncloses his hand, displays the blessing before the eyes of his children, holds forth the atonement, and discovers the beauty, the grace, the loveliness of Jesus; and as he for a few moments opens his hand, he kindles all the burning desires and breathing affections of the soul after the blessing. The living child then runs to the Father to procure it; but the hand is closed, the blessing is withheld. But to pursue our comparison, the child, having once seen what is in the father's hand, knows that it is there, and its object is to get possession of it; and therefore it will try to thrust its tiny finger into the father's palm, and thus force it open. Does not this resemble the child of God, who when he has seen the blessings that God holds in his hands, and the affections of his heart are kindled after those blessings, seeks by fervent prayer and earnest cries and holy wrestlings to prevail upon the Lord to give him possession of that blessing which he longs to obtain? Do I speak irreverently or unscripturally when I say that thus to seek the blessing is to thrust our finger into the closed palm of the Lord, and endeavour to force it open? for "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." "Let him take hold of my strength that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me. But as the child seeks to uncloset its earthly parent's hand, the father will often hold it tighter; and so when a living soul is seeking to get a blessing from the Lord, it often seems as though the hand of the Lord was clasped more firmly than before. But after a time the earthly parent suffers the little fingers of the child to prevail. What is the child's strength against the father's? But he is overcome by love; it was always his intention that the child should have the blessing, and his purpose was to give it in that way; and therefore he suffers his

strong hand to be overcome by the tiny finger of a little child; he unlocks his fingers, unclasps his palm and lets his child draw out the blessing. So it is spiritually with the family of God. He suffers himself to be prevailed upon; he unclasps his fingers and unlocks his palm, and so gives that blessing which he always meant to bestow. This seems clearly set forth in Jacob's wrestling with the angel. There was a blessing which the Lord always meant to give him—that Esau should not prevail against him, but was to wrestle for it. He must put forth his human hands and wrestle with the Lord and the Lord himself, the God of all power and might, allowed himself to be overcome, suffered himself to be prevailed upon, permitted weak lame Jacob to "have power with God and prevail," to show that our weakness is no barrier against our receiving blessings, for the Lord suffers our weakness to prevail over his strength. Then he "opens his hand," and not only displays the blessing, but allows the hand of faith to grasp the blessing, strengthens the hand of faith to lay hold upon Jesus' righteousness, the eye of faith to look upon Jesus' beauty, and the ear of faith to hear his voice and live."

8. "Thou openest thine hand, and satisfies the desire of every living thing." That word has been sweet to me sometimes—"every living thing!"

How comprehensive it is! And how low it descends! How it comes down to the weakest and meanest and least of God's family, if he is only "a thing" only "a living thing!"—if he cannot see himself "a man in Christ,"—no, nor see himself a child of God, no, nor see himself a new born babe! If he cannot see in himself the features of a child even, yet to be "a living thing!" As one said of old, "I am a worm, and no man." He could not rise to the dignity of a man—a man "in Christ;" no, he was "a worm." So here; even to be "a thing" "a living thing," such a "creeping thing" as was seen among the unclean beasts in the sheet let down from heaven by the four corners in Peter's vision, with this mark upon it, and no other, **life**; for the words to him were, "**kill** and eat" implying life in all the contents of the sheet. Or like the early foetus in the womb, possessed of life but no distinct features visible, no limbs

apparent, no human form, no human face; only a shapeless thing; but still having life. Now, perhaps, if you cannot trace the features of a grown up man as stamped upon you, and are exercised with distressing doubts whether your experience even amounts to the newborn babe, you may yet come in here, as being "a living thing," a **nondescript**; a sort of person that cannot make yourself out, having an experience which you think nobody can fathom, having exercises which nobody else seems to be harassed with, and walking in a path where no other child of God seems ever to have walked before you. Did not one say of old, **and have not you and I echoed his words?** "a beast before thee;" not a man, for "surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man" **Pr 30:2**; but possessed of life still, breathing after God still, with that in the soul which cannot rest satisfied short of the manifestation and the presence of God.

But here is the mark of the "living thing"—**the desire**; "Thou satisfiest **the desire** of every living thing." Not natural desires; not "the desire of the sluggard, which hath nothing" **Pr 13:4**, that is, nothing spiritual in the want, or in the answer; but the spiritual desires which the Holy Ghost himself has kindled, desires after God, "as the hart panteth after the water brooks," desires to know Christ by some sweet revelation of his glory, desires to be brought to the foot of the cross and to have his image stamped upon our soul, desires to be led into the length and breadth and depth and height of that love of his which passeth knowledge, desires to walk before God accepted in the Beloved, desires to feel that in our souls which shall sweetly satisfy us that we are eternally His. This "living thing," though a nondescript in his own feelings, has that which marks the existence of life in him; and that is, living desires towards the living God,—breathing affections after Jesus, a restless dissatisfied heart, discontented with the things of time and sense, feeling no pleasure in what the world presents, and sighing to the Lord for the discoveries of his grace and his love.



"Thou openest thine hand, and **satisfiest** the desire of every living thing." Every child of God, then, that has spiritual life, every one who is really seeking the Lord, through the Blessed Spirit's working in him, every "living thing" that is possessed of living desires towards Jehovah, "Thou **satisfieth**." Here is the mark of having spiritual desires,—that they cannot be **satisfied** without God. Many a person will say, "I have desires," but what are those desires? Are they a lingering and thirsting after righteousness? Are they a panting after God's favour? Are they a solemn cry in the soul after the manifestations of Christ's love? And do they issue in **satisfaction**? "Thou **satisfiest** the desires of every living thing." There will be a "satisfaction" when the desire is granted. "The desire of the slothful killeth him" **Pr 21:25**, for it never issues in eternal life; but when "the desire of the righteous cometh, it is a tree of life," which yields new fruit every month, and the fruit thereof is for meat and the leaf thereof for medicine.

This, then, is to be the path that the Lord leads his children in. He convinces them of their misery and guilt; he opens their eyes to see Jesus; he kindles in their hearts desires after him; he brings them to wait upon the Lord that hideth his face from the house of Jacob and to look for him; he shows them his hand full of blessings; he allows himself to be prevailed upon, through their intercession at his throne, to open his band, when the due season comes, to give them their meat, and to satisfy their desires. And now, I think, I have gone as low as is consistent with the Scriptures of truth. If there be any soul, in this chapel, exercised as I have described, and the Lord should please to bless what has been spoken by my feeble lips, it will take in every child of God, in whose heart God has planted his fear; it will comprehend every one, whose eyes are upon the Lord, expecting and hoping to receive blessings at his hands.

## A Waiting Soul and a Gracious Lord

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening, July 21, 1850

"Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee." Isaiah 26:8

These words form a part of "the Song" that is "to be sung in the land of Judah." This song is a hymn of praise, a song of deliverance; and in it the church recounts the Lord's dealings with her, with the fruit of those dealings, and blesses him for all his gracious acts towards her.

Time and opportunity will not allow me to enter into the general drift of the Song; I shall, therefore, this evening, chiefly confine myself to the words before us.

We may observe, I think, two leading features in them, corresponding to the two clauses of the text.

I.—*First*, the *past experience* of the church; and

II.—*Secondly*, the *present experience* of the church.

Her *past* experience we find in the words, "Yea in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, *have we waited* for thee."

Her *present* experience is contained in the expression, "The desire of our soul *is* to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee." In this twofold way then, I shall, with God's blessing, endeavour to take up the subject.

I.—The church speaks here of God's "*judgments*." What are we to understand by the word? We must not be misled by the sound. The word "judgments" in our language generally signifies the

manifestations of God's displeasure. When anything striking befalls an ungodly man, it is spoken of as 'a judgment;' and we are so much in the habit of attaching that meaning to the word, that we can scarcely divorce our minds from that signification. But it has, in the Scriptures of truth, a far wider and more comprehensive meaning. It is true, that the manifestations of God's displeasure are called in Scripture "judgments:" "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants thereof will learn righteousness." But there are many passages in the word of God, and especially in Psalm 119, in which it would be the greatest absurdity to suppose that by the word "judgments" nothing is signified but the manifestations of God's displeasure. For instance, in the 20th verse of that Psalm, we read, "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times." Was David's soul "breaking for the longing" that it had unto the manifestations of God's displeasure? That cannot be. We read in the 39th verse, "Turn away my reproach which I fear; for thy judgments are good." David would not call the manifestations of God's displeasure "good." He says also in another verse, "I have hoped in thy judgments." The manifestations of God's displeasure rather produce fear or despair than hope. "Correct me," says the prophet, "but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing." (Jer. 10:24.) There "judgment" is spoken of in direct contrast with wrath and anger. In fact, the word "judgments," in Scripture, means commonly, *the righteous dealings of God*—the declaration of his righteous character. It is true, that this is often in a way of displeasure; but it is also in a way of mercy. The righteous character of God is displayed not only in wrath, but in "justifying the ungodly," that "He might be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." Thus, the word "judgments" in our text seems to signify *God's righteous dealings*. It is used in a similar sense (Prov. 8:20), "I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of *judgment*." And again (Psa. 72:1), "Give the King thy *judgments*, O God, and thy righteousness unto the King's Son."

Now, it is in "the way" of these righteous dealings that the church declares she had waited for God.

Apply this to ourselves. Until the Lord is pleased to give us light and life, and work a work upon our souls, we know nothing, believe nothing, and feel nothing of the righteous character of God. We rather view him as unjust; for the carnal mind being enmity against God, the heart being alienated from the life of God, and wrapped up in the clouds of densest ignorance as to the character of God, we know him not, we see him not, we feel him not to be a righteous God. But when the Lord is pleased to quicken the soul into spiritual life, and send that word into the heart of which we read that "its entrance giveth light," *this* conviction flashes into the mind, and *this* truth is ever after sealed upon the soul—that God is a righteous God—that all his acts are acts of righteousness, and all his dealings in strict consistency with his holy and righteous character. We now come to know something of God's "judgments;" that is to say, as the righteous character of God is opened up to the soul, we see and feel that everything that God does must be consistent with that righteous character; that all his dealings are dealings in righteousness, and all his ways are ways of righteousness.

But now comes the opposition; because this righteous character of God is strictly opposed to our unrighteous nature, and these righteous dealings of God are diametrically contrary to the unrighteous thoughts of our heart, the unrighteous words of our mouth, and the unrighteous actions of our hands.

Yet God means to bring us to submit to his righteous dealings: and therefore he surrounds us with them. The text says, "In *the way of thy judgments;*" as though God's righteous judgments surrounding us on every side, and we walking in the midst of them, as in a cloud, it brought these righteous judgments into direct opposition to the workings of our carnal mind.

Now here we see something of the work of grace upon a man's conscience. He is surrounded with the righteous character of Jehovah: the righteous dealings of God enclose him on every side; that righteous character is opposed to his unrighteous

character; and every righteous act of the Lord is opposed to the unrighteous actings of his heart; yet he is compelled "in the way of these judgments" to wait upon God.

But let us come a little into particulars. It is in particulars that the life of experience and religion consists. We will not then lose ourselves in the **mist [midst?]** of generalities; we will come down to particular dealings of God upon the soul, and see how we still have to wait upon him "in the way of his judgments."

1. The Lord finds us *sinners*; he does not find us saints, holy people, prepared for heaven. He finds us sinners, and sinners, too, of the deepest, blackest dye. Sinners in heart, in lip, in life; sinners without, sinners within. For sin is engrained into our very being, in fact, our very selves. Then, if this be the case, these "judgments," or righteous dealings of God, must be altogether opposed to every breath of our carnal mind, every wish of our fallen nature. This we have to learn by the application of God's righteous law, by the manifestation of his purity and holiness, and by a sentence from his presence coming with a divine power into the conscience, to manifest and to condemn sin. And this brings us to his feet; because in all these things we are obliged to recognize the righteous character of God. If he send us headlong to hell, he is righteous. If he cut us down at a stroke, he is righteous. He cannot err, he cannot act unjustly. If he never hear a cry for mercy, he is still righteous: if he never bestow a look of love, he is still righteous: if he afflict us with every suffering here, and crush us with eternal damnation hereafter, he is still righteous. Now this is painful work; this is being betwixt the upper and nether millstone, ground, as it were, between the righteous character of God and the carnal mind; the soul lying under the righteous character of God, as the wheat under the upper millstone.

2. But again; the righteous dealings of God are *against all our idols*; for we are dreadful idolaters. Idolatry is imbedded in our very nature; a part of our very being; a second self. Idolatry is the worship of anything that the carnal mind intensely loves.

Now, the righteous character of God and the righteous dealings of God, must be directly against idols and idolatry. He is a jealous God. And as such, nothing provokes him more than idolatry. How in Old Testament times the displeasure of God was manifested against his people for this! What provoked him to indignation so much as their departing from him to worship idols? We too have our idols. Who is without them? The man who thinks he is without an idol, knows not what an idol is. The man who thinks his heart is free from idolatry, is an idolater, though ignorant of the idols he worships. Wife, property, children, name, respectability, ease, sensual lusts—O, the idols, the forest of idols in a man's carnal mind! But the righteous dealings of God are against them all, and especially against that heart-idolatry whereby these idols are so fondly worshipped.

3. But again. There is in our carnal mind *a determination to have our own way*. We are desperately selfish; we are determinedly obstinate; we do not choose the Lord's way very soon or very easily; we love to have our own will and our own way, and this in a thousand different forms, but all opposed to the righteous dealings of God. Still his righteous character, his righteous dealings must have the preeminence. If our will be unrighteous, and God's will be righteous, which must prevail? which is to stand? which to gain the day? If our will be opposed to God's will, our will must come down. It may be very hard work for our will to come down; but come down it must, come down it shall. The "judgments" of God will bring it down. You will find that the righteous dealings of God will never be brought into conformity with the will and way of your carnal mind. Thus, our will must give way, and our mind be brought down; that God's will and way may stand. This is no pleasant, no very easy, no very comfortable work. It is very trying, wonderfully trying—when I want one thing, and God wants another: when I will this, and God wills that. But God's will must and shall stand. It is very trying for my will to have to give way; yet, give way it must, if I am the Lord's; because he will bring me to that spot where I shall put my mouth in the dust, and say, "Thy will be done!"

4. Our *high looks* is another thing that must be brought down;

our proud heart another thing that must be humbled; our *self-righteous nature* another thing that must be crushed; our *worldliness* another thing that must be subdued. Yes, everything in us contrary to God and godliness must be laid low and effectually brought down. And they are all brought down and laid low by God's "judgments," in other words, by God's righteous dealings, and the manifestation of God's righteousness thereby.

Now when we get surrounded by these righteous dealings, then we are "in the way of God's judgments." Have you never found that God's righteous dealings stand in the way of your sins, of your idols, of your worldly-mindedness, of everything that your earthly nature cleaves to? If so, there has been a wonderful struggling in your mind; there has been some painful work in the court of conscience; you have not found religion to be as Dr. Watts speaks—

"Religion never was designed  
To make our pleasures less."

You have found religion to be a very trying thing, because it has so cut you to the quick and so come into your heart and conscience, as to lay the axe to the root of all your worldly happiness and every desire of your natural heart.

But until we get into something of this path, there is no "waiting for God;" for the church declares that it was "in the way of God's judgments" that she "waited" for him. It was being hedged up, surrounded, and encompassed with these righteous dealings of God that made her wait for him. She could not get out of his hands; she could not escape his strokes; she could not get away from his righteous character; she could not flee from his righteous dealings in her soul. She had therefore no alternative, (and grace made her willing) than to wait upon God, and to wait for him "in the way of his judgments." If she could have found refuge anywhere else, she would have hid her head in a refuge of lies. Could she have got hope from any other quarter, she would have pillowed her head upon a false hope; and could she have

obtained help from any other source, she would have rested in a delusion. But the righteous character of God having been revealed in her soul, and the righteous dealings of God surrounding her on every side, she could not get out of his hand; and therefore, amid all the strugglings of unbelief, infidelity, rebellion, and murmuring, she was bound fast, held down, and she had no alternative, but to wait upon him who could in his own time relieve, deliver, and bless.

But, besides this necessity of compulsion, there was mingled with all a blessed feeling, whereby she waited not merely from necessity, but also because the Lord was pouring out upon her the spirit of grace and of supplications, and enabling her thus to "wait." But what a strange intermixture of exercises and feelings this makes in the soul! Sometimes driven, and sometimes drawn; sometimes compelled, and sometimes, like Japhet, "persuaded;" sometimes from having no other hope, sometimes from wishing to have no other; sometimes from there being no other refuge, and sometimes from not desiring that there should be any other. Sometimes from bitterness, and sometimes from sweetness; sometimes from sorrow, and sometimes from joy; sometimes by threatenings, sometimes by smiles; sometimes by frowns, and sometimes by favours. And yet, all so wonderfully blended, and so strangely intermixed, that without hardly knowing at times whether it be from compulsion or from choice, from being driven or drawn, from the necessity of the case or the sweetness of the mercy, the soul is still brought to this point, "in the way of thy judgments have we waited for thee, O Lord."

But what is it to "*wait?*" Chiefly, by prayer and supplication and begging of God to appear. To cry, sigh, beg, supplicate, implore, long, and breathe out the soul's desire; to take no denial, the case being so necessitous; heaven or hell being at stake; the soul's interest lying so close to the heart—this is to "wait" upon God, and to "wait" upon him "in the way of his judgments," surrounded and encompassed with his righteous character and dealings.



It is a great thing to see God's righteous character, and to believe that his dealings are dealings in righteousness. It requires faith to believe it; because to our sense and reason, to our unbelieving minds and infidel hearts, these dealings of God often seem directly the contrary. This indeed is the trial—to *believe* that they are righteous dealings, and yet not to be able to see that they are such; not to dare to murmur, and yet have every disposition to fret; to be kept from open rebellion, and yet feel its miserable workings; to believe that God cannot act unjustly, and yet to be sadly tempted to believe he is not acting justly. And yet to be so overpowered by the righteous character of God as to be compelled to lie at his feet, and wait "in the way of his judgments" till he clear up the mystery, till he appear for the soul's good, till he remove the cloud, and shine forth in beams of mercy and love.

II.—But we pass on to consider, *secondly*, what the church speaks of as her *present experience*. I do not mean to say, that there was not much in her present experience mingled with the past; and much in her past experience mingled with the present. But as there is a distinction of tenses in our text, we will adhere to it.

*"The desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee."* God's righteous dealings had broken her down at his feet; they had taken away her idols, and brought her into submission to his righteous will; and with it all there was some manifestation of the Name of God. By the "Name of God," we are chiefly to understand the Lord Jesus Christ; for when God sent him as his angel before the children of Israel, he said, "My Name is in him." By the "Name of God," then, we understand him by whom God is made known—in whom the love and mercy of God are revealed—who has in himself all the perfections of Godhead—"In whom, dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"—in a word, the glorious "Immanuel, God with us."

Now after the Lord has been pleased to exercise the soul with these righteous dealings, and made it submit; when he has given

it to feel that he would be just if he sent it headlong to hell, he generally reveals something of the Son of his love, something of that great and glorious Name which he manifested to Moses when he put him in the cleft of the rock, and his glory passed by before him, and he declared that he was a God "forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin," in the Person, work, and blood of Immanuel. The Lord usually, then, after he has exercised our souls with his justice, manifests somewhat of his mercy; when he has taught us out of his law, he goes on to teach us out of his gospel; when he has shewn us something of his righteousness in himself, he shews us something of his righteousness in the face of Jesus Christ. And these manifestations of the Lord Jesus Christ to the soul, this bringing of the gospel into the heart, raise up a desire unto, and a love towards his Name. Thus, the church says, "The desire of our soul is to thy Name."

How sweet and expressive is the phrase, "*The desire of our soul!*" How it seems to carry our feelings with it! How it seems to describe the longings and utterings of a soul into which God has breathed the spirit of grace and mercy! "The desire of our soul,"—the breathing of our heart, the longing of our inmost being; the cry, the sigh, the panting of our new nature; the heavings, gaspings, lookings, longings, pantings, hungerings, thirstings, and ventings forth of the new man of grace—*all* are expressed in those sweet and blessed words, "The desire of our soul!" And what a mercy it is, that there should ever be in us "the desire" of a living soul; that though the righteous dealings of God are painful and severe, running contrary to everything nature loves; yet that with all these, there should be dropped into the heart that mercy, love, and grace, which draw forth the desire of the soul toward the Name of God. This is expressed in the words that follow, "With my soul have I desired thee in the night!" If you can say no more about the work of grace upon your heart than *that*—can you really use these words as descriptive of feelings experienced within, "With my soul have I desired thee in the night?" Is your soul longing after the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it ever in the night season panting after the manifestation of his presence? hungering and thirsting after the dropping-in of some

word from his lips, some sweet whisper of his love to your soul? These are marks of grace. The carnal, the unregenerate, the ungodly, have no such desires as these; there is nothing in their heart corresponding with "the desire of the soul" unto the Name of God. But it is the case with all the righteous, for "the desire of the righteous shall be satisfied."

And what do you desire, when you can say, "the desire of my soul is to thy Name?" Is it not, that he will manifest himself to your soul with some sweetness and blessedness; and thus give you power to lay hold of him and bring him into your heart that you may clasp him in the arms of faith and affection, be enabled to breathe forth the language of your bosom into his ear, and say, "My Lord and my God?"—'Thou art mine, and I am thine, and shall be thine when time shall be no more.'

Now this is having the desire of your soul to the Name of God—a longing after the Lord Jesus Christ in the manifestations of his Person, blood, work, and love. I never can believe there is such a desire in the heart of a hypocrite. There may be, and is perhaps, in him a desire to escape "the wrath to come;" but a single, simple, secret, fervent, heart-felt, panting desire—when no eye sees, no ear hears but the eye and ear of Jehovah—I cannot think that such a simple, sincere, filial, breathing is to be found in any but a regenerate heart. At any rate, it is set forth in the word of God as the experience of the church, "The desire of our soul is to thy Name!" 'Lord, we want *thee*; none but thee; nothing short of thee; thyself, in thy beauty, in thy loveliness, in thy preciousness; for nothing short of thee can make the soul happy or holy. Without thy presence, there is no solid peace; without thy smiles, there is no real happiness; without thy favour, all is darkness and death; and therefore, "the desire of our soul is to thy Name;" for, in having thee, we have everything that can satisfy, bless, comfort, and save.'

*"And to the remembrance of thee."* By these words we may understand, either to *remember the Lord*; that is, to have his Name, blood, grace, and love deeply engraved upon our heart—

and all to have an abiding place in the chamber of our memory; or else to have a sweet *recollection* of what the Lord has been to us in times past. The words may comprehend both of these significations. We will look at them separately.

1. *"To the remembrance of thee."* O, what short memories we have as to the precious things of God! How feeble, how transient, for the most part, are our impressions of heavenly realities! We can remember childish follies years ago, and sins, which we can only think of, or should only think of with shame and confusion of face. There is no difficulty as to having these things in remembrance. But the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ; his sufferings in the garden of Gethsemane, and upon the cross; his dying love, his bleeding sorrows, and what he is to the church of God—O, how hard, O, how impossible to keep these things in firm remembrance! Who is there that goes through the day carrying about in his bosom the Lord Jesus Christ; treasuring up in his memory the words of the Lamb; and sweetly meditating upon his work and sufferings? You can embrace a thousand vanities and follies. Self you can always carry in mind, with its sensual, idle wants; but the dear Son of God, the precious Lamb; the Lord of heaven and earth, the dying, risen Jesus—who is there that carries him enshrined in the tablets of his memory, is refreshing his soul from hour to hour by looking at, thinking upon, and living out of the fulness of the Lord Jesus Christ? And yet, we would hope, "the desire of our soul" is to these things. We have not much grace unless it be so. It is true, we cannot carry about in us the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Apostle speaks of himself; but we would fain hope we can say, that "the desire of our soul is to the remembrance" of him. We do not, we would not, forget him willingly. It is true, that the world comes with its huge sponge, and too often effaces his name and memory, and our carnal heart is, as it were, continually defiling the characters drawn upon it by the finger of the Spirit: and yet one would fain hope that there is a "desire" in the soul toward the remembrance of him, so that we cannot be happy without him. We are not satisfied with being worldly and carnal; but would fain have now and then a little setting apart of communion with him, a looking

unto and breathing after him. We would hope that there are gracious intervals, solemn moments, awakened feelings; living, breathing, earnest cries and desires, by night and by day, after the Lord Jesus Christ, in the sweet visits of his love. If we have this—this is not unlike "the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee."

I would hope that your religion is not like your Sunday coat, put on on a Sunday morning, and laid aside on the Sunday evening, but never worn through the week. That is a poor religion; that is not the religion of the Holy Ghost; that is not "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ" as your daily raiment. Whatever we are, we cannot call ourselves very thriving, very healthy, or very lively Christians, if we can do without the Lord Jesus Christ for whole days together. It does not seem very much like the experience of the church, "the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee."

2. But the words may also signify a *remembrance of the past*. We get into strange places. Carnality and death seem fearfully to prevail; and yet, we would not, we would fain hope, utterly forget the past;—the day of espousals; the seasons of love; the times wherein the Lord was gracious, when there was some sweet communion with him, and enjoyment of his grace and presence. Have we no Ebenezers—no times to which we can look back, when the candle of the Lord shined upon our head, and by his light we walked through darkness, when we could say, 'Jesus is precious?' Now if our soul has had any of these seasons, there will be "a desire to the *remembrance* of thee." We shall want a revival of the remembrance; a bringing back of sweet recollections and of heavenly feelings that flow out of these reminiscences, when the blessed Spirit leads us back to the days that are past, and drops anew some drops of the mercy and favour of God into the soul. If we can but find something of this in our hearts, it seems to correspond with the language of the church, "the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee."

But observe the connection. How the *past* and the *present* are linked together! "In the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee." It is "in the way of the Lord's judgments" that we have to wait for him; but when in his righteous dealings, we have to wait, without seeing the issue; to beg, without receiving an answer; to wrestle, without getting the victory; and yet have to "wait," plead, and beg; then, ever and anon, rising up as it were out of the ruins of self, through some discovery of his grace and mercy, springs up, "the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee." What a strange intermixture there thus is in the soul really and rightly taught of God! fearing his judgments, hoping in his mercy, trembling at his wrath, desiring his favour, crouching beneath his frown, drawn up by his smile, yet still waiting in the way of his judgments, the desire of the soul being towards his Name, and to the remembrance of himself!

Do you find this strange intermixture? "Judgment and mercy" was David's song. "I will sing," he says, "of mercy and judgment." And the church, in ancient days, speaks of waiting upon God in the way of his judgments; and yet "the desire of her soul was towards his Name, and to the remembrance of him." We cannot always put these two things together, and yet God has put them together. How there can be a waiting upon God "in the way of his judgments," and yet a desire towards his Name; how these two things can be consistent (and consistent they are); how these things can dwell in the same heart (and yet in the same heart they dwell)—how to reconcile these paradoxes, and put together these seeming contradictions, we sometimes know not. And yet, if there be, as there appears to be, this jarring work in our soul, it is harmonized sweetly in the word of God and the work of the Spirit on the heart. For we need both. We need the righteous dealings of God to lay low, and we need the merciful dealings of God to raise up; we need the righteous dealings of God to keep from presumption, and we need the merciful dealings of God to preserve from despair; we need the one to afflict, and the other to comfort; we need the one to awe, and the other to bless. And

thus, by this strange intermixture the soul is made right, and kept right; made tender, and kept tender; made humble, and kept humble; made to wait at the Lord's feet, and yet to look unto him with a desire towards his Name, and to the remembrance of his mercy, love, and truth, as felt, enjoyed, and experimentally realized.

## **THE WALK IN THE FIELDS AND AMONG THE VINEYARDS**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on January 5, 1862

"Come, My beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee My loves." Song 7:11, 12

I Do not often preach from the Song of Solomon, and this chiefly for two reasons. First, though this holy book is full of rich and choice experience, it is couched for the most part in language so figurative and allegorical that it needs more grace and wisdom than I possess to be sure I should always give the correct interpretation of the figures employed for that purpose by the blessed Spirit. And, secondly, the church of God, generally speaking, is not in a state fit to understand, receive and experimentally realise the lessons of holiness and truth contained in this portion of the Word of God. The Song of Solomon, as you well know, is a sacred nuptial song, and may be generally described as conveying the mutual expression of the love of Christ and of the church under the figure of a bridegroom and a bride delighting in each other's company, and giving vent to their affection in tender, yet chaste and holy language. But the church of God at present is rather a lone widow than a joyous bride; rather spends her time in fasting than in feasting; is rather complaining than courting; and rather sits by the rivers of Babylon with her harp hung upon the willows than pours forth in sweet melody the songs of Zion.

But the difficulties which I have named are neither of them insuperable. As regards the first objection, though much of the Song of Solomon is so allegorical and figurative as often to elude our endeavours to understand its spiritual meaning, yet there are figures in it which we seem in some sense able clearly and



experimentally to comprehend as seen through the thin mist of the allegory; and, as regards the second difficulty, there are passages also which meet the present experience of the children of God, because, though expressions of love, yet are they couched rather in the language of tender desire than of actual enjoyment. Take, for instance, such a passage as: "Because of the savour of Thy good ointments Thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love Thee." **So 1:3** Any true believer who has ever felt Christ's name to be sweet and precious can understand the experience contained in those words, even though in many points his faith may fall short of full assurance or present enjoyment. So again, "Draw me, we will run after Thee." **So 1:4** There we have the experience of a soul longing to be drawn by "cords of love and bands of a Man," and to run after Jesus that it may overtake Him, gain possession of Him, and follow in His footsteps, all which may fall very short of full assurance. Again, "By night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth: I sought Him, but I found Him not." **So 3:1** There we have the experience of a soul, mourning under desertion and the hidings of God's face, seeking the Lord, and yet unable to realise His presence or His power. "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?" **So 8:5** There we have the expression of a true-hearted child of God coming up out of this wilderness world, cleaving to Jesus with purpose of heart and leaning upon Him with all his strength, as the only object of his warm affection. Almost all these passages are couched in figurative language, yet easily intelligible, and certainly not beyond the experience of the greater part of the family of God.

We shall perhaps find, if God help me this morning to bring forth the choice experience of our text, the words before us to possess both of these characters. First, though the language is highly metaphorical, yet is it sufficiently intelligible through the light veil of allegory to present us with a visible portrait, and that no less than of a face beaming with the light and beauty of a very gracious experience; and yet, secondly, the experience thus portrayed in it is not of a character so high in spiritual enjoyment as to be beyond the reach of those who know something of the

breathing forth of the sincerity of love into the bosom of the Redeemer.

Let us then approach the words as they present themselves to us in the express language of the blessed Spirit, and see whether we cannot gather up from them some spiritual instruction, or gracious encouragement, or divine consolation, or profitable admonition.

I.—Observe, first, the **invitation** which Christ **for He is the speaker here** addresses to His beloved to accompany Him in His evening walk of love: "**Come, My beloved let us go forth.**"

II.—**Secondly**, the **place** where He invites her to go in company with Him. "Let us go forth **into the field**; let us lodge **in the villages.**"

III.—**Thirdly**, the **object** of their journeying together thus hand in hand: "Let us get up early to **the vineyards**; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the **tender grape appear, and the pomegranates** bud forth."

IV.—**Fourthly**, the **entertainment** which He promises her when they have gone through their survey: "**There will I give thee My loves.**"

I.—I have just hinted my opinion that it is our Lord who speaks here. The commentators, I believe, and amongst them I may name Dr. Gill, ascribe the words to the church; but, according to my view of the subject, they are much more appropriate in the lips of the Redeemer. Let me give you my reason. The invitation, "Come, My beloved," seems to fall with more propriety from the lips of the bridegroom than from those of the bride. He leads, she follows. He draws, she runs. He invites her to come: she listens to His invitation, and gladly takes hold of His proffered hand. Is not this more suitable, more becoming their mutual relationship? Would it not be so between lovers naturally? Is it not more becoming maidenly modesty to be asked than to ask, to be

courted than to court, to be invited to take an evening walk than to give the invitation? But when we look at the exalted dignity of the heavenly Bridegroom, full though He be of most gracious condescension, it must strike us at once upon higher grounds that it is more becoming for the Lord to give the invitation to the church to walk with Him than for the church to invite Him to walk with her.

I. But now look at the tender expression by which he addresses her: "**My beloved.**" This is His language throughout the whole Song to His spouse and bride. Whatever the church be in herself, and no language can describe the depths of her debasement through the Fall, she is dear and near to the heart of Christ. Two things must always strike us with wonder, and I may say holy admiration, when we can realise them experimentally in our own bosom.

First, that Christ, viewed by faith as the eternal Son of God in all the glory of His uncreated Deity, should ever have loved any of the human race at all. Did you ever attempt to realise the feeling that He, who is eternally God, should ever have condescended to love a creature like man? When I say "love," I do not mean that general approbation which God has as a Creator in the works of His hands, but that warmth of peculiar and tender affection, which we mean by the term. Is it not sufficient to fill our mind with wonder that the great and glorious, self-existent I AM should love a finite creature such as man? We can understand how equals can love equals, or even superiors inferiors when the disparity is not very great; but that He who fills heaven with His glory should love, with all the warmth of infinite affection, man, the creature of His hand—this indeed is a mystery. David felt this when he said, after a contemplation of the glories of the starry heavens, "What is man that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour." **Ps 8:4,5** Such also was Solomon's feeling when he had built the temple. "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee: how

much less this house that I have builded?" **1Ki 8:27** But when we consider what man is, not only as a **finite**, but as a **fallen** creature; when we contrast the purity and holiness of God with the impurity and defilement of man; and when we bear in mind how hateful sin is in the eyes of Him who cannot look upon iniquity, well may we stand astonished that a God so holy should love sinners so vile.

But the second thing is calculated also to strike us with wonder and admiration. The mystery, which never can be fathomed in this life and most probably will be equally unfathomable in the life to come, is that God should have loved some and not have loved others. Why He should have loved Jacob and hated Esau, chosen David and rejected Saul, are mysteries inscrutable to creature intellect. But though unfathomable by the line of human reason, they are still truths as clearly revealed in the Word of God as those doctrines which lie more within the compass of our understanding; and therefore should be received in faith, not cavilled at through unbelief. It will be our mercy, instead of puzzling our minds over this mystery, still less cavilling at it, to have such a testimony in our own conscience as Paul had of old, when he could say, in the full assurance of faith, "He loved me and gave Himself for me."

When, then, we look at the church in her present fallen condition, we may stand astonished that our gracious Lord should feel any love towards her. But so it is. Love is self-moving. Even in natural love, none can tell the source from which it springs. All we know of it is that it flows freely, of its own self-movement, towards its object. So it is with divine love: it flows forth spontaneously without seeking any other cause but its own self-movement, or any other object but that to which it softly yet strongly tends. "God," we read, "is love." **1Jo 4:8** That is His name; that is His nature. But if any ask **why** God loved any of the sons of men, all we can answer is, "Herein is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." **1Jo 4:10** And if any ask **how** we may know this love, all we can reply is, "And we have known and believed the love that God hath

to us. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." **1Jo 4:16**

1. But love cannot exist **without requital**. Is not this true in human love? How many a poor girl has died of a broken heart from unrequited love! How many a man has been almost driven to desperation by the object of his affections breaking her plighted troth and wedding another! It is in divine as in human love. Divine love needs requital. But there is this peculiar feature in divine love, and one in which it far exceeds all earthly affection, that it never knows the want of requital; it never feels the want of faithfulness. You may love an earthly object, and may have no requital. You may fix your affections upon one of the opposite sex and have them blighted, the object being unfaithful. But not so in heavenly love. It always meets with requital; it never meets with unfaithfulness.

But how can this be? Am I walking on sure and safe ground here, or advancing anything not in strict harmony with the Word of truth and the experience of the saints? Do you, then, think it possible that divine love can be thrown away? What is the cause of human love not being always requited? Is it not because the lover is not able to kindle a mutual flame in the bosom of the beloved? But can this be the case with divine love? To think so would be to cast a doubt on the power of the Almighty, as well as be expressly contrary to the Scriptures of truth. What do we read there? "We love Him because He first loved us." **1Jo 4:19** And again, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto US."

It is impossible, therefore, that divine love should be disappointed by meeting with no requital. It is true that you may sometimes doubt and fear whether Jesus loves you. But these very doubts and fears imply that you have some love toward Him; and if you love Him, you may be certain He loves you. Love to the Lord is a sure sign of a new and heavenly birth, "for every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God." **1Jo 4:7** And you may be certain also of His faithfulness to you, even though you are often

unfaithful to Him; for those whom He loves, He loves to the end; and "if we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself." **Joh 13:1 2Ti 2:13** If, therefore, He has once loved you, He will never leave you. Those two bitter drops which often turn the whole cup of human love into a draught of almost unmixed wormwood and gall, want of requital and unfaithfulness, are never found in love divine. These two things, then, you may depend upon, if indeed you love Jesus with a pure heart fervently—that your love is requited by His; and that He will be faithful to every promise ever spoken by Him to your heart.

2. But love cannot exist **without communion**—the mutual enjoyment of each other's society. It is so in earthly, it is so in heavenly love. Our blessed Lord, therefore, speaking in the words before us, invites His beloved "to come," implying that she was to take His proffered hand, that they might "go forth" in the enjoyment of each other's tender and affectionate society. She willingly accepts the offer. She is too pleased with His company not to listen when He invites. He leads, she follows; and hand in hand they go forth together.

II. But now look at the invitation couched in the expression, "Let us go **forth.**" There is something very experimental in this kind and loving invitation; something that must not be passed over if we would bend our ear to listen to the voice of the Lord. He had already said, "Come." That was, so to speak, the calling note, the first sound of the love trumpet to rouse up the attention of the bride. She hears; she rises; she obeys the call; she takes the proffered hand, and now the Lord says, "Let **us go forth.**" The idea contained in the expression seems to be that Christ and the church are to go forth out of everything which can interrupt their mutual enjoyment of each other's society. The world is looked upon as a distracting place, like an over-crowded metropolis, full of noise, smoke, din and bustle, where their communion would be interrupted by every passer-by. In order, therefore, to enjoy sweet communion without interruption, He takes her by the hand and invites her to go forth with Him.

But what is implied in the expression "going forth?"

1. Separation from **everything which interferes with the love of Christ**. He finds her in the world, sometimes allured by, and entangled in its flesh-pleasing snares, and sometimes overborne with its burdensome anxieties. Forth, forth from both of these must the child of God go if he is to walk hand in hand with Jesus. It cannot be a trio-Jesus, the soul and the world. In natural love, a trio is no company. There must be two only to enjoy the wished-for society. So in grace; it must be Christ and the soul, the soul and Christ, or else there is, there can be, no sweet communion. The world must not interpose nor separate the two by turning its face into the midst, for it comes worse than a mere casual visitor, or an unwished-for interfeerer. It is a rival. And what can be worse company for two lovers than the presence of a rival? The love of the world and the love of Christ cannot dwell in the same bosom: "For if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." **1Jo 2:15**

The first step, then, toward communion with Christ is to come out of the world: "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you." **2Co 6:17** If we are entangled in the love of the world, or fast bound and fettered with wordly anxieties, and the spirit of the world is rife in our bosom, all our profession will be vapid, if not worthless. We may use the language of prayer, but the heart is not in earnest; we may still manage to hold our head high in a profession of the truth, but its power and blessedness are neither known nor felt. To enjoy any measure of communion with the Lord, whether on the cross or on the throne, we must "go forth" from a world, which is at enmity against Him.

2. So also there must be a going forth from **all sin**. Christ never can have any fellowship with sin; for what fellowship hath Christ with Belial? If we are indulging in any sin, secret or open, there can be no fellowship with the Lord the Lamb. We must go forth out of it and leave all its abominations behind. But how can we do this? How can we crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts?

How can we deny ourselves; cut off right hands or pluck out right eyes; tear a beloved idol from the breast; and say to every iniquity, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" This we cannot do for ourselves; but the Lord can do it for us and in us. And this He does when He says, "Come forth." With the word of a king there is power; and by that power He can enable us to go forth out of all evil and out of everything hateful in His holy eyes.

3. But the invitation bids us also go forth out of the **professing church**. Christ is not there. There lies indeed the body, once animated with life divine; but the animating spirit is fled, and now there is nothing but a lifeless corpse. So it was with the church of old. The Lord once was "with the church in the wilderness" **Ac 7:38**; but the presence and the power of the Lord left it; and then that which was once the house of the Lord became the den of thieves. This going forth from the professing church was foreshadowed by the bodies of the beasts, whose blood was brought into the sanctuary, being burnt without the camp. The apostle, therefore, says, "Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach." **Heb 13:12,13** This I had to do now many years ago; for when I found and felt the power of God's truth upon my heart and conscience, I was as much obliged to "go forth" out of the professing church as I was out of the world and out of sin.

4. But this invitation of Christ implies also that we must go forth **which is the hardest thing of all to do out of self**. It is easy in some measure to leave the world; easy to leave the professing church; and, though more difficult, yet there are cases in which persons may even leave their sins, as the dog is said to have left his vomit, though he returned to it again. But to go forth out **of self**—there is the difficulty; for this said "self" embraces such a variety of forms. Still, to deny it, renounce it, and go forth out of it lies at the very foundation of vital godliness. This was strikingly intimated by our blessed Lord when He said "Whosoever will come after Me, let him **deny himself**, and take up his cross and follow Me" **Mr 8:34**



But what varied shapes and forms does this monster self assume! How hard to trace his windings! How difficult to track the wily foe to his hidden den, drag him out of the cave, and immolate him at the foot of the cross, as Samuel hewed down Agag in Gilgal. Proud self, righteous self, covetous self, ambitious self, sensual self, deceitful self, religious self, flesh-pleasing self—to detect, unmask, strip out of its parti-coloured clothes and changeable suits of apparel this ugly, mis-shapen creature, and then stamp upon it, as if one would crush with the heel of our boot its viper head; who will do such violence to beloved self, when every nerve quivers and shrinks, and the coward heart cries to the uplifted foot, "Spare, spare?" But does not the apostle say of himself, "I am crucified with Christ" **Ga 2:20**; "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" **Ga 6:17**; "I fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for His body's sake." **Col 1:24** All this is "suffering with Christ, that we also may be glorified together; a mortifying, through the Spirit, of the deeds of the body;" a being "always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." **Ro 8:13,17 2Co 4:11** Unless there is a going forth out of self by this self-crucifixion, there is no walking hand in hand with Christ, no manifest union, no heavenly communion with Him; for there can no more be a partnership between Christ, the soul and self, than there can be a partnership between Christ, the soul and sin.

II.—But now let us direct our attention to our next point—the place of appointment, the trysting spot, to which the blessed Lord invites the beloved of His soul to go forth with Him: "Let us go forth into the field."

### **I. What is the leading idea here? There are several.**

1. The first I shall name is that of **leaving the noise**, smoke and din of a large metropolis, where there is no privacy, no opportunity for retirement, for **the quiet calm** of a lonely field, where we may indulge in prayer and meditation, or retire into

one's own bosom and commune with one's own heart. The sounds and sights, the bustle and confusion of the busy town often prevent that calm repose and sacred communion to which the Lord would invite His believing people. He would take, then, His beloved as if by her hand and lead her out of the noise and din of the crowded town that she might find opportunity for a little quiet **meditation**. Even naturally how pleasant it is to an inhabitant of the crowded metropolis to get away from its smoke and din into the quiet country; and if a truly godly man, and blessed with a spirit of meditation, there to meditate upon the precious truth of God. Isaac, you will recollect, went out to meditate in the field at the eventide when he lifted up his eyes and saw the camels coming, announcing the arrival of the wife whom the Lord had found for him. I have myself found the field to be a suitable place for meditation, and often walk there on a Saturday evening for that purpose.

Thus the field in our text may represent the secret **meditation** of the soul. The saints of God in ancient days were much given to meditation. "My meditation of Him shall be sweet," **Ps 104:34** "O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day." **Ps 119:97** "When I remember Thee upon my bed and meditate on Thee in the night watches." **Ps 63:6** "Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." **Ps 4:4** Meditation is very profitable, and for ministers who would profit the church of God indispensable. Paul therefore says to his beloved Timothy, "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all." **1Ti 4:15** Meditation is to spiritual food what digestion is to natural food: without it there is no nourishment from the Word of truth. But it is an employment that very few are able or willing to exercise themselves with; in fact, to meditate upon the Word of truth requires a spiritual mind, heavenly affections and a soul under peculiar divine impressions, whereby sacred realities become not only suitable food, but the very element in which we live and move.

2. But again, "the field" may spiritually represent **a place of secret prayer**. How often even literally will the child of God go

into the field that he may have an opportunity for pouring out his heart before the Lord! You that have families, some, it may be, surrounded and often sadly worried with crying children, living in small confined houses, with little opportunity for secret retirement, scarcely able perhaps to call your sleeping room your own; how gladly sometimes you go forth into the fields where no eye can see you but the eye of God, and no ear hear you but the ear of God, that you may pour out your heart without interruption! The very calm quiet of the field suits your frame. The soft fresh air blowing upon your face cheers and refreshes your body; the lark twittering in the sky; the face of lovely nature spread before your eyes; the thorough solitude of the scene far away from the dusty roads and all sights and sounds of sin, all favour a spirit of prayer as you lift up your eyes and heart to heaven. If you are in trouble, there you may groan unheard; if dejected, there you may sigh, and neither wife nor child catch the sound; if favoured with access to the throne, there you may have communion with the Lord; and there, if business admit, you may sometimes stay in the grassy field till the shades of evening gather around you, and the stars shine forth in all their beauty and glory. Then you can go to your home refreshed and strengthened with your walk in the field, for the Lord has gone forth thither with you, and His company is the best of all. Thus the field may fitly represent that secret prayer which is the very life of the soul, and without which there can be no communion with the Lord of life and glory.

3. But "the field" also may signify a place of **self-examination**; for it may spiritually imply retirement, abstraction, solitude, quiet, being alone with God. Persons for the most part hate solitude. They love to live in a crowd, and thus, for the most part, escape the torment of being alone. Nay, how many of those who we hope fear God seem to be afraid of self-examination! And why is this, but because they fear that self-examination may bring things to light which might cover them with shame, and they are unwilling to be humbled or put their mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope? But how good self-examination sometimes is! Does not the apostle say, "Examine yourselves whether ye be

in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" **2Co 13:5** And again, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup." **1Co 11:28** How the Psalmist seems as it were to spread himself out before the Lord as he walked in this field of self-examination: "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**

II. But let me give the words a somewhat more enlarged signification. When the Lord says to His beloved, "Let us go forth into the field," it would seem as if He invited her to go with Him hand in hand, and see what was spread before their view. In His company, and taught by His Spirit and grace, she would see what she could not, with her own unassisted vision, ever descry.

1. He would bid her, for instance, look, first, at **the field of creation**. What an ample field of meditation is here; and how delightful it is to leave the crowded city and look upon the calm and quiet face of nature! But how much more sweet it is to be able to do this with a spiritual mind, and to conceive from it heavenly delight! Then as you view the sun walking in his brightness, or see the moon illuminating the dark night, and the stars glittering like so many diamonds in the sky, how the glory of God shines forth as thus traced out in these beautiful heavens! Men enjoy the warmth of the sun, or the light of the moon, and look, some with careless and some with admiring eyes, upon the constellations of the heavens; but how few see that the hand of God gave to them their being, and how fewer still can say, in the language of Cowper, "My Father made them all"! But we cannot see this field of creation with believing eyes except we walk hand in hand with Christ, His grace enlightening the heart and His glory illuminating the soul.

2. But there is another **field—the field of providence**; and into that field, as in the preceding, we can only go forth, so as to take of it a believing view, as we can walk hand in hand with Christ.

The field of providence is full of various paths, and these are often so intricate that we should soon lose our way unless we had such an unerring Guide and Companion. Now when the Lord is pleased to take us hand in hand and lead us into the field of providence, then, whichever way we look, we see that "all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies." **Ps 25:10** Look back and see the path of providence in which the Lord has hitherto led you up and down this wilderness world from your very infant days, and you will find mercy stamped upon every part of it. You could not indeed see it at the time, for the Lord "brings the blind by a way that they know not;" but you see it now, if at least you are walking in the field hand in hand with the Lord. However crooked that path once apparently was, it is now all made straight; however it seemed then to diverge from the right way, and almost to lose itself in a tangled maze, yet it is now seen all to have tended to one centre.

But, if blessed with a living faith as you are walking with the Lord in this field, you can also look forward as well as backward, and believe that as the Lord has appeared thus far as a kind God in providence, He will ever still appear in the same way on your behalf, that He will never leave nor forsake you, but be ever opening fresh fields for admiring and adoring His wondrous hand in providing for your wants. But we are not always nor often here. How often we take, as it were, our hand out of the Lord's and then we grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes! Then we feel, when we are not walking hand in hand with the Lord, the field of providence is obscured, its paths become intricate and confused, and, having lost the hand which holds the clue, we see little else but an inextricable labyrinth.

3. Then again there is **the field of experience;** and what a copious field is that in which to walk with Christ as your guide! But how faint our steps, unless we can walk in this field also hand in hand with the Lord! If, however, seeing light in His light, you take a view of the Lord's dealings with your soul, and look at all you have passed through in your mind from the day when the

Lord the Spirit first quickened you into spiritual life, what a field is spread before you! The sighs and groans that have gone up out of your bosom; the tears which have dropped from your eyes; the convictions of sin which have pierced your conscience; the mournings after the Lord and over your sins and back-slidings—can you not see the leadings and teachings of the blessed Spirit here? Look, too, again at the first breakings in of mercy upon your soul; the dawning beams of light upon your mind; the promise applied; the Person and work, the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus discovered; the salvation brought home with a divine power to your heart—what a field of sweet and gracious experience the soul can sometimes see spread before its eyes which at other times is hidden from view! But O how different it is to cast one's eyes over this field **without** Christ and **with** Him! Without Him all is darkness; with Him all is light.

4. Then, again, look at **the Scriptures**; what a field there is spread before our eyes in the inspired Word! What holy truths, what encouraging invitations, what comforting promises, what gracious precepts, what a field of richest, choicest treasure does the inspired Word contain for the soul to walk in hand in hand with the blessed Lord! As He guides it through the sacred page, illuminating the whole with heavenly light, how it testifies of Him both in Old Testament and New! Of Him all the prophets speak; to Him all the rites and ceremonies point, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy; and as He is the Word incarnate, so is He the sum and substance of the Word written. But He must walk with us in this sacred field, and do to us as He did to His disciples: "Then opened He their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures." **Lu 24:45** What is all **doctrine** without him? Separate from Christ, from His power and presence, doctrine is but notion, speculation and mere opinion. What again are the **promises** separate from Christ? Unmeaning declarations. For "all the promises of God in Him are yea and in Him Amen unto the glory of God by us" **2Co 1:20**; and therefore out of Him they are neither "yea" nor "Amen," that is, they have no affirmation and no confirmation. And again, what are the precepts distinct from Christ? Burdensome commands, without

end or motive for their performance. We see, then, how needful it is to possess the power and presence of Christ in the whole field of heavenly truth and in every portion of it.

III. But we will now advance to another invitation from the same gracious lips and addressed in a similar manner to the church: "**Let us lodge in the villages.**" It is as if the Lord said to her, "Now we have spent the day together in the field, seeing the beauty and glory of God in these various departments of providence and grace. Night is coming on; where shall we tarry during the night season? We will not go back to the noisy town. Tomorrow will bring us fresh employment in the calm, quiet country; but we cannot stay all night in the field. Let us lodge in the village."

1. Of course there is spiritual instruction communicated here. Let us see, then, if we can gather up the divine meaning of the words.

These villages, taking a spiritual view of them, seem to represent **gospel churches**. Villages are naturally distinct from the great metropolis, and yet they are different from solitary houses. We may view them, then, as little clusters of habitations gathered out of the world, not town houses situated in all the smoke and din and noise of the thronged streets, but quiet abodes in the country, far, far away from the bustling city. As, then, the Lord invites His bride to lodge with Him in the villages, they seem to be places in which she could lay her head down and sweetly enjoy the rest to which He invites her. But how does this agree with the other part of the invitation to go forth into the field? In this way: there is not only enjoying sweet communion with the Lord in the field, but there is enjoying sweet communion with His people in the church.

As, then, we are brought into spiritual union and communion with those who fear God, and especially by being members of a gospel church, there is a lodging of the soul in the village; there is a finding rest and repose, not only in the enjoyment of the Lord's

presence, but in the love and affection which Christians mutually bear to each other. And though this mutual love and affection amongst the members of the mystical body of Christ be not frequent in our day, yet still there is a measure of it enjoyed by every quickened soul; for love to the brethren is the first evidence of the work of grace upon the heart, according to God's own testimony: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." **1Jo 3:14**

2. Yet it is after all but **lodging** in the villages, merely tarrying for a night, enjoying just a short space of refreshment in the company of those who fear God, but no long permanence of Christian communion, through the various circumstances which often disturb Christian harmony and peace. How few churches really walk in mutual love and affection! What strife and division, what jealousies and suspicious coldness, if not unkindness, often divide the churches of Christ! But when Christ and the bride are together in the enjoyment of each other's company, then it is well with the villages; then does union prevail in the churches; and in that peace and union Christ and His bride can lie down together in the silent watches of the night.

III.—But their morning's work is already decided upon. If they repose for the night in the village, it is only that they may in the morning examine the village crops and see for themselves what fruit is to be borne by them. "**Let us get up early to the vineyards:** let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth." There was work to be done which could best be done in company. They had had a season of mutual communion in the field; they had spent the night in the villages in communion with the churches that fear God, obey His precepts, walk in His ways, and keep His ordinances. But there was work to be done in the early morning.

1. "**Let us get up early to the vineyards.**" I have observed in Scripture how much is said of getting up early in the morning. We have in Abraham's remarkable history three several intimations of



his rising early in the morning; and they were three very important occasions in Abraham's life.

The first instance of his getting up early was after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, when he rose up early to see whether God had heard his prayer for the deliverance of Lot; and he saw from afar, almost with the dawning light, that the smoke of the accursed cities of the plain rose up as the smoke of a mighty furnace. **Ge 19:27,28**

The next was when he had to send away Hagar: "And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder and the child, and sent her away." **Ge 21:14** Being obliged by Sarah's indignation at Ishmael's mockery to remove that thorn out of her side, and assured by God's own word that he should hearken unto her voice, he no longer delayed obedience. He felt deeply the stroke, yet he rose up early in the morning to show that he would no longer harbour in his house one that was an enemy to his wife's repose, and that in doing so he was doing the will of God from the heart.

The third time he rose up early in the morning was the most painful act in the whole history of Abraham's life, when he took his son Isaac to offer him as a burnt offering upon the very spot on which the temple was afterwards built.

But we do not understand the expression here in its literal sense; we give it a spiritual meaning, as implying activity and diligence. I have, however, observed there is very little good to be expected from persons who accustom themselves to lie in bed in a morning; it argues an indolent body and an indolent mind. But of course the Lord here speaks figuratively as implying that diligence of soul which is manifested by a diligent body in getting up early, and not losing precious moments on a bed of sloth.

2. But where did the Lord invite His bride to go with Him in the early morning? **To the vineyards.** Now this spiritually and

experimentally describes a searching examination into the state of the churches as they lie naked and open before that holy and heart-searching God with whom we have do. Christ and His bride had been walking in holy communion with each other; they had been lodging in the villages in sweet communion with the churches, and now they were to go together upon a tour of examination. They were to direct their steps towards the vineyards, to see what was going on there, how the vines looked, whether they were healthy, whether the canes had been well ripened, whether the foliage was strong and verdant, and what prospects they generally presented of fruit for that year. The figure, of course, was adapted to that country and climate. As in our country, farmers get up early in the morning to inspect the state of their flocks and herds, and to look over their fields so as to form some judgment of their present and future state, so in Palestine, where vineyards were the chief productions of the country, their owners and cultivators would naturally rise up early in the morning to examine the state of their vines. In the Scripture the vineyard is a standing figure of the church of God. "My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill" **Isa 5:1**; and so our Lord speaks. "A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen." **Lu 20:9** So in the very Song before us we read, "My vineyard which is Mine is before Me." **So 8:12**

Now, as a vineyard is a collection of vines and thus typifies a church, so each vine may be considered as typifying an individual believer as one of the church, When, then, the Lord had said to His beloved, "Let us get up early to the vineyards," He adds, "Let us see if the **vine** flourish," that is, let us look at individual cases. Thus, every believer should examine the state of his soul before God, and that with all that diligence, earnestness, and activity which are shadowed forth by getting up early for the work. Do not you think that it would be good sometimes thus to examine the state of your soul before God? Might you not sometimes well ask yourself, "Is my soul flourishing? Does it wear a healthy aspect? How does it look, viewed by a spiritual eye?" When the farmer goes into his field, he can see in a moment whether the crop is healthy or not, whether there is wireworm at the root, or

mildew on the stem, or blight in the ear. When an experienced gardener goes into a vinery, he can see at a glance the exact state of the vines. The appearance of the foliage and the general aspect of the vines betray in a moment to his experienced eye whether the red spider, or scale, or mealy bug, is infesting the house. It requires no minute examination; as disease in the human body betrays itself at once to the experienced physician, so a skilful eye detects at a glance disease in the vinery.

So it is, or should be, in grace. If I have a spiritual eye, directly I look into my soul, I can see whether it is healthy or unhealthy, whether the leaves of my profession be curled and mildewed, or whether they be green and verdant and give promise of a good crop. Think of the farmer who never goes into his fold-yard to examine the state of his flocks and herds, and who is too idle even to walk the breadth of his farm to see the state of his crops! Is such a man fit to be a farmer? What can such a man expect as his end but the workhouse? So the Christian, who has a crop of far more importance than all the wheat that grows in the farmer's fields, and of more value than all the sheep folded upon the farm, should look into the state of his soul to see whether it be flourishing or not. If prayer, if praise, if reading the Scriptures, if self-examination, if meditation, if faith, hope and love, and other graces of the Spirit are all active, lively and vigorous, then the vine is flourishing. If prayer is cold, formal and dead; if the Scriptures are little read or with a careless eye; if there be no self-examination, no meditation, no spirituality of mind, no going forth of faith and affection—then the vine is not flourishing. There is something wrong at the root. To use gardening language, the grapes sometimes "shank off," that is, become wizened and sour. The cause of this generally is, I believe, that there is something wrong at the root; that they have been chilled with the cold rains, and therefore what is called "root-action" is become unhealthy. In almost every plant it is at the root that disease begins. If ever you see even a plant in a flower-pot unhealthy, depend upon it there is something wrong at the root. It is over-watered or under-watered, or from some other cause the root has become diseased, and root-action is suspended or unhealthy.

So it is in religion; if there is anything wrong with a man, it is almost sure to be something wrong at the root. "The root of the matter," Job said, "is found in me." Job could appeal unto God that the root of his religion was right. If "the root" had been wrong, "the matter" would not have been right; but as long as the root was sound, like "the teil tree" of which the prophet speaks, though "it cast its leaves, the substance would still be in it," to put forth in due time boughs like a plant. **Isa 6:13** If a man's religion has no root, or if the root be injured by disease, it will be sure to discover itself in his profession. He cannot have a prosperous soul—prosperous inwardly and prosperous outwardly—unless the root be deep in the soil, and unless it be full of active fibres, drawing up secret nourishment from that river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God. Then he shall be "as a tree planted by the waters and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." **Jer 17:8**

3. Connected with this, therefore, comes the next question, whether "**the tender grape appear.**" The first look was at the general aspect of the vine. Was the wood well ripened; were the leaves well and fully grown; was there any appearance of mildew, blight, caterpillar, or any other noxious thing in operation to destroy the prospect of the crop? Well, if the first view were satisfactory, if the general aspect of the vine were favourable, now comes a closer examination to see whether "the tender grape" is appearing. Where is the opening blossom? If there be no blossom, there will be no fruit; and if there are no buddings of the tender grape, we shall look in vain when autumn comes for ripe clusters.

This "tender grape," spiritually viewed, seems to signify the tender graces of the soul. Depend upon it, nothing is more opposed to vital godliness than hardness of heart in the things of God. The tender conscience, the humble mind, the broken heart, the contrite spirit: these are true and scriptural marks and

evidences of the grace of God. In fact you will find that every grace of the Spirit partakes of this tenderness. Grace is an exotic; it is not a native plant. It cannot stand the frost, nor the cold east winds. It comes from the warm climate of heaven, and needs careful cherishing that it may live and grow. Thus the tender grape may represent that fear of God in the heart which makes the conscience tender; those inward actings of faith, whereby, as with so many tendrils, the Person and work of Christ are laid hold of; the first tender sensations of opening love toward the Lord, when, by some discovery of Himself, He for the first time makes Himself precious to the believing heart; the tender claspings of a good hope through grace, which lay hold of the finished work of the Son of God.

The tender grape may also spiritually represent the tender sensations of the soul under divine teaching, whereby it mourns over sin, laments its shortcomings and looks to the Lord with weeping eyes and sorrowful heart for pardon and peace. If we see no tender grapes in the spring, there will certainly be no rich, ripe clusters in the autumn. Full fruit indeed was not yet come; but this is what the Lord was looking for—whether the tender grape was budding out of the stem or opening its bloom. To me there is nothing more sickening than the hardness which one sees in so many of our preachers and professors. The dry, hard way in which they preach the most solemn doctrinal truths of the gospel is most repulsive to a spiritual mind, and makes one greatly fear whether such men ever knew anything of the power of truth for themselves in a tender conscience.

4. But there was also something else which the Lord in company with his bride was to look for: **"And the pomegranates bud forth."** The pomegranate is a fruit not peculiar to, but very common in the Holy Land, and is distinguished by a bright green leaf and a beautiful crimson flower, succeeded by a rich, ripe, red fruit, of which the juice is peculiarly luscious and sweet. The Holy Spirit therefore seems to have taken the pomegranate throughout Scripture as an emblem of choice gospel fruit. The high priest wore upon his robe pomegranates interchanged with

golden bells. The golden bells sounded his approach in the tabernacle and loudly proclaimed his coming; but the pomegranates silently proclaimed that he was to bear fruit unto God as well as sound forth his praise. It would seem from the Scripture that there was something peculiarly delicious in the juice of the pomegranate, and that it was mingled with wine to give the latter more flavour. Thus, the spouse says, "I would cause Thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranates." **So 8:2** As a delicious fruit they were therefore planted in oriental gardens: "Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits." **So 4:13**

Thus the pomegranate, as a spiritual emblem, signifies gospel fruit. The Lord and His church went forth therefore hand in hand to examine whether these pomegranates were budding forth—whether, in other words, there was promise of fruit in the churches. They were not looking in the expectation of finding pomegranates fit to be gathered; they did not go so far as that. Being the time of spring when they took their morning walk, fruit was not yet to be found upon the bough. Their examination was directed rather to see whether there was any appearance of a future crop. By this is intimated that the Lord deals very tenderly and gently with the soul, not expecting ripe fruit in the spring, but examining what marks there were of divine teaching in the early bud. Do you ever look into your soul to see whether these pomegranates are budding forth; to search and examine what you can find of the graces of the Spirit; what buddings forth of hope and love you can trace out; what marks of heavenly teaching, what tokens or testimonies of interest in the blood and love of the Lamb, and what prospects for eternity?

But how true it is that we cannot see these fruits in ourselves, whatever measure there be of them, except in company with Christ! Christ does not invite the bride to look into her own heart except in His company; but when favoured with His presence and smile, she may look and see whether the pomegranates are budding forth. And they will always bud forth when she is in company with the Lord, for then His grace is in operation; and

when His grace is in operation, then the tender grape gives a good smell and the pomegranate richly blooms, if we look into our heart in seasons of darkness, desertion and desolation, we shall see no fruit there. These tender blossoms shut up their leaves in the cold north wind; they are afraid to come forth except when the sun shines. But when the sun shines, the tender grape appears and the pomegranate buds forth; for in the presence of the Lord there is a springing up of every Christian grace. Thus you see that the Lord does not invite us to be poring over our heart to find what good there is in the dark night of cold desertion. Does He not say, "Let us get up **early** to the vineyards," as if to see them under the beams of the rising sun, and as favoured with His company? If the bride had gone forth into the vineyard without Him or in the dark night, what would she have seen of the appearing of the tender grape, or of the budding forth of the early pomegranates?

IV.—But this brings us to our fourth and last point; **the entertainment** which He has promised to give His beloved bride when the tender grape appears and the pomegranate buds forth: "**There will I give thee My loves.**" If we are all in darkness and confusion, doubting and fearing as to the reality of the work of grace upon our soul, there is no seeing anything of the tender grape, no viewing anything of the budding of the pomegranate. They may be there blooming and budding, but we cannot see them. But when the Lord is pleased to cheer us with His presence and company, then we see light in His light, and behold, in the teaching of His Spirit, what is hidden from us when in a state of darkness and desertion. It is for this reason He says, "There will I give thee My loves." Observe the expression, "loves," in the plural number. And may we not well ask what "loves" are these? They are many.

1. There is first His **everlasting** love; for He says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." It is a sense of Christ's everlasting love which rejoices the soul when shed abroad in the heart by the Holy

Ghost. For if this love had beginning, it might have ending; but being from eternity, it reaches to eternity.

2. Then there is **dying** love—the love our Lord displayed in dying upon the cross for such poor miserable wretches as we feel ourselves to be. If we can but view His dying love upon the cross, and have a sweet testimony that He loved us and gave Himself for us, then, under the constraint of this dying love, we can give Him all our heart, hate sin with a perfect hatred, desire to be conformed to His suffering image and be found walking in His blessed footsteps.

3. Then there is **pardoning** love, when He is pleased to bless the soul with a sight and sense of His atoning blood, and reveals that love which was stronger than death and triumphed over death and hell.

4. Then there is His **forbearing** love, bearing with all our misbehaviour, backslidings, wanderings and transgressions, which is never provoked to give us utterly up, though we deserve to be abandoned for our sins and crimes for ever and ever.

5. Then there is His **restoring** love—"He restoreth my soul"—whereby He restores us out of a state of carnality, darkness, and death, lifts up once more the light of His countenance and enables us once more to love Him with a pure heart fervently.

All these and other flowings forth of His love are spoken of here as His "loves." And these He gives to the soul of His own free grace, uncalled for, unmerited, undeserved, the spontaneous effusion of His own heart, which is full of the tenderest affection to all that love and fear His great name.

Was it not well worth going forth to enjoy all this? Was it not a blessed journey for His spouse and bride, when she could leave the world and sin and self behind, and go forth in such sweet company? O that we might be thus blessed! What is there worth living for or dying for but this? But how rare for the soul to be



thus favoured! And yet, say what men will, there is no real happiness anywhere else but in this knowledge and enjoyment of the love of Christ; no real separation from the world by any other power than this; no other real meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light but what this union and communion with the Lord reveals and seals.

The Lord of His infinite mercy establish these truths in our heart, favour us from time to time with the sweet experimental enjoyment of them, and give us to live and die in His most blessed embrace!

## Walking with God

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stanford, on Lord's Day Morning, Jan. 23, 1859

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Amos 3:3

The Lord here, under the form of a question, enunciates a very important and pregnant truth. "Can two walk together," he asks, "except they be agreed?" What must be the inevitable reply? Surely not. Unless agreed in heart, how can they walk together in person? But do we see this agreement as a substantial fact, or as a general case? Look at man and his brother man. Take men as they exist in this present world. Can we say that they are agreed, or, that being agreed, they walk together? The very physical features of the world, in its original formation as well as present constitution, widely separate man from man. What lofty mountains, deep rivers, wide seas, and barren tracts, naturally, *physically* sever men asunder! But these natural barriers of division are as nothing compared with the way in which man is separated *morally* from man. What differences there are of language, habits, manners, customs, religion, modes of thought, so that, were earth a level plain and communication as free as in this island, separation and division would still exist. *Politically*, too, how man is dissevered from man. What wars and rumours of wars are now convulsing the continent of Europe: and though we in our sea-girt isle seem in some way removed from present danger, who knows how soon a volcano may burst forth abroad that may throw its burning ashes and boiling lava on our own shores. [This sermon was preached before the late war in Italy.] *Socially*, too, how man is separated from his brother man! Rich and poor; the educated and the uneducated; the peer and the peasant; Dives clothed in purple and fine linen and faring sumptuously every day, and Lazarus at his gate, full of sores and picking up the crumbs which fall from the groaning table—are the poles wider asunder than luxury and poverty, fashion and rags, the square and the alley, "the changeable suits of apparel, the mantles, the wimples, and the crisping pins" of youth, rank, and beauty, and the squalid dirt, filth, and starvation of the outcasts of society? But even without taking in these vast extremes, merely viewing men as brought more nearly together in the different *relationships of life*, what wide differences everywhere

exist! What little agreement there is betwixt the employer and the employed, the master and the servant, the mistress and the maid. What an unceasing strife between capital and labour—capital demanding more work; labour claiming more wages. *Families*, too, how often are they divided father against son, mother against daughter, brother against brother, sister against sister, and what is worse, man against wife, wife against husband. *Religiously*, what sects, parties, and divisions there are in the professing church; so that in religion itself, as generally professed, there seems to be neither peace, nor union, nor harmony. Our *churches*, also, that profess the distinguishing doctrines of the gospel, how often are they split and riven asunder by contention and strife! What little real union there is in the very best churches; and even where there is the appearance of peace without, what secret jealousies, heart-burnings, suspicions, and surmises mar all peace within. Nay, among the very *saints* of God themselves, what little brotherly feeling, sacred union, or Christian fellowship are felt, or at least manifested. How soon the best men take offence, and how unforgiving when offended! How warmly the most unintentional slights are resented; and how those who believe they shall spend an eternity of happiness together are offended for months by an averted look, a hasty word, or a cold shake of the hand.

Wherever, then, there is this want of agreement the words of our text will apply. Thus we see what a wide scope the text embraces—how it enters into a vast number of different relationships, when under the pithy and pointed form of a searching question, it looks out as it were from a high tower upon the face of the world and the church, and asks, as in a voice of thunder, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"

But this is the least of the matter. It would not be of such deep or lasting importance were man only dissociated from his brother man. Let that pass. That would not amount to much. It would only be for time: eternity, we might hope, would bury all these divisions, and reunite in a better and brighter world those who have almost fought to their last breath over the grave's mouth. But we come to a much more important breach, a much wider and more fatal separation, than any at which we have hitherto hinted. There is the fearful, fatal breach between God and man, which is not for time but for eternity; not a matter of earth but of

heaven; not a momentary strife or passing quarrel, bounded by a few days or years, and limited to the narrow sphere of this transitory life, but stretching forward into revolving ages. Well then may God, from heaven his dwelling-place, look down upon earth, and addressing man, sound the startling appeal in his ears—"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Can I and you then walk together in friendship and amity—I so holy, thou so unholy; I so pure, thou so impure; I so enshrined in all the glory of my infinite perfections, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, and thou a child of sin and darkness, loathsome and vile as wrapped up in all the pollutions of thy sinful nature and actual crimes?

But is there not a way whereby God and man can walk together? Do we not read in the word of truth that "Enoch walked with God?" (Gen. 5:24;) and have we not recorded of him that "before his translation he had this testimony that he pleased God?" (Heb. 11:5.) Have not holy men in various ages followed Enoch's footsteps? Did not Noah "walk with God?" and why? because "he found grace [or favour] in the eyes of the Lord." (Gen. 6:8, 9.) Was not Abraham the friend of God? (2 Chron. 20:7; James 2:23.) Did not Moses see God face to face? and did not the Lord "speak unto him as a man speaketh unto his friend?" (Exodus 33:11.) Of Levi, too, we read that "he walked with God in peace and equity." (Mal. 2:6, 7.) We see, then, that there have been men who have walked with God; and if they did walk with God, it was by virtue of being agreed with him. But is there no way whereby others also may now walk with God as these walked of old? Were they the only favoured children of the human race, and are none but they admitted to any communion with the Lord God Almighty? Why need we assemble ourselves this morning in the name of the Lord if there were no way whereby we could walk with him—if there were no reconciliation whereby we might come to an agreement with the Majesty of Heaven? I shall, therefore, with God's blessing—

I.—*First*, endeavour to show what was the *original cause*, and what have been the *subsequent effects* of the *breach* that formerly took place between man and his Maker; for a breach implies previous friendship.

II.—*Secondly*, how the *breach has been healed*, that thus God

and man might be *agreed*.

III.—And *thirdly*, what are the blessed *fruits and effects* of the breach having been healed,—that now being agreed, God and man may *walk together*.

I.—At the first, in the original creation of man, there was no breach between man and his Maker. "God created man in his own image, after his own likeness;" and as "God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good" (Gen. 1:31), he could not but be pleased with man as the creature of his hands. Man could then render to God a pure obedience, acceptable to him as the spontaneous, grateful offering of an innocent heart and spotless hands. I have thought sometimes what must have been Adam's feelings when he awoke out of his first sleep, as Milton beautifully describes him, lying upon a bank of flowers—

"As new awake from soundest sleep,  
Soft on the flowery herb I found me laid  
In balmy sweat."

How as he gazed upwards and saw the majestic heavens, or looked around and viewed the glorious earth, he must have wondered who he was, whence he came, and what power had brought him forth! For Adam was not created a babe but a man—a full-grown man with every bodily power and every mental faculty alike complete. Thought, reason, and speech did not come to him by slow degrees as with us, but were given him at the moment of his creation; or how could he have been made "in the likeness of God?" A babe that neither sees, nor thinks, nor speaks, is not the likeness of him "who seeth under the whole heaven" (Job 28:24); "the thoughts of whose heart are to all generations" (Psal. 33:11); and "whose voice is powerful and full of majesty." (Psal. 29:4.) Nor did God leave him in ignorance of his origin and of that great and glorious Being who had given him breath. We have reason to believe, from what we read in the book of Genesis, that God his Maker often communed with man his creature; for we read of his walking in the garden in the cool of the day, as if it had been the habit of God to come down and talk with Adam face to face, as the day declined from the heat of noon, and the calm evening drew on in that happy garden in which he was placed to dress and keep it. There was no breach, then, no separation, no division between God and man. But Satan

envied man's happiness, and secretly plotted his overthrow. To see man promoted to that nearness to God whence he had fallen, stung him to the quick. Fearing to succeed with man, he attacked, with subtle craft and infernal policy, the woman, man's partner, but from natural constitution a weaker and easier prey. In the depths of his inscrutable wisdom, God permitted Satan to succeed. The woman was tempted and fell, and in her fall tempted and drew in the man. But both fell wilfully and voluntarily, openly rebelled against the express command of God, and deliberately preferred to sin rather than to obey. This made the breach, set God and man at strife, and severed and separated, as with a deadly blow, the creature from the Creator. Thus "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that ["in whom," *margin*] all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12.) Ever since then, there has been a strife between God and man—between the Creator and the creature of his hands. Now this strife or breach exists in the very nature of things. It might indeed have been prevented if God had so willed; but having once taken place, no power could avert the effects. It would not be consistent with the purity and perfection of God's character, that man should have sinned against him without a breach being effected. There is a natural, instinctive repugnance between what is holy and what is unholy; what is righteous and what is unrighteous; what is pure and what is impure. See how the chaste, modest female passes with an instinctive shudder of pity and horror by the street-pacing harlot. Look how a person neat and cleanly in person and apparel shrinks from the dirt and filth of the streets; and how his every sense is offended by the unutterable abominations of a London alley! How a man sober and temperate loathes the brawling revel of drunkards! And how the honest tradesman, who strains every nerve to meet his engagements, and to whom honour and honesty are as his life-breath, would shrink from any association with a fraudulent and worthless bankrupt! Thus you see that in the very nature of things there is and must necessarily must be a breach between good and evil—between what is pure and what is impure. If there were no such breach, purity would become impurity, sin would become confounded with holiness, and God himself cease to be God. Therefore, whilst the great and glorious Jehovah is what he is, so holy, pure, and righteous, there must necessarily be a breach between God and man. Now this breach, so far from becoming narrower, goes on increasing wider and

wider. The more pure that God is, and the more impure man makes or manifests himself to be, the wider the breach becomes. This was shown at the deluge, at the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, and at the destruction of Jerusalem. The greater the sin the wider the breach; and as the very nature of sin is to go on increasing, burning like a fire in proportion to every fresh accession of fuel, there is no hope that this gulf can ever of itself close up. Nor can all the skill, wisdom, or invention of men or angels combined do anything to heal the breach. Men think, in the darkness of their mind, that sin is but a little thing—a matter of very small moment; and they have therefore invented a number of words to palliate and soften it, so as to diminish its aggravated character. Satan has led them to reduce sin to a minimum, and thus persuades them that it is not that evil and dreadful thing which the word of God has declared it to be; at any rate, that they need not make themselves very uneasy about the consequences, as God is very merciful and will always accept a sincere repentance. Man may so flatter himself, and, being thus blinded and deceived, may go on heaping iniquity upon iniquity; but he will find at last to his confusion and dismay that words have not altered things; that the wrath of God burns against sin to the lowest hell; that the justice of God is arrayed against the criminal, and that "every transgression and disobedience will receive a just recompense of reward."

As an evidence of this, see how society has armed itself against violence and wickedness. If a robbery, and especially if a murder, take place in any locality however solitary or remote, how society arms itself against the offender. Every policeman that we meet stands before our eyes as a witness and an instrument of the uplifted hand of the law, and says by his very garb, "Here am I prompt to act, eager to detect the crime and arrest the criminal." If it were not so, how could we sleep in our beds? Thieves may say—"How hard it is that we cannot rob and plunder with impunity! Why should we not be allowed to break into houses, murder people asleep, take away their property, and set their dwellings on fire? At least, what harm can there be in getting a little of their abundance? And yet if we take a trifle of what they can so well spare, and if denied use a little gentle violence, the police give us no rest, seize us in our very beds, and carry us off to jail. Why are we not allowed to do what we like in this land of liberty?" "No," says society; "we can not exist if you do: we must

either put you down, or you will put us down." You see, then, there is an instinctive feeling in society that justice must have its sway, and that thieves' language may excuse crime among thieves, but that the law nevertheless holds on its stern course; for as the earthly vicegerent of God, it "beareth not the sword in vain." (Rom. 13:4.) So it is with the law of God. A company of sinners may argue like a company of thieves—"Why cannot we get drunk, if we like, or indulge in those passions which spring from, and are imbedded in our very nature? Is a cheerful glass a crime? Is love a sin? I own I am rather unsteady, but am I to be sent to hell for a little unsteadiness?" "Why should I be hanged?" may the murderer with similar justice say. "In my passion I struck him rather hard, or grasped his throat too tight; but I never meant to kill him. How cruel to hang me for a mere fit of passion!" You see the folly of such excuses in a moment, and know that the law is deaf to all such futile pleas. And yet we see on every side a company of sinners arraying themselves against the justice of God, as a company of thieves may inveigh against the justice of man. Now which is to prevail? You say the law must. God says the same!—"I cannot live unless the law prevail. I must live as the great and glorious God, of purer eyes than to behold evil, and that cannot look on iniquity, or I cease to be." Thus we see the eternal justice of God, the holiness of his righteous character, the intrinsic purity of his very being, all arrayed against sin and the sinner. And we know who must come down in this warfare. We need no voice from heaven to tell us who is the stronger. The thief may escape immediate arrest, and spend in profligacy the gains of violence and crime; and the murderer may die in his bed; but not so the sinner. There is an eye that tracks him through all the shady covert; there is a hand that can and will in due time arrest and bring him to justice. However the long-suffering of God may wait, if he die without faith and repentance, the thunderbolt of divine wrath will one day light upon his head and strike him down into a justly deserved hell.

We are all without exception sinners before God. However we may seek to justify ourselves or palliate the case, it still remains a fearful fact—a terrible noose out of which we cannot by any art or craft, plan or policy, draw our head. We are thus like a man who has committed a dreadful crime: he may try to juggle with his own conscience, to evade the fact, to palliate the deed, to



extenuate the circumstances, or harden himself against the consequences. Still there is the dreadful fact: the crime has been committed; the deed of blood has been done; under yonder hedge, in that dark pool, the murdered victim lies; and every gaping wound cries out against the murderer. So it is in a spiritual sense with every one of us. We have all sinned against God; we have in innumerable instances broken his holy law; we have brought ourselves under its righteous sentence; we are, by original and actual transgression, exposed to its awful curse. Like the murderer, we may seek to palliate the case, but the fact still remains a dreadful reality. As then the commission of a crime makes a breach between society and the criminal, so the commission of sin has made a breach between God and us; and unless that breach be healed, God and we can never walk together. And what will be the consequence? Is it a matter of little moment? Hear the certain consequence. If God and we are never brought to walk together, God and we must be eternally asunder; and if eternally asunder, where is God? In the highest heaven. And where shall we be? In the lowest hell. If you had not been a sinner, you might get from under this dreadful conclusion, this killing, crushing fact. But conscience in your bosom will tell you, far more plainly and more forcibly than I, that sinner you have been, that sinner you are, and being such, that there is a breach between you and God, which breach must be healed, or you and God can never walk together, either in this life or the next, on earth or in heaven, in time or eternity.

II.—But let me now advance a step further in this field of heavenly truth, and show *how this breach is healed*; how a reconciliation has been effected, and thus an agreement has been made whereby ruined, guilty man may once more walk together with God. And to a sinner deeply convinced of his sins; to a guilty criminal under the law's dread sentence; to a miserable wretch stricken through and through by a sense of inward condemnation, what tidings can be so suitable or so acceptable as a message of mercy from the very mouth of the Lord himself; a treaty of reconciliation held out to rebels and enemies; a means devised that his banished be not fully and finally expelled from him (2 Sam. 14:14); and terms of agreement propounded whereby God and man may walk together in friendship and amity? You may have heard the gospel so often that this message of mercy may sound in your ears as an idle tale. You may be even worse than

that; you may be gospel hardened, so as to have no conviction of your personal need of it, or be built up in a vain, presumptuous confidence in the mere letter of truth, without any vital experience of its power. Still, the tidings are not robbed of their intrinsic blessedness by your carelessness or your presumption; still is it my place to proclaim them in your ears whether they be to you the savour of life unto life, or a savour of death unto death. It is still my office to sound the gospel trumpet, and that with no uncertain sound; to preach the truth boldly and faithfully; and then leave it in the hands of the Lord to apply it as he may see fit.

What a wondrous way, then, has God devised in his own eternal mind, that the breach might be healed; that agreement might be made; that sinning man might be reconciled to his justly offended Maker, and yet that none of his glorious perfections should be tarnished or impaired! And what plan was this? Hear it, O heaven and earth! That the Son of God—his Son by nature and essence his co-equal and co-eternal Son—should take into union with his divine Person a pure, sinless, and spotless humanity; for "as the children were partakers of flesh and blood," it was necessary that "he himself likewise should take part of the same." (Heb. 2:14.) This was the will of God which Christ came to do, as we read—"Then said I, lo I come; in the volume of the book"—that is, the book of God's eternal decrees—"it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." (Psal. 40:7, 8.) God prepared for his dear Son a body, as the apostle says, quoting Psal. 40:6:—"Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not; but a body hast thou prepared ["fitted," *margin*] me." (Heb. 10:5.) This was a pure, holy, and incorruptible humanity—the body taken in the womb of the Virgin, offered as a bleeding sacrifice on the cross, but now at the right hand of God in heaven. Man had sinned, offended, gone astray, become involved in transgression. Before, then, there could be any healing of the breach, any reconciliation of man unto God, flesh and blood must be assumed, that in that nature an atonement might be made for sin, justice be fully satisfied, the law righteously obeyed, its penalty removed, and its curse taken away. This mighty work none but the Son of God could accomplish, nor he except by becoming man. As God, Christ could not suffer, bleed, or die. As God, he could not endure the wrath due to transgression, sustain the curse of the law, or work out an obedience such as it

demanded. Deity can no more obey than it can suffer, bleed, and die. Yet there must be obedience, or the law cannot be fulfilled; there must be suffering, or the wrath of God cannot be appeased; there must be blood-shedding, or a sacrifice cannot be offered; there must be death, for to die is a main part of the sacrifice. If the surety take the place of the debtor, he must endure the penalty of the debt; if the substitute stand in the room of the criminal, he must suffer the punishment of the crime. O wondrous scheme, that the Son of God should take our nature into union with his own divine Person, and in that nature render an obedience perfectly acceptable to God; an obedience which must be rendered, but one that we could not render; an obedience exactly such as the law demanded: perfect in thought, word, and deed. Outraged Justice else might say—"Where is my victim? I demand a victim: it must be either the criminal or some one in his stead. I cannot waive my rightful claim. I must have it satisfied, or else I should cease to be Justice." The blessed Lord comes forward and says—"Justice, take thy claim. Here is my innocent head: let thy thunderbolt fall upon it. Law, what dost thou demand? Perfect obedience. I render it. What dost thou inflict upon the criminal as the penalty of disobedience? The curse. I endure it. Holiness of God, what dost thou require? A spotless purity of soul and body, of heart, lip, and life; perfect love to God and man. Here I am: I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law in its length, breadth, and spirituality, in its holiness, purity, and power, is in my heart." Thus by the substitution of the Son of God as rendering an obedience in our nature, all the perfection of God were glorified; all his attributes harmonised; justice was satisfied, the law magnified, and the holiness of God well pleased. Complete satisfaction being thus made to all the requisitions of justice, room was given for mercy and love, pity and compassion to fallen man to come into full play, through the channel of a Redeemer's meritorious sufferings and death. There was no other way whereby the breach could be healed; but by this divinely contrived plan it has been healed, and that most effectually. Many, perhaps I may say most, men are sensible that they are sinners against God. Their conscience, when not hardened, pricks them in their bosom, and they cannot deny the truth of that verdict which is so powerfully registered in that court of courts against them. But what course do they take to heal the breach? They feel that they and God are not friends; they dread him therefore as an enemy. As, then, age, illness, or

death draw near, the judgment bar stands before them; and as they know they must appear there to answer for their sins, they are often filled with alarm and apprehension. How shall they heal the breach? How shall they satisfy the justice of God? How shall they obtain mercy? They know not. What then do they? They resort to many self-righteous devices, contrived for the express purpose of appeasing the cry of natural conscience, and of supplying a dim hope that when they die they shall go to heaven. But ah! it is a garment too short—it is a bed too narrow. They will find to their confusion that these works of creature righteousness have not healed the breach; have not atoned for their sins; have not satisfied the justice of God; have not fulfilled the law; have not opened a way whereby love and mercy, pardon, peace, and salvation, can reach their breast, and at death open the gates of heavenly glory.

III.—But we will now consider what are *the fruits and effects* of this healing of the breach, of this agreement made, and how, by virtue of this reconciliation, the child of grace is brought to walk together with God. He, like others, was once dead in trespasses and sins; for he was by nature a child of wrath even as others (Eph. 2:1, 8); and he, like them, would have perished in transgression and disobedience, or in a vain attempt to establish his own righteousness, had the Lord not interposed in his behalf. But the Lord had purposes of mercy and love toward him, and therefore would not suffer him to ruin his own soul by sin or self-righteousness. What course, then, does he take to bring about that personal, inward, experimental reconciliation without which he cannot walk with God in sacred fellowship and holy communion? He shows him his state and condition by nature and practice. A divine light, and with a divine light a new and heavenly life comes into his heart, whereby he is quickened out of his state of death in trespasses and sins. He awakes, as it were, from a long and deep sleep; he lifts his eyes upward, and what does he behold? The offended Majesty of heaven. He finds what he never before found; he feels what he never before felt—that he has an immortal soul in his body—a soul whose fixed state at death must be eternal joy or woe. He finds and feels that he is a sinner before the eyes and in the hands of a holy God. Aroused by these new and conflicting feelings, he begins to look around and within him, and turns his eyes, which were before fixed upon others, upon him self—from the world without to the

world within. Light breaking in more clearly, he begins to see the state into which he has brought himself by transgression. The Holy Ghost who has thus begun, carries on and deepens the work; lays eternal realities with greater weight upon his conscience, convinces him more and more acutely of his sins, and terrifies him by a dread of the future consequences: stops his mouth from all self-righteous pleas, brings him in guilty before God (Rom. 3:19), and opens up the breadth, spirituality, and curse of that righteous law which condemns him as a transgressor. In this school of divine teaching he learns, it may be slowly and gradually, but always effectually, what a breach sin has made between him and God. He sees and feels that there is a wide and deep gulf between him and God, and that that gulf remains impassable until some mode be found whereby either God can pass over to him or he can pass over to God. But how shall *he* pass over to God? How shall he get across this mighty gulf, in which at times he may see boiling up the sulphurous flames of hell? How shall he bridge it over? If doings and duties could bear him across the gaping chasm, would he not still have to encounter on the other side the terrible Majesty of heaven, which might hurl him trembling back? To drop the figure, what means shall he take to reconcile himself to God? He knows not, but he will often attempt many. He will break off his old habits; give up his old companions; renounce his beloved lusts; go to church or chapel; repeat prayers, read his Bible, and do anything to get out of his conscience the stings of guilt that he feels to be there. He yearns for pardon, peace, and reconciliation; but how to obtain then he knows not. Thus he may go on, exercised in conscience, harassed in soul, and depressed in mind—it may be through ignorance of the way of salvation; it may be through unbelief, though salvation is set before him; it maybe through the temptations of Satan assailing him and preventing him from receiving the Gospel in the love and power of it. But sooner or later the Lord the Spirit is pleased to take the veil from off his eyes and heart, and to show unto him the way of salvation through the atoning blood and justifying righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. I do not say that every saint of God has so clear and powerful a revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ to his soul that he sees him, as it were, with the eyes of faith, bleeding upon the cross for his sins; or that every one who is blessed with living faith has such a full manifestation of his person, blood, and righteousness as to leave no doubt behind of his interest therein.

Some of the Lord's people are so blessed and favoured, but by no means all. Yet all of them have the eyes of their understanding spiritually enlightened, and a spirit of wisdom and revelation given them in the knowledge of Christ, so as to know what is the hope of his calling them from darkness into light. (Eph. 1:17, 18.) All have, in God's own time and way, sufficient faith raised up in their heart to take hold of this way of salvation through the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God; and they have all-sufficient strength given to them to repent of their sins, to renounce their own righteousness, and to cast their weary, guilty, and naked souls upon the finished work of Christ. Or else where is the agreement spoken of in our text?

But many who truly fear God are in this state. They desire most earnestly to walk together with God. They feel they have walked long enough with a sinful world; long enough with Pharisees and legalists; long enough with the devices and follies of their own hearts; and now they would walk with God. They desire to have communion with the God of all grace. They long to have reconciliation, pardon, and peace spoken to their conscience. They would be friends of God instead of enemies; and would do anything to remove the burden of sin off their conscience, to get its stings and pangs out of their soul, and to have a testimony that the Lord is their God. These yearnings after reconciliation; these desires for pardon and peace; these breathings and breakings forth of your soul, it may be in the midnight hour, that the Lord would have mercy on, and bless you with some discoveries of his pardoning love,—whence spring they? From the Spirit of God. And whence come your sighs, cries, prayers, groans, entreaties? From the interceding breath of the Holy Ghost, who intercedeth for us and within us, "with groanings which cannot be uttered." Your very desires for reconciliation, pardon, peace, and salvation, bespeak the work of the Spirit; are evidences of divine light; are signs and marks of the life of God within. After a time the Lord will be pleased to show you more plainly and clearly how you are to be reconciled. It may be that you have been looking too much to the law; depending too much upon your own righteousness; turning your eyes too much away from the only Object of a sinner's faith: and looking askance at something to be done by yourselves. Will God sanction this by his Spirit and grace? He will not. Therefore you are far from rest and peace. But it may be in some moment of deep distress, when all

hope even of salvation seems taken away, that the Lord himself will break in upon your soul with a sweet and gracious promise, with the application of his atoning blood, and the revelation of his love. Then you will see the way of salvation and your interest therein; then behold the Son of God as your bleeding Surety; and then pardon and peace and salvation will be distilled into your soul as from the very mouth of God. Now you are agreed with God; and what are the points of your agreement? You could not agree with God whilst you were loving sin and living in sin; or whilst trusting to your own righteousness. God would not sanction such double dealing—would not smile upon such hypocritical conduct. But now that you esteem the Lord Jesus Christ, "the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely," you and God are agreed together in the high opinion you put upon his dear Son, and you and he upon that point are one. Now you agree. God smiles upon the agreement, and you begin to walk together with him, because upon that point he and you are of one heart and of one mind. As long as you were looking to yourself, you were secretly disregarding, slighting, and despising the atoning blood of the Lord the Lamb. You did not see the virtue and efficacy of that most precious blood. There was a secret leaning half upon that and half upon something of your own. But you are brought by the teaching of the Spirit of God in your soul to look to the atoning blood of Christ and no other; to his precious sacrifice and no other; and to hang upon his perfect obedience and no other. God and you are now agreed. You both see with the same eyes, feel with the same heart, and love with the same affection. He loves Christ: you love him. He honours Christ: you honour him. He has highly exalted Christ: you do the same by setting him upon the throne of your affections. You and God are now agreed.

So also with respect to the special *teaching* of the Holy Spirit in the heart. While you were looking to be made wise by your own exertions, you and God were at variance; but when you were brought to this point—"Let the Holy Ghost be my teacher; let me have what I have by his heavenly communication, and be what I am by his divine operation; let me be wholly the work of his hands,"—then you and God were agreed.

So, again, as to *thoughts and affections* about eternal things. There was a time when the world held in your heart the chief

place. It was not so in God's heart. You and God were therefore at variance. But now, through grace, you are brought to make eternity your chief concern. You and God are agreed there; for in the mind of God, eternity as much outweighs time as the stars in the midnight sky outweigh a grain of dust. There was a time when you loved the world and the things of time and sense; and earth and earthly things were your element and home. You and God disagreed upon that matter; because the Lord saw that the world was full of evil, whilst you saw it full of good. "The Lord saw the world under his curse, and you loved its favour and its blessing—seeking madly and wickedly to enjoy that which God had denounced: therefore you could not agree. Thus you see that in order to be agreed with God, we must have God's thoughts in our heart, God's ways in our soul, and God's love in our affections. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord." But they must become such; and when once God's thoughts become our thoughts and God's ways our ways; when once we have the mind of Christ and see with the eyes of God, then God and we become agreed, and being agreed, we can walk together. What is it to walk together? Why it is to enjoy union, communion, fellowship, and friendship. You see two persons walking together in the street: they are talking to each other. They agree, else they would not walk together. But walking together, it may be arm in arm, you see that there is an intercourse, a fellowship, a communion established between the two. God adopts the figure: "Enoch walked with God;" that is, if I may use the expression, he walked arm in arm with Jehovah. God spoke to him. God poured his love into his ear and heart; and Enoch, like a little child, stammered out his love and affection to God. So they walked together as Father and child for three hundred years. Now as we are brought to agree with God, we walk with God. He has set up a mercy-seat on high, and when they thus agree, God and man may meet at the mercy-seat of the Redeemer. As the eyes are enlightened to see the truth of God; as the heart is touched to feel the power of God; and as the affections are drawn forth to love the things of God, we meet at the mercy-seat. It is sprinkled with blood; it contains and hides from view the broken tables of the Law. There God meets man in gracious amity, and enables him to pour out his soul before him and to tell him his troubles, trials and temptations. And every now and then he sweetly relieves by dropping in a gracious promise, applying some portion of his



sacred truth, encouraging him to believe in his dear Son and still to hope in his mercy.

But the chief way whereby we walk with God is by *faith*, and not by sight. Abraham walked in this way. Unbelief severs the soul from God. There is no communion between God and an infidel. An unbelieving heart has no fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ; but a believing heart has communion with him. It is by faith that we have fellowship with God and his dear Son; and you will find that just in proportion to the strength or weakness of your faith is your walking with God. If you have faith in blessed exercise, as you look to the atoning blood, you find that you can walk with God; you can pour out your heart before him, tell him all your concerns, spread before him the inmost movements of your mind, and look to him for peace and consolation. But when your faith is weak—when it gives way under trial and cannot take hold of the promises, then communion is interrupted; there is no longer a walking with God. But in proportion as faith is strong, so there is a walking with God in sweet agreement; for faith keeps eyeing the atonement; faith looks not so much to sin, as to salvation from sin—at the way whereby sin is pardoned, overcome, and subdued. So it is by faith, and in proportion to our faith, that we walk together with God.

But there is no keeping up faith except by prayer and watchfulness. As prayer declines in the bosom, so does the strength of faith. You may go on neglecting prayer and supplication until every grain of faith seems lost out of your bosom, and may come at last to think you never knew anything of a work of God upon your heart, and have been deceived in believing there was any grace there. By watchfulness also is the love of God maintained. Unless you watch against your besetting sins, against the snares spread for your feet, against the temptations that daily and hourly beset your path, against being overcome by the strength or subtlety of your unwearied foe, you are sure to fall; and if you fall, you will bring guilt and bondage, darkness and distress into your mind, and cut off for a time all friendly intercourse with God. Therefore you must pray and watch; for without watchfulness, prayer is of little efficacy.

Then there is *reading the word*. It is in the Scriptures that the mind of God is revealed. There are the promises; there is the

revelation of mercy; there is God's blessed truth discovered and made known. If we neglect the Scriptures, have no heart to read them, or read them carelessly, unbelievingly, they will do us little good. They must be read with believing eyes and heart, received as the revelation of God, and must be mixed with faith, or assuredly they will not profit us (Heb. 4:2.) The life of God is a very deep secret, and sacred thing in the soul. God, it is true, will maintain it; he will not leave his work unaccomplished. But still, unless we read and pray, watch and meditate, wage war against besetting sins, and seek the Lord's face continually, we shall find the strength and power of faith very sensibly decline; and if so, there is no comfortable walking with God.

Is it your earnest desire to walk with God; to have a scriptural evidence that you are one of his beloved family; that he is your Father and heavenly Friend, and that when you die, death will only be an introduction to his eternal presence? Are you sensible that sin has made an awful breach between you and God? Has that breach ever been matter of deep and anxious concern to your soul how it is to be healed? Has it ever caused you a sleepless night or mournful day? Has it ever given rise to deep searching of heart? Have you ever seen by the eye of faith that there is a way whereby the breach may be healed?—that there is a mediator between God and man, an Advocate at the right hand of the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous? Have your eyes been enlightened by divine light to see; has your heart been touched by a divine finger to feel these solemn verities, so as to see the beauty and blessedness of them? Has that drawn up your faith and hope and love toward God? Is it no concern to you whether you are God's friend or God's enemy—whether heaven is to be your blissful home, or hell your dread abode? Every day is shortening the span of life, and some of you already have the snows scattered upon your head—snows which indicate the approaching winter—when you will have to stand before your great Judge. What then? Are there no anxious enquiries in your bosom, how the matter stands between you and God—whether you are reconciled, brought near, accepted, pardoned, and saved; or whether you are still in your sins, under their awful weight and dismal load, exposed to the wrath of God and the curse of a righteous law? You say "I am concerned; the things of eternity press very heavily and deeply upon me." Let us see the certain fruits and effects. If you are hungry, you do anything to

get food; if thirsty, you do anything to get water; if you are poor you take any employment to procure the necessaries of life. Then are you thus exercised? Is your mind thus uneasy? What! no sighs nor cries for mercy? No supplications to the throne? But you have had something communicated; you have had some views of Jesus; mercy has in some way visited your soul, and peace and salvation have been in some measure imparted. But you have backslidden; you have got into a cold, careless frame of mind; your heart has wandered from God; you have brought death and darkness into your soul. What then? Must all be given up? Must your profession be tied like a millstone round your neck, to sink you into a double hell? Not so. There is the fountain still open for all sin and uncleanness; there is the interceding high Priest, the ever living Mediator; there is the blood ever crying from the ground. There you must come; to that altar at which you once stood and there found atoning blood revealed; to that fountain which washed you once you must resort again, that the breach may be healed, pardon once more spoken, and your soul be enabled again to walk with God. And you will walk more carefully, watchfully, prayerfully for the future. As a burnt child dreads the fire, so your very backslidings may work for your spiritual good; and you may learn thereby to walk more humbly with God, and more tenderly and cautiously as regards yourself.

In this congregation we can have but two classes: those who are agreed with God, and those who are not agreed. Those who are not agreed must come to some terms of manifested reconciliation before death appears, or they will sink to rise no more. But there are those here who are agreed with God, through the Son of his love. The Lord will perfect his work; what he has begun, he will carry on and complete. And as salvation is all of his grace, it opens a way of escape for every sinner sensibly in his own conscience condemned by the law, and reveals a mode whereby God can not only save him, but be eternally glorified thereby in the Son of his love.

## **Waters which do not Drown and Flames which do not Burn**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, June 15, 1858

"But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. 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; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Isaiah 43:1, 2

The promises are strewn thickly through the pages of God's inspired word—as thickly, and, viewed by a spiritual eye, more gloriously than the stars which stud the midnight sky. These promises, so countless in number, so glorious in nature, are more certain in the fulfilment than the very rising or setting of those heavenly orbs; for their full accomplishment rests not on fixed laws of creation, but on what is more stable than creation itself, even the eternal counsel, determinate will, and unchangeable faithfulness of the Almighty Promiser. The goodness of man, the unworthiness of the creature, no more hasten and no more arrest their fulfilment than they do the course of the stars or the movement of the sun. Were it so, not one of these promises could ever have its due fulfilment, for their basis would be as fleeting as a summer cloud. Did they rest in any measure upon such a contingency as the obedience of man, every promise that God has given must fall to the ground unaccomplished, for fallen man is inherently incapable of rendering a pure obedience, and no other is available or acceptable. But, resting as they do upon the faithfulness of an unchanging and unchangeable Jehovah, his very glory is interested in their complete accomplishment.

But, apart from the question of their fulfilment, there are two things declared by the Holy Ghost of the promises generally, which are as important as they are blessed. 1. He says of them, by the pen of Paul, that "all the promises of God *in him are yea,*

*and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.*" (2 Cor. 1:20.) That is, all the promises are so ratified and established in the Son of his love; if I may use the expression, they are all so lodged by the will of God in the hands and heart of Christ, that they can no more fall out of his hands and heart than Christ himself can fall from his mediatorial throne. The promises can only cease to be fulfilled when Christ ceases to be the fulfiller, for he lives at the right hand of the Father to carry into accomplishment every promise recorded in the pages of inspired truth. 2. The second thing said of them is—"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by *these ye might be partakers of the divine nature*, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2 Peter 1:4.) Thus the promises provide for our *sanctification* as well as for our *salvation*; for when applied to the heart by the power of God, they instrumentally raise up a new and divine nature, and thus deliver us from the power and prevalence of those worldly lusts in which thousands live in present corruption, and die in everlasting perdition.

We have in the words before us a cluster of blessed promises made to Jacob and to Israel. But the question at once arises, Whom are we to understand by Jacob and Israel here? To elucidate this question, we must bear in mind that there is an Israel after the flesh and an Israel after the spirit. Now Israel after the flesh, that is, the lineal descendants of Abraham, in the first instance inherited the promises, as the apostle declares—"To whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and *the promises?*" (Rom. 9:4.) But these privileges they forfeited by rejecting the Son of God, for in rejecting him they cast away the promises made in and by him. Thus "they were broken off" as the apostle says in the same epistle, "because of unbelief." (Rom. 11:20.) They were once a good olive tree and stood in the garden of the Lord, bearing fruit to his praise; but they rejected the Son of God, for when he came unto his own, his own received him not (John 1:11); and therefore God for a time, for his rejection of them is not final, broke off the natural branches, and grafted into the stock the Gentiles, the believing Gentiles, that they might

partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree. (Rom. 11:17, 18.) In this way, Israel after the spirit, that is, the election of grace among the Gentiles, passed into the place of Israel after the flesh. And it is for this reason that the promises of old addressed to Israel and Jacob now belong to the believing church of God; for the Gentile church has passed by grace and faith into that state before God out of which the Jewish Church passed by her unbelief and her rejection of the Lord of life and glory.

It is, then, to believing Jacob—it is to spiritual Israel—in other words, the living family of God, that the Lord the Spirit addresses those comforting and encouraging promises in our text, which he prefaces by the words which so often drop in the Scriptures—from his heart and mouth—"Fear not." Knowing how subject Israel is to fears; how weak and helpless she is, and how when the Lord is not present to sustain her footsteps, she falls into doubts, as a child falls into the road when the mother lets go her hand, he bids her "Fear not," that she may be encouraged to look up in faith and hope that he will never leave or forsake her, but still be with her even to the end.

But you will find all through the word of God—and our text is no exception—that the promises are usually adapted to the peculiar circumstances of the saints of God—that they are not, so to speak, cast before them without any discrimination; not tossed down at their feet heedlessly and carelessly, as corn is scattered broadcast in a field; but are addressed to them for the most part as passing through affliction and trial—as being in circumstances that need the promise, and require that help which it holds forth and gives. Thus, in our text, when the Lord has spoken to Jacob and to Israel, and bade them "fear not," he adds—"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; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

In opening up the words before us, I shall, with God's blessing—

I.—*First*, endeavour to show *the broad basis*, the strong foundation upon which the promises rest, which is in the Lord having done four things on behalf of his people:—1, He has *created* them; 2, He has *redeemed* them; 3, He has *called* them; and, 4, He has *taken possession* of them—the last being implied by the words—"Thou art mine." And *because* he has done these things for them, he virtually engages that he will be with them when they pass through flood and fire.

II.—*Secondly*, the *state, case, and condition* of mind to which those promises are spoken, and to which they are so eminently adapted, which is, when Israel has to *pass through the waters* and wade through the rivers; when she has to *walk through the fire*, and to be encompassed with the flame.

III.—*Thirdly*, the *gracious promises* which the Lord makes to Israel in these circumstances of distress and peril: that in passing through the waters *he will be with her*; as she goes through the rivers, *they shall not overflow her*; when she walks through the fire, *she shall not be burned*; and when surrounded by the flame, *it shall not kindle upon her*.

I.—The Lord does not give his promises in a promiscuous, indiscriminating way. He does not, if I may use the expression, throw them down for anybody to pick up; nor does he deal wantonly and heedlessly with these blessed treasures. But though he gives them, and that most lovingly and affectionately, yet it is only to those for whom he has designed them in his own eternal mind, and for whom he has done or intends to do a saving, sanctifying work.

i: Thus, before he gives the promise to Israel, the Lord lays a broad basis of interest in him by declaring that he has *created* him and *formed* him. He thus claims him as his peculiar property, as the express work of his creating hand. For who can have such a title to him as his own Creator? As he elsewhere speaks—"This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise." (Isai. 43:21.) But this right of creation embraces various

particulars. 1. God, in the operations of his Almighty hand, created *both our body and soul*; and holy writ tells us how he created both. In creating man's body, he formed it out of the dust of the ground. He gave it life, but he did not bestow upon it immortality. He made it capable of sin and death. But in creating man's soul, God breathed into it the breath of life, and thus made it an heir of immortality. Yet immunity from sin was no more given to the soul than to the body; though sin and the entrance of death by sin did not destroy the immortality that God gave it when he breathed into it the breath of life. But in creating the soul immortal, how wonderfully has God formed it, and given it such qualities as to fit it for the eternal enjoyment of himself! What an understanding has he blessed it with—what affections he has given—what capacities of happiness—what powers of thought, reasoning, and expression—what faculties of admiration and adoration, which, when renewed by grace and developed, as they will be one day beyond all present conception, will be capable of apprehending and enjoying God in Christ in all his glorious perfections and eternal majesty. How curiously, too, has he wrought our body! What consummate wisdom has he stamped upon every part of it! How wonderfully has he formed this earthly tabernacle that it may be a receptacle for our soul during its time state; and afterwards, when fully purified from the stain of corruption and perfectly conformed to the glorious body of the Lord Jesus, may be a fit companion for the immortal soul throughout the countless ages of eternity. 2. The *time when, the place where, we came into being*, were also ordained and arranged of God. In this sense he may be said to have "created" and "formed" us, by fixing the bounds of our habitation, giving us that station in society, and placing us exactly in that position of life which he saw were best adapted to our spiritual profit, most conducive to his own glory, and harmonising most thoroughly with his own eternal good counsel. It is not by chance, then, that we are what we are as men and women. It was not blind fortune or casual accident which fixed your first birth, any more than that it was chance which fixed your second birth; so that what we are as present members of society, as occupying our various positions and stations in life, we are by divine appointment and in



pursuance of the original design of him in "whom we live, and move, and have our being."

3. But the words "*created* and *formed*" have a deeper meaning than this. They have respect not merely to the body and soul which God gave us, and to our present position in life, but point also to our *eternal standing in the Son of God's love*. Christ is spoken of in Scripture as possessing a mystical body, of which he is the glorious Head, as the apostle speaks, "And not holding the Head from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." (Col. 2:19.) Now every member of this mystical body has its appointed and determinate place in the mind of God, and is brought forth in time as he eternally designed it. I do not understand the words "creating" and "forming" here as referring so much to the work of regenerating grace, though I do not exclude that meaning, as to the mystical creation of the members of Christ, which "were written in his book and in continuance were fashioned when as yet there was none of them." (Psa. 139:16.) Thus the "substance" of Christ, that is, his mystical body, "was not hid" from the searching eye of God, when it was "made in secret," in the secret purposes of God, "and curiously wrought," that is, beautifully put together "in the lowest parts of the earth," as the place destined of God, where the members were successively to appear in their time state. (Psa. 139:15.) As the covenant Head of his mystical body, the blessed Lord is represented as the Father's "daily delight, rejoicing always before him;" and "while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world," as "rejoicing in the habitable parts of his earth, and his delight being with the sons of men." (Prov. 8:26-31.) There are "vessels of mercy which God has afore prepared unto glory" (Rom. ix. 23); and those were created and formed in the mind of God, as a potter forms in his mind the exact figure of the vessel, its size, shape, and use before he casts it on the wheel or moulds it, whilst lying there, with his fingers.

ii. But the Lord also tells Israel that he has *redeemed* as well as

created her; and this has additionally engaged him to be upon her side for ever and ever. This has made him a promise making and a promise keeping God; for it has engaged not only the love of his heart, but the faithfulness of his nature. But for the fall there would have been no promises; therefore no display of God's faithfulness in fulfilling them. The covenant of grace was made before the fall, but with a fore-view of it; and therefore all the promises made in the covenant regard man as a fallen sinner. Redemption was a part of the covenant; but the very meaning of the word points to a state of slavery and bondage. We were not created slaves. It is a state into which we sank through the Adam fall. Adam may be said literally to have sold himself to Satan; and for what? For an apple. He sold himself and all his posterity at that miserable price. He was tempted by Satan, through the instrumentality of his wife, to break the express command of God; and by that one act of wilful, voluntary disobedience,

"Brought death into the world, and all our woe;"

and cast himself and us into a pit of misery and wretchedness, out of which we never should have come but for the bloodshedding and obedience of the Son of God. The Lord Jesus, we read, "loved the Church and gave himself for it." (Eph. 5:25.) But when did he begin to love it, if we may use such a word as begin of love eternal? Surely before the fall. He saw her fall, as we might see a beloved wife fall into a river or from a window. So Jesus saw Adam fall into disobedience, and saw all the members of his mystical body ruined in the same awful crash. The abyss of sin and guilt, of misery and woe, of alienation and enmity, of separation and death, into which the Church at that moment sank, was not hidden, from the eyes of the Son of God as he lay in his Father's bosom. He saw her wallowing in filth and guilt, under condemnation and wrath, and reduced to a state of hopelessness and helplessness of which we can form no adequate conception. But this did not change the love of his heart. He loved her in the midst of, in spite of all her sin, filth, and folly. She never fell out of his heart; and this in due time he showed by coming into the world as her Redeemer to deliver her by his

precious bloodshedding and death from sin, death, hell, and despair. Though not only by original but by personal and actual sin, the Church was sunk into awful depths of guilt, yet he redeemed her, paid the full, the stipulated price for her—nothing less than his own life, his own blood; and by his sufferings and sorrows in the garden, and on the cross, by offering up in sacrifice his pure and spotless humanity, his holy body and soul, he redeemed her to God; he bought her back from death and hell, from sin and Satan, from the curse of the Law, and every pain and penalty which she had incurred as a trespasser and a transgressor, as a debtor and as a criminal. He washed away her sins in his most precious blood, worked out for her a robe of righteousness which he put upon her and in which she outshines the very angels, and will one day bring her with him in glory to astonish and judge a guilty world.

iii. But the Lord adds also in the text that he had *called her by her name*; that is, he had specially and spiritually called her by his grace—had separated her by regenerating work upon her heart from a state of carnality and death. As God called Abraham to go out of Chaldea into a land which he knew not, so does he now call his people out of the world to a spiritual and experimental knowledge of himself as the only true God and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. And this he intimates by the expression—"I have called thee by thy name;" for in calling her by her name, he had set upon her his own distinguishing mark. As a shepherd brands his sheep with the name of the owner, so when the Lord calls a soul by his grace, he puts his own mark upon it. Or as when a person calls us by our own name, it implies that he knows us and that we know him, so the Lord implies by the expression that he knows the Church with a knowledge of love and approbation.

iv. The last stone, so to speak, laid in our text as a part of this strong foundation for all the promises to rest upon is, that he has *taken possession* of her; for he says "*Thou art mine.*" Now this is the sweetest and most blessed declaration of all the four, for in it the Lord assures her that not only has he created and formed

her, redeemed her, and called her by her name, but that, by manifesting himself to her soul, and revealing his love and blood to her heart, he has taken possession of her affections, and thus made her manifestly and eternally his; so that he can look down from heaven to earth, and say, "Thou art mine—mine by electing purpose; mine by redeeming love; mine by calling grace; and mine by possessing power. It is as when the bridegroom after a long and faithful courtship, when a thousand difficulties and obstacles are at last surmounted, and marriage has made them one, clasps his beloved bride to his arms and whispers into her ear, "Now, thou art mine."

II.—But to come to our second point. The path of God's people from earth to heaven is for the most part one of much affliction, sorrow, and tribulation; and thus they are called from time to time to *pass through waters* and wade through *rivers*—to *walk through fires* and be surrounded by *the flame* of hot furnaces. But when they are placed in those circumstances, then it is that the Lord's promises are suitable to them, and this is the season when those promises are applied and sealed upon their heart and conscience.

i. But what is it "*to pass through the waters?*" "Waters" in Scripture are often used to signify trouble and sorrow. "I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me." (Psalm 69:2.) "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." (Psal. 42:7.) Thus the Church here is represented as passing through the waters, that is, the floods of trouble and sorrow through which she wades heavenward and homeward.

1. Some of these waters are *temporal* afflictions. Few of the Lord's people escape a large measure of those afflictions which spring out of and are connected with their earthly circumstances. As denizens of earth; as husbands, wives, and parents; as earning their bread with the sweat of their brow; as taking a part in the great battle of life in this day of unprincipled competition, where the weak are relentlessly trodden down by the strong; as necessarily in the world though mercifully not of it, the saints of

God have assuredly a large measure of earthly anxieties, sorrows, and cares. But mercy meets them even here. They need to be weaned from the world—to have the strongest bitters put into the sweetest cup—to be divorced from that love of earthly things which is so natural to us. The Lord therefore sends upon them many painful and severe afflictions. And these sometimes break forth upon them as waters; the idea being that of a flood bursting forth unexpectedly and with such extreme violence that but for the repressing hand of God it would carry them away. How many of the dear saints of God are now suffering under his afflicting hand! How many are now *lying on beds of languishing and pain!* We pass through the streets; we see the young, the healthy, and the strong, some bustling with business and some sauntering for amusement, with health and animation on every face. But do we see the pale sickly invalids, except now and then a poor consumptive one just come out for a little air? And who knows how many of these afflicted ones are the Lord's, and are now passing through these waters to that happy land of which "the inhabitant shall not say I am sick." How many, too, of the Lord's people are depressed with troubles and anxieties that spring from *their providential circumstances?* And often hears the expression, "Riches cannot give happiness;" but we rarely find the converse added, "Poverty can bring great misery." The Lord can indeed support under the heaviest load of pecuniary troubles; but there can be no doubt that providential difficulties, and the anxieties connected with them rack and tear the mind almost more than any other temporal affliction. How many too are clad in mourning both in body and mind *under distressing bereavements*, rending as it were their very heartstrings asunder. We see men's faces, and they may wear an outward show of cheerfulness; but could we read their hearts, we should see many of the Lord's family bowed down with sorrow and care, as being surrounded on every hand with difficulties and perplexities to which they see no present termination.

2. But these "waters" may also signify *spiritual* afflictions; for these are the most trying of all the griefs and sorrows that can befall the saints of God. When the Psalmist, or rather the Lord

speaking in the person of the Psalmist, said, "I am come into deep waters" (Psal. 64:2), he meant the waters of deep soul trouble. These waters are a deep and abiding sense of God's wrath as a consuming fire; the curse of a broken law drying up the spirit; the distressing weight and burden of guilt upon a man's conscience which he cannot get away from, and which seem a foretaste of the agonies of hell; the fears of perishing under the justly deserved anger of God, and sinking in death into the gloomy regions of endless despair.

3. "Waters" further signify *great and powerful temptations*. As we read of the dragon that "He cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood." (Rev. 12:15); so, as in the case of Job, Satan casts floods of temptation into the soul to drown it, if possible, in unbelief, rebellion, and self-pity, till hope and help seem almost gone.

II. *Rivers* also are spoken of in our text. Now "*waters*" burst out occasionally; but "*rivers*" are ever flowing. Thus "the rivers" spoken of in our text may be applied to those continual streams of grief and trouble which seem the allotted portion of some of the Lord's people. In the case of some, troubles come in gushes; now a cessation; then another gush. But in the case of others, troubles are continual; they never seem out of them, but, like the Psalmist, their "sore runs in the night and ceaseth not;" and, as Job complains, "the Almighty does not suffer them to take breath," or "let them alone till they swallow down their spittle." (Job 7:19; 9:18.) If the former are "waters," the latter are "rivers," for the first break out in gushes, but the last flow in unceasing streams.

iii. But we read also in our text of "*the fire.*" The figure is changed, because the Holy Ghost will not limit himself here or elsewhere to one comparison. He seizes figure after figure to convey his mind and meaning; plainly and distinctly. Fire shall try the saint of God as well as water, that his power may be as much seen and his grace be as conspicuous in flame as in flood, in the

hot furnace as in the deep waters. Several things in Scripture are compared to fire, and singly or in combination constitute "the fiery trial" spoken of as intended to try the Church of God. (1 Peter 4:12.)

1. Thus *the Law* is spoken of as a fire; for it is called "a fiery law which went from God's right hand." (Deut. 33:2.) It was given with thunders and lightnings; and the Lord himself descended upon Mount Sinai in a fire. (Exod. 19:18.) The apostle, therefore, calls it "the mountain that burned with fire" (Heb. 12:18), as distinct from Sion, the city of the living God. All this fire and smoke with these terrific thunders and lightnings were figurative of God as a consuming fire. For there is a fearful curse attached to the law,— "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." And this dreadful curse will burn up and consume all found under it. Now when this holy and righteous law is applied to the conscience, its curse comes in through the breach, and this curse being the fire of God's indignation against sin, it burns up all our fleshly righteousness; for it consumes everything which is not in strict accordance with its demands and its spirituality.

2. But as the figure of fire may be extended to all that burns, it may comprehend *the workings of our vile heart*, the corruptions of our base and fallen nature. These are fires, because they tend, except as restrained by the grace of God, to consume both body and soul. There is a fire of lust, of pride, of rebellion, of enmity, of daring determination, and unbending obstinacy, which all, when "set on fire of hell," like the tongue of which James speaks, would destroy us here and hereafter, unless the Lord were with us as with the three children in the hot fiery furnace.

3. Then there are also the *grievous assaults* of Satan, what the Scripture calls "the fiery darts of the wicked" (Eph. 6:16), which Satan, himself consuming in a perpetual fire, casts into the mind, and which seem to inflame all that is there combustible.

III.—But the Lord promises—and this brings us to our third

point—that when Israel passes through the waters, *he* will be with her, and through the rivers, *they shall not overflow her*; when she walks through the fire, *she shall not be burned*, neither *shall the flame kindle upon her*. Who can support the soul when it is passing through afflictions and trials except the Lord himself? There is everything in nature to sink and give way under the afflicting strokes of God's hand. There is no patience in the human mind—no resignation—no submission to the will of God. When his afflicting strokes come, they find in us nothing but rebellion, peevishness, and discontent.

I. The Lord, then, must manifestly, *by his presence and grace, be with his saints* when they are passing through the waters and through the rivers, that they may not give way to that rebellion, peevishness, and discontent that their hearts are full of. They want the Lord to be with them, that they may feel submission to his afflicting strokes. For when he is with them, by speaking a word home with power to their heart, by manifesting his presence, shedding abroad his love, and revealing his goodness and mercy, strength is communicated to the soul, so that when it passes through the waters it finds that secret and sacred support which bears it up and preserves it from sinking into, and being carried away by them. In fact, the promise—"I will be with thee," embraces everything that God can give in a way of sensible support; for if he is with the soul, he is with it in all his grace and love, in all his presence and power. There is, there can be, no greater blessing, no stronger support than this. Nor is there a single trouble, grief, or sorrow, which cannot be borne when the Lord is sensibly present, and lays his everlasting arms underneath the soul. And this he has pledged himself ever to do when his beloved Jacob and redeemed Israel pass through the waters, however high they may rise, however loudly the waves and billows may roar.

But again the promise runs—"The rivers shall *not overflow thee*." The natural tendency of these rivers is to sweep away, drown, and overwhelm. Let *sin* only be suffered to break forth out of the depths of our carnal mind in its awful depth, in its dreadful extent



and unmitigated fury; let only one lust or one evil passion burst forth in all its magnitude and to the utmost extent of its capabilities; and what would be the consequences? Such as any person of the commonest feeling of morality would shudder to think of. For whence come all those horrid crimes which shock society but from the depths of sin and evil which exist in every heart? Or let temptation be permitted to assail us in any or all its various forms, and let it meet with the sin that lies in our nature as so much ready-laid material, and the consequence would be that we should be swept away into destruction and perdition. We should commit the unpardonable sin, cast ourselves upon the rocks of despair, or be swept away by the stream into such an abyss of rebellion and alienation, that return to God would almost seem impossible. Our very character would be gone; we should disgrace our families and our own religious name, and concerning faith make utter shipwreck. But the Lord has promised that when we pass through the waters he will be with us, and through the rivers, however deep, however high they may swell, they shall not overflow us; we shall not be carried away by them far away from God and godliness; they shall not drown us in their rage and fury, dash us against the rocks, and leave our bleeding caresses stripped and naked upon the riverbank. But the rivers shall be so restrained by the power of God, that though they may rise, they shall rise only to a certain height; though they may swell and roar, it shall not be with such extreme violence as to overwhelm and drown the soul.

How many of the dear saints of God, when they have been brought into tribulation and sorrow, have found the fulfilment of this most gracious promise! And is there not one of these waters through which all must go—that deep and rapid Jordan which everyone must pass through? How dark and gloomy those waters have appeared to the eyes of many a child of God, in whom is continually fulfilled the experience of the words—"Who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." But how often have these waters only been terrible in prospect, in anticipation. How different has been the reality. When he comes down to the river's bank and his feet dip in these waters, and it

appears as though they would rise higher and higher, the Lord suddenly appears in his power and presence, and then the water sinks. He speaks a word of peace to his soul upon a dying bed—reveals Christ in his love and grace and blood—removes those doubts, fears, and disturbing thoughts which have perplexed him for years, and brings into his heart a holy calm, a sweet peace, assuring him that all is well with him both for time and eternity. Has he not then the fulfilment of the promise—"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee?"

Or there may be another saint of God plunged very deeply into and almost sunk under temporal troubles—who is afflicted in body, or distressed in circumstances almost beyond endurance, or bereaved of the tenderest object of his heart's affections, or passing through trials which almost madden him, and under which he is in daily fear of losing his very reason. In these waters, the Lord has promised to be with him; and how often he fulfils this gracious promise. He applies some word to his soul, or supports him by his felt presence, or enables him to look up and believe that "all these afflictions are but for a moment," and are "working for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And thus he is sustained as he passes through the waters. It is as if the Lord went through the waters with him step by step, and kept putting his hand under his head, or laid his everlasting arms beneath his shoulders. When he can feel this divine support he can lean upon the Lord, for he is manifestly supporting him. Is not this as if the Lord were whispering all the time into his soul—"Fear not; I have redeemed thee; thou art mine? When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee. The waters are deep, but they shall not overflow thee." Now as the soul is passing through these waters and finds the Lord's gracious support, then it feels that so long as the Lord supports, it cannot sink or be overwhelmed; for his power is so great, his love so strong, his presence so sweet, and his promises so sure, that the waters lose all their terror.

And so through the rivers: "*they shall not overflow thee.*" The Lord says to them—"Thus far shalt thou go, and here shall thy

proud waves be stayed." As he held back the Red Sea that Israel might have its waters as a wall on their right hand and on their left; as he cut off the waters of Jordan which came down from above, that they stood upon a heap when the soles of the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in its brim (Josh. 3:15, 16); so as the saint of God passes through the rivers which lie between him and the heavenly Canaan, God, by his power and grace, prevents them from overflowing his soul. They may rise very high; dark may the flood appear, deep the stream, and rapid the current; but there is a restraint put upon them by the Almighty hand of God, that however "the waters thereof roar and be troubled," the soul shall not be drowned in or overwhelmed by them.

It is only as we are brought into great and overwhelming trials that we are enabled to realise the sweetness of these promises. We may look at them at a distance and believe them to be true; or we may witness their fulfilment in others; but we must be brought into personal afflictions, and not only see the waters spread before our eyes, but they must come nearer and nearer, until we cry, "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul" (Psal. 69:1), that we may prove how faithful the Lord is to his word of promise. When, then, these waters gradually approach, or suddenly rush in, we look round and find that none can help us. Our dearest friends can do us no good. They may see us in great family troubles; or mourning under the most heart-rending bereavements; or stretched upon a bed of languishing and pain. They may pity our sufferings; but they cannot relieve them. Religious friends and spiritual ministers may visit us in great depths of mental distress; may see our conscience bleeding under the wounds inflicted by the chastening and rebuking hand of God. They may pity and try to comfort us, but all their words fall short; or, like Job's friends, they may sit wondering and stupefied, unable to speak a word, as doubting our case, distrusting our religion, or feeling unable to judge how the scale will turn. Then the soul possessed of life divine is obliged to go to the Lord, and look unto him and to him alone; as David, as Jonah, as Hezekiah, as Jeremiah, as Habakkuk, as

Micah, and many other a saint of God has done, and again and again will do. David beautifully describes the experience of the soul thus taught and led, thus afflicted and delivered—"The sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me. In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God; he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears." (Psalm 18:5, 6.) Then what follows? "He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters." "He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me because he delighted in me." (Psalm 16:19.) May we experience this sweet deliverance when we shall be called to pass through the rivers which still lie between us and Canaan! At the bare prospect, as the river in the dim distance rolls on before our eyes, and we see that we must cross it,—and, alas! there is neither bridge nor ferry, we may shrink with dismay. As a parent may come in and see his darling child stricken with mortal disease, croup or diphtheria, and in the killing prospect of the dreadful issue, may cry out with torn heart—"I can never bear to see that child stretched before my eyes a pale and motionless corpse;" or as a husband, when his beloved wife, about to be a mother, sinks in nature's trying hour, stands trembling and appalled at the dreadful anticipation, so the very sight of these rivers, so deep and overwhelming, has filled many a child of God with terror and amazement. How deeply, then, he needs the application and the fulfilment of the promise; and that the Lord Himself should whisper into his soul—"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee." It is almost as if the Lord said—"Here are waters, and thou must pass through them; they are not to be evaded, for they lie before thee in the road whereby thou must pass. Here are rivers, and there is no bridge over them: thou must go through them. But," says the Lord, "I will not leave thee to go through them alone, for they would drown thee. I will go with thee, and in passing through them I will take care so to restrain them that they shall not overflow thee." Thus, the more the soul knows of the trials and temptations, the troubles and afflictions of the way, and the more deep and bitter its experience of their magnitude, the more it proportionally knows, and the

more it wonders at and admires the exceeding riches of his grace. Nor is there any other way whereby the Lord's pity and compassion—for "the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy," (James 5:11,) can be experimentally realised, or his power and faithfulness manifestly be made known.

ii. Nor is he less gracious or less faithful as regards the furnace. "When thou walkest through the fire, *thou shalt not be burned.*" What! a miracle like this? Shall it be with the believing soul as it was with the three children, who were cast literally into a burning fiery furnace, and yet the Son of God was so with them in it that the very smell of fire had not passed upon their garments? Can the child of grace walk in the midst of the fires and not be burned? Yes, he can, because God has promised it. His gracious command to his people is, "Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires." (Isai. 24:15.) But how can they glorify him in the fires if the fire consume them? Thus he can walk through *the fire of the law*, and yet not be burned up by it; because Jesus has fulfilled the law, and has therefore taken away its damning penalty. It may blaze upon him, but it cannot consume him, for Christ has redeemed him from its curse, being made a curse for us. (Gal. 3:13.) He may feel the heat, but he cannot be destroyed by the flame; for that, so to speak, spent and burnt itself out when it exhausted its fury against the pure and sacred humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. So with the fire of *temptation*. He may have to walk through it. Many vile and wicked lusts may strive for the mastery; a thousand sins may be tempting and engaging his carnal mind; and they may partly win the day—may partly gain upon him, so that he may feel or fear their burning heat. But he shall not be burned up by them; they shall not destroy body and soul; the Lord will keep the flame of lust, rebellion, and infidelity from consuming him utterly. *Satan*, too, may cast his fiery darts; but the Lord will take care that they shall not destroy any one of his redeemed ones. They may set on fire the hay, wood, and stubble of the carnal mind; but they cannot destroy the gold, silver, and precious stones of the new man of grace. They may burn up a fleshly religion and consume the filthy rags of a more Pharisaic righteousness; but they cannot injure one member of

the new man; they cannot touch any one part of God's gracious work upon the heart, or destroy anything that he has wrought in the soul by his own Spirit or his own power. Bear in mind that there are two things essentially indestructible—the finished work of the Son of God, and the work of the Holy Ghost upon the heart. But both these works meet with all the opposition of earth and hell, and are borne, amidst sighs and groans, sufferings and sorrows, to their triumphant issue.

But the Lord further adds—"*Neither shall the flame kindle upon thee;*" that is, so as to burn and destroy thee. You may have had many fiery darts from Satan; but have they not all passed away, and you are still unharmed? You may have had many workings of wickedness in your wretched nature, many deep and foul corruptions oozing forth, but God did not permit them to break out so as to destroy body and soul. You may have many rivers still to ford, many furnaces still to endure; but the Lord having redeemed you, called you, and taken possession of you by his Spirit and grace, will be with you to the end, to bring you safe through every flood and fire, and set you before his face in glory.

Now the great thing is to have some evidence in our own conscience that the Lord has engaged to do these things for us. What we want is, to have some clear and sure proof that the promise is for us—to have some testimony that the Lord, by his Spirit and grace, has wrought that work of grace upon our souls which gives us a manifested interest in every promise made to Jacob and Israel. Now this we may know in some measure by comparing what we are and have as the work of God's hands, with what God has laid down in the words before us. He tells us that he has created, redeemed, and taken possession of Jacob and Israel. Has he created, redeemed, called, and taken possession of us? Have we any sweet persuasion or gracious confidence in our souls that the Lord has *created* us to his own honour and praise? Has he given us any testimony that he has *redeemed* us by the blood of his dear Son? Has he made us feel the bondage and slavery of sin, and given us to know anything of the value of the atonement, whereby alone we can be feelingly

and experimentally redeemed from it? Have we any evidence that he has *called* us by his grace, put his fear in our hearts; and quickened us into spiritual life? Have we any testimony that he has *taken possession* of our breast by manifesting himself to our soul, revealing himself, and fixing our heart wholly and solely upon his blessed Majesty? We must have some evidence in our heart that we have experienced these things before we can realise our interest in promises like these. But if he has wrought anything such as I have described in our soul, we may still expect to pass through waters and through rivers, to walk through fire and through flame; but we may also expect, as we pass through them, that the Lord will fulfil his gracious word, and that what he has said of promised help, support, and deliverance he will never leave void of full accomplishment.

## THE WAY-WORN PILGRIM'S HIDING PLACE

A Sermon Preached on Lord's Day Morning, July 31, 1853, at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road

"And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken." Isaiah 32:2, 3

What striking figures has the blessed Spirit here employed to bring heavenly realities before our eyes with greater distinctness and vividness, and to impress them with deeper power upon our hearts! There are some men, good men too, who are opposed to the use of figures in preaching, as marring, in their opinion, the simplicity of divine truth. I grant that the injudicious use of comparisons does mar the dignity of God's word, and that low, ill-chosen, or inapplicable figures may vulgarize, or obscure, or even pervert the sacred truth of God, and pollute as it were the oracles of the Most High. But we must not argue against the use of a thing from its abuse, and condemn the thing instead of condemning the men. Figures are like cutting instruments. Wrongly handled, they may cut the fingers of the user or mangle truth; rightly handled, they may be the sword of the Spirit and give to truth greater force and keener edge. How figurative is the language of Scripture! In fact, strong feelings almost unavoidably burst forth in figures. Take, for instance, the language **of love**, as we see it more especially developed in the Song of Solomon. How the Bride seems to bring forward figure after figure and to heap comparison upon comparison to set forth the beauty of her Beloved. "His head is as the most fine gold; his locks are bushy and black as a raven; his eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk and fitly set; his cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers; his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh." Every word here is a figure, as if her heart, burning with love, went out of itself to seek for objects in



creation wherewith to express its ardent feelings. So again the language of **deep affliction** is usually eminently figurative. Look at Job lying under the afflicting hand of God. How he pours forth the distress of his soul in figure after figure: "For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me. Doth the wild ass bray when he hath grass? or loweth the ox over his fodder? Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt? or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" **Job 6:4-6** "Is my strength the strength of stones? or is my flesh of brass? Is not my help in me and is wisdom driven quite from me? To him that is afflicted pity should be shewed from his friend; but he forsaketh the fear of the Almighty. My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as a stream of brooks they pass away;" **Job 6:12-15** "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope." **Job 7:6** And again, "I was at ease, but he hath broken me asunder: he hath also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for his mark. His archers compass me round about, he cleaveth my reins asunder, and doth not spare; he poureth out my gall upon the ground." **Job 16:12,13** Take again the language of strong **prophetic denunciation** as we find it in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. How these inspired prophets pour forth in emblem and figure their warnings and reproofs! "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores." Again, "The daughter of Zion is as a cottage in a vineyard, a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city" three figures in the compass of one short verse. When we come to the language of **instruction** we find the most striking lessons still conveyed by figures. The Proverbs are full of them; and He who spake as never man spake conveyed his blessed instruction—how? In **parables**, in other words, in figures. Figures leave a definite impression behind them, convey with them a peculiar light, explain difficult points, and are often remembered for years. Rightly used they singularly facilitate comprehension, and many who cannot understand an argument readily catch the same truth when conveyed by a figure. They are indeed greatly

subject to abuse, and may be enlisted in the cause of error; but such a misapplication is soon detected.

How full of striking and beautiful figures is our text! "And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken." But these numerous figures are all employed to point out one grand Object—the Lord Jesus Christ. The rays which these mirrors reflect, all converge to once focus—**the Man**, the wondrous Man, the only Mediator between God and men. The same figures, too, by implication, distinctly point out the **persons** for whom the man who is God's fellow sustains these blessed offices; and these are represented as travelling in a wilderness, amid wind and storm, heat and weariness.

In opening up the words of the text, I shall therefore attempt to show

I. Who **the travellers** are on their heavenward march, and the dangers and difficulties which beset their path.

II. **The hiding place and covert**, the refreshment and shade which the Lord has provided for these travellers in the Son of his love.

III. **The opening of their eyes to see**, and of their ears to hearken to the blessings thus provided for them.

I. The way to heaven is often spoken of in scripture as a journey, and this by no flowery meadow or purling brook, through no over-arching bowers or verdant shade, but through a wilderness. This figure has not only in itself a beautiful appropriateness, but possessed to the children of Israel a historic truth. It was through the dreary wilderness, and a forty years sojourn therein, that their fathers came into the promised land. Besides which, as their males were all commanded to appear, three times a year, before

the Lord, and had often to pass through wild desert tracts on their way to Jerusalem, it was a figure of which they had an actual, literal experience. Thus we find the Psalmist spiritualizing the pilgrimage to Jerusalem of the godly Israelite. "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them, who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." **Ps 84:5,6,7**

But we, in this cold, humid, Northern clime, must transport ourselves in imagination to an Eastern wilderness before we can see the beauty and appropriateness of the figure. In this climate, we have no idea of an almost tropical sun. An expression which I met with many years ago in Henry Martyn's Journal so struck my mind at the time that I have never forgotten it. He calls it "the **terrible** sun." This terrible sun, then, above, and the glowing sand beneath, want of food and water, of shade and shelter, with the exhausting nature of the journey, made a journey across the wilderness always a formidable and often a perilous undertaking. These perils are alluded to in the text, and four are specifically mentioned; **pestilential winds; thunder storms, drought, weariness and tiresomeness** of the long and painful way. These perils have, of course, all of them a spiritual signification, which it will be my business, with God's blessing, this morning to open and to point out its bearing upon the difficulties, perils, trials, and temptations which beset the path of a child of God on his heavenward pilgrimage.

i. The first peril mentioned is **the Wind**. This is implied in the promise. "And a man shall be as a hiding place from **the wind**." By "the wind" here, I understand the pestilential wind, sometimes called the simoom, or samiel, which at certain seasons passes over the desert, blasting and withering all it touches, and carrying death in its train. Were the traveller fully exposed to this noxious blast, he would sink beneath its deadly breath. He therefore needs a hiding place to shield him from its pernicious effects, and save his very life. But what is there in the spiritual desert corresponding to this pestilential wind? **Sin. That** is the deadly wind, the pestilential simoom, which bears death and destruction

in its breath. "For the wages of sin is death." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." And as wind diffuses itself in every direction, and subjects all it encounters to its influence, so the deadly breath of sin has diffused itself all over the world, and blows its terrific blasts over the wilderness of our fallen nature, withering and destroying all good as it springs up, as the samiel blights all that seeks to grow in the desert. Assailed by this deadly wind, the traveller, if he escape with life, is often smitten with disease. So the pestilential breath of sin pollutes everything it touches.

Like the wind of the desert, it taints every living thing subject to its influence. Our prayers, our desires, our performances, our holiest seasons and most sacred employments, the closet, the pulpit, the Lord's table, the pew, are all exposed to the noxious blasts of this pestilential wind. Our thoughts in their lowest depths; our words, however cautiously uttered; our actions, however directed to the glory of God and the good of men, all lie open to its influence, and are tainted by it as they spring forth. This noxious wind is not indeed **fatal** to the Lord's family, for "their life is hid with Christ in God," and therefore beyond the reach of its mortal influence; but it weakens where it does not destroy. If the spiritual traveller smitten by the blast do not lay his bleached bones among the thousands which strew the desert, yet he feels its poisonous breath in every limb. His knees totter, his limbs tremble, his breath is short and feeble, his whole head is sick and his whole heart faint.

ii. The second peril in the wilderness is "**the Tempest.**" This is implied in the promise, that a man shall be "a covert from the tempest." This we may characterise as the **thunderstorm** which differs from the pestilential wind in being from above, not from beneath; violent, not subtle; destroying by lightning, not by poison. There must in grace be some antitype to "the tempest" here spoken of. And what so aptly corresponds to this as the manifested anger of God against sin? When God gave the law on Mount Sinai, it was in a storm and tempest, as visible emblems of his wrath against sin; and the Psalmist speaking of the terrible indignation of the Almighty against sinners, compares it to a

horrible tempest. "Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup." **Ps 11:6** But what makes the tempest so terrible in the wilderness is the absence of shelter. The pilgrim there stands exposed to the full violence of the storm. Wherever he turns his eyes he sees but a trackless waste, without house or shelter. What an emblem of a poor guilty sinner without a manifested interest in Christ! And how sweet the promise, "And a man shall be a covert from the tempest."

But the storm teaches the value of the shelter; and the first mutterings of the approaching tempest warn the traveller to do as David speaks, "I flee unto thee to hide me." The heavenly traveller hears the distant roll of thunder in the sky, and marks the first arge drops that fall at his feet. He has light to see and life to eel that those tokens imply a coming storm; and therefore flees for refuge to the hope set before him in the gospel. But those who see no oming storm, whose eyes are not opened to discern the first symptoms the approaching tempest, take no heed, are overtaken, overcome, and destroyed. "A prudent man forseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished." **Pr 22:3** Noah, warned of God, prepared an ark to the saving of his house. Lot, admonished by the angels, fled out of Sodom. So there is a fleeing from the wrath to come. How careless, how secure, and unconcerned are we till quickened with spiritual life! Solomon speaks of those who sleep on the top of a mast, where one jerk of the wave, or one turn of the sleeper may precipitate him into the boiling ocean. God's anger is gathering against a wicked world. Who will escape this fearful storm of eternal unmitigated wrath? Those who flee to Jesus. Who flee to Jesus? Those only who feel their need of him. How are they made to feel their need of him? By the flashes of God's anger. Whence issue these flashes? Out of the thundercloud of God's holy law—the revelation which he has made of his anger against transgressors. How necessary then to feel the application of the law to the conscience, to experience what Job calls, "the terrors of God," that the "covert from the tempest" may be seen and fled unto! It is like the warning given in Egypt of the grievous hail:

"He that feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses, and he that regarded not the word of the Lord left his servants and his cattle in the field." **Ex 9:20,21** Faith credits what unbelief derides. As is their nature and operation, so is their end. Faith ends in salvation; unbelief in perdition.

iii. But there is a third peril in the wilderness—one in a measure peculiar to it, and rarely absent from it, **the want of water**, for the wondrous man here spoken of is promised to be "**as rivers of water in a dry place** ." The wilderness is especially dry. One of its most marked and distinguishing features is the absence of water. It is this which makes it a wilderness, for in those burning climes where no water is, all is desert. To be without this necessary of life is the greatest peril of the wilderness, and we may add, the greatest source of suffering. It is said by those who have experienced it in the desert, that of all painful sensations the most painful is continued thirst. The parched throat, the dried up mouth, the feverish tongue, the tottering frame, each vein, nerve, muscle, and artery of which is calling for water to relieve the burning fever, all tell of deadly suffering. Famine may be borne; but not thirst. Men have lived days without food, but not without water.

What an expressive emblem then is thirst of the desire of the soul after Christ. "Give me water or I die," cries the traveller in the wilderness. "Give me Christ or else I die," is the corresponding cry of the spiritual pilgrim in the wilderness of sin and sorrow. David felt this, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" **Ps 42:1,2** And again, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary." **Ps 63:1,2** What a mercy for the church of God that there is a relief for this spiritual thirst. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus

stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." **Joh 7:37**

iv. The fourth and last peril of the wilderness here mentioned is **the Wearisomeness of the way**. This is beautifully expressed in the words "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." What poetry and beauty there are in the expression, "a **weary** land!" as if the land itself were weary, weary of its own wearisomeness, weary of being such an uncultivated waste, and of wearing out the lives of so many travellers. We may stand in imagination on some lofty mountain on the edge of this wilderness and strain our eye across its weary wastes. What a sense of desolation creeps over the mind! Sand and sun—these are its items. Day after day, league after league, still the same Sand and sun. How wearisome to the eye; but how much more wearisome to the limb! How dreary in prospect; how much more dreary in experience! It is this unintermitting march, this sustaining of daily toil and daily thirst, which wears out the traveller. To begin is one thing; to hold on is another. Not Christian. to sink under trial and temptation, but to persevere to the end and be saved—this marks the Christian.

One main, perhaps the chief element of the wearisomeness of the desert is the unclouded sun, ever darting his beams down upon it. I have quoted the expression of a traveller, "The terrible sun." This expression seems strained to us in this damp Northern clime, where every ray of the sun is hailed with gladness. But many, yearly, in hot climates, die under those beams which are so cheering to us. "The shadow of a great rock" implies shelter from the sun, and is put in the same class of benefits with the hiding place from the burning wind, the covert from the furious storm, and the rivers of water in a dry place—all which are deliverances from destruction. We must put, therefore, the sun in the same class of destructive agencies, or there would be inequality in the different figures of the text. What does the sun here then represent? **Temptation**. In this sense the bride uses the word,— "Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me." **So 1:6** It was the sun of temptation which had

blackened the complexion of the bride. The heat of the sun acted on the juices of her skin as temptation acts on the evils of our heart—tanned and deformed her, and this made her cry out that she was "black as the tents of Kedar" that is, the Arab tents which were made of black camel's hair. Look at these elements of weariness—sand and sun, and see their counterparts—self and temptation. What a barren, interminable, sandy waste is self! What wearisomeness to be so much exposed to the sun of temptation! Are not you often weary of everything below the skies? Weary of the world, weary of the church, weary of sinners and saints, weary of the conflict with an evil heart, weary of sin, and above all, weary of self, miserable, miserable self? II. But having viewed the travellers in the wilderness, and their perils and difficulties, we pass on to the wondrous provision which God, of his infinite mercy and grace, has made for their relief. "And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Who is this man? Need I ask the question? Is there not a response in every God-fearing breast? It is the man Christ Jesus—the man who is God's fellow. How sweetly and blessedly does the Holy Spirit, in the text, bring before our eyes, and impress upon our hearts, the humanity of Jesus, "A **man** shall be as a hiding place from the wind!" And how blessed it is to have a scriptural and spiritual view of the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ, to see him not merely as God, truly essential God, one in essence, glory, and power with the Father and the blessed Spirit, but also man, made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted. And what a suitability there is in the humanity of the Lord Jesus, when we view it in union with this glorious Deity! As man he suffered, as man he bled, as man he died, as man he stands a mediator for his fellow men between God and man. As man, he has for human distress an affectionate, compassionate, sympathizing heart; as man, he obeyed the Law in every particular; as man, he bore all the sufferings of humanity, and thus became the brother born for adversity, flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone; yet perfectly pure, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and now exalted higher than the heavens.



This wondrous man, this Immanuel, God with us, is appointed of God, "a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest," and is made such to the spiritual travellers who are journeying onward through the waste howling wilderness. Let us then view this wondrous man under his various covenant offices and characters, as here set before our eyes.

i. "A **hiding place from the wind.**" This wind we have already explained as the pestilential breath of sin, that deadly simoom, that blighting samiel which sweeps over the desert of self. A hiding place is wanted lest it should destroy body and soul in hell. Where shall we find it? In the Law? That is going out of the wind into the storm. In self? That is the very thing we most want shelter from. Jesus is the hiding place, the only hiding place from sin and self. "Thou art my hiding place," said David of old. This was shown to Moses, in figure, when the Lord put him into the cleft of a rock, which Toplady has so beautifully versified, to paint the longing desires of his soul:

"Rock of ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in thee."

It is the man, Christ Jesus, who is the sinner's hiding place. His pure spotless humanity, his pierced hands and feet, his wounded side—here is the hiding place from the blasts of sin.

But **three** things we must know and experience before we can enter into the beauty and blessedness of Jesus as a hiding place from the wind.

1. **First** and foremost, we must **feel our need** of such a shelter. This is an indispensable preliminary. All religion without this is but a notion and a name. This sense of need is produced by feeling what fearful havoc sin has made in us. Its hot pestilential blasts withering and destroying every green thing in the soul must be felt before a shelter from them can be sought

2. **Secondly**, We must be brought to **see** the hiding place which God has provided in the Son of his love. But what beauty, grace, glory, and suitability do we see in the man, Christ Jesus, till he is revealed to the soul by the Blessed Spirit? None. It is He who takes the humanity of Christ Jesus, and shows it to the eye of faith. And this humanity he shows not as mere humanity, but as in union with, though distinct from, his eternal Deity.

3. Then follows the **third** step—the **entering into** the hiding place; and this, too, by a divine constraining power. Moses did not put himself into the cleft. "I," said the Lord to him, "will put thee in a cleft of the rock." This third point is of immense importance. Here many of the living family seem to come short. They feel their need of Jesus; they see his suitability; but they rest as it were at the mouth of the hiding place, without entering in. Being thus only partially sheltered, they are struck by the tail of the wind, and though safe, are not secure.

ii. But the same wondrous man is also "a **covert from the storm**," This we explained as referring to the law. How a shelter is needed from its condemnation and curse! Where is this refuge to be found? In Jesus. He has redeemed us from its curse, as the Apostle declares. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." **Ga 3:13** He fulfilled its demands and endured its penalty, and thus took it out of the way. "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." **Col 2:14** What is the happy consequence to the believer in Jesus? No condemnation. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." **Ro 8:1** All this he did as man; and therefore a man becomes to us a covert from the storm. O this blessed man!—this man of sorrows; this suffering, agonizing, crucified man. View him on the cross, bleeding for thy sins; and then lift up thine eyes and see him as the same man at the right hand of God. This was Stephen's dying sight just before he

passed into his presence. "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." **Ac 7:56**

iii. From this springs the third character which Jesus sustains to the pilgrim in the wilderness, "**As rivers of water in a dry place.**" How graciously does the blessed Spirit, by this figure, "rivers of water in a dry place," set forth the suitability of the Lord Jesus Christ to travellers in the wilderness. Turn our eyes where we may, there is no water to drink; nothing to satisfy the boundless desires of an immortal soul. What is there in nature which can supply your wants, or fill up the aching void of a spirit longing after God? Are not death and disappointment stamped on all earthly things? Your business, your families, your dearest and tenderest ties, may occupy the mind, but cannot satisfy the spirit; may entangle the affections, but cannot relieve the heart. The children of men feel nothing of this thirst after God. They do not long after the Lord Jesus Christ, and seek earnestly after a manifestation of his gracious presence; nor do they deem one smile from him dearer than a thousand worlds. To the children of the world this is not a wilderness; it is to them a rich, wide-spread demesne, a noble estate, a well watered garden from which they reap an ample revenue of pleasure and profit. But to the living soul it is a wilderness, dried up, desolate, and barren.

The Lord Jesus is spoken of as "rivers of water." The very thing in the desert which we need. In the wilderness we do not want strong drink; **that** would only inflame the thirst, make the blood boil in the veins, and smite the frame with fever. As it toils through the desolate wastes of sand it is water that the fainting spirit wants. So in the things of God. It is water—the well of water springing up into everlasting life which the soul needs. This the man himself is, out of whose side the beloved disciple saw gush blood and water. Out of his suffering Manhood flow mercy, pardon, peace, salvation, love, joy, holiness and happiness, as a copious river watering the desolate wilderness. Hence the promise is, "Her peace shall flow like a river;" and, "at God's right hand **from the Man who sits there,** there are pleasures for evermore," called elsewhere, "the river of God's pleasures." The

fulness of the Lord Jesus is not a rill, but a river; nay, more, not only a river, but "rivers." "All my fresh springs **not a spring, but "springs,"** are in thee." Need any way-worn pilgrim die of thirst when there are rivers at hand—rivers of pardon, peace, holiness, and happiness? Why, then, are these rivers not at once found? This mystery is opened up by the Lord himself. "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water." **Isa 41:17,18** Here we have the poor and needy seeking water and finding none till their tongue fails for thirst. Now the Lord says, "I will open rivers in high places and fountains in the midst of the valleys." Till the Lord himself opens them in the desert, they do not flow into the soul, and therefore are as if they were not.

iv. But the Lord Jesus is spoken of also as "the shadow of a great, rock in a weary land." He is a rock, "the rock of ages," on which God has built his church. As a rock, he is deep as well as high—so deep as to have under-bottomed the depths of the fall, so high as to be God's fellow, seated at his right hand. As a rock, too, he is broad as well as long—broad enough to bear millions of living stones built on him, and long enough to reach from eternity to eternity. The Apostle, therefore, prays that the church at Ephesus may comprehend with all saints, "what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge."

In our text, the Lord Jesus is spoken of as "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." The figure, as I have already hinted, is that of the "terrible" sun, when he darts his mid-day beams upon the head of the traveller, till his brain reels with the burning heat and his body is ready to sink under weariness and exhaustion. But when just about to fall and die, he espies in the distance a vast, overhanging rock, and hastens as fast as he can to reach its cooling shade. Its over-arching recesses form, as is common in Palestine, a deep grotto, intercepting the piercing light and

burning heat of the almost vertical sun. In these shady recesses he finds rest and shelter, and his throbbing brain and feverish pulse become cool and calm. What an emblem of the shade and shelter from the fiery sun of temptation which is found in the man Christ Jesus! He has been tempted in all points like as we are; but as the rock bears uninjured the beams of the hottest sun, and yet, by bearing them, shields in its recesses the way-worn pilgrim, so did Jesus, as man, bear the whole fury of Satanic temptations, and yet was as uninjured by them as the rock in the desert. And having borne them, he shields from their destructive power the tempted child of God who lies at his feet under the shadow of his embrace. How refreshing in the great and terrible wilderness is this sheltering rock where the wearied pilgrim may rest his limbs under the cool shade! In hot climates hundreds die every year under **coups de soleil**, sun-strokes. How many more, in a spiritual sense, die under the sun-stroke of temptation! Nor would any child of God come off with life were it not for the shadow of the great rock in the weary land. "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." There was the rock which saved Peter from the sun-stroke that destroyed Judas. The over-arching intercession of the man of sorrows shielded his faith from perishing to the root, and restored him to life after his temporary swoon.

Now look at the characters which the Lord Jesus sustains to the way-worn pilgrim. Four perils assail the traveller Zionward—the pestilential blast of sin, the tempest of a condemning law, the drought and desolation of the wilderness, and the burning sun of temptation. To preserve their life through these perils. God has provided a Man—the Man in whom his soul delighteth; and this once crucified but now glorified Man is "a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the storm, rivers of water in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

But now comes the great, the all-important question—how are these gracious realities seen, and how are these glorious tidings heard? The answer to which brings us to our third point,

III. The opening of the eyes to see and the unstopping of the ears to hearken to the blessings thus promised. "And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken."

Two gracious promises are here given. Let us examine them separately.

i. "The eyes of them that see shall not be dim." By nature all men are blind—blind to sin and blind to salvation; blind to malady and blind to remedy; blind to self and blind to Christ. This blindness is partly innate, and partly superadded. "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." **Eph 4:18** This is **innate** blindness—blindness of heart, as a consequence of the fall. But there is another cause of blindness. "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God should shine unto them." **2Co 4:4** This is **superadded** blindness—blindness produced by the special power of Satan.

But our text speaks rather of dimness than blindness. There is a difference between the two. The dead in sin are blind; the newly quickened into life are dim. We see this distinction in the case of the blind man whose eyes the Lord opened. When he first touched his eyes, light broke in but dimly and feebly. When asked, if he saw aught, "he looked up and said, I see men as trees walking." Before he saw nothing; now he sees certain objects, but the film still hanging over his eyes, he could not tell a man from a tree. The word here rendered "dim," means, literally, "besmeared," as if the newly opened eyes were bleared with water or matter, and therefore saw every thing through a mist or veil. How true is this of the wilderness pilgrim!

The breath of the pestilential wind, the thick clouds of the tempest, the hot and burning sand, and the glare of the mid-day sun, all blear and dim the eye. But the hiding place from the

wind, the covert from the tempest, the rivers of water, and the shady rock heal the dimness, and then "the eyes of them that see shall not be dim. Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off." **Isa 33:17** Till the pilgrims reach the rock their eyes are dim; but then, according to the promise, their eyes see out of obscurity and out of darkness. They see the Person of Christ as God-man, his suitability, atoning blood, and justifying righteousness; and seeing Him of God made unto them wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, they have in him all their hearts can wish. ii. "And the ears of them that hear shall hearken." This promise, too, is closely connected with the preceding. The same fall in paradise which sealed the eyes in blindness, stopped the ears in deafness. Therefore the promise runs, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped." **Isa 35:5**

But the persons spoken of in the text are not totally deaf, for they "hear." Yet there is a difference between hearing and hearkening—a difference almost analogous to that between the eyes being dim and seeing. The dim eye sees, but not distinctly; the hearing ear hears, but does not always hearken. To hearken implies faith and obedience. A disobedient son may hear his father speak, but does not hearken. Many under the word hear, but do not hearken, for they neither believe nor obey. But when the pilgrim in the wilderness reaches the hiding place from the wind, and the covert from the tempest; when he drinks of the rivers of water, and lies under the shadow of the great rock, he not only hears but hearkens—believes, loves, and obeys. It is thus that faith and obedience are wrought in the soul. This is hearkening to the word of God—to promise, and to precept. Necessity constrained him to hear the law; love constrains him to hear the gospel. His understanding, conscience, heart, and affections are all bound to the Man at the right hand of God; and thus he obeys not under the lash as a slave, but under the constraints of dying love as a son. Such are Zion's heavenward and homeward bound pilgrims. Happy are those who have any testimony that this is their character and experience; for of such we may safely say, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.





## **THE WEAK HANDS STRENGTHENED AND THE FEEBLE KNEES CONFIRMED**

A Sermon Preached on Lord's Day Morning, July 24, 1853, at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road

"Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you." Isaiah 35:3, 4

The prophecies of Isaiah begin where God begins with a sinner's conscience—in threatenings, rebukes, and denunciations against sin; and they end where God ends in a sinner's heart—in promises, mercies, and blessings. Thus the order of God's word, and the order of God's grace are in strict unison. The malady is disclosed before the remedy is revealed—the wound opened before the balm applied. Thus we read in the 1st chapter **Isa 1**— "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores." What a description of a sinner's state by nature and practice, of his fallen condition in heart, lip, and life! But how differently does the Lord speak in the close of the same prophecies! With what love and tenderness he addresses his Zion; what promises of blotting out her sins as a cloud, and of rejoicing over her with joy and singing; what declarations that though a woman may forget her sucking child, yet he will never forget her.

The chapter before us is full of promises, filled with them up to the brim, like the water-pots at the marriage feast of Cana. May the same gracious Lord who there turned the water into wine be

with us this morning, and give us to sip of the new wine of the kingdom.

The chapter, I remarked, is full of promises, but in the midst of these promises, interjected as it were by way of parenthesis, we find a charge given. The Lord had been speaking of "the wilderness and solitary place being glad, and of the desert rejoicing and blossoming as the rose;" but he breaks off suddenly, as if to commission certain persons to perform a certain work which he entrusts into their hands. "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold your Lord will come with vengeance; he will come and save you." To whom is this charge given? Who are the persons thus specially commissioned? God's servants, ambassadors, ministers, those whom he sends forth with his grace in their hearts and his word in their mouths.

From the words themselves, and their connexion with the context we gather two striking lessons—1. That a very important part of the Christian ministry is to strengthen weak hands, to confirm feeble knees, and to comfort fearful hearts; and, 2. That the very same persons to whom all the promises are made in this chapter, of whom the Lord says, "that they are the ransomed of the Lord," and to whom he declares, "They shall come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads"—have, at least many of them, weak hands, feeble knees, and fearful hearts.

In looking therefore at these words, I shall, as the Lord may enable, endeavour to show

**I. What is intended by weak hands, feeble knees, and fearful hearts.**

**II. The general commission given to strengthen weak hands, confirm feeble knees, and comfort fearful hearts.**

**III. The special message which the Lord himself sends by the mouth of his servants to those whose hands are weak,**

**whose knees are feeble, and whose hearts are fearful. "Fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you."**

The Lord, of course, speaks figuratively. Weak hands and feeble knees are not so literally, but spiritually. There is no reference to a rheumatic hand or a gouty knee, but to something spiritual and experimental, of which these are fitting and expressive types and figures.

i. What do we gather then from the figure? What is intimated by the expression "weak hands?" First, what is the hand? What is the special bearing of this familiar comparison? Is not the hand the most important and useful member of our body? Does not it perform many indispensable offices? Should we not be utterly crippled and maimed without it? What is there then in grace which corresponds to this important member of our body—to this distinguishing feature of man by which he is especially removed from the level of the brutes, and by which he executes the commands of his reasoning mind? May we not say that **faith**—that master fruit of the Spirit, that queen of graces—that most important, member of the new man, is represented here and elsewhere by the hand?

But the hand has certain very important offices to perform—offices so innumerable that we can only mention a few which may throw light upon our subject.

**1** The main office of the hand is to **take hold of and grasp an object**. The human hand is the master-piece of anatomy, the fingers and the strong opposing thumb being expressly constructed by their Divine Artificer to seize and retain objects; and therefore every muscle, artery, vein, and nerve conspire together to fulfil this destined office. Is there not in the office of faith something analogous to and corresponding with this? What says the Lord? "Let him take hold of my strength that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me." There is a taking hold then of God's strength. Is not this by faith? Is there

any other grace of the Spirit which takes hold of the Lord, as Jacob took hold of the wrestling angel or as sinking Peter laid hold of the hand of Jesus? "Lay hold on eternal life," is Paul's charge to Timothy. **1Timothy 6:12** But how is eternal life, and especially Jesus, "the Life," laid hold of except by faith? "He that believeth on me," says Jesus, "hath everlasting life." He has it by laying hold of it.

So we read also of "fleeing for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" **Heb 6:18** As the man-slaver fled for refuge to the appointed city and when his hand grasped the gates was safe, so guilty sinners flee for refuge to the Lord Jesus, and by faith lay hold upon the hope set before them in the gospel of the grace of God.

2. But again, the hand is the main instrument **whereby the soldier fights**. And is not Christian experience compared in scripture to a battle? "Fight the good fight of faith." The Christian is compared to a soldier. "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." **2Ti 2:3** But if the soldier have no hand, can he grasp the sabre or hold the musket? So can I grasp spiritual weapons, can I take the shield of faith, and wield the sword of the Spirit if I have no faith? We have to "put on the whole armour of God that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." We have a conflict to maintain, a battle to fight, foot to foot, shoulder to shoulder, against foes without and within—self, Satan, and the world. But to go into this terrible battle without faith, is like a soldier going to fight without a hand. The first uplifted sabre cuts him down.

**3** But by the hand also **we receive** what is needful for our daily support. The beggar receives by his hand the alms dropped into it. Is it not so in grace? In grace we are all paupers to a man, and we have thankfully to receive what God is pleased bountifully to give. Favours, mercies, blessings, tokens promises—these are the gracious alms which the Lord bestows on his spiritual paupers. When given they are received. But how? By faith. Thus there is a receiving Christ. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the

Lord so walk ye in him." So there is a receiving Christ's testimony; **Joh 3:33** a receiving out of his fulness; **Joh 1:16** a receiving the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Ghost; **1Th 1:6** and a receiving a love of the truth—But it is by faith and faith alone that these blessings are inwardly received.

**4** Our hand again, or rather the fingers of our hand, is the chief instrument of **touch**—therefore of **feeling**. A faith without feeling is a dead faith—the dead hand of a corpse. A living faith can no more exist without feeling than a living hand. Those who separate faith and feeling give us a skeleton hand without muscles to move it, nerves to influence it, or blood to animate it.

**5** By the hand too, not to enlarge here too widely, we **feed** ourselves, **dress** ourselves, and perform the various employments of life. From the queen who wields the scepter to the ploughman who holds the plough, all the varied duties of social life are performed by the hand. Without it man would be lower than the lowest brute; with it he has subdued the earth, and replenished it on every side.

ii. But in the text the hands of the Lord's redeemed family, are said to be **weak**. "Strengthen ye the **weak** hands." But if the hand be weak, it must perform its various offices very feebly and imperfectly. The hand being weak it cannot lay hold of Jesus firmly; it cannot fight valiantly; it cannot retain what it receives lastingly. All its offices are imperfectly performed, or hardly performed at all.

But what has weakened the hands? Is there not a cause? When God made the hand, did he create it weak? Dare we ascribe its present weakness to some fault in its original construction? That would be to reflect on its Divine Maker. No. This disease, like every other, bodily and mental, must be traced up to the fall. It is that deep-seated malady, that incurable disease which we have inherited from our first parents sin, dreadful sin, which has weakened the hand. It is original sin which, has Paralyzed every nerve, muscle and fibre of the soul, and killed out, as it were, the

image of God in which it was created. But besides this we are guilty of weakening our own hands. Nothing so damps, nothing so deadens the life of God in the soul as giving way to evil. Carnality, self-indulgence, pride, covetousness, compliance with worldly customs and maxims; neglecting God's word, secret prayer, hearing his truth, and living for the most part carelessly and recklessly—all these fearful fruits of indwelling sin, if allowed to gain head and prevail, sadly weaken the hands. Indulgence in evil is to the soul what indulgence in opium is to the body, gaining strength by habit, it enfeebles it, and but for the grace of God would destroy it. But the weakness of the hands is usually not felt till they are wanted to act. It is like a person whose hand is paralyzed. Whilst he is asleep in bed, or his hand is lying on the cushion, he feels not his helplessness; but when he wakes, and would fain raise his hand he cannot lift a huger. So in grace. Be engaged in worldly occupations, spiritual weakness is not manifest. But come to perform some spiritual act, say, to believe a promise, approach the Lord's table, seek his face in prayer, converse with living, spiritually-minded Christians, where is your hand of faith now? Weakened, enfeebled, and trembling like that of a palsied old woman, and you have to rue your folly for the injury you have done to your own soul.

iii. But the "**knees**" are also spoken of here, and said to be "feeble," as the "hands" are said to be "weak." Of course, this is to be explained spiritually as the preceding figure. The leg, of which the knee is the central joint, has to perform certain offices, to which certain spiritual movements correspond.

**1.** One special office is to **walk** and **run**. "Enoch **walked** with God." "They shall **run** and not be weary, and they shall **walk** and not faint." "Let us **run** with patience the hope that is set before us, looking unto Jesus." "I will **run** the way of thy commandments when thou hast enlarged my heart." But what if the knee be feeble? What strong walking, what active running is there then? The feeble knee seems as if it would let the whole body down. It is the first symptom generally of weakness. Lying on a sick bed we do not feel our weakness till we rise. Then how

weak and trembling are the knees! So when we would walk with God, or run the way of his commandments, the feeble knee faints and tires, and refuses its needful office.

**2.** But the Christian conflict is sometimes in Scripture compared to **wrestling**. "We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers." As in fighting the hand, so in wrestling the leg, and especially the knee is the most important member. Our enemies are unwearied, our lusts and passions strong, the host of hell is bent on our injury, if not destruction. How can we resist them or wrestle with them if our knees totter under us?

**3.** The knee is also the type of **prayer**. "For this cause I bend my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." A feeble knee then implies feebleness in prayer—a want of importunity and earnestness, of power and prevalence.

The same cause, be it borne in mind, which has weakened the hand, has enfeebled the knee. The same sickness, naturally, that makes the hand tremble, makes the knee totter; and thus the fearful malady that we have inherited by lineal descent from our fallen parents, has not only weakened the hand of faith, but enfeebled the knee of prayer.

iv. But the "**heart**" also, is said to be "**fearful**;" and that is the worst symptom of our malady, for the heart is the seat of life—the centre of all movement. If the heart palpitate through disease or nervousness, if fainting or terror arrest the ebb and flow of the genial current of the blood, it seems as if the sources of life were stopped at the very fountain. A stout heart might nerve a weak hand, or strengthen a feeble knee, as we know it has done again and again. But a fearful heart will make a strong hand weak and a firm knee feeble. All are fruits and symptoms of the same disease—sin. But the **guilt** of sin it is which more especially makes the heart fearful and fills it with dread. Guilt made David tremble before Nathan, and Jonah before the storm.

But besides this **special** cause of fearfulness, there is often a **general** timidity in the hearts of many of God's people. They are timid for the same reason that a female is timid—a sense of their weakness and helplessness. Thus sometimes they are fearful lest the work of grace be not begun in them—fearful sometimes lest the mighty power of sin should overwhelm them; sometimes lest their trials should outweigh their patience; sometimes lest they be left to themselves and not be chastened at all; and sometimes lest they should be chastened too severely.

But you will say, "are these persons the Lord's people?" Undoubtedly. Read the chapter for yourself and see if the Lord is not speaking throughout of his redeemed, his ransomed, the homeward and heavenward bound who are "to come to Zion with everlasting joy upon their heads." And to whom does the Lord give the commission to? As I before hinted, to his servants, his ambassadors, his ministers.

II. This brings us to the second branch of our subject—the **general** commission given to strengthen weak hands, confirm feeble knees, and comfort fearful hearts. These are the general instructions which the King of kings gives to his sent ambassadors. But can **they** strengthen weak hands? Can they strengthen their own? And if they cannot their own, how can they strengthen the hands of others? It is the Lord that does it through them and by them. They are but instruments, feeble instruments, in themselves all weakness and helplessness. What they are they are by the grace of God, and what they do they do by the grace of God. But viewed as instruments they strengthen the weak hands in several ways.

**1. By preaching the everlasting gospel** in its purity and power with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and showing that salvation is of grace, and of grace alone from first to last—and that this grace is sovereign, discriminating, free, and super-abounding. This message from heaven, this good tidings from a far country, suits weak hands, feeble knees, and fearful hearts. For what has weakened their hands, made them fearful? **Sin,**



original and actual,—sin in the fountain and in the stream, sin in its cause and in its consequences, in the root and in the fruit. Now could they be assured, that their sin is for ever put away, blotted out as a thick cloud, and will never come in God's debt-book against them—could they believe this and receive this into their hearts as a message from God to their soul, their weak hands would be strengthened, their feeble knees confirmed, and their fearful hearts comforted. Take away the malady, you give the remedy; give the remedy, and with the remedy comes the strength that is in the remedy. When the Lord healed the paralytic, he took up his bed and walked. The strength to take up the bed proved the completeness of the cure. The law discovers the disease, but the gospel reveals the remedy. Preach to poor guilty sinners human merit, creature righteousness, fleshly holiness—you add burden to burden, and grief to grief; you strengthen the disease, instead of strengthening the patient. But proclaim salvation by grace—the infinite mercy of God, and his everlasting and unutterable love; preach the eternal covenant ordered in all things and sure, the finished work of Christ, the atoning blood of the Lamb, justification by his imputed righteousness, and his ability and willingness to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him—and let the Blessed Spirit apply this precious gospel to the heart with his own special savour and power, the weak hands are strengthened, the feeble knees confirmed, and the fearful hearts comforted.

**2.** But again, many of the Lord's people are very fearful, as I before hinted, as to the reality of the work of grace on their souls. These doubts and fears weaken their hands and enfeeble their knees; for when they would fain raise the hand of faith to lay hold of the Lord Jesus Christ—when they would lift up the hands which hang down to grasp the blessings revealed in the gospel, this damping thought and chilling fear will sometimes come in to check them: "What right have you to these promises and mercies? Are you sure that you are a child of God? Can you clearly see the work of grace on your soul? Many have made as much noise as you about religion, and professed greater things than you, all whose profession has come to nothing." These

doubts and fears unnerve the uplifted Band; and then instead of it's taking hold of the Lord Jesus, and receiving the comforts which are in God's Word, it drops, and the heart being surcharged with fear, before the blessing is grasped it is gone. But if the servant of God is enabled to **describe the work of grace** upon the soul, and to bring forth such marks and evidences as meet the case of God's exercised family, as these are received into the heart, and a sweet response echoes in the bosom, faith is raised up and hope inspired; the graces of the Spirit are brought into exercise, and the weak hands are strengthened, the feeble knees confirmed, and the fearful heart cheered.

**3.** But the Lord sometimes strengthens weak hands by **speaking** through his servants **special words** of mercy and comfort to his chosen. "A good word maketh the soul glad." How ever short or simple that word be, let it come from God—if it be but his mouth that speak it—and let faith embrace it as a message from the Lord—what strength, what support, what comfort it gives! This then is a very important branch of the Christian ministry. "Feed my lambs," said Christ to Peter. "Comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak," says the apostle. These form a large portion of the Christian family, and the Lord himself takes special notice of them.

III. But besides these **general** instructions to his ambassadors, the Lord has put a **special** message into their mouths for his tried and exercised children, and has supplied them with the very words that they are to make use of. A familiar example will perhaps put this in a clearer light. The Queen sends an ambassador to a foreign court. He is furnished with certain **general** instructions by the tenor of which he is to abide. But besides these general instructions he is charged with a **special** message, or is the bearer of an autograph letter from his sovereign. These two things, though in themselves distinct, perfectly harmonize, and the particular message is in strict keeping with the general instructions. So it is with the Lord's ambassadors. What are their general instructions? "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees." That is to be

their general line of experience which God has put into their hands—the line of their ministry from which they are not to swerve, so as to make the heart of the righteous sad, and strengthen the hands of the wicked. But in addition to, yet in strict unison with these general instructions, the Lord has given them a particular message which they are to deliver as from his mouth. "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you."

1. How different is the Lord's speaking and man's! I might stand here and cry out till I was hoarse—"Be strong," but I could not communicate one particle of strength to your souls. But the Lord by one inward whisper, "Be strong," could communicate a strength that would carry you to the martyr's stake. This strength is an inward strength, as David found and felt—"In the day when I cried unto thee thou answeredst me and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul." So weak are the words of man; so powerful the words of God; the one mere bubbles of human breath, the other the power of him who called the world into being. But the ambassador speaks in the name of the sovereign; and as an earthly monarch will not let his ambassador speak in vain, neither will the King of kings. When then they say to the Lord's tried people, "Be strong," he himself is with them to apply the word with power.

But what if the soul reply, "How can I be strong? My hands are weak; my knees feeble; my heart fearful; and yet thou commandest me to be strong." O, what a mystery is this! But how it is opened up by the apostle in **2Co 12:9** : where the Lord Jesus spoke to him from heaven, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." No sooner were these words spoken than strength was communicated by them, and this made him say, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of God may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak then am I strong." Why? Because being weak he leant only upon

the Lord, and received out of his fulness that strength which is made perfect in weakness.

But how, "be strong?" What made you weak? Sin. Guilt lies heavy on your conscience and fears trouble your mind; your foes are many and your temptations strong. But if you have an assurance that all your adversaries are dead men, your sins pardoned, your backslidings healed, your transgressions cast behind God's back, what strength this communicates! Thus God does not say, "Be strong," and leaves the soul weak, but gives what he commands. Here is a man fallen down in a swoon. His hands droop, his knees totter, his heart faints. Give him a cordial. No sooner does he take it than it seems to distil strength through every limb of his body, and he starts up a strong man. So it is with God's cordials. Let but one drop of his heavenly cordial distil into the soul, and all its weakness disappears. "Let the weak say, I am strong."

2. This is one part of the message. A second is, "**Fear not.**" "Ah! But Lord," the soul says, "I do fear. I fear myself more than anybody. I fear my base wicked heart, my strong lusts and passions, and my numerous inward enemies—the snares of Satan and the temptations of the world. Thou sayest, 'Fear not.' But I do fear. I cannot help but fear." Still the Lord says, "Fear not." Let us see if we cannot find something to explain this a little more clearly. There is a crowd yonder, and a weak woman in company with her husband. He says to her all trembling and fearing to pass through the crush, "Fear not; take hold of my arm, cling close to me." She takes hold of his arm and fears not. So with the timid soul and its enemies. It says, "How can I press through this crowd of difficulties; how elbow my way through these opposing doubts and fears?" Its husband, the Lord, comes and says, "Fear not; take hold of my strength; cleave close to me!" The soul hears, obeys, and clings; its enemies give way; its doubts and fears part asunder, and it passes safely through. Or take another familiar comparison. Here is a child trembling before a large mastiff; but the father says, "Fear not, he will not hurt you, only keep close to me." "Deliver my soul," cried David, "from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog." Who is that dog

but Satan, that huge mastiff, whose jaws are reeking with blood? If the Lord say, "Fear not," why need we fear him? He is a chained enemy. But how the timid soul needs these divine "Fear nots!" For without him, it is all weakness; with him, all strength; without him, all trembling; with him, all boldness. "Where the word of a king is there is power;" and this makes the Lord's "Fear nots" so efficacious. As Augustine used to say, "Give what thou commandest, and command what thou wilt." The burden still remains, but strength is given to bear it; the trials are not lessened, but power to endure them is increased; the evils of the heart are not removed, but grace is communicated to subdue them.

3. But the Lord gives a gracious reason why his poor trembling ones are not to fear. "Behold your God will come with vengeance even God with a recompence; he will come and save you." The Lord then is not yet come; but he says he will come, and the promise of his coming takes away the fear. He says, "**Behold.**" Even that little word contains something in it noteworthy. The Lord is in the distance; his chariot is making ready; "for he maketh the clouds his chariot and walketh upon the wings of the wind." As the Lord said to his disciples, "Lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh," so by the word "Behold," the Lord would take the eyes of his people from ever being bent on the ground or ever looking at their own miserable hearts and the difficulties and dangers of the way. "Look up," he would say, "look up; your God is coming to save you." I like to dwell on every crumb as it were of our text. The jots and tittles of God's word, like diamond dust, are to be gathered up and treasured. In scripture there is much in a little; not like our sermons, where there is often little in much. The word of God is full to overflowing with the very essence of truth; more concentrated and fragrant than the otto of roses. Look at the next drop. Is it not the very quintessence of blessedness? "**Your** God." What, is he your God? **That** is the very dropping of everlasting love. In that one word is concentrated the essence of every blessing of the new covenant. But you say, "My hands are so weak, my knees so feeble, my heart so fearful; how can he be **my** God?" Do your weakness and

trembling alter God's love and mercy? It is not so in the things of men; and shall it be so in the things of God? Sitting on a doorstep, there is a poor paralytic old woman, who holds out a trembling hand for your bounty. Your heart is opened; you drop a coin into her palsied palm; but the hand is so weak that it lets the money fall almost as soon as the fingers have closed round it, and it rings on the pavement. What do you do? Take it up again, put it into your pocket, and say, with a chuckling smile, "If you can't hold it, you shan't have it?" This would be mocking her weakness as well as insulting her poverty. Now do you think the Lord will do what you would not do? He gives a promise, speaks a soft word, bestows a token for good. But your hand is weak. You get it, but you cannot hold it: like the poor withered paralytic, no sooner have you grasped the coin than you drop it. Now will the Lord take it away, and say you shall not have it because you could not hold it? It is the very weakness and misery of the object which calls forth the bounty of the giver; and the same liberal heart that bade him give, forbids him to recall. It is not then the weakness of our faith, nor the strength of our faith that adds to the value of the gift. A strong hand would not turn a shilling into a sovereign, nor does a weak hand turn a sovereign into a shilling. It is what the donor gives, not how the doner receives that makes the gift what it is. Let your hand be feeble; the gift is what the Giver has made it, and this gift is no less than himself. "Your God." And if God is your God, your doubts, fears, and misgivings do not break that sacred covenant tie. You are a husband, and your partner is afflicted with some mental disease; and the nature of the complaint may be such that she hardly recognizes your face, altogether doubts your affection, and does not believe you are her husband at all. Such cases we know are frequent. But do her doubts or denial dissolve your love, still less do they cancel the marriage tie? The state of her mind, however painful, does not alter the marriage relationship. So if the Lord's espoused ones, through Satan's temptations, doubt their union with him, do their fears break the wedding ring or cancel the marriage writings? If covenant love matched them in eternity, and covenant grace joined their hands in time, they are still his Hephzibahs and Beulahs, for "the Lord hateth putting away."

4. But this God is to come; and he is to come with "a vengeance;" **what a word is that!** and yet with a "recompence"—with vengeance in one hand and a recompence in the other. But is this consistent with grace and mercy that he should come with "vengeance?" Yes, it is. Love and jealousy are always co-partners, and recompence and vengeance are strict allies: love for the object, jealousy for the rival; recompence for the friend, vengeance for the foe. A delicate woman is insulted. May not her husband defend her, and avenge her of her insulter? If he struck him to the ground he would as a man, I do not say as a Christian, be justified. This vengeance then is twofold. 1. Against Zion's outward foes. 2. Against Zion's inward enemies. "Avenge me of mine adversary," cried the importunate widow to the unjust judge. "And shall not God avenge his own elect which cry day and night unto him? I tell you he will avenge them speedily." But there is another vengeance—that of which the Psalmist speaks, "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions." And are they not willing that he should do so? Your lusts and passions, pride, unbelief, covetousness, worldly conformity, and a host of inbred corruptions are enemies to God and enemies to your soul's profit and peace. Shall they then be spared? "No," says the Lord; "those mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them before me." These inbred foes are our worst enemies. People talk about their enemies; yes, we have all our enemies, and must have, if we are walking in the narrow way. "The carnal mind is enmity against God," and therefore against God's people. But who is your worst enemy? "Why, So and so, and So and so." No, he is not. It is not So and so. It is **yourself**. You are your worst enemy. A man may do himself more harm in five minutes than all his enemies put together could do him in fifty years. The worst enemy you ever had, or ever will have, dwells in your own bosom; and against that enemy the Lord comes with a vengeance. And who is the person you hate most in the world? Think of all the people whom you most dislike, and then I will name the person whom you have most reason to abhor. Yourself, You should do so, if you do not.

The man who does not hate himself is not a follower of Christ. A man must hate his own life before he can walk in the footsteps of a self-denying Jesus. A

Roman emperor once wished that all his enemies had but one neck that he might by one stroke of his sword put an end to them all. O, that our inward foes, our inward lusts and corruptions had but one neck, and that the Lord would smite off their heads at a blow!

5. But if he come with "**vengeance**" in one hand, he comes with a "**recompence**" in the other. A recompence! this word sounds strange. A recompence! A recompence is a reward; and that implies merit, does it not? But is there no other sense of the word "recompence?" Does it always mean reward? Not necessarily; certainly not here. Let us see whether we cannot dig into this word, and turn up a little nugget of gold out of it, it may be. You have passed through, we will say, a very painful day, have suffered much bodily pain. The night comes; your pain abates; you enjoy sweet refreshing slumber. Well, you say, this is a recompence for yesterday's suffering. But what merit was there in your tooth-ache? Just so here. The Lord's people pass through trouble and sorrow. The Lord comes and brings consolation and salvation. This is a recompence, for it makes up for all the trials that they have been passing through. Merit! I know of only one merit that we have—**hell**. If salvation were of human merit, not a soul could be saved.

6. But what is this recompence? "**He will come and save you!**" Salvation then is the recompence for the doubts, fears, and sufferings which the soul has passed through. But though the word recompence does not imply merit, it implies previous suffering. The Lord does not give mercy without misery, nor recompence without suffering; and when he comes and saves, it is all the soul wants. To be **saved!** Who can fathom the depth of that word? Only in eternity will it be known what is implied in the word **SAVED!** For the glorified spirit must look down from the battlements of heaven into the awful pit of hell, before it can



comprehend a millionth part of what is contained in the word **saved**. Saved from hell—saved from the pouring out of God's terrible wrath through countless ages; saved from eternal punishment with devils and lost spirits; and saved into that heaven which knows no end, but is ever opening up with richer manifestations of glory and bliss! What is there to be compared with salvation? But if not experimentally damned, not experimentally saved; if never feeling the pangs of hell, never knowing the joys of heaven.

These then are the persons who are saved from the bottomless pit and the devouring flame and eternal misery. Those that have weak hands, feeble knees, fearful hearts, in whom the Lord is working by his Spirit, and to whom he sends this sweet and tender message. Oh! for hearts to receive it, for faith to believe it, hope to anchor in it, and love to enjoy it. Surely then we shall give the God of all grace all the praise, and freely ascribe to him all the glory.

## **The Well and the Wall, or the Fruitful Bough and the Abiding Bow**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, Oct. 25, 1863

"Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." Genesis 49:22, 23, 24

What a striking representation has the blessed Spirit in the book of Genesis (49) brought before us of the death-bed of Jacob! How we seem to see the venerable patriarch, blind indeed and feeble, as being now in the 147th year of his age, yet retaining full possession of all his mental faculties, supported by the power, and favoured with the presence and blessing of God, as his Father and Friend. Let us endeavour to picture to ourselves the scene, not to amuse our minds with vain speculation, or to work upon our natural feelings by pathetically representing to our imagination the dying bed of the aged patriarch; but let us seek to edify and profit our soul by listening to his words as from the mouth of God; for they were words of truth and power, the far-seeing language of an inspired prophet, and therefore not the common leave-taking of a dying father, but a revelation to his sons of the mind and intentions of God towards them for ages and generations. His twelve sons, from Reuben down to Benjamin, surround his bed, for he had sent for them and said, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days." There they stand in the order of their birth, each awaiting the words that should drop from his lips: words, it might be, of good or words of evil—a blessing or a denunciation upon themselves and their posterity, even to the remotest times; for their appointed lot in "the last days" was the chief subject of his dying theme.

He begins as was natural with Reuben. "Reuben, thou art my first-born, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power." To Reuben, as the first-born, belonged the birthright. This was the "excellency of dignity and the excellency of power," for to it were attached both dignity of rank and superiority of authority. The birthright of the first-born son carried with it mainly four distinctive privileges above the rest of the sons. The first privilege was *headship* of the family, and therefore of all the other tribes; for though each tribe had its separate chief, yet all acknowledged the superiority of the first-born as representing in his person the common father of them all. The second privilege was the *priestship*; for until the institution of the Levitical priesthood, the right of sacrifice belonged to the first-born son. The third privilege was that of *kingship*; for with them, as with us, the right to the throne descended lineally to the eldest son. The fourth privilege was a *double portion* of goods; so that when, at the death of the father, the property was divided, the eldest son as heir took twice as much as any one of his younger brethren. But to Reuben was attached a sad and disgraceful blot. He had committed a crime forty years before which could not be forgotten nor forgiven. He had defiled his father's couch. The birthright therefore was taken from him as justly forfeited, and so we find the sacred historian recording: "Now the sons of Reuben, the first-born of Israel, (for he was the firstborn; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright. For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph's." (1 Chron. 1:1, 2.) The birthright, then, with its four distinct privileges was taken from Reuben and for ever forfeited. We shall see presently to whom the forfeited birthright fell, and how its privileges were apportioned.

Having passed sentence upon Reuben, the dying patriarch now addresses Simeon and Levi whom he joins together, putting Simeon first as the next son after the first-born. As Simeon had no real claim to the birthright, no wrong was done to him in its

not being given him. But both he and Levi had also forfeited their claim to it, such as it was, by their treachery and cruelty. "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations." This was an allusion to their cruelty in the case of Hamor and Shechem. "In their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel." Simeon, as perhaps the greater transgressor, was "divided in Jacob," and therefore the headship could not be his, as wanting unity of habitation; but to Levi, though "scattered in Israel," was afterwards given one part of the birthright—the *priestship*.

The dying prophet and father comes next to Judah, for his three elder brothers being set aside, he stood next in succession. Him he thus addresses: "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise" (his name, Judah, signifies praise): "thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee." He then pronounces that memorable prophecy, in which he intimates that from Judah the promised Messiah shall spring: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." By these words he gives Judah two of the privileges of the forfeited birthright, the *headship* over the tribes and the *monarchy*. "Thy father's children shall bow down before thee." There is the headship. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah." There is the kingdom—the right of monarchy, which though given at first to the tribe of Benjamin in the person of Saul, was taken away from it and fully vested in the tribe of Judah, in the person and house of David. I shall pass over what was said to the rest of the sons both as foreign to my subject, and presenting much difficulty of interpretation. But having seen to whom three of the distinctive privileges of the birthright were given, viz., to Judah the headship and kingdom, and to Levi the priesthood, you may want to know to whom the fourth fell—the double portion of goods. This portion of the birthright, as we have already read, was given to Joseph by the adoption of both his sons as heads of tribes, as his father said to him on a previous

occasion: "And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. (Gen. 48:5.) And again, "Moreover I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow." (Gen. 48:22.)

But we now come to the subject of our text, which is Joseph, of whom the dying patriarch thus speaks: "Joseph is a faithful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall."

Joseph was an eminent type of two things: first of our gracious Lord, whom he typically represented in several striking particulars. He was hated by his brethren, as our Lord was hated by his brethren after the flesh. He was sold by his brethren into captivity, as our blessed Lord was sold into the hands of the chief priests for a slave's price. He was cast into prison on a false accusation, as our gracious Lord was condemned to death and cast into prison on a false charge by lying witnesses. He was brought out of prison at the command of the king, as our blessed Lord was raised from the dead by the power of God. He was made ruler over all Egypt and all power was given into his hands, as our gracious Lord now administers all power in heaven and earth by command of the Father. In spite of all their transgressions against him, Joseph loved his brethren, secretly sustained them, and in due time made himself manifest unto them. So the Lord loves his brethren though they have sinned against him, girds them and feeds them when they know it not, and in due time manifests himself to their souls. As Joseph was entrusted with the disposal of all the goods in Egypt and fed his brethren out of the storehouses; so our Lord holds in his sovereign disposal all the gifts and graces of the Spirit, and gives out of his fulness to his brethren every needful supply, as Joseph gave them corn out of the barns of Egypt.

But Joseph was also a type of a believer. He was an eminent believer himself. The graces of the Spirit shone forth

conspicuously in him. He therefore stands forth in the Scripture not only as a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, but as a representative also of an eminent saint of God; and it is in this point of view that I shall, with the Lord's help and blessing, this morning consider him. I hope you clearly understand my meaning, or else you will scarcely be able to follow me in my delineation of his character. I view him then as a *representative character*—in other words, that his spiritual life as drawn by the pen of the Holy Ghost represents the spiritual life of a believer, with its trials and blessings, sorrows and joys, sufferings from man and support from God, together with the exercise of the graces of the Spirit in all vital and practical godliness. Taking our text, then, in this point of view as descriptive of the character of a believer, under the representative form of Joseph, I shall show,

I.—*First*, Joseph's *fruitfulness* with its *source* and *maintenance*: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall."

II.—*Secondly*, Joseph's *sore grief* with its *cause* and *consequence*: "The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him."

III.—*Thirdly*, Joseph's *strength* and its *divine Author*: "But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob."

I.—The grand distinguishing feature of Joseph, in which as a typical character he represents the child of grace, is pourtrayed in the words, "Joseph is a *fruitful bough*;" for this leads us at once to our Lord's striking figure of the vine, and the distinction which he there so vividly draws between the fruitless and the fruitful branches. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." (John 15:1, 2.) Our gracious Lord there makes a very clear and evident contrast between those branches which are in him by profession, and those which are in him by vital

union. Of the former he says, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away;" and of the latter, "Every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth (or cleanseth) it, that it may bring forth more fruit." It is evident, therefore, that the bearing or the not bearing of fruit is the grand distinction between the possessor and the professor. As they surrounded the bed of the dying patriarch, the brethren of Joseph might be represented by the branches that bear no fruit; but Joseph shone eminently and conspicuously amongst them as a fruitful bough. Indeed, we cannot read the history of Joseph from the first mention made of him by the Holy Ghost, as bringing to his father, with brotherly concern, "the evil report of the sons of Bilhah, and the sons of Zilpah" (Gen. 37:2) down to his dying bed, when "he took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence," (Gen. 50:25) without seeing what an eminent saint of God he was. Nor, indeed, is there any believer whose words and actions are recorded in the Scriptures who shines forth with fewer blemishes or brighter lustre. Viewing Joseph, then, as a fruitful bough, let us see how the Christian whom he represents worthily bears such a designation.

i. To be really fruitful, he must be fruitful in heart, in lip, and in life. And first in heart; for there the grand secret lies. That is the real source of all fruit in lip or in life. We see in Joseph's case how fruitful he was in heart; how in early days, when he was but 17 years of age, the grace of God had visited his soul, and what tenderness of conscience he manifested, for he could not connive at his brother's sin. He could not but know that communicating the sad tidings to his father would bring upon himself their hatred and persecution; but his soul was grieved at their iniquities; and if by his father's warning and advice they could be controlled, it would be for their welfare and his own comfort. As he grew up, the grace of God became more and more manifested in him; for the Lord separated him from his brethren in a very significant manner, and gave a prophetic intimation of his future exaltation by the two dreams which he related to them in the simplicity of his heart. But this very display of the Lord's peculiar favour to

him, and the intimation thereby contained that he would be exalted over them, only drew forth their enmity; for that they the elder should bow down to him the younger, mortified their pride and cut their vanity to the very quick. They could not, indeed, but see that there was something prophetic in these intimations; yet, instead of being awed by the authority of God, they only mocked him as "the dreamer"; conspired "against him to kill him," and though they were induced to spare his life, yet that they might for ever defeat the prophecy which they feared, they sold him as a slave into the hands of the Midianites. But when he was taken into Egypt, the fear of God still made itself more and more manifest in Joseph's heart. Refusing to yield to the solicitations of his vile mistress, he turned her into an enemy; and falling under her base accusations, was thrust into prison an innocent sufferer, where he was at first, no doubt, exposed to all those cruelties and hardships which, we know from history, were ever the lot of those confined in those gloomy abodes. And indeed, we expressly read in the book of Psalms, "He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron." (Psa. 105:17, 18.) It is very expressive in the prayer-book version, "The iron entered into his soul." Still, even there the grace of God shone upon and through him. The Lord gave him favour in the eyes of the keeper of the prison, bestowed wisdom to interpret the dreams of the chief butler and the chief baker, and no doubt often solaced him in his dark cell with the beams of his presence. But what occasion for patience and resignation to the will of God; first to be cast into this gloomy dungeon by a false accusation, and then to be kept for years with little prospect of release. But the time comes when Pharaoh has that dream for which no interpreter can be found among all the magicians and all the wise men of Egypt, until the chief butler calls to mind "the young man, the Hebrew, servant of the captain of the guard," who interpreted to him and his fellow prisoner the dreams so fatal to the one, so prosperous for the other. I need hardly remind you how Joseph is brought forth at a moment's notice and interprets at once Pharaoh's dream; how conviction of the truth of the interpretation falls upon the monarch's mind; how Joseph is exalted to be head over Egypt,



yet maintains the same quiet spirit he had showed in prison; how when his brethren came to him, submissively bowing down themselves before him with their faces to the earth, and thus fulfilling his dream, though they knew it not, instead of retorting their harsh treatment, his tender heart was softened towards them, though for wise reasons at first he made himself strange and spake roughly unto them. I need not remind you what tender inquiries he made of them on their second visit, after his father, and the yearning love he felt towards his brother Benjamin. You will well remember when the time came to make himself known, how he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck with many tears, kissed all his brethren and wept upon them, forgiving all their sins against him, speaking kind words to them, and promising them support in Egypt through the famine, for that the good of all the land was theirs. What an example of being a fruitful bough did Joseph manifest. How fruitful in the fear of God, in faith, in love, in every gracious and tender affection, was he in *heart*. How fruitful in *word*, by the good words which he spake to his brethren, all of which flowed out of love and affection. And how fruitful in *work*, by the good actions which adorned his life and conversation, whether he was a slave in the house of Potiphar, a servant of servants in the prison, or riding in Pharaoh's second chariot as ruler over all the land of Egypt. We, it is true, are not placed in Joseph's circumstances. We have neither his lowly lot nor his lofty exaltation. We have never been thrust into prison, nor are we likely to administer a kingdom. Still we have each our sphere of action, and we may have a measure of Joseph's grace without his iron fetters or his golden chain, without his dungeon or his dignity. The great question is whether we are a fruitful bough, for upon that depends our state and standing for time and eternity.

ii. But let us now observe the *secret source* of Joseph's fruitfulness; for as he is a representative of a child of grace, the source of his fruitfulness must be the source of ours. Let no one think that Joseph brought forth the fruits which made him so fruitful a bough by any inherent strength, or wisdom, or goodness of his own. There was nothing in him naturally to separate him

from his brethren, for he was as we are, by nature a child of wrath even as others. Whatever he was spiritually he was by the grace of God, which was given to him as a sovereign act of God's good pleasure. The Holy Spirit, therefore, leads us at once to the secret source of Joseph's fruitfulness by the words, "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough *by a well*."

In those burning climates, trees cannot grow or produce fruit except planted near streams of water. We find, therefore, in Scripture the figure of a tree planted by the waters often made use of. As an instance, David, describing the blessedness of a man of God in the 1st Psalm, says of him, that "he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that bringeth forth his fruit in his season." (Psa. 1:3.) In a similar way, the prophet Jeremiah, describing the blessedness of the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is, says, "For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river." He therefore adds, "And shall not see [that is, drought or decay] when heat cometh; but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful [that is, fearfully anxious] in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." (Jer. 17:8.) This, then, was the secret of Joseph's fruitfulness, that he was planted a well or a fountain, which was ever gushing forth in living streams of water, so as to keep the ground all around it soft and moist.

But what does this "*well*" spiritually represent? The influences and operations of the blessed Spirit; for all through Scripture, water is made use of as typical of the gifts and graces, operations, and influences of the Holy Ghost. Thus our Lord said, "He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly [or heart] shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive." (John 7:38, 39.) So also spake the prophet of old, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground. I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed and my blessing upon thy offspring." (Isaiah 44:3.) Thus as water has been, as it were, consecrated by divine authority to be a standing type of the gifts and graces, teaching and influences of the blessed Spirit, we cannot well err in so interpreting the well by which Joseph was

planted, and I may here observe that the word "bough" does not mean so much the branch of the tree as the tree itself; for we shall find as we proceed that it is a vine to which Joseph is compared. Joseph's fruitfulness, then, was given and maintained by his nearness to this well, that well of which our Lord said, "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14.)

But observe with me that this well was hidden from view, for as the vine was planted by it and its roots were necessarily hidden out of sight, the well also was concealed from human eye. You will, perhaps, remember that among the blessings of Joseph wherewith Moses, the man of God blessed him, there was not only "the dew" that fell from heaven but "the deep that coucheth beneath;" that is, the supplies of water couching or hiding themselves deep beneath the soil, and by their secret springs ever keeping it moist and fruitful. The source, then, of Joseph's fruitfulness was hidden from the eyes of men, and could only be discerned by the fruit that hung upon the bough. His brethren saw it and hated it. Potiphar, his master, until turned against him, saw it and approved of it, for he found, "that the Lord was with him, and made all that he did to prosper in his hand." The very keeper of the prison, probably naturally some inhuman wretch, could not but see it; and because the Lord was with him Joseph had favour in his sight. Pharaoh and all his servants could not but see it, though they knew not Joseph's God, for they all rejoiced with him when the fame was heard in Pharaoh's house that Joseph's brethren were come. But none of these knew the source of that fruitfulness with which he was adorned as a vine laden with rich and ripe fruit. So also it is now with every child of grace. The secret spring of his fruitfulness is hidden from the eyes of men: they can only see his good works, and glorify his Father which is in heaven. But the secret springs of grace which are continually flowing into his soul to keep his faith, his hope, his love, in a word, all his religion alive in his bosom are hidden from all human observation. Bear in mind that your religion, if it be the gift and work of God, will and must have a root to it. Job, amidst all his confusion, could still say of himself with all holy confidence,

"The root of the matter is found in me." He knew that "the matter," the all-important matter of spiritual and eternal life was deeply rooted in his heart. But whatever root our religion may have, it would all die away root and stock, stem and branch, leaf and fruit, were it not planted by the well. Two things then are wanted to make us fruitful trees; first the root and then the well. And you will ever find that the roots of your religion must dip themselves into the well to draw water out of it. Jeremiah, therefore, as before quoted, describes the godly man "as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river." You know how a tree will spread out its roots in a suitable soil. As the river then flows by, the tree planted by the waters spreads out its roots along the river bank, as if it delighted in the moisture of the stream as it continually bathes its rootlets. So as your faith and hope and love, and indeed every grace of the Spirit in your heart dips its roots into the well and is fed and sustained by the genial moisture ever coming from it, they receive fruitfulness into every pore. Cut off that supply, the root would dry up, the stem would droop, the branches would languish, the leaf would fade, the blossoms would fall, nor would there be any fruit hanging upon the bough. But as long as that source of fruitfulness remains; as long as the well continues full of water and the roots dip down into it and draw spiritual moisture out of it, so long is the bough fruitful. Your religion, if it is to stand the burning drought of temptation; your religion, if it is not to languish and die; your religion, if your leaf is to be green, if sap is to flow into the stem, if fruit is to adorn the branches, can only be thus supported and maintained by continually dipping its roots into the well; for the Holy Spirit is not only the giver, but the maintainer of all life in the soul. Though we cannot ourselves indeed see or understand how the blessed Spirit maintains the life of God in the bosom, yet we know that he does so by two distinct things: 1st, by the languishing and withering of every grace in the heart when he withdraws his gracious influences, for when he goes all our religion seems to go with him; and, 2ndly, by the renewals and revivals which are ever produced by the return of his presence and power. Our Lord, therefore, said, "He that abideth in me and I in him (which we can only do by the Spirit's

power and influence), the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing."

iii. But the Holy Spirit has brought before us another marked feature in Joseph, as a representative believer, whereby he was distinguished amongst his brethren as a fruitful bough: "Whose branches *run over the wall*." I have already intimated that the vine is the fruitful tree to which Joseph is here compared. As then "the well" represents the blessed Spirit with his secret influences and divine operations upon the soul, so "*the wall*" represents the Lord Jesus Christ. But you will perhaps ask me why? Do you not see that this wall is necessary to support the vine, to lift it, so to speak, from off the earth, for Jesus is the only support of the believing soul? The vine naturally is a trailing plant; it pushes forth no self-supporting stem, which, like the oak or the cedar, can rise of itself into the air. It needs continual support from its earliest growth; from the time that when as a rooted cutting it sends forth a shoot from the infant bud. So it is with the new-born soul: it needs support from its earliest birth, or otherwise it trails in the dust, where it might be trodden down and there lie bruised, crushed, and its very life destroyed by the wild beast of the wood. But there is a wall built on purpose, against which the tender shoot may be trained. Now the moment that this infant shoot finds that there is a wall, a support on which it can lean, to that wall it instinctively clings with all the ardour and tenacity of its young yet vigorous life. But if you watch the shoot thus put forth you will see attached to it what are called tendrils. These stretch themselves out here and there as if seeking some prop on which to lean; and the moment in which they find it, they clasp it close as if they would adhere to it to prevent the leader falling upon the ground. So it is with the child of God. He is in himself as weak as the tender shoot; his tendency is to trail in the dust, not because he loves the ground, for he loves the wall; but he can no more help himself nor raise himself up than the woman who was bowed together with a spirit of infirmity eighteen years could lift herself upright. (Luke 13:11.) But directly that he finds some sensible support by any discovery or manifestation of Christ to his soul as the Son of God, then to that support he clings with all the

tenacity with which a drowning man clings to the branch of a tree that hangs over the river. How suitable is the wall to raise him from grovelling in the dust, or being trampled in the mire by sin and Satan!

But you will observe it is said of Joseph that his branches *run over* the wall. Having found such a suitable support, the branches of the vine spread themselves all over it. And as the well and the wall go together and combine to make Joseph a fruitful vine, so his roots and his branches spread themselves in equal proportion. Gardeners well know that what is called "root action" is the secret of the vine's fruitfulness, for whatever defect there be in the root it manifests itself in the fruit. But when the well feeds the roots, and the wall supports the branches, then fruit adorns the bough. But you will also observe that by the support of this wall the vine becomes more exposed to the beams and rays and fostering heat of the sun. The vine is a native of a sunny clime. It revels and basks in a warm southern sky. It will grow in our climate, but ripens no fruit to perfection. But observe also that the further the wall extends, the further will the vine spread itself; for its very nature is to seek extension. Of all fruit bearing trees it will reach the furthest in extent, and I believe its best fruit is at its furthest end. I have seen a vine in Kent which spread itself over twelve houses, and I have seen another in Surrey which filled completely a very large hothouse, and which I was told would bear every year a ton of the finest possible grapes. What other tree can you find to spread so widely in every direction, or loaded with so prodigious a crop? The vine, therefore, well represents a Christian, not only in his weakness but in his fruitfulness, and the way in which that fruitfulness is communicated and maintained. When a vine is thoroughly healthy the branches run over the wall as if they delighted in the support thus afforded them, and they especially seek what I may call the *sunny* side of the wall; for the wall has two sides, a shady and a sunny, a northern and a southern aspect. The branches then "run over the wall" to get as far as they can out of the shady into the sunny side; and just in proportion as they lie and bask in the warm sun do the roots draw more and more moisture and sap out of the well. So the Lord Jesus Christ gives a solid support to every believing soul

which rests upon him for life and salvation, whether on the shady or the sunny side of his face, for though the one may be more comfortable, the other is not less secure. As then this support is sensibly felt, the believing soul cleaves more and more closely to him by the tendrils of faith which take hold of his Person and work; and its ever renewed delight is to support itself in all its weakness upon him as the Son of God, especially when he shines upon it; as the vine delights to spread itself over the wall to catch every beam of the sun to give verdure to the leaf, vigour to the branch, and ripeness to the fruit.

Now we should think that the sight of this vine, this fruitful bough or tree, would draw forth universal admiration. It would do so in nature. A vine loaded with fruit and spreading on every side its rich clusters would naturally be an object of general admiration. But it is not so in grace. As an instance, did the grace which shone so conspicuously in Joseph draw forth the admiration of his brethren? Did they like his "coat of many colours," or when they saw that their father "loved him more than all his brethren?" Were they pleased with his dreams? Did the favour of God thus manifestly bestowed upon him raise up in their hearts any wish to be themselves partakers of the same distinctive grace? We do not find that it did. On the contrary, we read that "they hated him and could not speak peaceably unto him." It is true that "they envied him;" but this very feeling only more moved their spleen, stirred up the enmity of their carnal mind, so that they actually conspired to murder him, though they knew it would bring down the grey hairs of their father in sorrow to the grave; and were only dissuaded from their murderous cruelty by the entreaties of Reuben. Though thus baulked by the providence of God of their intended crime of blood, they sold him for a slave to the passing Midianites, and thus got him, as they thought for ever, out of the way. As it was then, so it is now. The world cannot love the children of God; it may see, but cannot admire their Christian fruitfulness; may acknowledge that they outshine it, but still it hates what it cannot deny. We need not wonder at all this, for God himself has given us the reason. Enmity has been put between the two seeds; and that enmity will subsist unto the end

of all things. We come, therefore, now, by a simple and easy transition, to the second branch of our text, viz.

II.—Joseph's *sore grief*, with its cause and consequence. "The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him."

Two things are said of the archers, and one of Joseph. Of the archers that they "hated him," and "shot at him;" of Joseph, that he was thereby "sorely grieved." We will look at these points in their connection.

i. First, "the archers *hated* him." The figure, you see, is changed. The Holy Spirit does not tie himself to go on always with a figure, but changes it to another, if more suitable to convey thereby divine truth. The dying patriarch, therefore, drops the figure of the vine, and speaks of Joseph as a man, and as one shot at by archers. He also plainly intimates the reason why the archers shot at Joseph. It was because they hated him. The cause of their hatred was twofold: first, the favour of God manifested to him; and, secondly, from seeing the fruitfulness that sprang from his dipping his roots into the well, and spreading his branches so luxuriantly over the wall. His good works reprov'd their bad ones. His godliness, uprightness, and general consistency silently yet keenly rebuked their ungodliness. So it is, so it ever must be where the life and power of godliness are manifested; for "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus"—(mind, not all that *talk* godly, but all that *live* godly, as in union with Jesus)—"shall suffer persecution."

But who are these archers? In Joseph's case, they were mainly his own brethren, which made him feel it so keenly. When he was sold to be a slave, and torn away from his native land and his father's house; when he was thrust into prison, there to suffer all the pain and ignominy of the prison-house, how he must have reflected, "it is my brethren, my own brethren after the flesh, who have brought me here." We shall see by-and-by what bearing this has upon Christian experience; but I will just for the



present remark that the wounds given by his brethren sank very deeply into Joseph's spirit. The wanton eyes of his mistress, the angry eyes of his master, the scowling eyes of his jailer did not wound him like the murderous eyes of his own brethren.

If, then, we are like Joseph, fruitful boughs; if our faith stand not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God; if it be given and maintained by the Spirit's secret operations, and, as a consequence, we make Christ our all in all, we shall surely find archers of different kinds and from various quarters shooting at us.

1. Some of these archers will be from *the world*, for worldly men never can love the children of God; and with opportunity they will manifest their enmity by shooting some of the arrows wherewith Joseph was assailed. The law of the land has much tied men's hands, and broken, we trust, for ever, that bow of violence with which once they shot at the persons of the saints of God, when they shed their blood, shut them up in prisons, or spoiled their goods. But even now, as David says, "They bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words, that they may shoot in secret at the perfect." (Psa. 64:3, 4.) How often is the tongue of the ungodly "as an arrow shot out!" (Jer. 9:8.) How often are the arrows of calumny and slander at the child of grace, by which men seek to wound his reputation and injure his character; or where they cannot thus succeed, how they will aim at him the arrows of mocking scorn!

2. But the world are not the only archers who hate and shoot at the spiritual Joseph. *Professors of religion*, devoid of the power,—are not these archers too, and good marksmen,—fit to win a first-class prize at a rifle match? O how they hate to see the grace of God eminently shine; how the image of Christ in a believer's heart torments and condemns them. His separation from the world and practical condemnation of it, with all its fooleries and lying vanities; his godly fear, which will not allow him to have partnership with evil; his making Christ to be all in all for salvation, and the work of the Holy Spirit upon his heart for

sanctification; his earnest desire to glorify God in body and soul; the doctrines for which he contends; the experience of God's favour and mercy which he enjoys; the practical consistency which he manifests; all move the enmity of the professing generation against him for his truth condemns their errors, his knowledge of the power their death in the form, and his obedience to the precept their practical disregard of it. As, then, their enmity is stirred up, they shoot their arrows at him secretly or openly to ease their tormented minds, and please themselves by paining him.

3. Nor are they the only archers who sorely grieve the spiritual Joseph. Even the *children of God* themselves sometimes can carry their bows and arrows; and the wounds which they inflict are so deep and rankling that they are rarely thoroughly healed. Of all the arrows, except one which I shall presently mention, those are the keenest which are shot by a brother's hand. Is it not cruel, when behind our backs, the bow is held by one of the same faith as ourselves, and it comes to our ears that a friend, at least in profession, or even a minister who preaches the same truths which we ourselves believe, has been shooting arrows in secret against us to damage our reputation, or injure our usefulness? Sometimes these arrows come flying about in the shape of pamphlets. I have had, I believe, more than thirty, though I have never counted them and never cared to read them, written against me by friend or foe. But, through mercy, none have yet succeeded in breaking my bow or beating it out of my hand.

4. But of all arrows, those pierce the deepest which we have *winged ourselves*. There is a pretty tale in an ancient author of an eagle mortally struck by an archer in the breast, and, as she lay upon the plain in dying agony, she recognised the feather upon the arrow as having been taken from her own wing. A modern poet has versified the tale, but I shall only quote three or four of his lines, just to give my figure point and edge:—

"Keen were her pangs, but keener far to feel

She owned the pinion which impelled the steel.  
While the same plumage which had warmed her nest  
Drank the last life-drop of her bleeding breast."

Have you not been this eagle? Have you never feathered an arrow from your own breast? And as you recognised your own feather upon the shaft, did not sorrow and compunction pierce your inmost soul that you should have given strength, swiftness, and correctness of aim to that arrow which either now is quivering in your breast, or has made in it a wound which time itself will scarcely heal?

5. *Satan*, too, is a cruel archer, and his arrows are tipped with fire, for indeed they are, as the Scripture calls them, "fiery darts" when shot at the soul by this master bowman. What cruel use he can make of our slips and falls to fill the mind almost with despair. How he can point to the feather! "Hast thou not procured this to thyself?" How subtle his infidel shafts; how terrible his blasphemous injections; how deeply they penetrate: how sorely they wound!

These arrows, then, and others which I cannot now mention, sorely grieve the spiritual Joseph; and this indeed is the intention of the archers. Their arrows, as we shall presently see, do not prove his death or downfall, but they sadly wound his spirit, try his mind, and grieve his inmost soul. Have these archers ever been shooting at you? But perhaps you have not sufficient fruitfulness to draw forth an arrow. You may be too much like the world for it to shoot at you. It may see no difference between you and itself, and therefore may not think you even worth a shot, or not of sufficient value to count you fair game; for who wastes powder on crows or gulls? Or have the professors of religion seen in you sufficient of God's discriminating grace, of separation from the world, of the fruits of godliness or of the image of Christ in internal or external conformity to his likeness to lead them to shoot their arrows at you? But if they do, perhaps you have given them or even the world itself good occasion by your inconsistent conduct, by the slips or falls of which you have been openly

guilty, by your heedless words, or your worse than heedless works, to shoot their arrows justly at you? Have you not yourself feathered the arrow now sticking in your conscience? I ask these questions in all solemnity. Conscience, if it be alive in God's fear, will furnish the best answer to them.

But were these arrows, at least in Joseph's case, successful? They sorely grieved the man of God; and thus far the malice of the archers was gratified. Joseph's tears were a sweet morsel to his envious brethren; and they had the pleasure of grieving his spirit, if not the gratification of shedding his blood.

III.—We are thus brought to our *third* point—Joseph's *strength*, and its divine *Author*. There was a secret supply of strength and support given to Joseph which the archers knew not of; and by this unseen help their arrows, though they sorely grieved him, really fell short of working the mischief designed by them. "But his bow *abode in strength*, and the arms of his hand were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob."

i. Joseph, you see, carried a bow as well as the archers; of a different material and manufacture indeed, but far more potent, as made in heaven, and put into his hand by the mighty God of Jacob.

Now the chief object of the archers was to knock this bow out of his hands, or disable him from making use of it; for they could not but see that his bow had great strength in it, and that his arrows flew fast. Joseph's godly conduct was an arrow in the conscience of his brethren, for it, as condemning their ungodliness, galled and vexed their carnal mind. His dreams and the favour that God manifestly showed him were keen arrows against their pride and self-**consequence**; [**confidence?**] for they could not but see that it was the Lord God of their father who had given him a bow of steel, and that they must either fall down before him, or he before them. Joseph's godliness and refusal to listen to her base solicitations were all arrows in the conscience of his ungodly mistress, turning her impure desires

into deadly hatred. Thus, as representing the child of God, the spiritual Joseph carries a bow as well as the archers; and it is because the arrows which he sends from his lips and from his life do such execution that the archers are so enraged against him. If a minister, for instance, stands up boldly in the name of God, and holding firmly out the bow which the Lord the Spirit has put into his hand, shoots the arrows of truth thick and fast, the words of warning, of reproof, of rebuke, of denunciation of God's wrath against transgressors which fall from his lips, are all so many arrows that fly abroad in the congregation, and wound, it may be, many a heart and fall into many a conscience that he is not aware of. He is thus fulfilling that word, "Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee." (Psa. 45:5.) But if the people do not fall under the keen shafts of truth, and submit themselves to the Lord as conquered subjects, being made willing in the day of his power, these very arrows only stir up the wrath and rebellion of their carnal mind; and this is the secret cause of all that enmity and malice which worldly professors ever manifest against a faithful servant of God, "But his bow abides in strength." God has put a bow into his hand and arrows into his quiver by furnishing him with a spiritual, experimental knowledge of his own truth, and with life, light, and power faithfully to deliver his conscience. If, then, he draw his bow in the strength of God and shoot the arrows which he has put into his quiver, he must leave the event with the Lord, whether it be a savour of life unto life or a savour of death unto death. When Joseph was in the prison house, he still had his bow; he did not leave that behind in the palace of his ungodly mistress. Nor was it taken from him either by his brethren when they stripped him of his coat of many colours, or by the jailer when he put upon him the prison raiment.

But what was Joseph's bow? The *bow of faith* and the *arrow of prayer*. He could believe in the God of his father in the dungeon as well as in the house of his master; he could pray in the lowly cell as well as or better than when engaged in waiting upon his mistress. Oh! how many sighs and prayers would he put up in his prison cell, and how encouraged he would be by every fresh

manifestation of God's favour to hold strongly his bow, and to aim rightly his arrows. "His bow therefore *abode* in strength." But where would have been his bow, if he had given way to evil? It is sin and nothing but sin that strikes a believer's bow out of his hand. Have you no bow? have you no arrow? for, as I have said, faith is the bow, and prayer the arrow. Where, then, will your arrows be directed? Will you take up the arrows of malice and slander, of scorn or calumny shot against you by an ungodly world, and put them upon your bow to shoot them back? Their arrows will not fit your string, nor will they suit your bow. That is not the way, then, that God teaches his people to use the bow of faith and the arrow of prayer. The arrows which they shoot are up to the throne of the Most High. The cries, sighs, petitions, prayers, and supplications which the Holy Spirit puts into their quiver and which they lay upon the bow of faith, are all so many arrows directed up to the throne. They have to shoot high, for their arrows are directed heavenward and their object is that every arrow should reach the eternal throne, and should leave a mark, as it were, in heaven's own target. Their bow, then, is not like that of their enemies, the bow of unbelief, malice, and enmity; nor are their arrows tipped with deadly fire, aimed against character or person, ever seeking to damage or destroy; but heavenly is their bow, "the gift of God," for such is faith; and far-reaching are their arrows, for they are shot up to heaven's own gate through which they pierce when their prayers enter the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

ii. But whence comes it to pass that their bow thus abides in strength? Why do not the cruel wounds which they receive from their inveterate enemies cause their hands to drop and their bow to fall? The aged patriarch gives the reason, "The *arms* of *his hands* were *made strong* by the hands of the *mighty God* of Jacob." Much is contained in these words, if I had time to enter into them. We have a striking illustration of their meaning in that remarkable passage in the 2nd book of Kings, where we read of Elisha putting his hands upon the hands of the king of Israel, and bidding him shoot. (2 Kings 12:15-17.) When, then, king Joash shot, it was not really *his* hands which drew the bow, but the

hands of the prophet which were put upon his. Thus, in our text, the arms of Joseph's hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob being put upon them.

Observe the expression, "the arms of his hands," that is, the muscles of his arms, for it is the strength of the muscle in the arm which gives strength to the hand. A weak, flabby arm must ever make a weak, feeble hand. The first thing, then, was to put divine strength into Joseph's arms to draw the bow vigorously, and send the arrow far enough to reach heaven's gate. Do you not know that your prayers cannot reach the throne of grace, unless the blessed Spirit himself help your infirmities, and intercede for you and in you with groanings which cannot be uttered? In this way, then, the God of Jacob himself put his hands upon the hands of Joseph and actually drew the bow for him; for though Joseph held the bow, it was the Lord that bent it so firm and so strong. Two things you know are needful for an archer—strength of arm and correctness of eye. You may miss the target from defect of strength, or incorrectness of aim. The God of Jacob, who teaches the hands to war and the fingers to fight, gives both strength to the arm and aim to the eye. How unerring must that arrow fly when the Lord himself draws the string. Aim high. Set your affections on things above. Lift up your heart to the throne of God: and never cease to draw your bow as long as you have an arrow in your quiver.

Nor is this bow confined to private Christians. The servants of God, as I have said, carry a bow: and blessed is that Bowman the hands of whose arms are made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. When, then, we hold our bow in sight of all, and shoot our arrows of truth among our congregation, aiming at men's consciences, it is not we that draw the string, if any pierce through the joints of the harness. We have no strength of our own to draw the bow, nor wisdom of our own to direct the arrow. But the mighty God of Jacob puts his hands upon our hands, himself drawing the bow and himself directing the shaft. If, then, we are ever favoured to draw the bow with a vigorous arm, and shoot the arrow home so as to reach any man's conscience, and leave a wound there which none but the Lord himself can heal, it

is neither our own strength nor our own skill which gives the word of truth a saving entrance into the heart. You, too, though not called upon, as a servant of God, to bear the ministerial bow, have still your own private bow which you are bidden to make daily use of. And do you not find that there is at times a secret power put forth in your soul whereby you are enabled to use it aright? Do you not find that the Lord the Spirit sometimes teaches you how to pray and what to pray for? When then he intercedes in your bosom with earnest cries and supplications, it is he and not you who draws the bow of faith and aims the arrow of prayer. Do you not find yourself at times strengthened with strength in your soul to pray and cry and seek the Lord's face with a fervour and an earnestness, a boldness and a liberty surprising to yourself; and at such times, does not faith seem raised up in your heart with a sweet assurance that your prayers enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth? Why is this but because the mighty God of Jacob at these seasons strengthens the arms of your hands to draw the bow, as he strengthened the arms of Jacob himself to wrestle with the angel the whole night by the brook Jabbok? Do you not also sometimes feel, in a special manner, that faith is raised up in your soul to believe in the Person and work of the Son of God; to lay hold of him for yourself as all your salvation and all your desire, and thus realise the sweet influence and power of his blood and love? In such favoured moments it is not so much you that believe as the Spirit of God believing in you. How strong, O how strong is faith and hope, when the hands of the mighty God of Jacob are making strong the arms of our faith, and enabling us to believe to the salvation of our soul! And do you not also find, that the more the archers shoot at you and grieve you, the better you can use your bow and the more it abides in strength? O, how the Lord overrules and defeats, as he did so wonderfully in Joseph's case, all the malice of the archers! How he makes all things work together for good to those that love him; and what a confirmation it is to our faith, that when the world, or ungodly professors, or even the children of God themselves, or the great enemy of our souls shoots at us with his infernal artillery,—we find sometimes, to our soul's surprise, that our bow abides in strength; that there



is a secret power communicated which we cannot describe yet sensibly feel, so that the bow of faith and prayer is not beaten out of our hand. It is an indescribable mercy when the Lord so strengthens faith as to enable its to find access to himself; power to believe in and receive the Lord Jesus Christ into our very heart; power to submit to his dealings, however trying or mysterious in providence and in grace, and power to do in his strength what we never could do in our own.

Now as your bow thus abides in strength, and the arms of your hands are made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob, you will never take up the arrows shot against you and shoot them back against your enemies: for nothing is so likely to cause the bow to drop from your hands; nothing so likely to cause the God of Jacob to take his hands off yours, as for you thus to imitate the ungodly. I do not wish to speak of myself, but this is the way in which I trust I have been led to act—not to be provoked by all that has been said or written against me, to retort upon them their bitter, angry words. It is not from want of power, for I could give them as good as they bring; but I hope grace has taught me that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (James 1:20); and that "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds." (2 Cor. 10:4.) Bear in mind, then, that your bow is not of earthly but heavenly make, put into your hands by the God of Jacob, and that your arrows are not manufactured as theirs are of carnal, but of spiritual and divine material, and have been lodged in your quiver by the God of heaven. Keep, then, firmly to your own spiritual weapons; and though the archers may sorely grieve you with their keen shots, never lay aside the bow of faith that God has given you, to take up the bow of anger and revenge, which is the carnal weapon of your enemies. Never lay aside the arrows of spiritual prayer and supplication to take up the malicious darts of the wicked, lest you provoke the Lord to withdraw his kind support; and then where will be your strength to draw the bow, or where your skill to reach with its shafts the throne of grace?

Let me, in conclusion, just briefly run over some of these thoughts again which I have put before you that they may leave a more abiding impression upon your mind and memory. The leading theme of my subject was, that Joseph, as a fruitful bough, typically represents a true believer. The cause of his fruitfulness I showed you in the well and the wall. I then directed your attention to the enmity drawn forth against him on account of his fruitfulness, and to the grief and pain it caused to his spirit. I then showed how Joseph was not defeated by all the malice of his enemies; that his bow abode in strength, and the reason was because the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. I endeavoured to impress upon your minds the blessedness of a personal experience of these vital truths. And now let me conclude by expressing my earnest desire that we may feel a sweet persuasion in our own breast that we are in some measure walking in Joseph's footsteps; that Joseph's God is our God, and Joseph's shepherd our shepherd; for the aged patriarch added, "From thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel." And O may the very God of Jacob help us as he helped Joseph, and may we find our bow still to abide in strength, with a blessed conviction in our conscience that it was put into our hands by the Lord himself, and by his grace will ensure us a glorious victory over all our external, internal, and infernal foes.

## **WHAT IS IT THAT SAVES A SOUL? PUBLISHER'S NOTE & PREFACE**

The following work by J. C. Philpot was not a sermon but was originally written at the request of the Publisher of another work who used it as an Appendix. It was subsequently re-published as a separate work and is here reproduced in response to many requests.

### **PREFACE BY J. C. PHILPOT**

When, at the request of the Publisher of another work, I undertook to furnish an Appendix, and to give in it an answer to that important question, "What is it that saves a soul?" which question was there left undecided, I intended merely to write a few pages, without affixing to them my name; but as I wrote, I found the subject to grow under my hand, and thoughts and ideas to flow into my soul.

I felt, especially when I came to the second part of my subject, namely, **salvation as an inward possession**, that it could not be despatched in a few common-place words, but that it demanded what I could not bestow—pages of life and feeling, unction and power—to set it forth so as to meet the wants of God's tried family. I saw on every side of me salvation as an **internal reality**, unknown, unprized, uncared for, unregarded. Some I saw who called themselves ministers of God zealous enough for salvation **outwardly**, sound in the letter of truth, and contending earnestly for the doctrines of grace, who either never spoke of salvation **inwardly**, or if they mentioned it at all, despatched it in a few meagre sentences, which were usually so mixed with error that they only puzzled simple souls and discovered to a discerning eye the ignorance and emptiness of the preacher.

Others I observed who, from their pomposity and conceit, seemed to think that "wisdom would die with them" **Job 12:2**, pulling down what God in His Word has built up, and building up what He has pulled down. These would-be teachers I saw setting up forms, ceremonies, ordinances, prayer-meetings, church membership, family prayer, and a thousand other external things, all good in their place, as if they were the sum and substance of vital godliness. Others, again, I perceived, who call themselves **experimental ministers**, either setting up sins as evidences of grace on the one hand, or holding up universal hatred of sin as an evidence on the other.

Thus the ins and outs, the ups and downs, the mysterious workings, the invisible track, the inward conflict, and all that peculiar, deep, ever-changing, fluctuating path which is trodden by the family of God. I saw to be either never touched upon or, if attempted to be entered into, so mystified, confounded, and misrepresented, that a living soul was more distressed and perplexed by all that he heard than comforted and encouraged. I saw, also, that even ministers who bore marks of their call by grace and of their call to the ministry, were either resting in a past experience, or so "established," as they call it, "in Christ," which I believe to be an establishment upon their lees, that they differed little, if at all, from the letter Calvinists of the day.

Thus, whilst some were calling good evil, and evil good, putting bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, and others were setting up the shadow for the substance, and the form for the power, I saw that those who should stand in the gap had put up their swords into the scabbard, and never drew them against those enemies of Christ who came in the garb of friends. The question seemed to be. "Are you an Arminian or a Calvinist? If the former, you are a foe; if the latter, a friend." And thus the most dangerous and insidious enemies of vital godliness are received into the camp of Christ because they can repeat the watchword and wear the dress of His soldiers. Thus I saw truth to be fallen in the streets, vital godliness uncared for, external things highly regarded, Christ's sheep unfed, and the devil's goats unseparated. So that I

felt myself led to insist on an **internal** salvation at greater length than I at first intended, though with the deepest consciousness of my ignorance and inexperience, and to affix my name, that it might not have the disadvantage and suspicion which are usually attached to an anonymous work.

Without, then, expressing any opinion in favour of or against the pamphlet to which this Appendix is affixed, I send forth this feeble attempt to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, and to show the nature of that salvation which a man must know and possess for himself before he can enter into the kingdom of heaven.

J. C. PHILPOT

## **WHAT IS IT THAT SAVES A SOUL?**

Well may every sensible sinner desire a true and satisfactory answer to a question of such importance. Well may everyone who has tasted the wormwood and the gall, been pierced with the sting of sin, groaned beneath the curse of the law, and trembled at the judgment to come—well may every such guilty, self-condemned wretch "kiss his lips that giveth a right answer" to the all-important question, "How shall man be just with God?" Job 9:2

## **WHAT IS IT THAT SAVES A SOUL? SALVATION OUT OF AND IN US**

To answer, then, this question aright, we must view salvation under two points:

1. Salvation considered as an act **out of us**.

2. Salvation considered as an act in **us**. As the former precedes the latter, we will give it its due preference. And as "none teacheth like God" **Job 36:22**, and as He is "the Father of lights" **Jas 1:17**, "the Fountain of life" **Ps 36:9**, and "the only wise Jehovah" **Jude 1:25**, may both writer and reader have grace given them to look up unto Him for that "anointing which teacheth of all things, and is truth, and is no lie" **1Jo 2:27** .

I. Salvation, then, is to be considered, first, as an act **out of us**, as an eternal, irreversible transaction, originating in the mind of Jehovah, and utterly independent of the creature. To suppose that any new plans, any before unthought of schemes, any alterations of purpose, any improvements of an originally imperfect design, can take place in the mind of Jehovah, is to cast one of the greatest insults on the wisdom and power of the Triune God which the creature can offer. If He is **All-wise**, no new thought can arise in His mind; if He is **All-powerful**, no unexpected obstacle, no unlooked-for contingency, no unforeseen emergency can defeat His purpose; and if He is the source and spring of the very existence of the creature **Ro 11:36**, neither the will nor the power of the creature can be stronger than He. We consider him to be the most skilful engineer who can calculate beforehand, with the greatest accuracy, the movement and effect of every wheel and cog of some new piece of machinery, and whose hand can execute with the greatest nicety the invention of his mind. We call him the ablest general who plans best before the battle every manoeuvre which he means to perform, and who executes with the greatest precision and success his original design. To miscalculate, to be defeated by some unlooked-for obstacle, to stop short on account of some unforeseen hindrance, stamps a man as a bungler. To err in his original estimate impeaches the skill; to be unable to execute his plan argues defect of power in an architect.

Now, shall a general have a plan, an engineer have a plan, an architect have a plan, and shall God not have a plan? Shall we measure a man's skill by the wisdom of his design, and his power by its execution, and shall we not measure the wisdom and power

of God in the same way? Shall we consider him a dolt and a fool who has no regular system of business, no organised plan of managing his affairs, no fixed hours of work, no preconcerted series of operations, and shall we not tremble to ascribe all this folly to God? A Manchester cotton factory could not go on for a week if it had not some system of operations, some regular plan which assigns to every wheel its work, and to every hand its place. And yet men are to be found of such daring impiety as to ascribe to the only wise God a confusion, a disorder, a negligence in the management of the eternal destiny of man which, if acted upon in this great town, would shut up its busy factories, beggar its vast population, and turn its crowded streets into a habitation of dragons and a court for owls.

We cannot, therefore, deny that all which God does, He does according to a plan settled in His own eternal mind, without impeaching either His wisdom to contrive, or His power to perform. If, then, all that God does, He does "according to the counsel of His own will," it is plain that the salvation or damnation of souls must form a part of His eternal purpose. If all things that take place flow in a channel cut out for them, follow each other according to a fixed order, and form as much a part of God's universal government as every wheel contributes to the movement of some complicated machine, then salvation must be included in the one great original design. To say that God appoints some things, but not others; decrees temporal events, but not spiritual; watches over the fall of a sparrow, but leaves man's immortal soul to chance, random, and hap-hazard, is as bare-faced an assumption as for an ignorant rustic to examine one of Watt's steam-engines, and say: "This boiler, this flywheel, this piston, Watt planned; but this parallel motion, this governor, this self-registering valve, this beautiful precision of every movement, he left to chance. His mastermind forgot **this** part of the machine, and omitted **that**; and all this exquisite arrangement and nice adaptation is the result partly of skill and contrivance, and partly of hap-hazard, luck and fortune." No less vainly and ignorantly do all talk who deny salvation to be a complete plan, harmonious in every part, and having its origin,

progress and end in the will and purpose of God alone. Because we cannot perceive the harmony and beauty of the one great whole, because there are objections and difficulties, because we cannot comprehend the object and bearing of every part, are we at liberty to deny that salvation is one great harmonious plan? As well might the ignorant rustic above-mentioned cavil at every wheel and movement in the steam-engine, the use and beauty of which he could not comprehend.

## **WHAT IS IT THAT SAVES A SOUL? SALVATION OF GOD AND TO HIS GLORY**

If salvation, then, as a **whole**, be one grand harmonious plan, **all the parts** and branches of salvation must be of the same nature. Say that a part is not harmonious, and you say the whole is not so, for the harmony of the whole depends on the harmony of the parts. These branches, or parts, then, demand our careful attention; and if we can show them to be complete, we shall do so of the whole.

The first branch, then, of salvation is the manifestation thereby of the glory of the Triune Jehovah. Nothing can be so dear to God as His own glory. Nothing less than the manifestation of it can be the supreme end of all His actions. The origin of all created beings, from the brightest angel to the grovelling worm, can only be ascribed to the desire which Jehovah has to manifest thereby His own eternal glory. Salvation, therefore, which is the greatest act of God, must be traced up to the same source. "To the praise of **the glory of His grace**," says Paul **Eph 1:6**, "wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved." And again **Eph 1:12**: "That we should be **to the praise of His glory**, who first trusted in Christ." "And that He might make known **the riches of His glory** on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory" **Ro 9:23**.

Now, if salvation at all rest on the will of man, and depend for its final success on the power and ability of the creature, it is evident



that not a single soul might be saved. Nay, if it did so depend, there is not the slightest doubt in the mind of those who experimentally know the fallen state of the creature, that no one **could** or **would** be saved. Unless, then, salvation be a decreed, fixed, unalterable, irreversible plan, it is clear that God might be disappointed of all the glory which He has proposed to Himself to accrue to His great Name thereby. And if we only allow that He sees the end from the beginning, and knows beforehand every event which is to take place, which Arminians themselves acknowledge, it is evident that looking forward to, and foreseeing the disappointment of all His schemes, He would have stopped short, and never would have devised the plan of salvation at all. Nay, to carry the argument one step farther, if God could, by the resistance of the creature, be defeated of the revenue of His own glory, He would never have called this world into being, or formed man from the dust of the earth. **We** plan schemes, in the result of which we are disappointed, because we cannot foresee future events; but if we were gifted with the fore-knowledge of all things, we should only commence such undertakings as we were sure we could execute. Let no man, then, ascribe that folly to God which he would not do to a fellow-creature.

## **WHAT IS IT THAT SAVES A SOUL? LOVE THE CAUSE**

Our feeble faculties being unable to grasp the mind of Jehovah as one harmonious whole, we are compelled to ascribe to Him a succession of acts, which succession has no real existence in Him who is one eternal Now—"the same yesterday, and today, and for ever". Thus we speak of the regard which God has to His own glory as the first act in the scheme of salvation, and His **eternal love** as the second. But in His infinite mind there is neither first nor second, future nor past, prior nor posterior. When we say, then, that eternal love is the second moving cause of salvation, we use the language demanded by our feeble minds, and do not mean thereby to ascribe to God any such imperfection as a succession of motives implies.

Love, then, is a cause of salvation. But if Jehovah be perfect and unchangeable, His love must be of the same nature. The more pure, the more unwavering, the more unalterable that love is, the nearer it approaches to perfection. To be fickle, to move from object to object, to be damped, discouraged, destroyed, alienated, or in any way impaired by external circumstances, takes from the purity of love. The fond wife that clings to her husband in spite of ill-treatment and neglect, that loves him in disgrace and ignominy, that wears his image on her heart, though he be transported as a felon, or hanged as a malefactor, commends herself to our admiration as a pattern of conjugal love. The tender mother who yearns after her profligate son, and waters her midnight pillow with tears of love towards him, though her heart is well-nigh broken by his licentious habits, we at once admire as an example of maternal affection. The strength, the unalterable nature, the purity, the disinterestedness of these two instances of human love go instinctively to our heart.

Now, shall we measure the purity and perfection of creature affection by a certain standard, and throw that rule aside when we measure divine love? If the love of God to the sons of men be fickle, changeable, dependent on circumstances, influenced by their conduct, alternately given and taken away. then we must say boldly that the love of God is imperfect; and if the love of God be imperfect, then is God Himself imperfect too. But if God loves those whom He loves, eternally, infinitely, perfectly, then must He love them unchangeably and unalterably. Does God, then, love all men? Did He love Esau, Pharoah, Saul, and Judas? He tells us Himself that "He hated Esau" **Mal 1:3**, and Paul declares that this hatred was "before the children were born, and before they had done any good or evil" **Ro 9:10-13**.

We must come, then, to this conclusion, that God loves some and hates others. But is there no moving cause in the individuals themselves? Are not some good and others bad, some obedient and others disobedient, some who deserve love and others who deserve hatred? If all men are equally fallen, equally vile, equally involved in condemnation and transgression, there can be in

them no original difference. If some are saved and others lost, some made eternally happy and others eternally miserable, we must look for the cause of this difference as existing somewhere else than in the persons themselves. And let us argue the matter as long as we will, if we once admit original sin and the Fall of man, we must still come to the same conclusion, that the difference made between the saved and the damned originates not in them, but in God; in a word, that He freely hates some and freely loves others.

But the existence of love can only be made known by actions. Love is a hidden principle in the bosom, as far as regards those **by** whom it is felt; but with respect to those **to** whom it is felt, it can only be manifested by some outward conduct. Thus love is the spring of salvation, as salvation is the fruit of love. The one is the cause, the other the effect; the one the inward motive, the other the outward action. But we measure love by the trials it will undergo, the sacrifices it will make, the sufferings that it will endure for the object of affection. By the same standard we measure the love of God towards the children of men. **Redemption**, therefore, is continually set forth in the Word as the test and proof of the love of Christ: "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it" **Eph 5:25**. "Who loved me," says Paul, "and gave Himself for me" **Ga 2:20**. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us" **1Jo 3:16**. If redemption, then, is the fruit of love, the effect of it, and the expression of it; if love is limited and particular, redemption will be limited and particular, too. The effect cannot be greater than the cause, nor the action than the motive.

## **WHAT IS IT THAT SAVES A SOUL? A COMPLETE ACT OF GOD**

But is redemption a **complete** act, a **finished** work? If it is the execution of an original plan, and executed, too, by incarnate Deity, it surely must be as perfect as its Author. But is that work perfect which is uncertain and contingent, which depends on the

fickle caprice and changeable will of a creature, and that, too, a fallen creature? Did the creation of the world depend on the co-operation of man? Can he cause a single blade of grass to grow, or make one hair black or white? Is the co-operation of man admitted into any one of the acts of God? If such a thing were possible, would not the admixture of the work of the creature stain and mar the whole?

### **WHAT IS IT THAT SAVES A SOUL? HOW MANY ARE REDEEMED?**

Universalism means all; if Christ does not save all, can His work be called a perfect work? If redemption be universal, and only a portion saved, is it to be called a perfect work? If redemption springs from love, if redemption is universal, love will be universal; but if any be lost, if any be in hell, for whom Christ died, their redemption was in vain, and all Christ's love to them was in vain. He paid their debt, and still their debt is due. He put away their sins, and still their sins remain. He loved them, had power to save them, did all that He could to deliver them from hell, came down upon earth for the express purpose of bearing their sins in His own body on the tree, rose from the dead for them, and ascended up into heaven as their High Priest and Advocate; and after all He cannot save them, after all this mighty, this infinite, immeasurable expenditure of love, sufferings, tears, groans, agony and blood, they perish in their sins, and are cast into hell.

Is Christ really and truly God? Has He all the attributes of Deity? Is He all-wise and all-powerful? Does He see the end from the beginning, and know all things, past, present, and to come? Did He know, when upon the cross, who would be saved and who would be lost? Then what a waste of love, what a useless expenditure of suffering, what a needless amount of agony, if the effect of all He then suffered hung upon the free-will of the creature, and millions were never to benefit by all that He then endured for them. But did Christ die for the sins of **all** mankind?

Then He bore the sins of the men of Sodom and Gomorrah; of the host of Pharaoh, that perished in the Red Sea; of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, whom the earth swallowed up; of the seven accursed nations of Canaan; and of all those who perished in the universal deluge. But all these had died in their sins. Was a chance given them in hell? Did Christ bear their sins on the cross, and afterwards go down into hell with offers of grace to the damned? Had free-will another opportunity, another day of grace, another season allowed it for the exercise of its mighty powers? Jude tells us that such as these "are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" **Jude 1:7**. Paul says that "they were destroyed of the destroyer" **1Co 10:10**. But if Christ died **for all**, He died for these, and if He died for these, there must have been some purpose, something to be done, some effect to arise from His bearing their sins. If He died not for them, then redemption is no longer universal.

We have found out millions for whom Christ did not die. A limit is at once set to the universality of the texts so often quoted in favour of universal redemption. If He **did** die for them, then they either receive some benefit from His death, or they do not. If they receive any benefit, then souls already in hell, who have died in their sins, and perished under the wrath of God, are saved. And if **some**, why not **all**?

The pains of hell will surely have taught them to use their free-will better than they did upon earth, and an hour's experience of the burning lake will have made them close in with the offers of grace. Christ would not knock so long in vain at the doors of their hearts as the Wesleyan ministers say He now does at the hearts of their hearers. If the damned, they tell us, had the same offers as we, how gladly would they embrace them. If Christ then died for them, hell has long ago been dispeopled of its ancient inhabitants. Cain, Pharaoh, Saul, Ahithophel, Doeg, Esau, and thousands of others, whom the Scripture represents as the enemies of God, are now in heaven, singing the praises of the Lamb. But if Christ did not die for all these, then redemption is

not universal; a limit has been set to it, and it is what we contend for—particular.

Thus we consider and believe from the Scriptures of truth that Christ "laid down His life for the sheep"; "was once offered to bear the sins of many"; "sanctified the people with His own blood"; "loved the church, and gave Himself for it"; and bare the sins of His elect family in His own body on the tree. As the names of the children of Israel were borne on the breast of the high priest **Ex 28:29**, so do we believe that Jesus bore on His heart the names of His elect when He hung upon the cross, and atoned by His blood for all their sins and transgressions. He paid their debt to the uttermost farthing, satisfied the most rigorous demands of eternal Justice, suffered in body and soul the full weight, measure and tale of the sins of His people, and left not a single sin of theirs unexpiated or unatoned for. Godhead gave dignity and merit to the sufferings of Manhood; and thus Immanuel, God with us, became the all-sufficient Saviour of all that were given to Him, loved by Him, and redeemed by Him.

## **WHAT IS IT THAT SAVES A SOUL? IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS**

The last branch of salvation as an outward act which we have space to consider is the imputed righteousness of the Son of God, which is unto all, and upon all them that believe. The law of God, being the transcript of His eternal justice, could no more be broken with impunity than that God would cease to be God. Unless, therefore, that law were perfectly obeyed, either by man, to whom it was given, or by a Surety who should stand in his place, that holy and just law must pour out its penalties and curses on the disobedient to all eternity. If this is true, then Christ was made under the law, and perfectly obeyed it, either for the whole of the human race, or for a part of it. If for the whole, then all men are justified, all men have obeyed the law through their Surety, all stand before God complete in Christ, without spot or blemish, or any such thing. The doors of heaven are opened

for all, and all the race of Adam shall sit down in the wedding garment at the marriage of the Lamb. But if this be not the truth, and though all have broken the law, only a **portion** be saved, then we must come to this conclusion, that only those are justified for whom Christ as a surety obeyed the law, and that it is Israel only who are justified in the Lord, and shall glory.

## **WHAT IS IT THAT SAVES A SOUL? SALVATION INWARDLY**

Thus far have we traced salvation as an **external** act, as something done for us, and done out of us. In these covenant engagements and transactions, we had no participation as living agents. They were planned and executed before we had any existence, except in the predestinating mind of Jehovah. As the tree pushes out its buds, which buds had an existence in the tree before they came into visible growth, so do the predestinating purposes of a Triune God bring us into being, that we may enjoy the benefit of all that was done for us, when we had no existence but in the mind of Jehovah.

And this leads us to speak of salvation as a work wrought **in us**, as a mighty act whereby that which was originally and always ours becomes a personal reality, an enjoyed possession, a received inheritance, as an heir is invested, when he arrives at age, with that property which was his own long before he was put into possession of it.

God is all-wise, and therefore takes no rash, precipitate steps. As the original plan of salvation was devised by infinite wisdom, so all the successive steps of the execution of that plan are directed by the same boundless wisdom also. "Wherein He hath abounded towards us," says Paul **Eph 1:8**, "in all wisdom and prudence." Thus, in His dealings with His people, God does not put them at once into possession of all the blessings which He has laid up for them. He has pardoned, for instance, their sins; but He does not immediately, when He calls them by His grace, put them into possession of this blessing. He has first to teach them their need

of it. He has to prepare their heart for the right reception of it. It is no common gift, and He has to teach them how to value it. They are saved from wrath and eternal misery, from His dreadful displeasure and ever-burning indignation against sin. They have need to be shown, and made deeply to feel, **from** what they are saved, as well as **to** what they are saved. And as the oak does not grow to its full stature in a day, but needs years of sunshine and storm, of beating winds and howling tempests, to give it strength and consistency, a deep and wide root, as well as a lofty and branching stem, so do God's children need months and years of trial and temptation, that they may push a deep root downwards, and shoot up healthy and vigorous upwards.

Thus, before the soul can know anything about salvation, it must learn deeply and experimentally the nature of sin, and of itself, as stained and polluted thereby. It is proud, and needs to be humbled; careless, and needs to be awakened; alive, and needs to be killed; full, and requires to be emptied; whole, and needs to be wounded; clothed, and requires to be stripped. It is, by nature, self-righteous and self-seeking; is buried deep in worldliness and carnality; is utterly blind and ignorant; is filled with presumption, arrogance, conceit and enmity, and hates all that is heavenly and spiritual. Sin, in all its various forms, is its natural element. Covetousness, lust, worldly pleasure, desire of the praise of men, an insatiable thirst after self-advancement, a complete self-abandonment to all that can please and gratify every new desire of the heart, an utter contempt and abhorrence of everything that restrains or defeats its mad pursuit of what it loves—these are some of the features of the unregenerate nature of man.

Education, moral restraints, or the force of habit, may restrain the outbreking of inward corruption, and dam back the mighty stream of indwelling sin, so that it shall not burst all its bounds, and desolate the land; but no moral check can alter human nature. A chained tiger is a tiger still. "The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots" **Jer 13:23**. To make man the direct contrary of what he originally is; to make him love



God instead of hating Him; fear, instead of mocking Him; obey, instead of rebelling against Him; and to tremble at His terrible majesty, instead of running upon the thick bosses of His buckler—to do this mighty work, and to effect this wonderful change, requires the implantation of a new nature by the immediate hand of God Himself. Natural light, natural love, natural faith, natural obedience, in a word, all natural religion, is here useless and ineffectual. To turn the stream does not alter the nature of the waters. Let the muddy brook be diverted from its southern course. and made to run north, it is a muddy brook still.

Thus the old nature may be restrained and modified, and directed into new and different channels, but it is old nature still. And this is the employment of hundreds who call themselves ministers of Christ and labourers in His vineyard, to use pick-axe and spade, and cut out various channels for the waters of old nature to run in; and when, by much toil and labour, they have drawn off a few streamlets into their narrow canals, they dignify their success with the names of "conversion," and "regeneration," and "a work of grace." Thus one cuts out a channel in the Sunday School, another digs a broad canal for the Bible Society, a third opens a new cut for decided piety, and a fourth excavates a wide channel for self-righteousness. under the name of Christian holiness. But after all their pains, and after all their success in leading the streams of nature to flow into these new channels, it is old nature still, as fallen, as ignorant, as blind, as carnal, as dead, as full of enmity against God, and as unable as ever to enter into the kingdom of heaven. To whitewash, to paint, to gild over, to clothe, to trick out, to put a gloss upon, in a word, to reform the outside of old nature, is the religion of the day.

Hundreds of churches and chapels are built, thousands of sermons are preached and millions of money are expended with the sole purpose of hewing out the rough block of nature into the shape, limbs and features of a man; and all this labour produces nothing but a statue, a dead image, a lifeless resemblance of vital godliness, which has a mouth, but speaks not' eyes, but sees not;

ears, but hears not; hands, but handles not; feet, but walks not; neither speaks through its throat. Churchman and Dissenter, Orthodox and Evangelical, Baptist, Independent and Methodist, all join hand in hand in the good work. "They help every one his neighbour, and every one says to his brother, Be of good courage. So the carpenter encourages the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smites the anvil, saying. It is ready for the sodering: and he fastens it with nails, that it should not be moved" **Isa 41:6,7**.

But reformation is not regeneration, neither is a change of life the same thing as a change of heart. There may be abundance of zeal, devotedness, consistency, studying of the Bible, private and family prayer, hearing of the gospel, religious conversation, attention to the ordinances of the New Testament, and a great show of outward piety and holiness, where there is not a spark of divine life in the soul. Man's religion is to build up the creature in good works, in piety, in hearing the word, in reading religious authors, in activity, in all the busy ferment and excitement of societies and schools. God's religion is to throw the creature down into the dust of self-abasement and self-abhorrence.

Man would teach religion as he teaches arithmetic or mathematics. This rule is to be learnt, this sum is to be done, this problem is to be understood, this difficulty is to be overcome, and thus progress is to be made. The fire is to be kindled, the bellows to be blown, the steam to be got up, the engine to be set to work, the prescribed task to be done. Religion, according to the received creed, is something which a man must be urged into. He must be made religious somehow or other. He must either be driven or drawn, wheedled or threatened, enticed or whipped into it, by human arguments or human persuasions. Religion is set before him as a river betwixt his soul and heaven. Into this river he is persuaded, invited, exhorted, entreated to jump. He must leap in, or be pushed in. His feelings are wrought upon, and he takes the prescribed spring. He becomes a professor. He hears, he reads, he prays, he supports the cause; he attends the Sunday School; he models his garb according to the regimentals

of the corps to which he belongs; he cashiers shirt collars, combs his hair smooth, and trims off his whiskers; he furnishes his head with the creed of the sect which he has joined, talks as it talks, believes as it believes, and acts as it acts. And all this is called "conversion" and "decided piety," when all this time there is not an atom of grace, a grain of spiritual faith, or a spark of divine life in the poor wretch's soul.

Now, God's way is very different from all this miserable system, so widely prevalent. He does not build up until He has first pulled down, nor save before He has made the soul to feel itself lost. He does not take the sticks and stubble of old nature to lay a foundation with, nor does He use slime instead of mortar to build up a rotten Babel. Man's way is to put a stick here, and place a stone there; to fill up this corner with a brick and the other corner with a tile; and in this progressive way to build a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven.

God's way is to come down and confound their language, to scatter every stick and every stone to the four winds of heaven, and not to leave one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down. He is a jealous God, and will have no partner in the way of salvation. He will not put the new wine into the old bottle, nor a new patch on the threadbare garment. Joshua's filthy garments **Zec 3:4** must be taken away from him before he is clothed with a change of raiment. Thus killing goes before making alive: poverty before riches; beggary and the dunghill before the inheritance of the throne of glory; the grave of buried hopes and the dust of self-aborrence before exaltation to a seat among princes **1Sa 2:6-8** . Sowing in tears precedes reaping in joy; ashes go before beauty, mourning before the oil of joy, and the spirit of heaviness before the garment of praise.

Salvation is not an outward thing. It stands not in the letter, but in the spirit; not in a sound creed, but in the enjoyment of it as a balm to a broken heart. Thus, in answering the great question, "What is it which saves a soul?" we must first premise that the very word "save" implies a previous state, for which, and from

which, it is a remedy, an escape, a deliverance. That salvation implies previous loss, ruin and misery, and that it is a deliverance from all these everybody admits. But it is not so readily admitted, or, if acknowledged in words, it is not put forward as a fundamental truth, that it is a **felt** loss, ruin and misery, from which salvation is an escape.

All who acknowledge the truth of the Bible admit in words the Fall of man, and that to be saved is to be delivered from the terrible consequence of that Fall. But that a man must deeply know and feel it; that he must have his soul weighed down and burdened by it; that the conviction of guilt, wrath and alarm must be wrought by a supernatural power into his experience; and that he must be ground down by the upper millstone of the law, and the nether millstone of a guilty conscience—these great and solemn truths are shunned, shirked and muffled by nearly all who profess to show the sinner the way to Zion. "Go to Christ; look to Jesus; devote yourself to the Lord; lead a consistent life; read this and that author; attend to known duties; be up and doing; join our society; become a member of our church; hear our minister; set up family prayer; send your children to the Sunday School; diligently cultivate holiness; hate all sin; watch against all evil tempers; exercise faith in the atonement"—these, and similar exhortations, are lavished in boundless profusion upon seeking sinners from thousands of modern pulpits. But the nature, the depth, the power, the feelings, the cutting convictions, the groaning cries, the tearful anguish, the gloomy prospects, the sinking despondency, the utter helplessness, the thick darkness, the wretched unbelief; in a word, all those inward transactions which are carried on in a seeking sinner are passed over by all the letter-ministers of the day. These things are taken for granted, and are either totally omitted or slightly alluded to.

**WHAT IS IT THAT SAVES A SOUL? WHAT WE ARE SAVED FROM**

But if we wish to know what it is that saves a soul, we must know what that state is **out of which** it is saved. If we have not the beginning, we cannot have the middle nor ending. But our modern professors and preachers never had a beginning to their religion. They were pious from childhood; or they had the advantage of religious parents; or they were brought up at the Sunday School; or they sat under a gospel minister; or a good book fell into their hands and made them pious; or they became serious, and impressed with the necessity of religion; or they married a religious wife, or husband, and so they became religious too. Such, and similar accounts, are daily given to the public in pious periodicals, related in conversation, or given in at church meetings, and implicitly received by universal charity as a true experience and as a genuine work of grace. But where is one to be found out of a thousand who can tell how the Lord began with him, and what were his feelings under His divine teachings; who can describe the path by which he has been led, the ups and downs which he has experienced, the changes through which he has passed, the vessels from which he has been successively emptied, and the conflicts in which he has been engaged?

Who, of a thousand professors, can speak feelingly of the wormwood and the gall of sin, the poisoned stings of guilt, the arrows of God in the conscience, the mire and filth of a desperately wicked heart, the strugglings, sinkings and wrestlings, the alternate hopes and fears, the beams of light and the shades of darkness, the short-lived confidence and the soon-returning despondency, and all the varied experience of an awakened soul? Self-loathing and self-aborrence in dust and ashes, gloomy forebodings of eternal punishment, cries unto God out of the pit of guilt, succeeded by fits of sullen silence, alternate repentance and hardness of heart, being now overcome by sin, and now mourning and sighing over his weakness against it—such exercises as these, how few speak of with that feeling, unction and power, which show that they have passed through them! Or, again, the heavy burden of sin, the daily weight of evil, the floods of infidelity and atheism, the torrents of filth, lust, and obscenity, the sudden rushings in of blasphemous thoughts,

dreadful imaginations, foul ideas, horrible cursings, and all the heavings up of the filthy bed of a sensual and devilish heart, what minister in a thousand carries any evidence in his preaching that such a track has been trodden by him?

But if salvation implies a previous state from which it is a deliverance, then I say that it is childish folly to talk of being saved if we know nothing experimentally of what we are saved from. If a man ask me, then. "What is it which saves a soul?" I answer, "Why do you ask that question? Before anything about salvation can be known, there is a previous lesson to be learnt. If you have not learnt this, you have nothing to do with the other. You might as well think of learning vulgar fractions without first learning to read. But what is your motive for wishing an answer to this question? To learn a few notions, to inform your judgment, to adopt a sound creed? If this be your motive, my business lies not with you. You have to go and first learn another lesson, and until you have been taught this, I can give your question no answer."

Salvation is a gift, the choicest and richest gift which the hands of a Triune God, whose name is Love, can bestow. It is a portion, an inheritance, an estate, a treasure, an eternal reality. The full possession, the entire enjoyment, the complete acquisition of this predestinated weight of glory, is indeed reserved until a future state; but the earnest, the first-fruits, the early ripe clusters, the first dew-drops of this eternal inheritance, are given to the elect whilst upon earth. The everlasting enjoyment of the presence and glory of Christ is often compared in Scripture to a wedding. Thus we read **Re 19:7** of "the Lamb's wife," and of "the marriage of the Lamb." So the Church is said to be "brought unto the King in raiment of needlework," as the bride in Eastern countries was brought by the father **Ge 29:23** to the bridegroom. But we read of "espousals" also, which always preceded the celebration of the marriage. "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine **espousals**" **Jer 2:2**. "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" **2Co 11:2**. So Joseph "was espoused to the virgin Mary, before they

came together" **Mt 1:18**; that is, before they became man and wife.

Now this espousal was a necessary prelude to marriage, though it was not the same thing. And, therefore, a betrothed virgin was punished as an adulteress by the Levitical law **De 22:24**, if she was unfaithful to her espoused husband. To be betrothed had the nature of marriage in it, though it was not the same thing as marriage. The parties did not live together, and were not put in possession of each other. Thus, it is in **this life** that the spiritual betrothment takes place, and the spiritual marriage in the life to come. "I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies; I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord" **Ho 2:19,20**.

### WHAT IS IT THAT SAVES A SOUL? **SALVATION—PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE**

Thus, if we look at salvation, we shall see that it consists of three parts—salvation past, salvation present, and salvation future. Salvation **past** consists in having our names written in the Lamb's book of life before the foundation of the world. Salvation **present** consists in the manifestation of Jesus to the soul, whereby He betroths it to Himself. And salvation **future** consists in the eternal enjoyment of Christ, when the elect shall sit down to the marriage supper of the Lamb, and be for ever with the Lord. Now, as none will ever enjoy salvation **future** who have no interest in salvation **past**—in other words, as none will ever be with Christ in eternal glory whose names were not written in the book of life from all eternity—so none will enjoy salvation **future** who live and die without enjoying salvation **present**. In other words, none will live for ever with Christ in glory who are not betrothed to Him in this life by the manifestations of Himself to their soul.

According to the Jewish custom, the man, at the time of betrothing, gave the bride a piece of silver before witnesses, saying to her, "Receive this piece of silver as a pledge that at such a time you shall become my spouse." And the parties then exchanged rings. This meeting of the espoused parties together, who then saw each other for the first time, is a sweet type of the first meeting of the soul with Jesus. The damsel had heard of the youth, but till then had never seen him, as seeking souls hear of Jesus by the hearing of the ear before their eyes see Him. The veil was upon her face **Ge 24:65**, as the veil is upon the heart **2Co 3:15**, until Jesus rends it in twain from the top to the bottom.

The bridegroom gave his betrothed a piece of silver as a pledge that all he had was hers. And thus Christ gives to the soul, whom He betroths to Himself by His own manifestations, a pledge, a token, a testimony, which in itself is the first-fruits and assurance of eternal glory. The parties exchanged rings as pledges of mutual affection and eternal faithfulness. And thus, when Christ reveals Himself to the soul in His dying love, mutual engagements, mutual promises, mutual assurances and pledges of faithfulness and love pass between the soul and Him. "One shall say, I am the Lord's, and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob, and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord" **Isa 44:5**. At these seasons, "in the day of the King's espousals" **So 3:11**, the language of the soul is, "I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste; He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love" **So 2:3,4**.

All doctrines, notions, forms, creeds, ordinances and ceremonies short of this manifested salvation are as the dust in the balance, and as the driven stubble before the wind. What, for instance, is election, except it be revealed to my soul that I was elected before the foundation of the world? What is redemption to me, except the atoning blood of the Lamb be sprinkled on my conscience? What is the everlasting love of a Triune Jehovah, unless that eternal love be shed abroad in my heart by the Holy



Ghost? What is the final perseverance of the saints, unless there is a blessed enjoyment of it in the conscience as a personal reality? To see these things revealed in the Bible is nothing. To hear them preached by one of God's ministers is nothing. To receive the truth of these into our judgment and to yield to them an unwavering assent is nothing. Thousands have done all this who are blaspheming God in hell. But to have eternal election, personal redemption, imputed righteousness, unfailing love, and all the other blessed links of the golden chain let down into the soul from the throne of God; to have the beauty, glory and blessedness of salvation in all its branches—past, present, and to come—revealed to the heart and sealed upon the conscience, this is all in all.

And thus all doubts and fears, all convictions of sin, all cutting discoveries of inward vileness, all terrible views of God in the light of a broken law, all groans, sighs and tears, all heart-sinkings, and dismal forebodings of death and judgment that do not lead up to, and terminate in, a revealed salvation and a manifested Jesus before a man closes his eyes in death, have no more to do with religion than the clanking of a madman's chains or the howling frenzy of a maniac. A man's soul must be damned or saved. And as far as inward religion is concerned, a man must have salvation as an internal reality, as a known, enjoyed, tasted, felt and handled possession, or he will never enter the kingdom of heaven. He may be Churchman or Dissenter, Calvinist or Arminian, Baptist or Independent, anything or everything, and yet all his profession is no more towards his salvation than the cut of his clothes, the height of his stature, or the colour of his complexion.

Everything of an outward nature, nay, truth itself, is a bed too short and a covering too narrow. And thus all a man's consistency of life, soundness of creed, walking in the ordinances, long and steady profession, and everything on which thousands are resting for salvation, of a merely external nature, can no more put away sin, satisfy the justice of God, and give the soul a title for heaven,

than the oath of a common swearer, or the lewd conversation of a harlot.

## **WHAT IS IT THAT SAVES A SOUL? WHAT IT IS NOT**

If, then, we be asked what it is which saves a soul, we answer that it is not works of righteousness which we have done or can do; nor the use of our free-will, which is only free to choose and love evil; nor closing in with offered grace, to do which we have no natural power; nor watchfulness, prayer and fasting; nor self-denial, austerity and outward sanctification; nor any duties and forms; nor, in a word, any one thing singly, or multitude of things collectively, which depend on the natural wisdom and strength of man. Nor, again, is it head-knowledge, nor firm conviction of truth in the judgment, nor such workings of natural conscience as compel us to assent to a free grace salvation, nor a life outwardly consistent with the gospel, nor membership in a gospel church, nor natural attachment to the children and to the ministers of God, nor zeal for experimental religion, nor sacrifices made to support truth. Nor, again, does salvation consist in doubts and fears, tribulations, temptations, workings of inward corruption, legal terrors, fits of gloomy despondency and heart-rending despair.

All these things "accompany salvation," and are to be found in all the heirs of glory; but some of them or all may equally be found in hypocrites, apostates and reprobates. Nor, again, does salvation consist in **desires**, for "the sluggard desireth, and hath not"; nor in **tears**, for "Esau cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry" **Ge 27:34**; nor in merely **seeking**, for "many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able" **Lu 13:24**; nor in **wishing**, for "it is not of him that willeth"; nor in **running**, for "it is not of him that runneth," and though "in a race run all, one alone receiveth the prize." Neither does salvation consist in outward gifts, as preaching and praying, as a man may "taste of the heavenly gift," and yet "his end be to be burned" **Heb 6:4,8**;

whilst Saul prophesied, Judas preached, and the sons of Sceva adjured devils by the name of Jesus.

Nor does it consist in **natural faith**, as "Simon Magus believed, and was baptised" **Ac 8:13**; nor in **natural hope**, as there is "the hope of the hypocrite that shall perish"; nor in **natural comforts**, as there is "a walking in sparks of our own kindling"; nor in **vain confidence**, as "the fool rageth, and is confident" **Pr 14:16**; nor in **talking about religion**, for "a prating fool shall fall"; nor in **being thought well of by others**, as Paul once thought well of Demas **Phm 1:24**, "who loved this present world" **2Ti 4:10**; nor in **the children of God feeling a union with us**, as David "took sweet counsel with Ahithophel, and walked to the house of God in his company" **Ps 55:14**.

To sum up the whole, salvation does not consist in anything of the **flesh**, that is, "in anything earthly, human and natural," as "the flesh profiteth nothing" **Joh 6:63**; neither "they which are the **children of the flesh** are the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for the seed" **Ro 9:8**. Thus, no man can deliver his own soul, nor give to God a ransom for himself, or his brother **Ps 49:7**; but all "flesh is grass," fit only to be cut down by the mower, and to be cast into the oven **Mt 6:30**.

We come, then, to this conclusion, to which God sooner or later brings every elect soul, that those who are saved are saved, because God **will save them**; that "He hath mercy on whom He will have mercy," and on them alone **Ro 9:15**; that He saves them not from any foreseen goodness in them, but of His own distinguishing, sovereign grace; that He loves them freely, eternally and unchangeably; and that they are redeemed, justified, quickened, sanctified, preserved, and glorified, only because they are the objects of the undeserved love of a Triune Jehovah.

**WHAT IS IT THAT SAVES A SOUL? SALVATION OUTWARDLY AND INWARDLY**

Here, then, is the answer to the question. "What is it which saves a soul?"

1. Having an interest in the electing choice of God the Father, in the redeeming blood and justifying righteousness of God the Son, and in the quickening, sanctifying operations of God the Holy Ghost. That is the inheritance sealed to the elect as eternally theirs, by "a covenant ordered in all things and sure." This is salvation **outwardly**, and he that has neither part nor lot in this salvation will perish in his sins under the tremendous wrath of a just and holy God.

But there is,

2. the salvation **inwardly** which consists in the manifestation of Jesus to the soul, whereby electing love, atoning blood, justifying righteousness, and an eternal inheritance beyond the skies are sealed home upon the soul, and made personal, individual realities. To this inward enjoyment of salvation all the children of God are predestinated, and none of them die without a greater or less share of it. Some of them, indeed, are now being plunged into the terror of the law, others doubting and fearing, others cutting themselves off as hypocrites, others groaning beneath the weight of sin, others overcome by the power of their lusts, others harassed by the devil, others fainting by reason of the way, and all engaged in a terrible conflict with the old man of sin.

Some, again, are cut to the heart on account of their backslidings, others abhorring themselves in dust and ashes, others buffeted with the sorest temptations, others filled with rebellion and fretfulness, others entangled in Satan's snares, and others sitting in stubborn silence, or well-nigh swallowed up with despondency. Some have never found their Saviour, and others have lost Him; some have never felt pardon and deliverance, and others have been "again entangled in the yoke of bondage"; some are shut up, and others cannot come forth; some are hoping against hope, and others doubting against evidences; some are "plagued all the day long, and chastened every

morning"; and others are fearing they are bastards, because "the rod of God is not upon them."

But as all the family of God have a common interest in the salvation that is **external**, so do they all agree in this point with respect to the salvation that is **internal**, that it must be a **supernatural** religion, a manifested Saviour, a revealed righteousness, a sprinkled conscience, a sealed pardon, a shed-abroad love, an enjoyed redemption, that alone will satisfy or save. And thus all their strippings, emptyings, chastisements, temptations, conflicts, sorrows, sighs, groans, and tears; all their doubts, fears, terrors, quakings, gloom and despondency; all their views of the justice of God in a holy law; all their ups and downs, changes, vicissitudes, guilt, condemnation, and bitter feelings of anguish on account of sin; in a word, all their experience of the depths of a desperately wicked heart—all, all serve in the hands of the blessed Spirit to bring them to this point, that salvation is in the blood and righteousness of Christ alone, and that this salvation must be revealed to them, and in them, to deliver them from the flames of hell.

## **WHAT IS IT THAT SAVES A SOUL? ONLY TRUE SOURCE OF FRUIT**

"But," say the Arminians, "if salvation be such as is here described, what becomes of the interests of morality, what provision is made for good works, what security is there for holiness of life? Will not a belief of his election make a man presumptuous, a confidence in his final perseverance render him careless, and a persuasion that he cannot sin himself out of the covenant lead him to licentiousness?" To this we answer: "Yes; such will be, and are the fruits and effects of the doctrines of grace, when they are not wrought by the hand of God in the soul; but are learnt, as hundreds learn them, in the understanding and judgment only." But this effect does not prove the doctrines to be untrue, but is rather a fulfilment of the Word of God.

"Let their table," that is, the doctrines spread before them on which they profess to feed, "become a snare, and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap" **Ps 69:22**. We read of "spots" in the primitive believers' "feasts of charity, **feeding themselves without fear.**" These drank into the doctrine of election, etc., unmixed with holy awe, unattended with a trembling at God's word, and a spiritual reverence of His terrible majesty. Now, these characters are said "to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, and to deny," that is, by wicked works, "the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ" **Jude 1:4, Jude 1:12**.

But because ungodly men pervert the right ways of the Lord, and abuse truth to their own destruction, does it follow that the same effects follow the same doctrines where they are spiritually taught and spiritually received? The rays of the sun draw up ague and fever from the pestilential marsh, and turn a dead carcass into carrion. But is the sun less pure, are his beams less bright, are his rays less cheering, is his genial warmth less fostering to every herb, fruit and flower, because he draws putrefaction out of what is in **itself** putrid, and corruption out of what is in itself corrupt? And thus, because the doctrines of grace received into a corrupt heart serve only to draw forth its natural corruption, it does not follow that it is so where the word of life is received "into an honest and good heart" **Lu 8:15**; that is, a heart made honest by the shining in of heavenly light, and made good or like unto God **Mt 19:17** by the impress of His divine image. In this prepared soil the doctrines of grace take deep root, and being watered from time to time by the dews and rains of the blessed Spirit, bring forth fruit abundantly.

## **WHAT IS IT THAT SAVES A SOUL? INWARD AND OUTWARD FRUITS**

Thus they bring forth: 1. **Inward fruit.** Of these the first is **conversion**, which consists in a change of heart, a change of affections, a change of feelings, a turning from formality to

spirituality; from free-will to free-grace, from self-righteousness to self-abhorrence, from hypocrisy to honesty, from self-justification to self-condemnation, from profession to power.

The second is **godly fear**, which realises God's heart-searching presence, trembles at His frown, dreads His displeasure, is afraid of His judgments, feels His chastening hand, and seeks above all things His favour and the light of His countenance.

The third is **humility**, which springs from a knowledge of God and a knowledge of one's self, and consists in a spiritual acquaintance with the deceit and wickedness of the heart, in esteeming others better than ourselves, in feeling how little grace and real religion we possess, in confessions to God and man of our vileness, in sitting at Jesus' feet to be taught by Him, in taking the lowest room amongst the children of God, in being a babe in helplessness, weakness, foolishness and nothingness.

A fourth inward fruit is **godly sorrow**, which springs from a view of a suffering Saviour, and manifests itself by hatred of self, abhorrence of sin, groaning over our backslidings, grief of soul for being so often entangled by our lusts and passions, and is accompanied by softness, meltings of heart, flowings of love to the Redeemer and of indignation against ourselves, and earnest desires never to sin more.

A fifth fruit is hope, which springs up out of despair, and is raised up in the soul by a spiritual discovery of the compassion, the mercy, the forbearance, the lovingkindness, and the pity of the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. This opens the heart in prayer, melts down its sullen obstinacy, enlarges its narrow, selfish, jealous, contracted views of God, holds it fast as a sure and steadfast anchor amidst storms and tempests, and encourages it to wait at mercy's door till full deliverance comes.

A sixth fruit is **love**, which consists in love to **God**, on account of His tender mercies, loving-kindness and forbearance in the midst of, and in spite of, all our crookedness, obstinacy,

perverseness and dreadful wickedness: in love to **Christ** as a Saviour, so suitable to our miserable condition as filthy, polluted, justly damned wretches; in love to the exercised, harassed, and tempted **children of God**, as fellow-sufferers and fellow-heirs; in love to the **ministers of Christ**, as messengers with a message to our guilty souls, as interpreters of our experience, as stewards of heavenly mysteries and discoverers of the secrets of our hearts **1Cor 14:25**; in love to the **truth** of God, which makes us free; to the **word** of God, which has entered our hearts; and to the **promises** of God, which have from time to time encouraged us. These are only a few of the inward fruits which the doctrines of grace, spiritually received into the soul, invariably produce.

But besides these there are, secondly, **outward** fruits. Such are: separation from a profane world and separation from a professing world; honesty and boldness in the cause of truth; liberality to the poor and needy of God's family: general consistency of life and conversation, abhorrence of all the tricks of trade, lies of business, and frauds of commerce; hatred of flattery, given or received: in a word. a life agreeable to the precepts and ordinances of the gospel.

Such are the fruits, **inward** and **outward**, which are produced by the doctrines of grace when applied to the soul by the blessed Spirit. God being the only fountain of life, grace and fruitfulness, the soul that is brought into His blessed presence, to walk with Him, to have communion with Him, and to enjoy access unto Him, derives, for the time, from this holy nearness, faint marks of resemblance unto Him.

And thus, eternal election revealed to the soul, personal redemption applied to the heart, imputed righteousness sealed upon the conscience, and never-failing faithfulness manifested within, so far from leading to licentiousness, are the only truths which will produce real fruit. And, on the contrary, all self-denial, outward sanctification, mortification of the flesh, long prayers, and all the good works of the Arminian catalogue, are nothing but



counterfeits and imitations of the fruits of the Spirit, and will therefore leave their deluded owners to the just vengeance of Him who is a consuming fire.

## **What is Truth? or Truth in its Purity and Truth in its Power**

Preached at Woodbridge Chapel, Clerkenwell, London, on Lord's Day Morning, May 14, 1865

"What is truth?" John 18:38

Before I proceed to speak from my text, or unfold the mysteries of divine truth which in connection with it have been suggested to my mind, I wish briefly to mention the reason why I have been induced to take it this morning. After I had engaged myself to preach here, which I certainly should not have done but for the personal and pressing solicitations of two of your deacons, and the peculiar emergency of the case—the severe and continued illness of your esteemed minister, I was considerably exercised in my mind about the engagement which I had thus made. This exercise of mind arose chiefly from two sources. The first was the sudden and unexpected change in the weather from great heat to much cold and wet, raising a fear in my mind lest, in my present delicate state of health, I might take a severe cold, and lay myself up just on the very eve of my engagement to preach at Gower-street. The second was that I was a stranger to the minister, the place, and the people, and they almost as much so to me, though I wish to add that your pastor was well known to me by report as a man sound in truth, and of a consistent, godly life. With these exercises upon my mind I retired to rest. I fell asleep, and towards the morning I dreamed a dream. Now generally I pay very little heed to dreams, as believing that for the most part they are but the loose, unchecked wanderings of our mind when our senses are locked up in sleep, or, as the wise man speaks, they come "through the multitude of business" (Eccl. 5:3); that is, are as if the reflex images of the multitude of our daily occupations flitting confusedly through our brain. But in this dream, though it was doubtless in some way connected with the exercises of my mind, there seemed to be something peculiar. I seemed in it to be sitting in this pulpit, just as I now am, and the

chapel and congregation, though I never was here before, appeared not very unlike what I now see before me. As then in my dream I was sitting in this pulpit, a hymn was given out and sung, the words of which have escaped my memory, but there was in them a striking and peculiar setting forth of the truths of the gospel. The subject of the hymn at once arrested my attention, and it seemed to be immediately suggested to my mind to preach from the words, "What is truth?" As it was not the text from which I had intended to speak, I took the Bible from the cushion to find the place, but could not do so; some confusion thence arising in my mind, soon after I awoke. Whether my dream came from God I could not tell then, and I cannot tell now. I must leave that point therefore undecided; but as the words thus came to my mind in connection with my preaching in this pulpit, and as on my waking thoughts the subject seemed suitable to the people, the place, and the occasion, I at once decided to speak from them. Thus much for the history of my text, and an explanation of the reason which has induced me to take it this morning.

It is now about twenty-eight years ago since I first spoke from it, for the place, time, and circumstances are fixed indelibly in my memory. In the spring of 1837, I assisted at the opening of a little chapel of truth at Calve, Wilts., and taking the words for my text, was I believe specially helped to preach from it the word of life; for not only did much power seem to attend the testimony from my lips, but as a special instance of that power, I may name that the sermon was signally blessed to a young woman in distress of soul for her comfort and deliverance, who some little time afterwards died of consumption and made a most happy end. Now if the Lord should be but pleased to bless my sermon this morning from the same text as signally as he blessed it then, I shall think there was something in my dream more than a "multitude of business," and in my discourse from it something more than a multitude of words.

It runs, you will observe, in the form of a personal question, that is, a question asked by one person of another. A question,

therefore, of this kind implies two persons: the person who asks the question, and the person of whom the question is asked. Who then was the person who asked this important question, "What is truth?" Was he a good man? No. Was he a bad man? Why, if he was not a good man, he must have been a bad man; and yet was he not the worst of men: at least, he was surrounded with, and hard pressed by worse men than he, for I think you will admit that to sin wilfully is a greater sin than to sin ignorantly, and that the greater the privileges the greater the crime of trampling them under foot. The man, then, who asked the question if not the worst of men, was but a poor, weak, vacillating creature, ground down between fear of his master Tiberius, a very monster of tyranny, cruelty, and cunning, and of the Jews by whom he was surrounded, and that not merely the wayward, impetuous mob, but their leaders, the chief priests and elders, and all the council, who were thirsting after the blood of Jesus. Now God was determined that his dear Son should be pronounced innocent of all charges by the very man in whose hands the administration of the law at that time lay. We read, therefore, that Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, "took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it." (Matt. 27:24.) Thus the very verdict of his own conscience was for saving Jesus, as an innocent man, from a malefactor's death by crucifixion, if he could have done so without risking his own popularity and life. But the purposes of God must stand and the Scriptures be fulfilled. I need not tell you, then, that it was this very Pontius Pilate who asked the question, "What is truth?" And I need not tell you who it was of whom he asked it. Of no one less than the Son of God who stood before his tribunal, that he might, according to the purposes of God, bear our sins in his own body on the tree. And yet though he asked the question, he had no care or desire to hear the answer. It seems to have come out of his mouth in a sort of careless way, as if suggested to his mind by the Lord's words, "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." They fell upon his mind as something strange and new, and he therefore hastily asked, with a kind of careless infidelity, "What is truth?" Yet he seems to have been struck either with the majesty or the

innocence of the speaker, for we read, "And when he had said this he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all."

But you may say, perhaps, "What! are you going this morning to preach from the words of a bad man?" No, I am not going to preach from the words of a bad man. I am going to give an answer to a question put by a bad man. Is not that scriptural? Is not that legitimate? Had the Lord never a question put to him by a bad man? And did he never answer that question when so put? Did not bad men, men whom the Lord himself called "hypocrites," ask him on one occasion, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar?" And did not our Lord give a gracious and wise reply, "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's?" (Matt. 22:21.) And was he not asked on the same day by the infidel Sadducees whose wife the woman would be in the resurrection of the seven husbands who successively had had her? (Matt. 22:28.) And did not he give them also a wise and gracious answer? May not I, then, in a similar way, and following his example, take for my text the question of a bad man, "What is truth?" and if I can give a right answer to the question, shall you find fault because my text came from unclean lips? If I do not rightly and scripturally answer it, I will give you full liberty to find fault with my answer, but do not blame me for taking the question as my text.

The question is "What is truth?" In answering that question, I shall so shape my answer as to bring truth before you under these three points of view:—

I.—*First*, Truth in its *purity*.

II.—*Secondly*, Truth in its *power*.

III.—*Thirdly*, Truth in its *products*, by which I mean its *fruits* and *effects*.

I.—We live in a lying world. Nor is the reason far to seek. Satan is

its god and prince; and as "he abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44), the present world, being by the permission of God under his lordship and dominion, bears the impress which he has stamped upon it, and whereby he has made it a world of deception and falsehood. We ourselves went astray as soon as we were born, speaking lies. In lies we grew up; in lies we lived; and but for his grace, I speak now to those in whose heart God has wrought by his Spirit, in lies we should have died, either as professors or profane; for there are thousands of both who live and die with a lie in their right hand. Living then in a world of lies, where there is little else to be heard or seen, known or loved but false words and false deeds, false doctrines and false professions; living surrounded by an atmosphere of falsehood, if there be any truth in the world, or any truth in our heart, lips, or lives, that truth must come from God, for he is the God of truth, as Satan is the father of lies.

But to come back to the question which I have undertaken to answer, "What is truth?" When Pilate asked that question of him who was the Truth itself, he had a reference, as I have already explained, to the Lord's preceding words: "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." The Lord's own words, therefore, afford the only true key to the question, and give a clue to the right answer. By "truth" the Lord meant beyond all doubt divine truth, heavenly truth, religious truth—not natural, or scientific, or even moral truth, though the last would be included, but the special truth which he came from heaven to teach, reveal, and exemplify by his life, death, and resurrection. Now in this sense ask yourself, *What* is truth? Can you define it in your own mind? Have you ever thought what truth is? Have you any distinct idea, which you can express in a few words, of its peculiar nature, its distinguishing features, or its essential character? Perhaps not; for few persons really think or examine any subject for themselves, even in these important matters. Let me then define it for you. According to my view of it, Truth, that is, divine truth, is a gracious revelation given by God himself of his character, of his mind, and of his will. This is as short and as clear a definition

as I can give.

But *where* has God been pleased to give it? For he has given it that we may know, believe, and enjoy it. He has lodged it in three sacred depositories. He has lodged it primarily in the *Person* of his dear Son, who is the truth itself. (John 14:6.) He has lodged it, secondly, in the pages of his *holy word*, which is called "the Scripture of truth." (Daniel 10:21.) And he has lodged it, thirdly, in the *hearts* of his believing people, whom he sanctifies by his truth. (John 17:17.) These, then, are the three depositories of divine truth; so that out of the Son of God, out of the Scriptures, and out of the hearts of God's people, there is no divine truth to be known, believed, or enjoyed. God would not let this world be given up wholly to the dominion of Satan. He was determined from all eternity, that there should be a revelation of his character, mind, and will to a people whom he chose out of the world for the express purpose that he should be glorified in them; and to place this revelation secure above all the storms of time and all the assaults of hell, to lay it up in those three sacred depositories which I have just named to you.

i. Now this brings us to Truth in its *purity*, which was the first point that I proposed to consider. I want truth in its purity. If I go to fill my glass at a fountain, I want pure water. I do not want water mixed with sewage. The purer and cleaner the water the better. The Lord said to the woman of Samaria, "If thou knewest the gift of God and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." This is the water I want—"living water"—the Lord's own gift, and in me too, as he said in the same blessed discourse, "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14.) Of this living water, of its source and nature, we have a beautiful description in the last chapter of Revelation, where John saw "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." I do not mean to say that this river in its primary signification represents truth, for it rather

represents divine life and love—the life of God and the love of God, but we may take it as an emblem of truth in its purity. For as the river of water of life proceeded out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, it may so far exemplify truth as stored up and flowing out of the Person of Christ.

But let us look at this point, Truth in its *purity*, a little more in detail. There are certain grand foundation truths of our most holy faith, without holding which we cannot hold truth in its purity. Upon two or three of these points I shall briefly touch that I may answer the question, "What is truth?" in harmony with the oracles of God.

1. I commence, therefore, with *the Trinity*, that grand and glorious fundamental truth of three Persons in one God: a Unity of the divine Essence in a Trinity of three distinct Persons. This is a grand, cardinal, foundation truth, manifested in Christ as "the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his Person," (Heb. 1:3,) revealed in the Scriptures, and more fully in those of the New Testament, and made known to believing hearts by the teaching and testimony of the Holy Ghost. Upon this grand foundation truth the whole revelation of the character, mind, and will of God is based, and therefore every branch of divine truth stands fully and firmly in connection with it. He therefore that is unsound here is unsound everywhere, be it in doctrine, experience, or practice; and as no one can know the mysteries of the kingdom of God unless they are revealed to him from heaven, as the Lord told Peter (Matt. 16:17) and the rest of his disciples (Matt. 11:25; 13:11), we may boldly say that if a man know not the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost by some discovery of these three Persons in the glorious Godhead to his soul, he cannot be said to have a vital acquaintance with any one branch of gospel truth in its purity, or with any one mystery of the kingdom of heaven in its power.

2. *The Person of the Son of God*—by which I mean his complex Person, uniting essential Deity with a pure, holy, and sacred humanity, having two natures, yet being but one Person—is



another foundation truth of our most holy faith, a cardinal branch of truth in its purity. His essential Deity is so closely and intimately connected with that vital, fundamental doctrine of his eternal Sonship, without which, in my judgment, the Trinity itself cannot be rightly or scripturally maintained, that, not wishing to speak controversially, I unite them for the present together as one. When, therefore, I now speak of the Person of Christ, I mean not so much his divine Person, as the Son of God from all eternity, as his complex Person, as the great and glorious God-Man, Immanuel, God with us. In his Person thus constituted as all truth was by the Father eternally lodged, so in him as manifested all truth necessarily centres, and from him as revealed all truth essentially flows. Truth therefore in its purity embraces all the covenant offices and gracious relationships of our most blessed Lord—everything in fact that Christ is in himself, and everything that he is to the Church of God. It embraces him therefore in his incarnation, as taking into union with his own divine Person in the womb of the virgin the flesh and blood of the children. It embraces him in all his course though life, from the manger at Bethlehem to the cross at Calvary, throughout which he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, with all that obedience which he rendered to God's law, and whereby he wrought out a perfect righteousness in which the Church of God might stand for ever justified. It embraces and comprehends his dolorous sufferings in the garden, when the weight of sin imputed to him and the hiding of God's face forced from his surcharged brow that terrible sweat which fell in great drops (or, as the word means literally, "clots") of blood. It comprehends and embraces more especially that sacrifice and blood-shedding for sin which he accomplished upon the cross, when he offered up his sacred humanity upon the altar of his essential Deity, and thus as the Holy Ghost testifies, "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," and "by one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified." (Heb. 9:26;10:14.) It therefore embraces that sacred and solemn giving up of the ghost, or the voluntary yielding up of his life, which he had taken for that very purpose, whereby he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, and which was an integral part of his sacrifice; for the death of the victim was

needful that the sacrifice might be completed. It embraces his lying in the sepulchre, where he was entombed, not only that he might fulfil the Scriptures and especially the type of Jonah, but that he might perfume the grave for us; that we might not only die with him mystically in soul, and thus know what it is experimentally to be buried with him in death spiritually by vital union, but die also with him in body, and be thus buried with him literally and corporeally in the bowels of the earth. It embraces and comprehends his glorious resurrection from the tomb, when he was declared to be the Son of God with power, God setting his own attesting stamp upon his meritorious sacrifice, bloodshedding, and death by raising him from the dead. It embraces and comprehends his ascension up on high, in the sight of his disciples, when a cloud received him out of their sight. It follows him up as they did in heart and affection into the courts of God, and embraces him where he now is, as the great High Priest over the house of God, the Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. Thus truth in its purity, as stored in the Person of Christ, embraces all those sacred transactions which were carried on in the days of his flesh by the Son of God, and are now being carried on upon our behalf by him in the very courts of heaven. It embraces, therefore, and comprehends also all that the risen Son of God is to his Church now. It embraces his *priesthood*, for he is now a priest, as the Holy Ghost declares: "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a ministry of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." (Heb. 8:1, 2.) Observe the words, "we *have* such a high priest," that is, have now. And you will bear in mind that this is one part of the peculiar blessedness of the priesthood of the Lord Jesus that he is executing it *now*, even now, for us who are still here below. The high priest under the Law, you will recollect, performed two special offices for the people. First, he offered the sacrifices, and particularly on the solemn day of atonement, when he killed the goat of the sin offering outside the veil. But secondly, he offered intercession for the people when he took the blood within the veil and sprinkled it upon and before the mercy seat. Christ, as the

great anti-type of the high priest under the law, executed one part of his priesthood here below when he offered himself as a sacrifice for sin; but the other part of his priesthood he is executing now, having gone himself within the veil, and, by the virtue and efficacy of his blood once shed upon earth, there ever liveth to make intercession for us. It embraces him also as our *prophet*—our prophet for the present, as well as for the past and the future: for our Lord's teaching as a prophet not only embraces the days of his flesh and his gracious words as preserved in the New Testament, but his present teaching when, as our ever-living prophet, he still communicates to us from time to time sweet instruction, by opening our understanding to understand the Scriptures, and especially by sending the Spirit down into our hearts to testify of himself, to reveal himself to our souls, and to make himself near, dear, and exceedingly precious. It embraces also his *kingly* office, whereby he sits enthroned as Sovereign Lord in the courts of heaven; for "all power is given unto him in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18), and "he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet." (1 Cor. 15:25.) Truth, therefore, in its purity embraces his kingly sceptre, which he sways from time to time over believing hearts, and his sovereign rule and dominion which he exercises over the Church and the world—over all men, all things, and all circumstances. It looks also into the future, for it embraces his second coming, when he will "appear the second time without sin unto salvation," and "shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." (Heb. 9:28; 2 Thess. 1:10.)

Thus I have endeavoured to show you briefly, yet summarily, how Truth in its *purity* is stored up in the glorious Person of Christ, and therefore embraces all that he has been, all that he now is, and all that he ever will be to the Church of God. But how little is he known, believed in, resorted unto, and lived upon as the truth, the living, incarnate Truth—not truth as a thing, a doctrine, a creed, but truth as a Person; and O, what a Person! none less than the Son of God, and as such containing in himself all truth as the sun contains in itself all light and heat, and is ever giving them out of its inexhaustible fulness as the very nature

and character of its existence. O how few so know, believe, and feel this, as to live daily unto and upon him, and thus be continually receiving grace out of his fulness, so as to drink truth from the Fountain head in all its divine purity, sweetness, and blessedness. And yet how tenderly he invites us to come to him and drink. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, if any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." (John 7:37.) And again, "Whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely." (Rev. 22:17.) Even to the poor woman of Samaria, he could say, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink: thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." (John 4:10.) Encouraged by these invitations, may we leave those earthly streams which men have fouled with their feet (Ezekiel 34:19), and by prayer and supplication, with continual reading of the Scriptures and secret meditation, may we ever seek to drink into truth in all its original purity as stored up in the glorious Person of the Son of God.

3. But if Truth in its purity centres in the Person of Christ, it must be in perfect harmony with all that *grace* which is eternally in him, and which he came to reveal to us; for "the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." It was therefore in him that this grace was manifested to believing eyes and hearts, according to that testimony: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14.) Truth therefore in its purity embraces all the doctrines, or as I prefer to call them, the truths of grace. It thus comprises *election*, for the remnant who are saved are chosen according to "the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5); special *redemption* also, for "in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7); *Justification* also, for "we are justified freely by his grace" (Rom. 3:24), and to sum up the whole, the fulness and *fixedness* of salvation, or certainty of *perseverance* unto the end, for "by grace we are saved." (Eph. 2:5.)

ii. But I stated that Truth in its purity was lodged and stored not only in the Person of Christ, but in the *Scriptures* which have been given to us by the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, as a gracious revelation of the character, mind, and will of God, which I gave as a simple definition of truth. It is indeed primarily in Christ that this character, mind, and will of God are revealed to us; for he is not only "the brightness of the Father's glory," but "the express image of his Person," where the word translated, "express image" is literally "character," or stamped impression. In him, too, is the mind of God seen, for he has made known to us the thoughts of God's heart, and the will of God also, for he came to do it and reveal it to us. But that this revelation of the character, mind and will of God should be preserved safely for all ages, and be made known to each successive generation of believers, it has pleased the God of all wisdom and grace to write it down for their instruction. O how blessed it is to have the word of God—the inspired Scriptures, free from all intermixture of error, as a special, infallible revelation, that in them truth may shine forth in all its purity, and that we may daily read and search them, understand their meaning by divine teaching, and drink into their spirit by a personal, experimental application of them to our heart.

II.—But this brings me to my second point, which was to lay before you Truth *in its power*.

i. You may receive all that I have said and much more; you may in a certain sense and to a certain extent believe it; you may stately and regularly hear it preached, and be fully satisfied with thus receiving, thus believing, and thus hearing it. But all this will not prove you to be a child of God. There is a "form of knowledge and of the truth," as the apostle speaks (Rom. 2:20), as well as a "form of godliness;" and a man may have a form of knowledge without vitally, savingly knowing the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, as he may have a "form of godliness," whilst he denies the power thereof. Many a man has the form of truth, its outside shape and body, in his judgment, in his brain, who never felt the power of truth, as a real, vital substance in his

heart. It is therefore not sufficient for me, in answering the question, What is truth? merely to unfold truth in its *purity*. I must unfold truth in its *power*, if I am to answer it as a servant of Christ, if I am to "study to show myself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth," or if I am in any way by it effectually to reach your consciences.

We thus come to what I intimated as the third depository of the truth of God in which he is pleased to lay up his truth, viz., the *hearts of his believing people*.

The Scriptures I pointed out as the second sacred depository of God's truth; for it is through the scriptures, the Holy Ghost enlightening our understanding to apprehend them, touching our conscience to feel them, quickening our hearts to believe them, that we come to know truth in its purity. In this day when the verbal inspiration of the Scripture is disputed or denied, and that not as formerly by avowed infidels only, but by men sitting in high places as leaders and teachers in Church and Dissent, it will be our wisdom and mercy to believe and cleave to what God has himself said of his own word. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." (Tim. 3:16, 17.) If "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God," it must be a verbal inspiration, that is, the very words in and by which divine truth is revealed must be as much inspired as the truths themselves. Truths which are certain must be expressed by words which are certain; or else you have certain truths and uncertain words; and if you can explain to me how certainty of truth can be conveyed by uncertainty of expression, you will be able to convince me that a stream of water can flow straight through a crooked pipe, and that clean water can come out of a dirty pipe. The testimony of God to his own word is, "Every word of God is pure" (Prov. 30:5.); "The words of the Lord are pure words." (Psa. 12:5.) Indeed it is this purity of the word, this perfect freedom from the least intermixture of error, which makes

us love our Bible; for it both enlightens our understanding and warms our heart. "The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." (Psa. 19:8.) "Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant loveth it." (Psa. 119:140.) But take away this purity and this perfection, and the Bible sinks down at once into a common book, of no value and of no authority, for truth in its purity is lodged in the word of God; and if we are to receive it as purely as it is revealed we must receive it from the word of God, as made life and spirit to our souls. If then truth in its purity is in the Person of the Son of God as the Fountain, truth in its purity is in the Scriptures as the stream; for as Christ is the personal, the Scriptures are the written revelation of the character, mind, and will of God.

Now when the Holy Ghost takes the truth as it is personally and primarily in Christ, and makes it known unto us, for it is his sacred and blessed office to take of the things of Christ, and to show them unto the Lord's own family, and as the Spirit of truth to guide them in to all truth, (John 16:13), then truth in its *purity* becomes truth in its *power*. Thus out of the fulness of Christ, through the holy Scriptures, the blessed Spirit lodges and lays up truth in its third sacred depository—*the believing heart*. But let us look at this a little more in detail. I like to work a subject out—not to leave text and subject, preacher and hearer, all alike in confusion, but to present to the people a clear, distinct, compact representation of the truth, that I may not only be an interpreter of the mind of the Spirit, so as to clear up any dark and doubtful points, but shed a distinct and blessed light upon his teachings and operations in their hearts.

ii. What then is our first experience of truth in its power? Is it not the *entrance* of truth into the heart? "The entrance of thy words giveth light." (Psa. 119:130.) "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power." (1 Thess. 1:5.) "They themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you." And what was that entering in? "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but

as it is in truth the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." (1 Thess. 2:13.) This is a divine begetting—a new birth: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." (James 1:18.) "The word of God is quick, (or "living," and as such giving life,) and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword." (Heb. 4:12.) The entrance of this enlightening, quickening word, is to make truth in its purity become truth in its power. Until God the Spirit was pleased thus to work with a divine power upon your soul, you lived in lies, you loved lies; your religion, if one you had, was a lying religion, for there was no truth in it, no reality, no power. It might look well in the opinion of men, well in your own; for until our eyes are spiritually opened we see neither our nakedness nor our rags, neither know the truth nor care to know it; but as poor, self-deceived creatures you would have lived, and as such you would have died but for the sovereign, distinguishing, superabounding grace of God, which plucked you as a brand from the fire made by the sparks of your own kindling. But when God has purposes of eternal mercy toward one of his chosen people, and to carry out these purposes, deigns to lodge his truth in that vessel of mercy, he commences by shooting a ray of light out of his own divine fulness into the soul. Now as "it hath pleased the Father that in Christ should all fulness dwell" (Col. 1:19), for "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9), this ray of divine light is out of the fulness of Jesus. Divine light and divine truth go together. "O send out thy light and thy truth." (Psa. 43:3.)

1. But what do we see, what do we feel in this first communication of God's truth to the heart? *That there is a God.* Thousands and tens of thousands have risen this day in this vast metropolis who do not know that there is a God. Do you or I know that there is a God? If we do, why and how do we know it? Because God has in some measure shined into our souls, to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ; because he has taken the veil of unbelief and ignorance from off our heart, and shown us light in his own most blessed light. Now this beginning, in many cases, may not be very powerful nor very deep, yet there is a reality in it; and there must



be a reality in it if it be God's work, for God's work is real work. When God said, "Let there be light" there was real light. It tarried not, but burst forth at the creative fiat, and, to use the Lord's own words of the sea, "it broke forth as if it had issued out of the womb." (Job 38:8.) As real is the light of God in a sinner's heart, as really, as truly, as clearly enlightening the soul, as the natural primeval light enlightened the original darkness.

2. But when the light and life of divine truth thus first come into a sinner's conscience, this quickening ray shows him not only that there is a God, but reveals to him also the true *character* of God. Did I not define truth as a revelation of the character, mind, and will of God? What is the character of God, or rather that part of his character with which we are first made acquainted? That he is just, that he is holy, that he searcheth the heart and trieth the reins; that he hates sin with a perfect hatred, and will sentence to eternal punishment every transgressor with whom he comes into judgment. This is truth in its *purity* made truth in its *power*. For what is the effect? Fear, guilt, trembling, an apprehension of the wrath to come; because now, for the first time in our lives, we have a real apprehension of the truth of God, for the first time in our lives feel the power of God's truth in our soul. You may have heard the truth of God for years; your fathers may have brought you to this place to hear the word of life from childhood; it may have been a kind of family creed for several generations, as well known as the family pew or the family Bible. Thus you may have never heard anything else but truth, and you thought perhaps that you knew something about truth, and would have been highly offended had your knowledge of it been questioned. But there was a day never to be forgotten, as long as life has being, when a something came with the word into your conscience, which produced such feelings as you had never known before. An arrow shot from the bow of him who never misses the mark; an arrow of truth came right into your heart. And as that arrow coming from his unerring bow was lodged in your conscience, it brought with it this conviction, that there was a God, and that you were a sinner before him; that there was a holy law by which you were condemned, for an awful curse was attached to it; and

that living and dying as you were, there was no hope for your guilty soul. This more or less was the working of your mind as a consequence of the entrance of divine truth into your conscience; and you thought perhaps, and that for weeks, months, or years, there was little or no hope for you. And so you went on doubting and fearing, seeking and crying, begging and praying for mercy, never fighting against but falling under the power of truth—for truth was now your meat and drink, as having got firm possession of your heart and conscience.

ii. But by and by, in some unexpected hour and in some perhaps unexpected way, another ray of light was shot into your soul—a ray of divine truth out of the same fulness, and yet revealing the character of God in a different relationship. It might have been a sweet promise, an encouraging invitation, a gracious word, a loving look, a still small voice, a gentle breaking in of light, a soft whisper, a healing touch, or it might have been a blessed revelation of the Son of God to your soul, shining into your heart like the sun in his strength. Now that was truth in its power; for it was the voice of truth in your soul attended with the firm conviction that God spoke in and by it through his word. Now directly that the truth of God began to be thus opened up to your soul by the power of the Holy Ghost, now you embraced and laid hold of it as thus divinely presented to the heart. How sweet it was; how it dropped like honey and the honeycomb; how plain it appeared, how clear, and how powerful. I have drawn your case as if you were long a hearer of the truth before you became a believer in it. But I will now assume another. You might have been prejudiced, as many are, against the doctrines of grace, hated the very word "election," and fought desperately against the sovereignty of God as controlling every minute event. But when the precious truths of the everlasting gospel were let down into your soul as from the Lord himself, and the word of his grace began to open itself in its sweetness, blessedness, and power upon your heart, then what you once loathed you now loved, and what you had despised and rejected was now fed upon as the very truth of God. You could say with Jeremiah, "Thy words were found and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and

rejoicing of my heart" (Jer. 15:16); with David: "How sweet are thy words unto my taste; yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth" (Psa. 119:103); and with Job: "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." (Job 23:12.) You could have gone through fire and water in defence of God's truth. Husband, wife, children, money, character—all were nothing compared with God's truth in your estimation, for you had felt its power in your heart. You had openly or secretly despised, it may be, those who preached, and the people that professed God's truth. But when truth was opened in your soul in both its purity and its power, such was its sweetness and savour, such its influence and effects, that you could say, "This people shall be my people, and their God my God." Such or similar were the effects of truth on my heart when more than thirty years ago I first felt its power. It called upon me to make great sacrifices—as great, perhaps, if not greater than have been made by any one here present. Could I have been content to hold truth in impurity, in insincerity, in unrighteousness, I might have held the gospel, or rather half the gospel, in one hand and the world in the other; but when truth in its purity became truth in its power, then, like Moses, I chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." (Heb. 11:25, 26.)

iii. But we have to learn the power of God's truth upon the heart in various ways; and there are two particular effects of the power of truth which every living soul is sooner or later taught to know and feel. 1. One is its *liberating* influence. Our blessed Lord said on one occasion, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31, 32.) There is a liberating power in God's truth as made vitally and experimentally known to the heart. It unbinds the fetters and shackles in which the soul is bound by the law; it removes slavish dread of man; takes away the apprehension of death and judgment; liberates from a thousand fears and a thousand foes; and breathes a sweet liberty into the soul wherever it comes; for "where the Spirit of the Lord

is, there is liberty." Now if you have experienced any sweet inflowing of the truth of God, and it has come with a liberating power, and a blessed influence which set you free from fears of death and apprehensions of the wrath of God; if it removed a load of guilt from your conscience, and with it a thousand doubts and fears that your mind was exercised with, so that you could bless and praise God for his manifested mercy, you know something not only of truth in its purity but of truth in its power; for it has done for you what nothing else could do but that gospel which is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth (Rom. 1:16); and you have proved for yourself that "the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." (1 Cor. 4:20.)

You should bring your heart to a sound and strict examination on this point. Have you then any experience of either bondage or of liberty; of either law or of gospel? You should compare your experience with the word of God; and as the servants of Christ open up his truth in your ears, and show you from it the various marks and tests of divine life, you should, as it were, hold up your experience to the light. Let the word of truth and your personal experience of its power be like the two scales of a balance. The tests and marks of divine life are the weights which the servant of God puts into one scale; you put your experience in the other, and then you have to look and see whether the whole be good weight. I have put one weight into the scale—the liberating efficacy and influence of God's truth. Is it good weight? Is it a sound scriptural test? I have already given you scripture proof for it; so that point seems firmly settled. Now can you put into the opposite scale any liberating influence which you have ever felt from the power of God's truth in your heart? Any sweet liberty which you have ever enjoyed, any blessed deliverance from guilt, wrath, fear, and bondage into the glorious liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free? (Gal. 5:1.)

But take here a cautionary remark. Do not at once conclude that you have never felt the liberating power of truth, because you have not been fully delivered from all doubt and fear, or because your deliverance was not so clear and signal, or so marked and

decided as some are favoured with of whom you have read, or with whom you have conversed. Rather examine *how* the liberty came, and what were its *effects* than its exact measure; for it is a fact that many of the dear children of God walk habitually in much bondage of spirit who have at times been blessed with the sweetest deliverances, and have often to cry, "Bring my soul out of prison that I may praise thy name" (Psa. 142:7), "I am shut up and cannot come forth," even when at favoured seasons their feet have been set in a large room, and they have walked at liberty, in real enjoyment of the promise, and in gracious obedience to the precept. (Psa. 31:8; 119:45.) Now, bearing this needful caution in mind, can you say, as in the sight of a heart-searching God, that it is good weight, and that your experience does not prove light in the scale? If so, you need not fear your soul's being weighed in the balance in the great day, and then found wanting; nor need you tremble now as Belshazzar trembled, when "the joints of his loins were loosed and his knees smote one against another," as the fingers came forth of that mysterious hand which wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of his palace, among other words, that fatal one, "Tekel, Thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting." (Dan. 5:5, 27.)

2. But take another mark, another scriptural test that you know not only truth in its purity but truth in its *power*. Whenever truth comes into the soul in its vivifying power, it has a *sanctifying* influence. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth," was a part of that wondrous prayer which our great High Priest offered up when on the eve of his sufferings and death, he sanctified himself to that gracious office that those who should believe in his name might be sanctified through the truth. (John 17:17, 19.) We therefore read that "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water by the word." (Ephes. 5:25, 26.) This "washing of water by the word" is the cleansing, sanctifying influence of the word of truth upon the heart when received in power; and it is the same thing as "the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which is shed upon us abundantly through

Jesus Christ our Saviour, that being justified by his grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:5-7.) When the gospel comes "not in word only but also in power," it comes "in the Holy Ghost" (1 Thess. 1:5), that is, in and with the teaching and testimony of the Holy Ghost. It is this coming "in the Holy Ghost" which gives truth in its power such a sanctifying influence on the heart. But you will ask perhaps, What is a sanctifying influence? It is the communication of holy feelings, heavenly desires, and gracious affections; in a word, it is the breathing into the soul of that sweet spirituality of mind which is life and peace. If we are among the people of God, he chose us in Christ "before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." (Eph. 1:4.) If he chasten us in this time-state, it is "for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." (Heb. 12:10.) It is this holiness of heart, this heavenly mindedness which I mean when I speak of the sanctifying influence of truth in its power. Now did truth ever come into your soul with any measure of this sanctifying influence? Did you ever long to get away from the chapel, go home to your room, fall upon your knees, and have blessed fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ? And were you ever so favoured when you did get home? Or sometimes when alone, in reading, or meditation, or secret prayer, did the word of God ever come into your soul with that sweet unction, savour, and dew that it seemed to make the very room in which you were holy ground? I remember when God was pleased to reveal his dear Son to my soul in my sick room many years ago, I was afraid almost to go out of my room lest I should lose the sweet, holy feelings and blessed spirituality of mind which I then and there enjoyed. Depend upon it, there is a holiness of heart and affection, an inward holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; and depend upon it, whenever truth comes into a believer's soul, it comes with that sanctifying influence, which not only gives him a meetness for, but is a blessed foretaste of the inheritance of the saints in light. "Saints" are sanctified persons—sanctified by God the Father by his eternal will (Jude 1; Heb. 10:10), sanctified by God the Son with his own blood (Heb. 13:12), and sanctified by God the Holy Ghost, who makes their

bodies his temple (1 Cor. 6:19), sheds abroad the love of God (Rom. 5:5), makes them abound in hope (Rom. 15:13), and sets up the kingdom of God in their heart. (Rom. 14:17.)

Truth, then, in its power, does not lead, or leave a man to become a lawless, licentious Antinomian. It does not leave him in the mud and mire of sin; it does not leave him, still less lead him to be a carnal, sensual, proud, covetous wretch, with a mere profession of religion, having a name to live when dead. Wherever it comes it sanctifies. And it cannot be the truth of God in its power unless it do this. We judge, and that rightly, of things by their influence and effects. We had, for instance, lately a very cold March, with a long and almost uninterrupted succession of piercing east winds, chilling all early vegetation and shutting up the earth, as it were, in a cold embrace, out of which she durst not look up. By and by a change came, and April was as unusually hot as March was unusually cold. The wind came round to the genial south. The sun broke forth in all the warmth of his beams, and we were almost melted with the heat. What was the consequence? Why, nature put forth a new face; vegetation burst out from its prison; every tree at once clothed itself with leaves, and one scene of beauty almost immediately flushed into view. It is just now the middle of May, and I who am not young never saw a more early or a more beautiful season. There was the effect of a warm April sun. Now if the Sun of righteousness arise upon a soul, with healing on his wings, shall there be no effect? Can the sun shine warm in the sky, call forth sleeping vegetation and clothe every tree with leaf and some as now with flowers; and shall there be a shining in of the Sun of righteousness upon a soul, and leave it locked up in the frozen embrace of death? Again, we have had a very dry season lately, for cold March and hot April were both very dry. But during the last week copious showers have fallen. Do we not already see the effect? How fresh and green everything is; how earth seems to rejoice under the genial showers which have so thoroughly watered it. Now shall there be a pouring out of the Spirit of God upon a men's soul like the showers of the early and latter rain, and he be as dead and dry as the London pavement, with no more fruitfulness in him

than the very stones over which we walk or drive! Amidst the trees of righteousness which the Lord has planted that he may be glorified, will you stand as a dead tree in a London square, or be one of these trees of which Jude speaks, "whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots?" (Isa. 61:3; Jude 12.) Surely, if you know truth in its power, and the Spirit of God water your soul with the rains and dews of his grace, there will be some analogy between the natural and the spiritual rain; and there will be in you some spiritual fruitfulness, as in earth there is a fruitfulness under the falling showers.

III.—This brings me to my third point, which is, Truth in its *products*, or its fruits and effects.

I said that God had lodged his truth in three depositories: the Person of his Son, the Scriptures of truth, and the hearts of his people. Now, was his truth dead or dormant in his dear Son? Or is his truth dead and dormant in the word of his grace? How, then, can it be dead and dormant in believing hearts? If, then, God has lodged his truth in the hearts of his people, it is his will that they should manifest the fruits and effects of his grace in their lips and in their lives. I have no opinion of a loose and careless profession; and I have a worse opinion of a loose and careless life. Depend upon it a loose and careless walk, conduct, and conversation never bore the stamp of God upon it. A man may slip and fall, and be by the grace of God recovered; but if there be anything more than another which has cast discredit upon truth in its purity, upon the doctrines of grace, it has been the loose, licentious, careless, ungodly lives of many of its professors. Therefore look to it. If you hope you know truth in its purity, and if you have felt truth in its power, look to it, and examine well whether there are corresponding fruits and effects manifested in your lips and lives. Time and opportunity will allow me to name only a few of them.

1. What, then, is the first main fruit and effect of receiving truth in its power? *Separation from the world*. The first precept to which a promise is attached is this: "Come out from among them,



and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:18.) Where, then, there is no separation from the world, there is no manifested interest in that promise; and if you believe that you are a son or daughter of the Lord Almighty, and have not yet come out from the world, whether dead in sin or dead in profession, you do but hold a lie in your right hand if such a faith be in it. Such a faith and such a profession, if Scripture be true, are not of God; "for whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:4.) But how can we be said to have overcome the world unless we are separate from it? Separated from it, we overcome it; united to it, it overcomes us. Separation, therefore, full, lasting, unqualified separation must ever be a fruit of God's work upon the soul—the sure effect of receiving truth in its power. I know what God's grace did for me in separating me more than thirty years ago from the world, and from everything dear to nature and the flesh. I know, too, what sacrifices this separation entailed upon me, and how it compelled me to sacrifice my position in life and all my prospects in life, and abandon the prizes of all my studies and labours for many years at a public school and the university when just within my reach—prizes which were my just due, and on which my eyes had long been fixed. Yet I was compelled so to speak and act as to separate me eventually from all the cherished projects and prospects of my worldly ambition, and to give up everything through feeling the power of the truth of God in my soul. I always therefore contend that separation from the world and everything worldly is one of the first fruits and effects of the grace of God in the heart.

2. The *fear of God*, as manifested by the possession and actings of a tender conscience, is another fruit and effect of truth in its power. And O what a blessing it is to have the fear of God in a tender conscience! It is spoken of in the Scriptures as being "a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death." (Prov. 14:27.) If, then, you have the fear of God in your breast, you

have a fountain of life; and what is that fountain but the "well of water" of which our Lord spoke as "springing up into everlasting life?" (John 4:14.) Having then that fountain of life you depart from the snares of death; and as this fountain is not a muddy pool but a springing well, it will water your own soul, it will water the souls of others, it will make you fruitful in every good word and work, and will at last issue in all the bliss and blessedness of everlasting life.

3. *Cleaving* to the truth of God, his people, his cause, his ordinances, his servants, his house, his promises, his precepts, and everything connected with God and godliness, and that in a spirit of love and affection from a deep sense of their value and a warm realisation of their preciousness, is a mark also and fruit of knowing the truth of God in its power. Wherever the Lord by his own secret work upon the heart makes his truth precious, the very first effect is love—love to the Lord and to his people. "Whom not having seen ye love." "We know we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." There is such a love to the Lord and his people in that spring-time of the soul when Jesus first makes himself known and precious. O there is a spring-tide of the soul like our present May month. How beautiful the country looked yesterday as I came up by the train from Croydon. Nature, like a young blooming bride, shone and glittered in all the greenery and bravery of her new apparel. So is there a spring in the soul when every grace of the Spirit shines and glitters with an unspeakable beauty and freshness—the day of its espousals, when the first embrace seals the happiness of its virgin love. And in that spring-tide of the soul, what love there is to God's dear people, what love to God's truth, what love to everything connected with God and his word!

4. *Uprightness of conduct*, integrity before God and man, honorable actions and transactions in our business (if in business), obedience to God's revealed perceptive will, in all the various relations of life, are fruits also of receiving the truth of God in its power. Where grace lays hold of a man's heart and comes into his conscience in purity and power, it must make him

an upright, consistent man. He must be an honest man, or he is nothing. And if an honest man, he will carry his honesty into his business; he will carry his integrity into all the walks of life; he will make it manifest day by day by his conduct and conversation that uprightness and integrity are stamped upon him by a divine hand; and even the world itself will acknowledge it. This recalls to my mind a good man, a deacon of a church in the country, though but a farm labourer, who was called under my ministry when I was in the Church of England. The farmer, and he was in a large way of business, came to him one day with tears in his eyes and said, "O, you are the only man I can trust upon my farm. They are robbing me in all directions. Will you take the oversight of the men?" He hated the man's religion, but the only one he could trust of all those by whom he was surrounded was this godly deacon now gone home. Was not that a testimony to a despised religion that its possessor was alone worthy of trust? So if grace has laid hold of our heart, it will make us upright in our conduct, in the church and in the world, and influence our movements at home and abroad. And though in these days perhaps a man who truly fears God can scarcely live, or at least much thrive, when all around are engaged in dishonest or dishonourable practices, yet to part with his integrity is to part with both his conscience and his hope; he will therefore and must be an upright man, come what will. And so in the various relationships of life—as a father, as a husband, as a friend—he will be an affectionate father, a loving husband, and a faithful friend. Thus you may follow him through the walks of life and say, "Here is grace; see one who fears God above many; it is stamped upon the man. You can see he is what he professes to be, and that the grace of God is in him of a truth."

Thus I have endeavoured in a feeble way to give you an answer to the question—"What is truth?" I have endeavoured to show you truth in its purity, truth in its power, and truth in its products, or its fruits and effects. Can you set to your seal that these things are true? Are they things, the life, reality, and power of which you have felt in your own breast, so that you can say, "Yes, I do know these things or some good measure of them by

vital experience; for blessed be God I have felt them in my soul, and I am glad to have heard this morning the answer to "What is truth?" so as not only to receive it from your lips, but to be able to bear witness that it is a right answer from God's own attestation to the power of his truth in my heart."

## What Things to Flee, What Things to Follow

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening, July 21, 1844

"But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." 1 Timothy 6:11

I have often been struck with the vein of sincerity that runs through Paul's writings; and have sometimes thought, if infidelity were not case-hardened, it would fall beneath the power of the sincerity so manifestly displayed, and would come to this conclusion, that whether what we read in the Scripture is the revelation of God or not, this one thing is certain, that Paul believed it to be so. It seems to me nearly impossible to read his Epistles without seeing that he writes them out of the fulness of a believing heart, and that he himself was perfectly convinced of the truth of those things which he declared. And I do not know any of Paul's Epistles which show more of this striking vein of sincerity than the two Epistles to Timothy. What an affectionate, I might say, parental solicitude does the Apostle display in them! What tenderness, gentleness, and wisdom shine through them; and how his whole heart and soul seemed to desire the spiritual prosperity of his dear son to whom he addressed them.

In the text, we find him exhorting his beloved son Timothy to *flee* from some things, and to *follow* after others. "But thou, O man of God," appealing to him as a servant of the Lord of Hosts, "*flee* these things; and *follow* after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." If then, with God's blessing, I am enabled this evening to show, *first*, the things that we are to flee; and *then*, what we are to follow, I shall, I trust, spiritually unfold the mind of the Holy Ghost in the text.

I.—But in order to see what things the Apostle exhorted his dear son Timothy to flee, we must go back a little to the early part of the chapter.

We find, then, the Apostle, in the beginning of the chapter, (1 Tim. 6:1) giving a precept to believing servants; "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed." The Apostle was afraid of the abuse that human nature might make of the doctrine of grace. The Lord in mercy, perhaps, had visited the soul of some servant, or slave, as the word literally means, as in the case of the runaway Onesimus. (Philemon 15, 16.) Now the slave might argue, "If the Lord has made me free; if I am an heir of glory; if God is my Father, the Son my Saviour, the Spirit my Teacher, and heaven my eternal home, am I still to be a servant, and do servile drudgery?" "Yes," says the Apostle; "God's mercies in grace do not alter your relation in providence. The Spirit's work in your heart does not take you out of your temporal station in life; and so far from releasing you from all obligation to obedience to your master, it rather enhances it by giving new motives how to perform it in the spirit of the gospel." "Let," he says, "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." Let them pay their unbelieving masters additional honour, instead of less, that the master, seeing what advantage the servant takes of the doctrine he professes, may not blaspheme or revile the name of God which the servant takes into his lips.

He then goes on to consider another case, where the believing servant had a believing master. "And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren." The servant might say, "My master and I are both believers, and stand upon an equality in Christ; we are precisely upon one footing. And why should there be any difference or distinction of station on earth? Why should he command, and I obey?" But the apostle says, "Let them not (the believing servants) despise the believing masters because they are brethren, but rather do them service (that is, obey as servants) because they are faithful (that is believers) and beloved of God, partakers of the benefit," that is, of grace. So far, then, from the servant being absolved from

all respect and obedience to his master because he is a believer, he is bound, for that very reason, to pay him additional respect, and serve him more faithfully. These things he enjoins on Timothy to "teach and exhort."

And this leads him to speak of those loose and licentious characters in the professing church who preached different doctrines. "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words." There were in the professing church, in those, as in our days, practical Antinomians, who considered that by the gospel all the bonds of obligation were dissolved; and that grace, instead of making a man more obedient to the will and word of God and to human laws, released him from all earthly ties, and gave him liberty to act as he pleased. Now, the apostle exposes such characters, and warns his beloved Timothy against them; "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words," that is, sound, healthy doctrines, as opposed to all flights of wild enthusiasm; if he consent not to such wholesome, sound doctrine as this, "he is proud," puffed up with presumption and vain conceit; "knowing nothing," with all his professed knowledge, as being ignorant of divine teaching; "but doting" (that is, raving in his excited mind, or idly dreaming, like a superannuated creature, or one who has lost his intellect by old age or idiocy), "about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness;" a covetous heart being the root of all; and then, he emphatically adds, "from such withdraw thyself."

The things, then, that the apostle calls upon his beloved son Timothy to flee, are those evils which he mentions. And he calls upon him in the name of the Lord to flee from, that is, shun, avoid, and depart from these things. But what is it that makes us depart from these things? What they are, I shall presently show. But that which makes us to depart from them, and withdraw from

the men who teach them, is this—having had the heart touched by God's Spirit. This produces *light* in the understanding, giving us to see light in God's light; and thus we see the evil of these things in the light of God's countenance. And this divine work raises up also *life* in the soul, so that the evil of them is *felt* in the life of God's Spirit; and the conscience being thus made tender before the Lord, we flee from what we thus see, and what we thus feel to be hateful to God.

But let us come a little to particulars, and see what those things are that we are exhorted to flee from; for the exhortation is addressed not merely to "the man of God," but it belongs to the whole church of God; it must not be confined to ministers, but is equally incumbent upon private individuals; for "Let *every one* that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

1. We are then called upon to flee from "*questions and strifes of words.*" But are not questions and strifes of words the chief things preached nowadays? If a man can bring before the people some knotty question, some intricate text, some out-of-the-way figure, or mysterious passage, and solve it to his own admiration; or, if he can get up some strife of words, and show how all else are in error, and how he alone is right—how it feeds his pride at the wonderful display of wisdom which he thus makes before his congregation! If you were to analyse by this test of Paul's many so-called gospel sermons, and see their drift—how often, instead of God's glory and the edification of God's people, would they be found to turn upon mere questions and strifes of words!

2. But certain fearful evils are closely connected with these questions and strifes of words, as "envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, and perverse disputings." "Envy," because some may be better received by God's family than themselves; "strife," being engaged in perpetual contentions, and raving against all that differ from them; "evil surmisings" and suspicions of the motives of those who oppose or withdraw from them; and "perverse disputings," perpetually wrangling from mere perverseness on every disputed point. The real authors of all



these evils being men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth, and supposing that gain is godliness, covetousness being the root of all their movements.

Now these things and these men the Lord the Spirit, by the pen of Paul, calls upon us to flee; he says, "From such withdraw thyself." And sure am I, if God the Spirit be our Teacher, and make our consciences tender in his fear, that we shall flee them; and we shall withdraw from these men of envy, strife, and discord, and especially from preachers whose ministry teems with these evils. My Zoar friends, if ever a minister came among you, full of questions and strifes of words; if any one should get into this pulpit whose object seems to be to exalt himself, to sow strife, discord, and confusion, and rend the church and congregation, never let him stand up in this place again. From all strifes of words, from all perverse disputings, and from the men who scatter these firebrands, the Holy Ghost bids us flee. And I am sure that every sent servant of the Lord, who knows what divine teaching is in his own soul, and near to whose heart lies the glory of God and the profit of the church of Christ, will flee these perverse disputings, and will withdraw from men who sedulously propagate them to get themselves a living.

II.—But we pass on to consider what the things are which the Lord the Spirit in the text, calls upon us to *follow*. This divine Teacher, in mercy not only sets before us the things we are to shun, but the things also we are to pursue.

But, as I endeavoured to show what led us to flee the evil, let us consider what it is that induces us to follow after the good the apostle here speaks of. Two things chiefly conspire to do this: *first*, a feeling of our need of them, a deep and painful conviction in our souls how very far short we fall of attaining and enjoying them. And *secondly*, the raising up, by a divine power in our heart and conscience, intense desires and spiritual breathings after the enjoyment of these blessings, so as to know the sweetness, unction, and power of them. It is like one running a race: the sight of the goal to which he is tending urges forward

his steps; the view of the prize stimulates his exertions. So spiritually, unless our eyes are opened to see the beauty, and our hearts in some measure touched to feel the power of the things we are to follow, we shall be but sluggards in the race; our hands will hang down, our knees will be feeble, our spirits languish, and our desires after them will be half-hearted, and but faintly breathed out.

Let us, then, take one by one the things which the apostle calls upon Timothy, his dear son, to follow.

1. The first is "*righteousness.*" "Follow after righteousness." We may understand two things by this expression. First, the discovery to the conscience of Christ's imputed righteousness in the way of justification; and secondly, the communication to the soul of a divine or righteous nature, whereby it brings forth the fruits of sincerity and uprightness before God. Both are to be followed after. But it may be asked, why the first, if a man has a knowledge of his justification, and a sense of his acceptance with God? But may not a sense of interest in Jesus' glorious righteousness, and the inward testimony of the Spirit be lost in the enjoyment of them, or at least considerably diminished, for a time? We read (Luke 15:8) of the woman who lost a piece of silver. Was there not a lighting of the candle, a sweeping of the house, and a diligent search into every corner till it was found again? The woman's piece of money was not really lost; it was still in the house; but as to her feelings, it was as much lost as though she were never to receive it again into her possession. So a sense of acceptance and justification by Christ's righteousness, this precious coin from heaven's mint may be lost for a time in feeling, though not really lost out of the heart. And what will the soul do that has lost it but diligently search the house in every corner, by the candle of the Spirit, till it find the piece of money again?

The Lord sees fit that many of his dear children should be often tried in their minds, and cast down in their souls about their acceptance with him; he permits clouds to rise and darken their

evidences; he suffers Satan to shoot in his fiery darts; he allows their carnal mind to breed numerous doubts and fears; he withdraws the light of his countenance, and suspends the inward witness of the Spirit. These things cause the soul to walk in darkness and gloom, and halt and stumble by reason of the difficulties of the way; so that its feelings are those of Job, when he complained: "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him." (Job 23:8, 9.)

The Apostle calls upon us, then, to "follow after righteousness;" that is, to press forward and eagerly desire in our consciences a sense of acceptance with God, a knowledge of pardon and of justification, that we may taste and realize "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." Now, if a man watches the various movements of his heart, if he is much tried with temptations, much beset with perplexities, and much harassed by Satan, to follow after righteousness will cut him out abundant work; and he will not have time, and will feel less inclination, for "questions and strifes of words, and perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds." He will not be for solving knotty points of divinity; but he will be for having this knotty point solved in his conscience, "Where do *I* stand? Am I bound for heaven or hell? Is what I have professed to believe a work of grace the genuine work of the Holy Spirit on my heart? Is my experience the fruit of the inward teachings of God? Do my feelings come from the Spirit's inward operation? Am I right before God? Am I washed in the blood of the Lamb? Do I stand accepted in the beloved? Does the Holy Ghost bear his sweet witness in my conscience?" Where a man is exercised and tried upon these points, he will follow after righteousness; because he cannot be satisfied until he enjoys the manifestations of it to his conscience, and is brought to feel the love of God in his soul.

But as I before observed, the word "righteousness" has another signification in the New Testament. There is righteousness *imparted*, as well as righteousness *imputed*; and, in this sense,

righteousness is a fruit of the Spirit, and resides in "the new man," which, as we read, "after God (that is, after the image of God) is created in *righteousness* and true holiness." It is, in this sense, an inward principle of uprightness, honesty, integrity, simplicity, and godly sincerity; in a word, what we understand in the Scripture by the word holiness. Now holiness is a thing in our day much sneered at; and it seems as though some would almost trample the very word under their feet, and consider it only another name for legality. But the Holy Ghost declares most plainly that "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." (Heb. 12:14.) The Lord himself prayed to his Father, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." (John 17:17.) And the Apostle exhorts us to put off "the old man with his deeds," and "yield our members servants to righteousness unto holiness."

The righteousness, then, spoken of in the text, not only means acceptance and justification before God, but also that inward work of the Holy Ghost which produces a righteous and holy principle within us, with all the graces of sincerity, uprightness, and godly fear, brought with power into the heart. This is the righteousness the Apostle speaks of as "fulfilled in us." "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," (Rom. 8:4); and is the express fruit of the Spirit; "For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth." (Eph. 5:9.)

But how are we made spiritually to "follow after righteousness" in this sense? By knowing our own defilement, feeling our own filthiness, seeing the pollutions that cleave to every thought, word, and action, and thus becoming thoroughly sick of sin, and sick of self. As we feel and abhor these evils, we shall, under the teachings of the Spirit, desire to bring forth fruit to God's glory, and to do those things that are well-pleasing and acceptable in his sight. If there are no inward breathings after sincerity before God, uprightness before men, and integrity in our various callings; if there is no hatred to evil, and love to that which is good; no inward desire to please God, no fear to offend him; no spiritual sorrow because we hourly do things that are displeasing

to him; if there is no inward groaning of soul because we are so base and vile; and no earnest wish for the Lord to work in us that which is well pleasing in his sight,—I want to know what grace has done for us? But, just in proportion as we feel our lack of inward fruit, as we see afar off, at a vast distance, the beauty and blessedness of the Spirit's graces, and desire them to be brought into the conscience with divine power, there will be a following after them with the whole soul. As David says, "My soul followeth hard after thee." (Ps. 63:8.) Thus, sometimes on the knees there will be a pleading with the Lord to work it in us; sometimes there will be self-abhorrence because we know so little of it; and sometimes a desire that the Lord would turn away our eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken our soul in his way. There will be often, too, an earnest wish to avoid those sins in which we have been already entangled, and a desire to be kept from those snares which before have proved so dangerous. O that those who preach the doctrines of grace would more "follow after righteousness!" How often do those who stand up in the name of the Lord to preach a full and free salvation (to their shame be it spoken), make the truth stink in the nostrils of those who fear not God! What lightness, what frivolity, what presumption and vain confidence are visible in some! What drunkenness and even worse, such as adultery and lasciviousness, do we find sometimes come abroad in the world as transacted in secret by others who have stood up to preach the gospel of the grace of God! How these things, when they come to light, as sooner or later they do, grieve the hearts of the Lord's people who are zealous for the truth, and what occasion do they give for the enemies of God to blaspheme!

2. "*Godliness.*" That is the second thing which the Apostle desires his son Timothy to follow after. *Godliness!* What is meant by the expression? It occurs very often in Paul's Epistles, and especially in those to Timothy. Thus, we read, "Exercise thyself unto *godliness.*" (1 Tim. 4:7.) "*Godliness* with contentment is great gain." (1 Tim. 6:6.) "Great is the mystery of *godliness.*" (1 Tim. 3:16.) "All that will live *godly* in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Tim. 3:12.)

By the word "*godliness*," I think, is intended, the life of God in the soul; the inward teaching of the Spirit. For we find it opposed to "bodily exercise," which, says the Apostle, "profiteth little," whilst "godliness is profitable unto all things." (1 Tim. 4:8.) Now nothing is more opposed to all forms, and such exercises of the body as bowings and prostrations, than the inward work and teachings of the Spirit. And this *godliness*, or the life of God in the soul, in which all the power of religion consists, the Apostle exhorted his dear son Timothy to follow after. But how are we to follow after it? Two motives must conspire to urge us forward to this pursuit. *First*, a deep, painful, and increasing conviction how far short we fall of it. *Secondly*, to see its beauty, and to have an earnest desire to have it brought with divine power into our consciences. In order, then, "to follow after godliness," we must learn what we are by nature; we must feel our ignorance, know our baseness, and experience what fallen wretches we are. We must be well acquainted with our helplessness and thorough impotency to work anything spiritual or gracious in our own consciences; and thus, feeling poor and needy, come before the throne of mercy and grace beseeching the Lord to do for us what we cannot do in and for ourselves.

We must see, too, what a beautiful thing godliness is. We must feel what a precious gift it is to have the life of God in the soul; to have something more than a name to live; to have something deeper than mere consistency of conduct; to have something more abiding than a few doctrines floating in the head. We must feel what a mercy and blessing it is to have the Spirit of God for our Teacher, communicating light, life, power, and savour to our souls; working in us faith, hope, and love, and communicating out of Christ's fulness all his heavenly graces. But in order really to know and prize them, we must experience also what sweet feelings, blessed emotions, and divine sensations—what an inward power and satisfaction are known and realised in the soul under the operations of God the Spirit. To be acquainted with these inward feelings will make us follow after "godliness;" not the "form," which a man may have while he "denies the power;"

not merely a set of correct notions; not the articles of a sound creed; not admittance into a gospel church; not attending to gospel ordinances; not hypocritical gestures, or turned-up eyes;—all which things may subsist where the life of God is absent. But we shall follow after the inward teachings of the Spirit, the presence of God in the soul, and the manifestations of his goodness and love. This is *godliness*; and to have this heavenly teaching and these divine operations in the conscience makes a man a godly man. It is not taking up a profession of religion, embracing a sound Calvinistic creed, coming out of the professing world, being baptized, and joining a gospel church, that makes a man a godly man, though a godly man will do some or all of these things; but a man may be and do all this, and only add hypocrisy to the rest of his sins. But to be a godly man is to have the Holy Ghost for our Teacher, to live under the bedewings and droppings of his grace upon our spirit, and to feel his divine operations in our heart and conscience. Now as we feel how short we come of the power of this vital godliness; as we deeply and daily experience how barren we are without his fertilizing dew; how cold without his reviving warmth; how dark without his heavenly light; how worldly and carnal without our affections are fixed heavenward by his inward drawings; and as we see sometimes the beautiful land of godliness very far off—these things stir us up to follow after it. We are thus led inwardly to say, "What will it profit me, if this or that man thinks well of my religion; what good will it do my soul to have a name to live while dead? O what will it profit me in that terrible day, when the King shall sit upon his great white throne, to have deluded my own soul, deceived God's people, and died with a lie in my right hand? But to have had 'godliness,' to have experienced the Spirit of God working in me and dwelling in my body as his temple, to have known the presence of Jesus, to have felt the inward teachings of the Holy Ghost, and his divine testimony in my conscience—*that* will enable me to stand in that great day when the heavens are rolled together like a scroll; *that* will give me boldness before the Son of Man at his coming." So, as a man feels these things laid with weight and power on his conscience, he will say also, "What avail to me 'questions and strifes of words,' and 'perverse

disputings of men of corrupt minds?' What avails to me their doting about things that will not profit my soul? How do I stand? Where am I? What does God think of me? And have I any testimony in my conscience that I am right for eternity?" As these things are felt, there will be a following after godliness.

3. The next thing the Holy Ghost calls upon Timothy, by the pen of Paul, to follow after, is "*faith*." Now what I said before is equally applicable to this, that we can follow after nothing until we know how short we come of it, and how desirable it is to possess it. Look at the man running a race! Is it not because he sees he is yet short of the goal, that he presses on to reach it? And does not the feeling how desirable the prize is when the goal is reached, also stimulate his exertions to obtain it? So spiritually, if I think I have "all faith," if I need no more than I have, if I want no more communications from on high, I shall not be following very eagerly after it. But if, on the contrary, I feel, as I do painfully, what an unbelieving heart I carry in my bosom, what infidel suspicions dart across my mind, how unable I am, in my own power, to receive God's truth in the love of it, and how helpless to call the little faith I may have into exercise,—as I am conscious of these things, and yet know by heartfelt experience what an active grace faith is, these two things working together in the soul will urge me to follow after it. Nothing is easier than a profession of faith; it costs but a few words. It only requires a seared conscience, a hard heart, a presumptuous mind, and a hypocritical tongue to lay claim to all the faith possible. But when, by God the Spirit's teaching, we have been driven out of refuges of lies; have been shown how undone we are by nature; when we groan and sigh under a body of sin and death, and feel how deficient and ineffective our faith is at those seasons when we most need it—this will make us "follow after faith." Not that we can obtain it by our own exertions, but we follow after it as a divine gift, as something communicated and brought into our conscience by God the Spirit.

Now, if we know anything of unbelief on the one hand; or anything of faith on the other, we shall find that we want faith to



be brought into our souls, continually. Here is the world spreading its nets, and entangling our feet in its snare; sometimes distracting the mind with its business, at others alluring the heart with its pleasures; and continually attempting to draw us aside into paths that, if walked in, would make a living conscience bleed. Do not you, men of business, feel the world to be a fearful snare to you, in these days of almost general cheating and swindling, when business transactions can hardly be carried on by a man of tender conscience? I am sure you must find it hard work to act in the fear of God. But the more you find the world setting snares for your feet, the more will you need that faith which overcomes it. If a man have nothing but false faith, when he goes abroad he can leave his religion at home. He can go on the Exchange, or into the market, and talk and act as if he made no profession at all. Religion, he thinks, is not wanted there; he can transact his business best without it; for then he can do as other people do. But a Christian man cannot thus act. He knows that to go into the world, and leave his faith at home, would be like a soldier going to war without taking his musket, or rushing upon the enemy, without any weapon of attack or defence. He that knows anything of living faith, cannot leave it thus at home, for it will not leave him. He cannot leave at home the inward rebukes and checks of conscience, if he act wrong; he cannot leave at his fireside the tongue of truth, nor a heart made honest by God's grace, for they will ever accompany him. And thus he will find on the Exchange, in the market, and behind the counter, his need of living faith in exercise; for he feels that he can only overcome the world by the possession of this precious grace.

I will tell you how it is with most persons. Sin does not very much affect or trouble them; and the reason is, because there is no inward dam set up against it. I very well remember Old London Bridge. Often, as a boy, have I passed over it, and stopped to look at the tide rushing impetuously through the narrow arches. But I pass over London Bridge now, and I see no such rushing of water, and no such danger to the slight wherries. What has made the difference? There is now a greater passage for the water; it is no longer hemmed in by the narrow ancient arches; the old

lumbering water-works exist no more. It was the opposition that the old bridge made to the stream that caused such a rush of the water through the middle arch, and sometimes raised so fearful a cascade. Now the arches are all wide and open, and the tide flows through freely. So it is in grace; where there is only a name to live, it is New London Bridge; the arches are wide enough to let the waters flow through; there is no opposition made to sin. But where the grace of God lives and moves in the heart, it is Old London Bridge. And just in proportion as the dam opposes and keeps back the water that comes in like a flood, shall we feel the rushing of sin against the narrow arches, and fear sometimes that the power of evil will carry the bridge and us all away together.

So again, with respect to every gracious thought and act, as prayer, meditation, reading the Scriptures, abstaining from evil, watchfulness and circumspectness: only so far as we are blessed with living faith can we spiritually do these things. If a man do these things formally and hypocritically, as the acts of mere bodily exercise, he may be wholly free from the temptations, perplexities, and harassing insinuations of Satan that assail the soul that seeks to worship God in spirit and in truth. But if a man has the power of grace in his heart and a living principle of faith in his conscience, whereby he sets himself against the subtle workings of the flesh, he will soon feel how helpless he is toward anything spiritually good, and how he needs perpetual supplies of life and power from the Lord.

4. "*Love*" is another grace that the Apostle urges his son Timothy to follow after. Love is the grand cementing bond of union between Christ and the members of his mystical body. Well then may we earnestly follow after this as the choicest gift the Lord has to bestow. But I may say of this, as of all the other graces that God the Spirit bids us follow after—our want of it makes us desire it. Do we never feel the workings of enmity against God, rebellion against his holy law, or coldness toward his dear people? Do we not sometimes seem as destitute of love toward God and his people, as if we had not one grain of spiritual affection? But if we had never felt some flowings out of love toward God and

toward his people, we should not wish to follow after it. We cannot follow after a thing that is not desirable; we do not desire a thing that has no value in our eyes. But when we know what a blessed grace love is, from having at times enjoyed a measure of it, and felt our hearts warmed by it to God and his people, and find how cold and lifeless we are without it, the very sense of want creates a following after it, and a pleading with the Lord to shed abroad his love in our hearts. A sincere and hearty confession of our coldness in his ways, and of our want of love towards his people, is really a following after it. And is it not better far, in our secret chamber, on our midnight bed, in some lonely corner where none but the eye of God sees us, to be mourning over our want of love, and beseeching the Lord to bestow this heavenly gift upon us, than to be engaged in "questions and strifes of words," and "with perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds?" Is not this secret panting after the gift of divine love far better than to be continually angling and wrangling upon knotty points of divinity, and cutting down all who differ from us? Is it not far more profitable, in the solitude of our heart, to feel our want of love, and plead with the Lord to bestow it upon us, than to display our fancied wisdom before men, or by slandering and backbiting, seek to exalt ourselves at the expense of others?

5. The next grace which the Apostle urges the "man of God" to follow after, is "*patience.*" But why is patience needed? Because if we are the Lord's people, we are sure to have many trials. The Lord sends us afflictions that he may give us the grace of patience to bear them. But O, what a rebellious heart do we carry in our bosoms! What perverseness, peevishness, and self-will dwell in its! How soon our temper is stirred up, and our irritable minds roused in a moment by the veriest trifle! How little patience have we under the trials that God sees fit to lay upon us! The Lord afflicts some of his people with weakly tabernacles; and how impatient they sometimes are under this dispensation! He sees fit that others should be tried with a persecuting partner in life; and how peevish and fretful they often are under this trouble! Others he is pleased to afflict with disobedient offspring;

and how murmuring and rebellious are they when their children are not what they would wish them to be! Others he chastens in providence, disappoints their schemes, blasts their prospects, and brings to poverty. Trial upon trial, embarrassment upon embarrassment, difficulty upon difficulty beset them on every side; and O, what peevishness and fretfulness, what hard thoughts of God, and what self-pity work in the carnal mind! We thus learn our need of patience, and that it is not a fruit of nature's soil. The want of it makes the soul follow after it; and when the Lord does give submission to his will, and enables his children to see how profitable these trials are for their souls, and how, but for this heavy ballast, they would certainly have been carried away into the world, they can see his merciful hand in their heavy affliction. Thus, sometimes by feeling peevish and rebellious, and thus knowing their need of patience; and sometimes by feeling submissive, and enjoying the sweetness of it, they see what a blessed grace patience is; as the Apostle says, "For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." (Heb. 10:36.) Scarcely any grace do we more daily need than that of patience. We need it toward God, when he crosses us in our schemes, thwarts us in our desires, and instead of shewing why he afflicts us, hides himself behind a thick cloud that neither faith nor prayer can pierce through. We need patience with each other, with the world, with our relations in life, and with the church of God. We need patience when anything is said or done to hurt our minds, wound our feelings, irritate our tempers, and stir us up to revenge. And what a mercy it is, under these sharp trials, to have patience, and thus follow the example of the blessed Lord, "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." (1 Pet. 2:23.) Perhaps you are a servant, and have a master or mistress who is wayward and irritable, or so harsh and oppressive that your carnal mind boils over with wrath. But what a mercy it is under such trying circumstances to have patience! Or, your partner in life may at times by unfounded suspicions and jealousies greatly irritate you. You feel it sometimes very much to affect your natural disposition, and stir

up your easily excited temper. But what a mercy it is to feel a little patience under the trial, and to win by affection what we cannot obtain by sullenness! Our spiritual friends too often try our minds by cutting speeches, and these not always to our face. Our proud heart resents the injury, and would bid us draw the sword of revenge. But have we not always found that when we have taken the sword to strike down a brother, there was a concealed blade in the hilt which ran into our own hand? And thus we learn rather to bear and submit to injuries, and to desire that God may bless us with patience, than say, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."

We thus gradually and slowly learn our need of patience: and being inwardly convinced that we have no power to work it in our own hearts, desire to follow after it, that it may be communicated by God the Spirit to our souls.

6. The last grace the Apostle desires this "man of God" to follow after is "*meekness.*" And O, what a blessed grace is this! What an exhortation do we find the Holy Ghost giving by the Apostle Peter to the women that profess godliness! "Whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair," (and perhaps, he would have added, "of putting flowers into it," had he lived in our time) "and of wearing of gold" (such as gold necklaces, and watches by the side), "or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, *even the ornament of meek and quiet spirit*, which in the sight of God is of great price." (1 Pet. 3:3, 4.) O what wise instruction does the Apostle give to those wives and daughters that profess godliness! And how he warns them against attiring themselves like the daughters of Belial, and following the women of Canaan in their love of gay and fashionable apparel, while they slight the inward adornings of the Spirit, such as kindness, gentleness, meekness, and humility! But how far better are these inward ornaments which the Spirit of God puts into the heart! And how much more comely do they look thus spiritually attired than if loaded with all the finery that the daughters of Belial array themselves in!

But how are we to follow after this grace of meekness? By learning the contrary. I have had at times a contentious spirit, and (more especially formerly) have, no doubt, carried this spirit into the ministry, whilst endeavouring sincerely and honestly to contend for the truth of God. But "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God;" and thus, as the Lord the Spirit leads us on, we shall flee from our own spirit, and cease from strife and contention. Not that we shall be a whit less faithful, God forbid! Nay, the more we feel the power of truth, shall we with greater faithfulness contend for it: but we shall contend more in the spirit of meekness. How often have we mistaken false fire for the light and fire of God's Spirit! and have contended more for our own views, in our own spirit, with many rash and unbecoming words, rather than for the glory of God. But after a time we are led to see that strife and contention, in our own spirit, are contrary to the spirit and temper of the gospel, and are brought to see what a blessed grace the spirit of meekness is. Nay, the very want of it, the risings up of an excited temper; the anger, strife, envy, and jealousy that often work in our bosoms convince us how little we know of "the meekness and gentleness of Christ." We thus feel what a blessing it is to be made humble and submissive; and how impossible it is to enter into communion with a broken-hearted Jesus, till the soul is in some measure weakened by his Spirit. But it is by having a succession of things to try and provoke us, that we learn whether we have meekness or not. The husband can be very meek, while his wife and children are doing everything to please him; but where is his meekness when they thwart and provoke him? The master may be very meek, while the servant is obedient, obliging, and attentive; but how is he when things are different? Thus the knowledge of the disease makes us desire the remedy; and by the wretched sensations caused by wrath and evil temper, we are brought to desire an experience of those sweet feelings which gospel meekness produces in our consciences.

These, then, are the graces of the Spirit which Paul exhorts his dear Son Timothy to follow after. Now, if you are a reckless

Antinomian, and have plenty of notions in your head, but are destitute of God's teaching in your heart, you will not want to "follow after" these graces of the Spirit; you will be satisfied with a name to live, and call all such exhortations the very dregs of legality. But if God the Spirit has wrought with power upon your conscience, you will say, Lord, these are the things my soul desires to follow after; I feel my deficiencies, and how short I come in these matters! How little do I know of righteousness, faith, love, patience, and meekness! How wofully defective in these inward graces and blessed teachings! But, Lord," the soul says in simplicity and sincerity, "I desire to follow after them, and to be possessed of them; to have them revealed in my heart, and wrought in my conscience by the power of God the Spirit." So far, then, from kicking and rebelling against these wholesome and sound truths, we shall be grieved that we come so short of the graces of the Spirit, and earnestly desire to be led into a deeper experience of them.

To sum up all in a few words. Here are the things which God the Spirit bids us flee from; and here are the things which he bids us to follow. And may I not say with the Prophet, "If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him?"

## **The Whole Armour of God**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, Dec. 22, 1861

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand." Ephesians 6:13

In the verse immediately preceding our text, what a vivid picture does the apostle set before our eyes of the enemies with whom the Christian has to combat in fighting the good fight of faith! "We wrestle not," he says, "against flesh and blood;" that is, not against flesh and blood only, for surely one who has given such a description in Romans 7 of the conflict between flesh and spirit could not mean that there is no opposition between the one and the other worthy of the name of a wrestling match. Have we not daily to wrestle against the opposing or alluring world without; against all the power of corruption within? Does temptation never assail us? Do the lusts of the flesh never strive for mastery? Is sin in us a dead thing which neither lives, nor stirs, nor moves? Every Christian must feel that "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and that these are contrary the one to the other." (Gal. 5:17.) And if the one is contrary to the other, what must their irreconcilable opposition produce but a conflict? That daily, unceasing conflict, then, were enough to task all our strength. Were there no other enemies but those we meet with in an opposing world without or encounter in a corrupt nature within, we must fail and fall unless made more than conquerors over both through him that loved us. But the apostle overlooks, so to speak, for the time the conflict which there is in the new man of grace against flesh and blood to direct our thoughts to a severer combat, to a more arduous and continuous battle, which is not against flesh and blood, but "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Observe his language here, and look at it under two different



aspects. See *first* the *number* and *nature* of our foes; *secondly*, the *position* which they occupy. By "principalities and powers, the ruler of the darkness of this world and spiritual wickedness," we are to understand, as is expressed in the margin, "wicked spirits;" and by "high places," we are to understand the air above us, as Satan is called in this epistle "the prince of the power of the air." (Eph. 2:2.) It is, then, as if the apostle would represent the very high and wide atmosphere with which we are surrounded, the very air which we are ever breathing, as tenanted, I might rather say infested with a whole posse of infernal spirits; as if an innumerable company of devils were in the sky watching our every movement; sometimes making deadly thrusts at us by open violence, and at others seeking to entangle our feet in their accursed wiles; but whether by force or fraud, ever plotting with each other our eternal destruction. If you cannot believe or realise this, only look at the way in which he describes them. Do but consider the language which he employs, and bear in mind that they are inspired words, which, as such, are to be received in implicit faith. He describes them, then, as "principalities, as powers, as the rulers of the darkness of this world, as spiritual wickedness," or "wicked spirits" [margin] "in high," or, as the margin reads, "heavenly places." Let us seek, with the Lord's help, to penetrate into the meaning of these words. There is, we have reason to believe, what is sometimes called "a celestial hierarchy;" in other words, the blessed angels themselves are not all of one rank or condition. This seems plain from various parts of Scripture. In this very epistle, for instance, we read of our blessed Lord being exalted "above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this world but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:21); and again, "To the intent that now unto the principalities, and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." (Eph. 3:10.) These expressions—principality, power, might, and dominion—seem to show us that there are different ranks in the angelic host. Again, Gabriel speaks of himself as standing in the presence of God (Luke 1:19), which would seem to imply some distinguished privilege, and thus Michael is called in Daniel "one of the chief

princes" (Dan. 10:13), and by Jude "the archangel." It is not indeed a decided matter of faith; still we may believe that there is a difference in rank between such angels as Gabriel or Michael and other angelic beings, who are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." I should not, however, have touched upon this point but for the purpose of casting some light upon our text. It would seem then from it that Satan, who was once a pure and bright angelic spirit, has counterfeited this celestial hierarchy by an infernal hierarchy of his own, of which he is the head; for we read of "the devil and his angels who fought against Michael and his angels." (Rev. 12:7.) Thus in imitation of the ranks and orders of angelic beings, there are, we have reason to believe, ranks and orders of infernal spirits; and as these possess all their former angelic power, though now perverted into malice and wickedness, and as they exert this influence over this world, they are styled by the apostle "principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness (or "wicked spirits,") in high (or heavenly) places." But you say, "Who sees them? who feels them? What evidence have we that we are surrounded by these infernal spirits, all plotting our downfall? You tell us so, and you try to prove your point; but what evidence have we that we are surrounded by such infernal foes, or that we have to fight a battle for our life against them?" Well, the time may come when you may have these infidel doubts resolved in a manner that may prove a day of the deepest distress you may ever pass through; or you may learn it by being entangled in some snare of their laying which may well-nigh break every bone in your skin. But because they are invisible are they less real? Because you may not at present feel their power, is that power less strong? No; just the contrary. It is because they are invisible that, though so little dreaded, they are all the more formidable; it is because they exert apparently so little power over you that they really hold you in an iron, though to you it may seem but a silken, vice. For it is not so much the open violence as the secret stratagems of Satan that we have to dread, the hidden snares which he spreads for our feet, the subtle influence which he exerts over our carnal mind, the crafty suggestions, the infidel thoughts, the sensual

imaginings, the rebellious murmurings, the lurking enmity, all which he, as it were, inspires with his infernal breath. James speaks of the tongue as "set on fire of hell." (James 3:6.) This gives us a clue to the way in which Satan acts. When the tongue is speaking "vanity," or "boasting great things:" when it "defileth the whole body, and is full of deadly poison," who sees that Satan is setting it on fire? And if this be the case with the sins of the tongue, why should it not be with every other sin also? So that though we have no visible evidence of these infernal spirits hovering over us as so many unclean birds in the sky; if we hear not their voice or see not their form, yet this is the very reason why we have actually to dread them more, because the less they are seen the more power they exert. We are bidden, therefore, by the apostle to "put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." It is not, you see, his open violence so much as his secret craft that we have to dread. So great is this that but for three circumstances, all men without exception would fall a prey to his wiles.

1. The first is that the spiritual and eternal life of all the saints of God are *secure in the Person of his dear Son*. His own words are, "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Yea, he gives if possible a stronger reason still: "My Father which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." (John 10:28, 29.) All the sheep of Christ are therefore bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord the Lamb; they are all secured in the oath and promise of God which he made to the Son of his love in the everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure, when he declared that "his seed should endure for ever and his throne as the days of heaven." (Psalm 89:29.) Satan, therefore, may battle and buffet, bite and bruise, harry and harass, worry and wound, tease and torture, enchant and ensnare the family of God; but he never can pluck out of Christ's hand the least member of his mystical body. Did not the Lord himself thus express to his Father his heavenly will, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me?" (John 17:24.)

2. But there is a second reason why Satan cannot eventually prevail over the least member of the Lord Jesus. Our blessed Lord *has spoiled* him of his dominion over them. Thus we read that "he took part of the flesh and blood of the children, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14); and again, "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it," that is, his cross. Thus, when he went up to heaven he "led captivity captive," and dragged these infernal spirits bound at his chariot wheels, depriving them of all their power to destroy his people. (Col. 2:15; Eph. 4:8.)

3. But there is a third reason why the saints of God are not to be overcome in this strife; and that is, because *God has provided an armour for them*, clad in which they shall be able to stand against all the wiles of the devil.

This brings us to our text, in approaching which this morning I shall

I.—*First*, show you, as the Lord may enable me, *what this armour is*, called here "*the whole armour of God*;" and what it is "*to take it*," or "*put it on*."

II.—*Secondly*, how by taking the whole armour of God *we shall be able "to withstand in the evil day."*

III.—*Thirdly*, the caution that when "*we have done all*," or, as the margin reads, when we have "*overcome*" all, then in that hour of our greatest danger still "*to stand*."

I.—In opening up and describing the whole armour of God, it will be necessary, with God's help and blessing, to look at the several parts as the Holy Ghost has here brought them to our view by the pen of Paul.

i. I shall therefore, commence with the *girdle*. "Stand, therefore, having your *loins girded about with truth*." Of course you are well

aware that Eastern nations are not dressed as we are; that they wear not tight, close-fitting garments, suitable to the industrious, active habits of Northern climes and European nations, but loose flowing robes, which however inconvenient they might be to us, are well adapted to their climate and habits. But as even they sometimes must exert themselves in husbandry, in war, or in the chase, they are obliged to gather and gird them tightly round their loins when they address themselves to anything which requires active exertion. In their houses, sitting upon their sofas and cushions, these robes are allowed to fall lightly from their persons. But it would not do to work in the field or go to battle in this fashion. The Jews, therefore, and other Eastern nations, always had at hand a broad and strong girdle, by means of which they could fasten their dress firmly round them and yet leave the arms at full liberty to hold a mattock or wield a sword. This will explain the reason why in the Scripture we so often meet with the phrase of "girding up the loins," that is, to take the first step towards active exertion. Taking that idea, then, the apostle bids us as the first step "to stand," that is, to arise from a sitting posture, to get upon our feet, and prepare ourselves for the coming fight, by "having our loins girt about with truth." This is then the first and undermost part of the armour, without putting on which the rest of the pieces could not be properly got on, or be made to fit each in its place. This girdle or belt is spoken of as the "girdle of truth." By the word "truth" here, I understand two things: 1st, *sincerity*, for *that* is the basis of all Christian profession; that is the first piece of armour which we have to take up to make us right and tight, to keep our loose garments together, and to gird up our loins for the coming battle. As Elijah girded up his loins when he ran before Ahab; as Gehazi was bidden to gird up his loins and lay the prophet's staff upon the child's face; as our Lord himself bids his waiting disciples, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning;" so must we gird up our loins to fight the good fight of faith, to run with patience the race set before us, to be daily and hourly prepared for the Lord's coming as a thief in the night. But without the girdle of sincerity, honesty, uprightness, and truthfulness, what is our profession worth? If not absolutely armour, the girdle of truth

must be put on, or there is no possibility of taking up the other pieces. Mark, then, that the first requisite of a Christian is *sincerity*. But do not mistake my meaning. There is much sincerity which is not "the girdle of truth." When I speak then of sincerity, I understand by it what the apostle calls, "godly sincerity." (2 Cor. 1:12.) There is a sincerity even in religion which at best is but a rotten girdle. Is not the papist sincere? I have seen them in days past at their devotions, and I have seen sincerity, though a blind and superstitious sincerity, stamped upon their every feature and gesture. But this girdle was woven with human fingers in an earthly loom. The girdle of truth is of heavenly manufacture, and in a sense resembles our Lord's garment, that it is "without a seam," of one piece, "woven from the top throughout." There is in it, therefore, no intermixture of lindsey-woolsey, no rotten threads, no part weak whilst the rest is strong. As in a chain the strength of the whole is determined by the tenacity of the weakest link; so the strength of the whole girdle is determined by the weakest part; every part, therefore, throughout must be equally strong or it will break asunder at the rotten place. A girdle that will never break was never woven by human fingers. Nothing else but godly sincerity of which every thread is of divine manufacture can stand the strain which sin and Satan will surely put upon it. Who could be more sincere than Paul when he was persecuting the church of God? He "verily thought within himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth;" but that verily thinking was not sufficient to make him right in the sight of God when "being exceedingly mad against the saints of God, he persecuted them even to strange cities." He needed sincerity of another kind—sincerity of God's own giving, such as was communicated to him at Damascus' gate. No man is really sincere until God makes him so; for there can be no real sincerity without divine light, no real earnestness without divine life. We play with religion until God makes us in earnest; at least I know it was so with me. I had my fits and starts about religion and thought I would be religious some day or other, having a great respect for it and for religious people. But the world always broke in upon my resolutions, and swept them away. It was like a child at the seaside trying to stop

the incoming tide by taking its little wooden shovel and throwing up a heap of wet sand. I never was sincere until God made me so by planting his fear in my heart.

But "truth," as the girdle of a Christian soldier, means not merely sincerity, but an *experimental knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus*. We are to have "our loins girt about with truth," which implies taking truth up with a believing hand and putting it round us so as to strengthen us for action. And as I have just shown you that there must be no rotten threads in the girdle of sincerity, so there must be no mixture of error in the belt of gospel truth. The girdle of truth must be made of pure truth without. If there be in it the least intermixture of error, it will be like a rotten piece in a literal girdle: it will break where it is rotten. How we have lately seen this in the controversy concerning the Sonship of Jesus! How many a girdle of men who were thought "valiant for truth" has broken in this part. They held their error in secret; but when a strain was put upon their girdle it broke where it was rotten. In order then to be firm and strong, it must be throughout pure and perfect, which the truth of God is as revealed in the word. Whatever error a man may hold, *that* is his weak point; and sooner or later he will find as the prophet declares, "instead of a girdle there shall be a rent" (Isai. 3:24); for like the girdle which the prophet hid by Euphrates, it will by means of this error become "marred and profitable for nothing." (Jer. 13:7.) This makes me, then, so zealous against error, for I see its tremendous consequences. I may be called a man of a bitter spirit, because I warmly denounce it. But why do I denounce it but because I see in what a perilous state the souls of men are who are entangled in it? To be given up to believe a lie is one of the most dreadful judgments of God. No, my friends, if we are to fight the good fight of faith, we must hold the truth experimentally and feelingly in its purity and power; and so far as I am enabled to do this my loins are girded with the girdle of truth. As with our blessed Lord, "truth was the girdle of his loins and faithfulness the girdle of his reins," so truth and faithfulness, the truth as it is in Jesus, and faithfulness to what we believe and know for ourselves, must be the girdle of ours. But you may ask

with Pilate, "What is truth?" Truth is that inspired revelation of himself and of his mind and will which God has made known in the Scriptures, and which the blessed Spirit reveals with power to the heart of his people; such as the doctrine of a Three-one God; the true and proper Sonship and Deity of our blessed Lord; the Deity, personality, and divine operations of the Holy Ghost; to this I may add what are usually called the doctrines of grace, and, not to occupy your time and attention unnecessarily, to sum up the whole in one expression, the truth which maketh the soul free. Now in proportion as we know the truth in the sweet experience of it, and have it brought into our heart by the power of God, are our loins girded with this heavenly girdle; for bear in mind it is to be worn, not looked at, clasped and buckled round us, not held loosely in the hand.

2. But look now at the *second* piece of armour of which the apostle speaks and which we have next to put on, "*the breastplate of righteousness.*" The breastplate was one of the most important pieces of armour that in times of old, before the invention of gunpowder, shielded the warrior, for it protected the vital parts. The heart, the lungs, the liver, all these vital organs were protected by the breastplate, which was made sometimes of pieces of iron or steel overlapping each other, and sometimes of a single solid piece of metal. So in grace: the heart, which is the seat of all vital feeling, whence the streams of healthy blood are propelled through every artery and vein; the lungs, whereby we inspire the vital air, the pure breath of heaven, and breathe forth prayer and supplication to God; and the liver, whereby we obtain a healthy appetite to digest the bread of life, the food on which we live: these inward organs, so to speak, of the new man of grace must be protected by a breastplate. What is that? "*The breastplate of righteousness.*" Our own righteousness? What protection will our own afford? I remember reading many years ago in Lord Macartney's "Embassy to China," that in one part of their voyage they saw upon a Chinese fort, which made a show of averting their progress, a number of men walking on the ramparts in splendid armour. After exchanging a few shots the fort was taken, and what did they find this armour to be? It was



all made of glittering paper burnished up to represent steel. These men were set up for show to frighten away our ships. Their armour could scarcely have repelled a child's arrow, much less such weapons as are used in our naval service. So would be a breastplate of our own righteousness; like the Chinese paper armour, it might be shining to the eye, but as weak as water against a hostile thrust from our implacable foe. O we want a better breastplate than one of paper, or even iron, if it be manufactured from nature's mine and welded by human hands. We want a breastplate of Jesus' own righteousness, in which there is no flaw or chink. We read of Ahab, that a man at a venture drew a bow, but the arrow reached his heart, for it pierced the joints of his harness, or, as the word there means, armour. You see there was a joint, or a place where the plates did not fully overlap each other; the arrow found out that joint; and though he had a breastplate on, yet because there was a chink or faulty spot in it, the arrow drank his blood through it, and he sank down in his chariot a dying man. So our breastplate, if it be of human manufacture, will have these faulty places; a piece of goodness here and a patch of righteousness there, like a bed quilt, a tiling of shreds and patches. What sort of protection will this be when the enemy against whom we fight urges his deadly thrust? But there is a breastplate which he never can pierce, the breastplate of *Christ's righteousness*. As Hart well says—

"Righteousness within thee rooted  
May appear to take thy part;  
But let righteousness imputed  
Be the breastplate of thine heart."

But as other parts of the armour are to be considered, I must dismiss this piece with one solemn admonition. Christ's righteousness, not your own, must guard your bosom as your breastplate in battle, as well as be your wedding dress when the battle is done.

3. *"And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of*

*peace.*" The ancients generally wore sandals—a kind of sole loosely fastened on by ties; but when they went into battle they wore greaves, a kind of strong leather boot reaching a good way up the leg, which, being covered over with small brass or steel plates, protected their lower limbs from blows. The apostle alludes to these military greaves where he speaks of our feet being "*shod* with the preparation of the gospel of peace." We have to stand firmly and strongly on our legs if we contend with our enemy. A loose fitting sandal may do for peace, but we want something stronger and better for war. This strong, firm, iron-bound shoe is the gospel of peace, that well fits the foot: it is a firm shoe which will not come off in the mud, nor allow Satan to cut at our feet so as to overthrow us in our goings. It is called here "the *preparation* of the gospel of peace," but the word "preparation" also means the *readiness*, the alacrity which this gospel shoe gives us; for as the military shoe gave the warrior alacrity to move forward, lent him firm standing, which he could not have had with his naked foot or by his shifting sandal, so that he could maintain his hold upon the soil, even though the ground were slippery with blood; so if once we have the gospel shoe well fitted on, have the gospel of peace put on, as it were, by the Blessed Spirit, so as to be closely wrapped round our feet and legs, and can stand firmly in it by the renewings and revivings of his grace, we shall then maintain our standing in the very teeth of hell, in the very face and under the hottest fire of Satan. But if we stand upon a broken law; upon the ever-shifting soil of creature merit; upon the quicksand of our own resolutions, or our own present or future exertions; or upon ground made slippery through the commission of secret or open sin, and the blood and gore of a guilty conscience all spilt upon it, we shall certainly fall in the day of battle. Nothing but the gospel, the precious gospel, called here "the gospel of peace," as revealing and bringing peace to the conscience, "the peace of God which passeth all understanding," can secure a firm standing for our feet, if we are to fight against Satan and all his embattled hosts. And as there was a fitness, and what we may call a suitability in the armed shoe to the warrior's foot, as not only protecting the flesh, but bracing and strengthening the muscles, so when the gospel

comes in sweetness and power as a message of mercy, a revelation of peace to the conscience, it not only protects from hostile blows but binds up; not only guards but braces the Christian warrior's foot, and gives him a firm and solid standing in the field of battle. To be well established in the truth is an inestimable mercy; and indeed without it there is no power to resist temptation, overcome the world, fight against Satan, or triumph over death and hell.

4. But now comes a very important piece of armour. We have seen the girdle of truth; we have looked at the breastplate of righteousness, and we have examined the greaves of the gospel of peace. But the warrior is not yet complete: there are still unprotected parts in which he may receive a dangerous thrust. He must have a *shield*, then, that he may ward off every blow from whatever quarter it may come. And what is the shield of the Christian soldier? What is called here the "shield of faith." This shield then will require a little examination. Observe, then, that it is not faith itself which is the shield, but the Object of faith. This seems plain from what God said to Abram, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." (Gen. 15:1.) What is the happiness of Israel but that the Lord is her salvation, her shield, and her sword? "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord, the *shield* of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency?" (Deut. 33:29.) And is not "the Lord God a sun and *shield*?" (Psl. 84:11.) It is not then our faith, much less any natural goodness, strength, or wisdom of our own that will avail us in this terrible conflict. But it is having Christ between us and Satan, interposing his Person and work, blood and righteousness; and thus, by faith, taking and making him our shield and buckler, we shall "quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." It is called the shield of faith, because faith alone takes hold of Christ as our buckler. The expression "fiery darts" is an allusion to a customary mode of warfare in ancient times. They used to wrap arrows round with tow, or some other inflammable material, which they set on fire, and then shot them over the walls into the besieged city, which, if they alighted upon any wooden building or other combustible surface, either set the town

in flames or produced such confusion as to distract the combatants while the enemy stormed the place. Thus they were to the ancients what shells are now.

By these "fiery darts," or, as the word literally means, darts which have been set on fire, we may understand Satan's infernal suggestions, his diabolical insinuations, his infidel reasonings, the hard thoughts which he raises up in the minds of God's people, the rebellion, peevishness, fretfulness, and despair that he is permitted to hurl against them as so many flaming arrows. But why are they so much to be dreaded? Because we carry within us a whole magazine of combustible material. Lying deeply hidden in our carnal mind, almost like the barrels of gunpowder once concealed under the Houses of Parliament, there is a countless store of the most inflammable matter, which these fiery darts, if they reach it, can in a moment explode. Had we no such corrupt nature, no such inflammable material, Satan might shoot his fiery darts against us without doing us any more injury than the literal arrow would injure a wall of stone. But we carry about such a mass of inflammable material that it only needs one fiery dart to set the whole on fire. Have you not sometimes felt such rebellion working in your mind, such hard thoughts of God, such enmity, such dregs of filth, such horrid thoughts and fearful blasphemy, that it seemed almost as if you were possessed of the devil? And at other times such swarms of infidelity have swept over your mind that you seemed to have scarcely a grain of faith left. There has been and still is much talk about the "*Essays and Reviews*;" but I have long had the substance of the *Essays and Reviews* in my carnal mind. I need not read *Essays and Reviews* to stir up infidelity: I have had enough of that working in my own heart for many a toilsome year, and even now scarcely a day passes without one or more of these fiery darts being hurled at my soul. I have neither read them nor do I mean to read them; but I believe there is scarcely an objection which these *Essays* contain that I have not had previously in the depths of my reasoning mind. I do not mean that they have been worked out as these enemies of the cross of Christ have set them off with argument and erudition; but perhaps some may have occurred to my mind

which they have not glanced at; for I have often felt the truth of a remark made by Halyburton, that the Lord hides from such men the greatest difficulties that lie against religion; for being in nature's blindness they have not light to see them; and also in tenderness to the faith of the weak, does not permit all their subtleties to be published. We know, therefore, what these men mean and the awful end to which they are driving, which they themselves cannot see, as being shut up in unbelief, because we have the counterpart in our own bosom. But the snares in which they are trapped to their own destruction are our temptations; as their glory is our shame, and their rejoicing our misery. But how distressing it is to the believing soul to find such infidel reasonings in his wicked heart, and how when this furious storm blows he seems almost driven from his anchorage!

But again, what *desponding* thoughts often rush into the breasts of many a poor child of God, who is not subject perhaps to, and may never once have experienced those infidel temptations to which I have alluded. Satan can work according to our natural constitution, education, habits of thought, and in any other circumstances in which we may widely differ from one another. If I have a reasoning mind, he can adapt his fiery darts to stir up in me infidel thoughts. If I am of a desponding turn, he can fill me with the most gloomy, melancholy feelings so as to make me almost despair of salvation. If I am naturally peevish or fretful, he can work upon those fretful feelings, and raise up most awful rebellion, self pity, and hard thoughts of God. He knows exactly our constitution, and wherever he sees a weak point there will he shoot in a fiery dart.

But how shall we meet these fiery darts of Satan? There is only one way. By taking the shield of faith, holding up Jesus presenting as it were against these darts the Person, the work, the blood, and the love of the Lord the Lamb. But how can we do this? By an act of faith, by believing in the Son of God with all our heart, let Satan say what he will. Satan may say that he is not the true and real Son of God. "Yes, but I say," the soul answers, "he is: God has revealed him to my soul as such; and besides this

inward testimony I see it shining as with a ray of divine light in the Scriptures. In spite, then, Satan, of all your suggestions and all the reasons and arguments of unenlightened, uninspired men, I still hold by this truth; for it has been ratified in my inmost heart; He is, he is the Son of God." There you take the shield of faith, for by faith you hold up Jesus, as the Son of God, against the fiery dart. Or again, if Satan say that the Scriptures are not true, or not inspired; that they are only like other books, written by the pen of man; "O, but," you say, "I know they are true and inspired by the Holy Spirit, for I have felt their power; they have been applied to my soul; I have been comforted by them. They are true; they are inspired of God, let Satan say what he will." This is taking the shield of faith, receiving into it the fiery dart, and thus quenching its flames. The ancients were accustomed to protect wooden buildings against fiery arrows by covering them with wet hides, which quenched the fire. To this there is an allusion in the expression, "to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." Or Satan may rouse up in your mind a storm of rebellion against God, and represent him as your angry Judge or vindictive enemy. But you say, "Can I rebel against so merciful a God, who has done so much for me in body and soul? Shall I contend against him who has blessed me and held me up in the paths of truth and righteousness so many years?" Here is again a taking of the shield of faith to quench the fiery dart which of itself would be enough to set all your carnal mind on fire. Or if Satan shoot a burning arrow of despair into your desponding mind, which seems for a time to penetrate deeply, and to be kindling the most gloomy feelings within; in the strength of faith once more you take the shield with, "Did not the Lord once appear on my behalf? Did he not visit and bless my soul on this or on that occasion? Yes; I have felt his presence, seen his glory, tasted his love, and enjoyed the superaboundings of his grace. Satan, avaunt! You cannot reason me out of this, nor make me believe that the Lord has never blessed my soul." Here again is the shield of faith; and by this shield as thus held up against it the fiery dart is quenched and falls harmless to the ground. But I would not have you to think that I mean we can always or indeed often do this. My object is merely to point out what the shield of faith is, and how

the Christian warrior uses it; but I by no means intend that he has any strength to do so except as enabled by the power of God.

5. But let us pass on to another piece of the armour. There is "*the helmet of salvation.*" The head is a vital organ; therefore needs well protecting, for a blow there might be instantly fatal. The Lord, therefore, has provided a piece of protective armour for it, called here "the helmet of salvation." This is more fully explained by the apostle in another epistle, "And for a helmet the hope of salvation." (1 Thess. 5:8.) But what does the head, spiritually and experimentally viewed, represent? What is it naturally? Is it not the directing organ of the whole body? All our senses are in our head—the eyes by which we see; the ears by which we hear; the nose by which we smell; the palate by which we taste. May not then the head, spiritually viewed, represent the active senses of the living soul, whereby it sees Christ by the eye of faith, hears Christ by the ear of faith, tastes Christ by the palate of faith, smells the sweet savour of his name as the ointment poured forth by the nose of faith, and may I not add, praises and blesses him by the tongue and lips of faith? The head, then, is the representation, so to speak, of that united assemblage of living organs whereby Christ is apprehended as all our salvation and all our desire. But if the head be spiritually all this, it will need some protection. View then, the protective armour provided for it, here called "the helmet of salvation," and see whether you have not already found it able to cover your head in the day of battle. Have you not already had some deadly thrust against it? Satan, if he could, would have put out your eyes, so that you could no longer see Christ by the eye of faith; would have stopped your ears, so that you never more could hear a word of consolation from his lips; would have stuffed your nose with dirt and mud, that you never could have smelt again those garments of his which smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia; would have vitiated your palate by his poisonous drugs, so that never again could you have tasted that he is gracious; would have tied your tongue and muzzled your lips to prevent you from pouring out your soul in prayer and supplication, or in praising and blessing his holy name. A good hope through grace is called "the helmet of

salvation," as being "the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins." (Luke 1:77.) Does not Satan often seem to cut at your very hope of eternal life, just as if, with all the strength and malice of a French cuirassier at Waterloo, he would cut you down at a stroke by cleaving your head in twain? Now, how could our poor, unprotected head stand against such a deadly blow? but there is a *taking* of the helmet of salvation. How so? By receiving salvation into the heart as the free gift of God; so that if salvation by grace has reached your heart, the helmet is already put upon your head to shield it in the day of battle.

We have looked thus far at the *defensive* weapons provided for the Christian warrior in the armoury of God. But he has given us something more than defensive armour. It would not have been enough for the ancient warrior to go into battle with only defensive armour, however strong or well put on. He needed a sword as well as a shield. The Lord, therefore, has not kept this weapon back from the spiritual warrior. Here it is, "*The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*" But you may perhaps ask, Why should the sword be needed by a Christian soldier? Is he not to submit to every injury, and when smitten on the one cheek meekly turn the other? Yes, as regards his fellow man, but not as regards his infernal foe. Are we to let him shoot his fiery arrows and deal us all manner of sword-thrusts, and we not return as good as he gives? Surely not; for of course it is spiritual, not natural fighting; blows upon the soul, not blows upon the face, that we are now talking of; for the sword of the Spirit is not the sword of Gideon or a Damascus' blade, but the word of God. To understand how this is wielded, see how our blessed Lord dealt with Satan in the wilderness. Satan came to him with all his infernal subtlety, actually tempting him to doubt, or at least visibly prove by a miracle, that he was the Son of God. But how calmly, how blessedly our Lord met his suggestion. With what weapon? "It is written." This was the sword of the Spirit. But see its effect. At once Satan gave back, and pressed that temptation no more. He could not overcome "It is written." *That* thrust from the hand of the Lord pierced him through, for he well knew that what God had written must be fulfilled. He knew not only the



omnipotence of Jehovah, but that he was a God that could not lie, and that God would cease to be God if his word could fall to the ground unaccomplished. He trembled, therefore, at God's word in the hands of his dear Son. His own pangs convinced him that what God said must be fulfilled, for he was carrying in his own bosom the penalty of his ancient disobedience to the revealed will of Jehovah, when God said, "Let all the angels of God worship him," and he refused from pride to do so. So it is now. No other sword but that of the Spirit, which is the word of God, can beat him back. Creature arguments, logical reasonings, good works and good resolutions, vows, tears, and promises, are of no avail against Satan. There is only one weapon whereby we can fight him to any purpose, and that is the word of God. But observe, that it must not be merely the *letter* of the word. It must be the "sword of *the Spirit*," and therefore a spiritual sword, which can only be taken in hand when the word of God is applied with a divine power to your heart, and you have a living faith in it as made "life and spirit" to your soul. It is of no use my bringing forward a text to resist a temptation of Satan, unless I can make that text my own; in other words, unless I can handle that sword as one who knows how to wield it. To take up a text and not know the sweetness and power of it, would be like a child taking up a warrior's sword without having the warrior's hand. He might play with the sword, but what is the sword of a giant in the hands of a child? The sword of Scander-Beg, a famous Albanian warrior against the Turks, used to be shown at Vienna. A man who once looked at and handled it said, "Is this the sword which won so many victories? I see nothing in it; it is but a common sword." The answer was, "You should have seen the hand that wielded it." So it is not merely taking a text, adopting scripture language, and quoting passages, which will beat back the fiery assaults of Satan. This is having Scander-Beg's sword without having Scander-Beg's arm. But it is having the word of truth brought into our heart by the power of God, faith raised up to believe that God himself speaks it to our heart, being thus enabled to wield it in the strength of the Spirit and by the power of faith in living exercise, to resist every hellish thrust. In this battle we must not give way. To flee is to be conquered, for, as Bunyan well says,

there is no armour for the back. We must fight, even if we die fighting; resist even unto blood, striving against sin. I tell you again and again that we must never give way; even if we fall we must get up again and fight on; for "a just" (that is a righteous) "man falleth seven times and riseth up again: but the wicked," that is those abandoned to their wickedness, "shall fall into mischief;" that is, open wickedness under the power and condemnation of which they shall ever lie. (Prov. 24:16.) Do we not read, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall, I shall arise" (Micah 7:8); and again, "Though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down." (Psalm 37:24.) Thus even if in this conflict you should slip and fall, lie not still as a conquered captive, but get up again and fight. "Resist Satan, and he will flee from you." He is a conquered enemy; he cannot destroy you if you are the Lord's. The word of truth, therefore, is full of most gracious promises, and sweet encouragements "to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ," and never in heart or hand submit to be conquered by sin or Satan.

6. But now comes another weapon of no less importance than the preceding, which is "*all prayer*." Unless we have this last addition to all the rest of our armour, it may prove like a coat of mail upon a footman at the Lord Mayor's show. The Lord Mayor's footman might wear the armour which an ancient knight wore, retained as a memorial of the days of chivalry in the Tower; but how would he acquit himself if he had to stand against a knight of old, to meet Richard Coeur de Lion or Saladin in the tented field? How would he acquit himself in real combat without knowing by long exercise the use of his weapons? So unless we have this blessed grace and gift of "*all prayer*" to exercise us well in the use of our weapons, to keep them all clean and ready for active service, we might appear to be dressed up in knightly armour, but could we stand the least thrust of a hostile blade? Does not the apostle say, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit?" Observe the words "Praying *always* with all prayer and supplication." Then it is not praying *sometimes* but "*always*," that is, at all times as the Lord enables; and that with "*all prayer*," that is all manner of prayer, public, private, mental, vocal; and

"all *supplication*," which is something more earnest, more importunate, more fervent, more beseeching, more wrestling than prayer, having in it more of Jacob's spirit and petition, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." And observe also, it must be "*in the Spirit*," not in the mere utterance of words; not in the mere form and custom, not lip labour, and tongue service, but as Jude speaks "praying *in the Holy Ghost*" (Jude 20); and as the apostle speaks of himself "I will pray with the Spirit and with the understanding also" (1 Cor. 14:15); for it is not we that pray but "the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." (Rom. 8:26.) Without this Spirit of grace and of supplications poured out upon us from on high (Zech. 12:10), we cannot even see the pieces of armour which God has provided. We cannot see the girdle, or the breastplate, or the greaves, or the shield, or the sword, or the helmet; still less can we put them on. But when the Lord is pleased to bless us with the Spirit of prayer, then we see the girdle of truth and put it round our loins; then we see the breastplate of righteousness and clasp it firmly over the chest; then we see the shoes and put our feet into the Gospel as the Gospel of peace; then we take up the helmet of salvation and place it on the head; then we draw the sword of the Spirit out of the sheath and flash it in the very face of Satan.

7. But now comes one more qualification still for the Christian warrior, which is to "*watch thereunto with all perseverance*." The direction for the Christian warrior is to be ever upon the look out; never to be off his guard; never to take his armour off nor lay his sword aside. When have saints fallen? In unguarded moments. How did David fall? By walking on the house-top instead of being with his army, and not guarding his eyes from wandering. He fell from want of watchfulness. You perhaps have found the same. You have been entangled in a snare of Satan. What you then did was not done wilfully, presumptuously; but you were off your guard, and Satan took advantage of your defenceless state to overcome you with his wiles. We need therefore, watchfulness, so as to suspect everything and everybody, and none so much as ourselves, and that "with all perseverance," so as never to drop

asleep. You know the penalty of a sentry being found asleep at his post. It is death by the articles of war. We are sentries; the enemy is watching us and we must watch him. We must watch eyes, ears, tongue, hands, feet, hearts—yea, we must live in a constant attitude of holy watchfulness or Satan will surely gain the advantage of us. But you will say, "What hard work this is!" Yes, it is hard work, very hard work; not a work for sluggards and cowards; but remember this, that there is salvation at the end of it, and, I may also add, there is no salvation without it, for only "he that endureth to the end shall be saved." It would be hard work for you to be in a military or naval engagement, fighting perhaps up to your ankles in blood; but if you were there in the Queen's service, you must fight. You must not run away from the field; you must not dive into the hold. So it is hard work to be ever struggling against sin and Satan, putting on the armour and keeping it bright; but what is the consequence if we don't do so? Defeat. And what is defeat in this battle? Death and woe for ever. Satan is never so well pleased as when we are careless and thoughtless and without our armour on. So it comes to this: I must either put on the armour of God by faith, or else perish entangled in the wiles of Satan. It is not as though it were with us a matter of indifference, as I might eat a meal or not; put on a coat or not; sleep a certain time or not. Salvation is not, like these bodily acts and a thousand others, a mere matter of indifference. It is whether my soul is to be for ever in the enjoyment of bliss or for ever under the wrath of God. The apostle, therefore, says, "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that"—

II.—To come to our next point, "*you may be able to stand in the evil day.*" There is "an evil day" that comes upon each and all. And what is the evil day? The day of Satan's power; the day of temptation; that day which indeed is and ever will be an evil day unless that armour is put on to enable us to stand. Whatever day that may be, which is to you a day of temptation, *that* for you is an evil day. The sun may shine brightly in the sky and nature wear its most smiling aspect; all may seem pleasant without and within, but it will be an evil day for you if Satan lay a snare and

you fall into it. It will then be our wisdom and mercy to see beforehand the approach of this evil day—and there are always symptoms of the evil day coming. Rain does not fall without clouds; night does not come on until the sun has sensibly left the sky; so the evil day does not come upon the Christian without warning from above. Look out and see; even now perhaps there is a gradual diminution of the light; clouds begin to gather; heavy drops fall upon the pavement; the storm is coming; the evil day approaching. What unclean bird is that in the sky, like the fabled roe, or condor of the Andes, spreading his dark wings and whetting his beak and claws? I see, I see; I hear, I hear the rushing of his wings; Satan is at hand; I must put on my armour. Where is my girdle—where my breastplate—where my shoes—where my shield—where my helmet? The enemy is at the gates; the battle-trumpet is sounding. I shall be overcome unless I put on my armour. Where, too, is my sword, my Jerusalem blade, that I may fight with Satan and give him blow for blow and thrust for thrust? Here, then, is the soul in "the evil day," praying and watching, taking the shield of faith and putting the armour on. It is by doing this, and only by doing this, that it "*stands*" in the evil day. But where are we if there is no armour on, no girdle of truth round the loins, no sincerity before God or man; no breastplate of Christ's righteousness to guard our heart; no hope of salvation to cover our head; no gospel of peace in which our feet may stand, no shield of faith to hold up against the fiery darts of the wicked one, no sword of the Spirit wherewith we may return blow for blow? Why, we must be overcome. Like a naked man in the midst of armed warriors, we must surrender before the uplifted sword cleaves our skull. You see then the necessity there is that the Christian should not only know there are these pieces of heavenly armour, but should put them on as God has bidden him. And he does put them on when the Lord is pleased to put them on for him, for he alone "teacheth our hands to war and our fingers to fight." He does equip himself when the Spirit calls to arms and gives him power and strength to put on the various pieces. Only so can he withstand. But is he safe *then*? Some of the greatest victories have followed the most seeming defeats; it was so at Marengo, where Buonaparte defeated the Austrians just as they

had gained the day; and some of the most disastrous defeats have followed in the very train of victory, as Ben-hadad found to his sorrow. (1 Kings 20:29.) When an army has gained a battle, it reposes upon its arms, wearied with the conflict. If a fresh attack be then made, how soon a victory may be changed into a defeat. But some of you may not understand and others object to my natural figures and historical allusions; I will give you, therefore, Scriptural examples. Look at Lot, Gideon, and Jephthah. Hezekiah fell by pride after the Lord had cast all his sins behind his back; Peter denied Jesus after a glorious revelation of him as the Son of God. How suitable, therefore, the exhortation of

III.—Our third point, *"having done,"* or, it is in the margin, *"overcome all to stand."* Now suppose you have overcome all your foes and fears. You have put on the girdle of truth and the breastplate of righteousness. Well shod have been your feet; well protected has been your head; able to quench the fiery darts has been your shield; sharp and trenchant has been your sword. As soon as this has been the case with you, well what next? Now pride begins to work,—vain-glory and self-confidence. You congratulate yourself on the victory gained; you get off your guard; stand at ease; and think you shall see war no more. Surely now you may take a little rest; surely now you need not be quite so prayerful, so watchful, or so persevering as before. Now this is the very time for Satan to make a fresh assault. David did not fall into sin when fighting against Saul: he was upon his guard then, and we see how nobly he twice acted when his enemy was in his grasp. But when he had defeated his enemies he remained idle at home, and then overcome by temptations he slipped and fell, most awfully fell, and left a name covered in some respects with disgrace, and a most solemn warning to the saints of God to take heed to their feet. May we learn wisdom from such examples! We may have fought, we may have conquered, and then exulting in the victory fall a prey to the next temptation. We are never really secure until we exchange time for eternity. But meanwhile there is no security for any, be he young or old, except in the grace of God, and that mighty power whereby he keepeth those that are his by faith unto salvation.

The Lord enable us to put this armour on: he has provided it for us; he can equip us with it; and by the power of his grace can bring us off more than conquerors through him who loved us.

## THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road, London, on Lord's Day Morning, August 3, 1851

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." Ephesians 6:13

Every child of God is a soldier, and a real one. In the Christian army, there are no feather-bed, no fire-side soldiers. All to a man are actual combatants. Are not their enemies real? Flesh and blood real? The world real? And Satan real?—a real devil? And if their enemies are real, the conflict with their enemies must be real too. "Every battle of the warrior," we read, "is with confused noise and garments rolled in blood." And such is "the good fight of faith." It is no sham fight, no Hyde Park review: but a hand to hand battle, in which wounds are inflicted, blood shed, and life, according to our feelings, often at stake.

But how shall we be able to fight this sore battle, and so to withstand the enemies of our soul's salvation as to come off more than conquerors? Weak as we are and & fenceless, without one weapon of sufficient temper and strength: through sin, like the children of Israel, "made naked unto their shame among their enemies" **Ex 32:25**, fall we shall, defeated we must be, unless we have some better weapons than our own armoury can furnish. God, who knows the strength of our enemies: God, who knows the weakness of our flesh, has therefore provided in the heavenly armoury weapons whereby, and whereby alone, we can make an effectual stand.

Of this heavenly armour the apostle speaks in the text, where, addressing his Christian brethren, he says, "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." He here makes it imperative upon them to take not **a part** of, but "the **whole**



armour of God." assuring them that it is indispensable to their safety: that only by being clad in it from top to toe, can they "withstand in the evil day." when all the powers of earth and hell are arrayed against them: and that even then, when they have in the strength of that heavenly armour "done," or "over-come all," they must not put it off: but will still need it "to stand."

In opening up the words of our text, I shall endeavour, with God's blessing, this morning,

I.—**First**, to describe the **heavenly armour**; its various pieces and accoutrements, as indispensable to the Christian soldier:

II.—**Secondly**, to shew how this heavenly armour is **taken, worn, and used**.

I.—In order to do justice to our text, it will be necessary that I should take up, one by one, these several pieces of the heavenly armour; for it says, "Wherefore take unto you the **whole** armour of God." If, then, I, as a combatant, am without one piece, I run the risk of defeat; and if I, as a minister, in laying open this text, omit one, I am so far unfaithful in neglecting a part that may be for our spiritual defence. As a Christian, then, and as a minister, I must take the **whole**, each and all being alike indispensable.

1. The **first** piece of heavenly armour that the apostle speaks of is, **the Girdle**: "Stand, therefore," he says, "having **your loins girt about with truth**." The loins, or lower part of the back, is the seat of strength, as well as of activity and motion. No heavy weights can a man lift, no hard work can he perform unless he be strong there. The prophet therefore says, "Make **thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily**" **Na 2:1**. Of Behemoth, we read, "His strength is in **his loins**" **Job 40:16**. These loins, then, the seat of activity and strength, need to be guarded by a piece of heavenly armour, lest Satan make a deadly thrust there. If he can get a blow at our unprotected loins, it will paralyse every movement. A stroke here, so as to reach the spinal marrow, prostrates indeed. "Smite through the loins of them that rise

against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again" **De 33:11** . We need, therefore, to have our loins girded about with a piece of heavenly armour which shall effectually protect them from these paralysing blows.

This heavenly girdle is "**Truth,**" What truth? By "truth" here we may understand. I think, two things.

**First,** generally Christian sincerity; "Truth," as the Psalmist speaks, "in the inward parts" **Ps 51:6**. Uprightness of heart lies at the base of all true Christian profession. If a man have no sincerity Godward, he has nothing. Our loins, therefore, or the seat of strength and activity, need in this sense to be girt about with what the apostle calls "simplicity and godly sincerity" **2Co 1:12**. If there be insincerity in our profession, O what advantage is given to Satan! A blow from his hand against our profession, when there is no consciousness of sincerity Godward, must be fatal. Here he smote Judas, Saul, and Ahithophel; and they fell to rise no more. Against, then, these fatal blows, we need a girdle of truth—to be sincere Godward; to have truth in our inward parts; and, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to be made upright in our Christian profession. "I was upright before Him, and kept myself from my iniquity."

But we may observe further, that the ancients wore loose dresses; and as these were often in their way impeding their movements, they kept them tight round their body by a girdle. So we are continually impeded by the loose dress of unbelief, "the sin that doth so easily beset us," as the apostle calls it, alluding to it as an encumbering garment, which clings round the limbs, and impedes all free movements. But when the loins are girt about with sincerity and truth, it braces them with flesh activity and strength.

But secondly, the word "truth" is also used in a more **particular** and restricted sense to signify **Christian truth, "the truth as it is in Jesus."** A man may be sincerely wrong. Do you think that there is no sincerity but what God implants? Are not many Papists

sincere? many Mahometans sincere? many utterly devoid of grace, and bitterly opposed to the work of the Spirit, sincere? Yes, surely. Not spiritually, but naturally sincere. View the crowds of persons this day going to church and chapel where we know the truth is not preached, must we make a broad sweep with them all, and say, They are all of them wretched hypocrites, dishonest and designing, doing it to be seen of men.' I dare not say so. Christian sincerity is one thing; natural sincerity another. Was not Saul of Tarsus sincere? And the mariners that threw Jonah overboard?

But spiritual sincerity itself, in deadly conflicts with sin and Satan, is not sufficient without a knowledge of "the truth as it is in Jesus." Young converts are spiritually sincere, but how unable to fight in this great battle!

The truth, then, as revealed in the gospel of the grace of God must be the foundation of our spiritual strength. We cannot fight against Satan with lies. If we fight against him, it must be with truth. The truth of the gospel made known to the soul, revealed and applied to the heart and conscience by the Holy Spirit, must be the girdle to strengthen and guard the loins in the day of battle.

2. We pass on to consider the **second** piece of Christian armour, "**the Breastplate of righteousness.**" Now as the loins are the seat of activity and strength, so the breast is the seat of the **heart**, the fountain of the blood, which it propels through every artery, and of the **lungs**, which alternately inspire and expire the air, the vital breath of heaven. These are two vital parts. We need, therefore, to have this double seat of life specially secured.

Spiritually viewed, the **heart** may represent two things:—Firstly the **conscience**; and secondly the **affections**. And the **lungs** may represent two things also:

1. the inspiration of life and feeling, of prayer and supplication from God; and

2. the **expiration** of desires and breathings after his favour and presence. Now all these vital parts—the peculiar seat of life and feeling, the special domain of heart religion—need to be covered with a heavenly breastplate; for if Satan could pierce any of these, that thrust would be fatal.

But how often does he aim his thrust against the **heart**, as the seat of **conscience!** and would, if he could, by deadly thrusts at that tender point, plunge the soul into despair! He would, were it wholly unguarded, hurl dart after dart, and shoot arrow after arrow into the conscience, till he made it bleed to death. We need **conscience**, then, to be guarded by a piece of heavenly armour. This is provided from the heavenly armoury—"**the Breastplate of righteousness**"—not our own, no, not our own, but **Christ's imputed righteousness.**

Let Satan strike **that**, if he will. He could not pierce it when worn by the captain of our salvation, though, in the wilderness and in the garden, he thrust sore at it; as the Lord speaks, "Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall, but the Lord helped me" **Ps 118:13.** Let him strike at it now as worn by the soldier. It is to strike against a wall of flint, against a breastplate of steel. If that breastplate be on, let him accuse: let him tempt to despair: let him say, Your sins are too great to be forgiven: you have backslidden beyond all hope of recovery: you have no real religion; your beginning was wrong, the middle is wrong, and the end will be wrong; you are only a hypocrite, who will die in despair; there is no fear of God in your heart. These are some of the "fiery darts" of Satan aimed against conscience. If, then, we put on our own righteousness to shield us from these thrusts, it is but a wicker breastplate which the first fiery dart will set in flame, or the slightest thrust pierce through. We need a breastplate of steel, not of wicker-work such as our own fingers may intertwine, but Christ's righteousness imputed; as Hart justly says,

Righteousness within thee rooted,  
May appear to take thy part;

But let righteousness imputed,  
Be the breastplate of thy heart.

And our **affections** also; for the heart is not only the seat of conscience, but the seat of the affections. What fiery darts can Satan throw into our affections! What lusts he can kindle through the eye! What love of the world; what greedy desire of gain; what sensual imaginations can he kindle into a flame! Even the tender affections which sweeten the bitter cup of life, the social relationships of husband and wife, parent and child, how he can distort even them, and pervert into idolatry the most hallowed ties! David's overweening love to Absalom nearly cost him his throne and his life. Eli loved his sons till he ruined them, and brought a curse upon his house. Nay more, the heavenly affections themselves; the pure desires, the celestial love of God's own implanting, need to be guarded. These affections the breastplate of Christ's righteousness only can guard, and preserve pure, holy, and tender, that the sacred flame may be ever kept burning upon the altar of a broken heart.

But the heart is also the seat of the **lungs**, that important organ of life, by which we alternately inspire and expire the breath of heaven. This may represent, in a spiritual sense,

1. the **inspiration**, or breathing in of God's Spirit, whereby we draw in the breath of heaven, "Come from the four winds, O breath" **Eze 37:9**; and

2. the **expiration**, or breathing out of these heavenly desires whereby the soul pours itself out before God. This **inspiration** and **expiration**, these inflowings and outflowings of life divine, need to be covered by the breastplate of righteousness; for soon, soon, Satan would strike a dart through the lungs to stop all inspiration of God's favour, and all expiration of desire, thankfulness, or praise. But our own righteousness—what a poor defence! Can it guard or protect the vital seat of these heavenly operations? But when the impregnable breastplate of Christ's imputed righteousness is received at the hands of God, fitted on

to the bosom, and firmly clasped all around, the conscience, the affections, and the life of God are all shielded as with adamant.

3. But we pass on to the **Greaves**. "**Your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.**" There is armour for the legs and feet; for these too may be assailed by the Prince of darkness. The feet have often to tread in miry ways; to walk amidst thorns, and snares, and pricking bushes; and, in ancient warfare, the uncovered feet were liable to be wounded by a weapon called "caltrops," or balls with three spikes of iron issuing from them, strewed on the ground.

By "the feet," we may spiritually understand our walk and conversation. Against this Satan may aim a fearful thrust. He aims at every unguarded spot; sometimes at the loins,—the seat of strength and of activity; sometimes at the heart and lungs,—the conscience, the affections, and the life of God; sometimes at the feet,—the walk, the conduct, and conversation.

Here is one of our greatest temptations—lest Satan should entangle us in anything disgraceful, inconsistent, or unbecoming! O how we seem to walk amidst snares and temptations! and how Satan is aiming deadly blows at our legs and feet, to cut them off, and lay us low. We need, then, "greaves," as they are called, or shoes reaching half way up the legs, in order to protect them from these deadly thrusts of Satan. And what has God provided? "The **preparation of the gospel of peace.**" There is something very sweet and expressive, though perhaps at first sight obscure, in the word "**preparation.**" It seems to my mind to convey the idea that the "gospel of peace" is prepared for and fitted to the feet and legs. It is not a loose leather shoe that may be kicked off and on: not an old, easy slipper: but a tight, firm, strong, clasped, and buckled boot, or greave, of polished steel: "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass." This fits closely and tightly round the leg; and is "the **preparation** of the gospel"—the leg and foot prepared for the gospel, and the gospel prepared for the leg and foot.

Thus, the apostle does not send us to Sinai to get a greave from that fiery mount, nor to the smithy of Moses and Aaron, that they may forge a piece of armour to protect and guard our life, walk, and conversation. But he sends us to the gospel, "the preparation of the gospel of peace;" not the law of war, but the gospel of peace. Here is firm standing. To be at peace with God through this gospel gives firm foothold. To be shod aright, the foot must be neither in the tight pinching boot of the law, nor in the loose slipper of our own obedience; but in the firm yet pliant, strong yet soft, easy yet impenetrable greave of the gospel. And observe, it is "the gospel of peace," not wrangling and quarrelling. Get only a sweet sense of peace into your heart; let the gospel of peace reach your soul, and you will find a piece of armour that will guard life and conduct and conversation, and be your best preservation in this wilderness from the thrusts of Satan at your daily walk.

4. To make the body armour complete, before I pass on to the shield, I shall next take in order "**the Helmet of salvation,**" which is to cover the head. The head, we may consider, as the seat of two special things:

1, of **energy**, activity, authority, movement;

2, of **apprehension** and understanding. Now Satan aims his deadly blows at our head, sometimes to destroy and paralyse all energy and movement, all life and feeling in the things of God, and sometimes to confuse our understanding, to thrust us into some error, or draw us aside into some heresy. How stunning is a blow on the head when unprotected by any defence! All energy and movement cease. So in grace. Were our head not guarded, how should we be stunned and paralysed by Satan's blows! And we may observe, that there is an intimate relationship between consciousness and energy. The same organ, the brain, which apprehends, communicates influence to every muscle. If Satan, then, can confuse our mind, how he paralyses all the springs of motion!

Has not your mind sometimes been sadly tempted with erroneous doctrines? When you have heard of some deadly error that has been going abroad, has there not been something in it that seemed to lay hold of your mind and carnal understanding so that it seemed almost true? Now here is Satan confusing the mind, stunning and bewildering it with his plausible errors. What need, then a piece of armour to guard the head. And we have it provided: "**the Helmet of salvation.**"

But why is "the Helmet of salvation" so suitable to the head? Because all truth contains in it salvation, and all error involves in it damnation. There are no trifling errors. All errors, examined to the root, are fatal. Satan never troubles himself to introduce an unimportant error. His blows are at the head. If you examine every error that comes abroad, you will find that it always is aimed at Christ, to deny his Godhead, his actual Sonship, the efficacy of his blood, the imputation of his righteousness, the truth of his grace, the power of his resurrection; or in some way or other to destroy and put away salvation, complete salvation, through the Person, work, and blood of Jesus. As Satan, then, aims these deadly blows at our head to confuse our judgment, we need a piece of armour to guard and shield it all around, which is called here "the Helmet of salvation."

A child of God is made very tender about the truth. To part with truth is to part with life; to embrace error is to embrace death; and the more that he lives in communion with Christ, the more he will value "the truth as it is in Jesus." Never give up truth. If you give up truth, what is there then to save your soul? But "the Helmet of salvation" must be put on and worn; and it is put on and worn when salvation is laid hold of as it stands in the Person of the Son of God. Salvation by grace, what but this can shield the head in the day of battle? Keep it firmly braced round your temples. Legality and self-righteousness, heresy and error will strike, but will glance harmlessly off the helmet of salvation.

5. The next piece of armour that I shall take, is, "the **Shield of faith.**" We have seen the body guarded on every side, except, as



Bunyan, I believe, says, there is no armour for the back.' At any rate, we have seen the body guarded in front: for it is a front to front battle; a face to face, hand to hand, foot to foot, shoulder to shoulder engagement. We have seen the loins, the legs, the feet, the breast, and the head all protected; but there may be haply some unguarded part. We have to fight with a very skilful enemy, who watches every movement and every unguarded place to make a deadly thrust. We need then one piece of defensive armour more, which in ancient times was a very useful one—**the Shield**; so that by looking on every side where the darts fly, we may oppose it in an instant.

This shield is "the shield of faith." How needful is this! What are we, where are we, how can we fight for a single moment, when unbelief seems to gain power and prevalence? We faint, we sink, we have no strength to lift up a finger, when unbelief and infidelity work so powerfully in our carnal mind. O how we need the shield of faith, faith in lively exercise, that it may be opposed against Satan, come from whatever quarter he may, thrust on whatever side he will! This shield of faith is "above all," or "over all," so as to protect whatever part may be unprotected, and to guard every portion unguarded. But one reason is especially mentioned, "Whereby we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the Wicked."

The ancients were accustomed to employ "fiery darts," that is, arrows tipped at the end with tow, which they kindled, and then threw against their enemies. How beautifully this represents the fiery darts of Satan! his blasphemous and obscene injections; for how they set on fire the carnal mind! Like the burning arrows used by the ancients, wherever they stick they set on fire. But these fiery darts of the devil, these infidel, blasphemous suggestions, these dreadful injections which this Prince of darkness shoots into the carnal mind, we cannot, with all our own strength, resist. We need heavenly armour, and the shield of faith, so as not to give credit to Satan's lies; but when the fiery darts come, to hold up the shield, that they may spend all their strength on that. **That** they cannot set on fire. Our carnal mind is

very inflammable; the least fiery dart can set it all on flame. But not so with the shield of faith: that is made of materials which can quench every fiery dart.

When we believe our interest in the Son of God: that our name is in the book of life: that God is our Father. Christ our Brother, the Holy Ghost our Friend and Teacher: when we can believe that all Satan says is lies, and lies only: that all these imaginations are but **his** contrivances, all these base workings of **his** raising, all these vile thoughts of **his** suggesting, and not take them as our own: when we can thus object "the shield of faith;" they drop off, they do not reach the soul; they meet with no materials which they inflame. They fall down quenched by "the shield of faith." But begin to doubt and fear and sink; to believe all that Satan suggests: to fall in with his carnal reasonings; to listen to his infidel suggestions, and give way to his vile thoughts, and the whole carnal mind is immediately set on flame. O how we need, deeply need the shield of faith to "quench the fiery darts of the Wicked!"

6. Now the pieces that I have thus far considered are pieces of **defensive** armour. But I pass on to one piece, and only one, of **offensive** armour, **the Sword**; for in this battle we have not merely to receive blow upon blow, and thrust after thrust; but we have to maintain the offensive as well as the defensive; we have to thrust at Satan as well as to be thrust at by him; to fight with him as well as he to fight with us. And what is our weapon? One only. But O, what an effectual one, called here "**The Sword of the Spirit!**"

This is the only piece of offensive armour provided, and yet about the last that we are enabled to take hold of. How apt we are to meet Satan upon Satan's own ground! He reasons for, and we reason against; he brings his arguments, we bring perhaps our counter arguments; he tempts, and we are seduced by his temptations; he speaks, and we listen; he finds words, and we find ears; he lays the snare, and we lay a foot to be caught in it. If we attempt to fight, it is often by some sword of our own

forging, not the right Jerusalem blade, not the sword from the heavenly armoury. Resolutions, promises, tears, acknowledgments, confessions—all these are but weapons of earthly make and temper. How slow, how unable are we to take the only true weapon, **"the sword of the Spirit; which is the word of God!"** What an example the blessed Lord left us when he was tempted. Thrice did Satan bring his temptations to cast Jesus down: and thrice did Jesus meet him with the sword of the Spirit, "It is written, it is written, it is written." He used no other weapon: and that weapon made Satan quail.

Now "the sword of the Spirit" is "the word of God." But we can only use this sword so far as it is opened up to our understanding, applied to our heart, sealed upon our conscience, and faith is given to lay hold of it. A promise, a precept, an invitation, a warning, an admonition, a truth—it matters not what part it be of God's word suitable to our state and case, it becomes "the sword of the Spirit" when laid hold of by faith, and is the only effectual weapon whereby to beat back Satan. Through the temptations of Satan, the soul sometimes seems ready to sink into despair. It is almost as though he had got the victory, so fast and thick does he hurl his fiery darts, arrow upon arrow, suggestion after suggestion.

Well, how can you stand? You have no strength in yourself; you never had any; and the little you had in Christ, or thought you had, seems gone. Just at this critical moment, some promise seems to drop into your soul just suitable to your case; it is caught up as "the sword of the Spirit;" and by that the enemy is beaten back. Or Satan is tempting you to some sin, and painting before your carnal mind some pleasure or profit to be gained by committing it. Here you are, wavering and wavering, and standing upon the very brink of a fall. In this critical moment the Lord drops some precept, admonition, or warning; the word comes with power to your soul. Here is "the sword of the Spirit, the word of God;" and by that the temptation is defeated, and Satan driven back. O! without "the sword of the Spirit" we are, as it were, only a target for Satan's arrows. But when, in addition to

the defensive armour which repels, there is the offensive weapon, "the sword of the Spirit," which thrusts, he not only gains no ground, but is for a time beaten back.

II.—And then comes the heavenly recipe, how to **take, wear,** and use this armour aright.

**"Praying** always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." It is by **faith,** as we shall presently see, that the heavenly armour is received, worn, and used: but it is chiefly by the "prayer of faith:" for by believing prayer is the armour taken: by continual prayer **"praying always"** kept on: and by spiritual prayer **"supplication in the Spirit"** used and wielded. If we do not continually "pray in the Spirit," the limbs will, so to speak, shrink: and the armour drop off.

The knights of old exercised themselves every day in their full armour, or they could not have borne it, nor used their weapons with dexterity and strength. So must the Christian warrior, by prayer and supplication, "exercise himself unto godliness." Without "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance"—standing sentry in the armour, keeping ward and watch—its very weight will crush us. But it is "praying in the Spirit." Not loud, long, formal prayers, nor vain repetitions; but, as Jude speaks, "praying in the Holy Ghost," by the help and intercession of the Spirit; and that **"always;"** at all seasons, all times, all places, everywhere, and whenever the Spirit of grace and supplication may fall.

Again; it must be **"all prayer;"** that is, all kinds of prayer—public prayer, private prayer, mental prayer, crying prayer, groaning prayer, weeping prayer, meditating prayer; prayer feeble, prayer strong; prayer of necessity, prayer of importunity; prayer of distance, and prayer of nearness; the prayer of the publican, the leper, and the outcast, as well as the prayer of the believing, the hoping, and the loving. With prayer, must be joined **"supplication,"** that is, beseeching the Lord, weeping at his feet,

begging of him to appear, clasping his knees, and pouring out the soul into his bosom. To this must be added, "**watching thereunto.**" To watch for the answer; to wait for the appearing of the Lord "more than they that watch for the morning." And this, "**with all perseverance,**" never giving it up, taking no denial, begging of the Lord again and again, and wrestling with him till he appear to bless, visit, and shine upon the soul.

O how this heavenly recipe keeps every part of the armour bright, and the soldier active and expert in its use! The armour indeed of itself, as being from heaven, gets neither dull nor rusty. It is we who get sluggish in its use. But, to our apprehension, faith and prayer make it glitter more brightly. How, for instance, "the prayer of faith" brightens up the girdle of truth, and makes it glitter and shine! How it burnishes the breastplate, and makes it fit tightly round the bosom! How it makes the helmet glitter in the sun, and its noble plumes to wave in all their native lustre! How it beats out every dent the shield may have received from the fiery darts, and fits it for fresh encounters! And how it sharpens "the sword of the Spirit," gives it a brighter polish, and nerves the arm to wield it with renewed activity and vigour! O this is the secret of all true victory! All is, all must be well, when we are in a prayerful, meditative, watching state: and all is ill, when this heavenly recipe is neglected: when the hands droop, and the knees faint, and prayer seems dead and motionless in the breast. Let there be in the soul an abiding spirit of prayer, and victory is sure. Satan has little power against the soul that has an abiding spirit of prayer, and is "watching thereunto with all perseverance." But, without this spirit of prayer, we are a prey to all his temptations, and can neither take, wear, nor use the only armour against them.

Such, then, is the armour that God has provided: and such is the way in which it is to be taken, worn, and used—taken by faith, worn by prayer, and wielded with perseverance—for it is never to be laid by till death unclasps it. And, you may depend upon it, that God would not have provided such an armour as this, so complete a panoply, unless there were a real battle to fight. Christian warriors are not Chinese soldiers, who wear armour of

pasteboard, painted to resemble iron; but their armour is of real steel. As, therefore, God has provided such an armour as this, it is plain they have no puny enemy to fight.

Now Satan's grand stratagem is to conceal and hide his strength. He is like a skilful general, who does not shew all his army, but conceals them behind hedges, walls, and trees, and keeps them close in the trenches, so that the enemy may not see all his force. Satan is never so powerful as when we know least of his power, and he is never so successful as when he shoots at us from behind the trench. The apostle, therefore, says, "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against **the wiles of the devil.**" It is his devilish craft and subtlety that we have so much to dread. Lay aside one piece of the armour, and you are at once shot down.

The text speaks of "an **evil day;**" that is, a day of danger, of alarm: a day on which the Prince of Evil is plotting: and an evil, dark and gloomy day for us, unless we have on the heavenly armour, and know how to wear and use it. "**Put on,**" says the apostle: "take unto you the whole armour of God." There is a putting of it on. It is not like the Armoury in the Tower. where guns. and pistols, and other military weapons are hung up in ornamental circles to be looked at as a spectacle: but it is to be taken, to be put on, to be received from the hands of God, and clasped round by his own fingers.

I have already shewn how needful prayer and watchfulness are to the putting on of heavenly armour. But I may further add, that it is **by faith** we put on every piece. If we have no faith, we have no Christian sincerity, nor spiritual knowledge of the truth; therefore, "the loins are not girt about with truth." If we have no faith, we have on no breastplate of Christ's righteousness; for that is only put on by faith. If we have no faith, we have no defence for our feet; for by faith we stand and walk; and therefore the feet are not "shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." If we have no faith, we have no helmet, because "salvation" is laid hold of by faith. If we have no faith,

we cannot have "the shield of faith;" that is evident. If we have no faith, we cannot use "the sword of the Spirit," which is only wielded by faith. If we have no faith, we have no true prayer; for it is "the prayer of faith" that is effectual with God.

By faith, therefore, is every piece of the heavenly armour put on; and by faith, living faith, is every piece of it used. What strange characters we are! Able to fight one day, fleeing the next; resisting Satan this moment, and giving way that. How is this to be accounted for? Because at this moment we have faith; at the next, we have, or seem to have none. Faith is to the soul what a main-spring is to the watch. The main-spring is broken, or wanting. What is the watch worth? So faith is the main-spring of the soul. Let there be no faith, there is no inward movement. There may be hands, but like the hands of a child's watch, they are made for shew, not for use: a bauble and a toy, not a working instrument. There must be faith in the soul in order that the hands may move in accordance with the will of God, and keep right time with the dial of the Sun of Righteousness.

Faith too, we need not only to wear, but to wield this heavenly armour, so as to "withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." It is, in the margin, "having **overcome** all, to stand." And what a flood of light does this cast upon a Christian's path—that the greatest danger lies in, and after victory! Bunyan has beautifully touched upon this, where he represents Christian as stumbling and falling immediately after he had got the start of his brother. When you have, in the strength of Christ, overcome one temptation, you are standing upon the brink of another: and the very pride that may lift up your heart for having gained one battle, only opens a way to fall by the next encounter.

What a strange warfare! Paul's maxim would not do for the Duke of Wellington, "When I am weak, then am I strong." That would not do to go to Waterloo with. We are never so weak as when in ourselves we are strong; we are never so strong as when in ourselves we are weak. Let me think myself secure, I fall; let me fear to fall, I am safe. O the mysteries of the Christian life! O the

paradox of the heavenly warfare! And therefore, with the deepest wisdom, the apostle has said, "Take unto you the **whole armour** of God." Do not leave a single piece out; your life is at stake; forget not one buckle; leave loose not a single clasp; "that ye may withstand in the **evil day.**" There is an evil day coming; a day of temptation, an hour of trial; an evil day when the clouds gather blackness, the welkin is overspread with gloom, and the enemy comes forth in all his strength. In that "evil day," the hour of temptation, who can stand? None but he who has on "the whole armour of God."

Well; the evil day passes over; the sky clears, the clouds break, the sun comes forth, and its bright beams glance upon the warrior's armour. It is unharmed; it has effectually shielded him; the fiery darts have dropped quenched at his feet. Is he safe now? When one Waterloo is gained, is peace to be proclaimed, and maintained for five-and-thirty years? Not so in the heavenly warfare. "Having done all," or, as it is in the margin, "overcome all," and gained the victory, then comes the difficulty—"to stand." Why, it is as though there were greater danger after the victory than before it: that when the battle has been fought, and the enemy fled, then the devil was stronger than ever; because then we are for laying aside the heavenly armour. We perhaps say, We have fought and conquered: let us enjoy victory; get our furlough: hang up the armour: take a quiet nap to refresh ourselves.' But Satan sleeps not; he never rests, nor tires; and therefore, when the Christian warrior has laid the armour aside, and said, Now let me sleep, I have gained the victory!' **that** is the moment for his unsuspected adversary to take him at unawares, and aim at him a deadly thrust. Therefore, the apostle says, "**Having done** all, or overcome all, to stand."

O, we must never lay aside the heavenly armour! And this is a mercy, that if we have one piece, we have all. God does not send us to the battle half armed. He who has provided one, has provided all. Let this too be remembered, and laid to heart, by way of encouragement—that the Lord, in choosing recruits, does not, like our army sergeants, choose the strong, active, stout,



lust, vigorous, and healthy. He admits strange characters into his regiment; those whom no army doctor would pass; the halt, and the lame, the blind, the crippled, and asthmatic, the wheezing, and the paralysed; the consumptive in lung, the diseased in heart, and the withered in limb; he enlists them in his heavenly regiment, makes them all whole by a touch of his finger, clothes them with his heavenly armour, sends them forth to battle, and fights for them as "the God of armies." Thus, weak in themselves, they are strong in Christ, and in the power of his might. And every such soldier will eventually win the day, gain the prize, and come off more than conqueror through him who loved and gave himself for him.

## The Wilderness and its Fruits

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, Hempstead Road, on Lord's Day Evening, July 28, 1850

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope; and she shall sing there as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." Hosea 2:14, 15

The prophecies of the Old Testament are often very obscure, and some almost unintelligible. This arises partly from the very nature of the subject, and partly from the highly figurative language in which they are couched. But, what adds to the difficulty, is our ignorance for the most part of the circumstances under which they were delivered, of the times to which they apply, and of the events which they dimly foreshadow.

But taking a broad view of prophetic Scripture, I consider that it admits for the most part of three distinct interpretations: *historical, experimental, and unfulfilled*; corresponding with the three times—*past, present, and future*.

1. Many prophecies of the Old Testament are already *fulfilled*; such as the sufferings, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ; the casting off of Israel; the calling of the Gentiles; the dispersion of the Jews. These prophecies have been fulfilled, their interpretation is strictly *historical*, and relates altogether to the *past*.

2. But there is a large portion of prophecy which is still *unfulfilled*; such as the calling of the Jews; the second coming of Christ; and that glorious period still *future*, when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

3. But, besides the interpretation of those prophecies which are *past* and therefore *fulfilled*, and those which are *future* and therefore *unfulfilled*, there is that which bears more immediately and directly upon the *present*—*experimental interpretation*. And indeed, without this, this part of God's word would be to us a dead letter. If it did not bear upon our own experience; if there were not a *spiritual* interpretation as well as a *literal*; if prophecy were not descriptive of God's dealings with the soul *now*, we might as well put our Bible into the drawer. We might almost take a thread and needle, and sew up the prophetic part of God's word; or tear it out of the Bible, if it have no reference to us. To the past we look back with admiration; to the *future* we look forward in hope; but the *present*, the *spiritual* and *experimental* interpretation of prophecy as bearing upon our own soul, is that which most deeply concerns us. Living under the dispensation of the Spirit, we need a spiritual interpretation.

These three interpretations we find sometimes in the very same chapter. We have an instance in the one before us. (Hos. 2.) In it we find a prophecy already *fulfilled*; "I will cause all her mirth to cease, her feast-days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts; and I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me; and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them." The present state of Judea stands forth as a literal fulfilment of these words. The new moons, the sabbaths, and solemn feasts of Israel have ceased in the land, and her vines and fig-trees are destroyed. But we have reason to believe that this chapter also contains prophecies which one day *will be literally fulfilled*; that when the Lord brings back his captive Zion, he will "betroth her unto him for ever in righteousness, in judgment, in lovingkindness, and in tender mercy; he will betroth her unto himself in faithfulness, and she shall know the Lord." And, united with these two, we have the *spiritual, experimental* interpretation shining throughout the whole chapter, as bearing upon the experience of God's children. It is in this latter point of view, that I shall, with God's blessing, now consider the words before us. We may observe in them two

leading features.

*First; the bringing of Israel into the wilderness.*

*Secondly; what God does to her when he has brought her there.*

I.—"Behold," he says, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness." But what are we to understand by "the wilderness?" I think we may understand by it two things. *First, the world; secondly, the human heart.* For, we shall find, if the Lord enable, that to a child of God both the world, and the human heart as dissected and laid bare by the Spirit of God, bear marks and characters of "a wilderness."

i. But what is "a wilderness?" We must comprehend the word literally, before we can understand it spiritually.

A "wilderness," then, is, *first*, a place where *no corn grows*. That is the very character of the Arabian desert. No grain grows there fit for man. But *secondly*, it is a place where *no corn can be made to grow*. Now, you know, in this country there are commons and heaths that do not bear grain in their present state; but they might be brought under cultivation and made to produce it. But there are wild, waste districts in the Scottish Highlands, which could not by any cultivation be made to grow corn. So with the "wilderness." You might plough, sow, harrow, and roll it, but you would never have a crop. The sun would dry it up; there is no soil in which the plant could grow. It might spring up for a time; but with all our attempts, it would soon utterly wither away. And the *third* idea to make up a desert, and flowing out of the two former features, is, that it is a place of which *the inhabitants are always rovers, without a settled habitation*. They have no home, house, nor building, but live in tents; and are continually shifting the spot on which for a time they dwell.

Do not these three ideas very much make up the figure of a "wilderness?" See whether they are not applicable to two things in the experience of a child of God—*the world, and his own heart.*

1. *The world* is not "a wilderness" to a worldling. To him it is a beautiful estate, enclosed in a ring fence, with land easily cultivable and soil of the best quality, producing the richest crops, laden with golden harvests. But to a *child of God*, as I shall show you by and by, (if led into it,) the world is but a "wilderness;" from which no crop grows to feed his soul; from which by no exertions of his own can food be made to grow; and in which he is, and ever must be, a wanderer, not a settled inhabitant.

2. And this, too, with *the human heart*. We shall find, I think, these three ideas of "a wilderness" meeting also in the human heart, as laid bare by the keen dissecting knife of the Spirit to the spiritual eye of a child of God. Out of his heart no bread can come, for "in him, that is, in his flesh, dwelleth no good thing;" there is no food in it for his new nature; nothing of which he can say, 'This is what my soul can feed upon.' And though he may seek to cultivate it, and is bidden and chidden to do so; and though he has tried often to put in the plough, to clean it with the hoe, to rake it with the harrow, to sow good seed, and to water it perhaps with the waterpot, yet, after all his attempts, the harvest is only a heap in the day of desperate sorrow, the soil being absolutely barren, totally uncultivable and unproductive, with all his fairest exertions. He is tossed up and down, in consequence, as the locust, finding nothing in his heart on which he can set his foot, on which he can build for eternity, or in which he can safely and happily dwell, as a fixed resting-place.

Now, bear these things in mind, and when I come to the "wilderness," as the Spirit of the Lord has promised to bring his people there, you will then see whether you have an experimental knowledge of these two things for yourselves.

ii. The Lord says, "*Behold, I will allure her.*" Does this mean the first work of the Spirit upon the soul? I believe not. The first work of the Spirit, we read in Scripture, and we find confirmed by experience, is, to convince of sin, to prick to the heart, to wound, to make the soul sensible of its state before God, and its utter

alienation from him. Therefore, the word "*allure*," cannot apply to the first work of the Spirit upon the soul. Men may talk of being drawn by love; but what is the religion of those who are thus drawn by love? What depth, what reality, what power, what life, what godliness is there in it? The word "*allure*" is not applicable, then, to the first beginning of a work. That usually commences with conviction, a sight and sense of sin, a cry for mercy, a feeling of wretchedness and ruin, and a despair of salvation in self.

But after the Lord has been pleased thus to pierce, to wound, to convince, and bring down, he often, perhaps usually, drops down some sweetness, blessedness, and consolation into the soul. He gives it to taste a few dewdrops of his love, some honey-drops from the Rock of Ages. This I call the Spring of the soul. You know what a beautiful season spring is; when the leaves are clothing the trees, when the birds are singing upon the branches, when the flowers are springing out of the ground, when the chilly winds of winter are gone, when the balmy breezes blow from the south, when the sun rises high in the sky, and sheds gladness over the face of the renewed earth. Thus the soul has, generally speaking, a Spring; and, as there is but one spring in nature, so for the most part there is but one spring in grace. As regards our natural life, it is only once that we are young; and it is so spiritually; we only once enjoy that sweet season of which Job speaks, "As I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle." (Job 29:4.)

During, then, this youth of the soul, this Spring season, this "day of espousals," there is an "alluring" of the heart unto God. Now this we need. And why? Perhaps we are bound up with carnal companions, or by snares we cannot break; hampered by worldly relations, and their persecutions we cannot face; tied down with lusts and sins, and the chain of these we cannot burst; in the world, and unable to come out of it. Notwithstanding all the frights, terrors, alarms, and convictions that the soul may experience, (though these for a time may operate, and that powerfully); yet when their effect has ceased, it slips back into

the old spot; it is not fairly or fully brought out. We want something beyond law and terrors to do that; we need something besides thunder and lightning to bring the soul fully unto God.

There is an old fable of the sun and Boreas, or the North wind, once having a strife as to which could first make a traveller throw aside his coat. The North wind had the first trial. But though he sent forth his chilling blasts, trying to blow the traveller's coat off, yet the more that lusty Boreas blew, the tighter and closer did the traveller wrap his cloak around him. But when he had blown his worst and last, and was defeated, then the sun tried what he could do. He burst from the clouds in all his warmth and brightness, and shot his rays with such fervour, that the traveller soon threw aside his cloak, and fled to the wood. I dare say, the fable was meant to illustrate the difference between harshness and kindness; but it seems to bear upon our subject also. Law terrors, convictions, and alarms—these are like old Boreas, with his blustering cheeks; they will not bring the great coat off; you wrap the old cloak tighter round you. Something melting is wanted; something warming, cheering, reviving, comforting, and blessing. And when the Sun begins to shine, and a few rays of righteousness, warmth, light, life, and love beam upon the heart, then it does in a moment what law and terrors could not do in a century—it melts off the old garment, brings the soul unto Jesus, and into sweet union and communion with him. There is felt and seen, then, a beauty, a blessedness, a reality, a sweetness in the things of God, which the tongue cannot describe. By it the heart is drawn unto the Lord Jesus, to the truth as it is in Jesus, to the people of Jesus, and to the service of Jesus. World, friends, foes, relations are all disregarded; neither frowns nor smiles have any effect. There is such a sweetness then felt in the things of God, such a blessedness and reality, that the soul is "allured" by them out of everything that before held it back from union with a living Head.

Under these blessed feelings, a soul will do anything for Christ; will make any sacrifice, give up anything, bear anything, endure anything for the Lord Jesus. The Spring of nature is beautiful to

see; but the Spring of grace is more beautiful to feel. Early days, if not the most profitable, yet are often the best days in our feelings.

Now, by these "allurements," sweetness, and blessedness, the Lord draws the soul into a profession of religion, into perhaps joining a church, taking up the cross, walking with the people of God, putting itself forward, and that in the utmost sincerity, to serve the Lord Jesus. And perhaps, we think, we shall enjoy this all our days. At this season, when we see old professors carnal and worldly-minded, and we feel full of life and zeal; some mourning and sighing, and we singing and dancing; others complaining of their bad hearts, when we scarcely know that we have a bad one; others cast down with temptations, and we not exposed to them; or groaning under trials, and we ignorant of them; we think that they must be deceived. We say, 'This is not religion; the religion we have is a very different thing; there is a sweetness in ours; there is a comfort, a blessedness in it.' Perhaps we write very hard things against these old professors; think they have been doing something very bad, and have sinned away their comforts; or that it is their own fault they are not so lively, so happy, and so comfortable as we. But we do not know what the Lord is doing by this "alluring," nor what his purposes are; that all this is to bring us "into the wilderness." And when he has got us there fairly and fully, then to shew us what the "wilderness" really is.

iii. But how does this take place? A "wilderness," I endeavoured to show represents generally two things—*the world* and *the human heart*.

Now, I dare say, when your soul was flourishing, *the world* in a measure flourished with you too. The Lord, generally speaking, calls his people young: being young, they have not many worldly trials: and therefore, very often natural youth and spiritual youth go hand in hand. There is a buoyancy, then, naturally, and spiritually, and the two are often closely united. But now comes the "wilderness." Now comes the world, as opened up in its real



character. Trial often begins with some heavy stroke of a worldly nature. This is sometimes the first stab that the soul gets when it comes into the "wilderness." Perhaps some *illness* robs us of health for life; or some *stroke in providence* casts down all our airy Babels: or some *disappointment*, it may be of a very tender nature, lays all the youthful hopes of the heart prostrate in the dust. Now, up to this time earth was not manifested as a "wilderness" world, nor was our heart altogether divorced from it. And though the Lord was sweet and precious, yet there were *worldly things* indulged in; *worldly society* perhaps not fully given up; *worldly practices* that the heart was not weaned from; *worldly connections* not fully broken through. John Newton speaks of his enjoying in early days the presence of the Lord sweetly in the woods, and yet spending the rest of the evening in carnal company. Now that seems very strange; yet perhaps you and I might have done something of the same kind. When I was a Fellow of my College at Oxford, soon after I felt the weight of eternal things, I have sat in the Common Room after dinner with the other Fellows, and amidst all the drinking of wine, and the hum and buzz of conversation, in which I took no part, have been secretly lifting up my heart to the Lord. But I could not go amongst them after I got into the wilderness. The reason was, I was not fully brought out; though there was a blessedness felt in the things of God, yet the evils of the world were not clearly manifested; temptation was not powerfully presented; and therefore, the danger of it was not felt nor feared. But now, the world begins to be opened up in its real character. Once it was your friend; now it has become your enemy: once it smiled upon you; now it frowns: once it did you good; now it slanders you, and does you all the evil it can: once you could enjoy it, but now it palls upon your appetite; disappointment, vexation, and sorrow embitter all; and you find the world to be what God declares it, "a wilderness." No food grows in it; nothing that your soul can really be satisfied with; "vanity and vexation of spirit," are written upon all. Though you may try to get food out of it, all your attempts are blighted with disappointment; and you in consequence, finding no solid footing, become a wanderer, a pilgrim, and a stranger, tossed up and down in it, and having in it neither heart

nor home.

2. But again. The *human heart*, as opened up to a child of God, is a "wilderness," too. You did not know this formerly; you did not know you had so bad a heart. When the Lord was first "alluring" you into the "wilderness," you could not see that you had no strength, no holiness, no wisdom in yourself; that your heart was a cage of unclean birds; that there was nothing spiritually good in it. In early days, we cannot discern between the Lord's strength and our own; between natural and spiritual feelings; between the zeal of the flesh and the life of the Spirit. Nor do we understand these things until our senses are exercised to discern good and evil. A clear line is not drawn at first in our soul between nature and grace; and therefore, our hearts in early days are not to us a "wilderness." We think we can cultivate them; why should we not? Cannot we encourage a spirit of prayer? Cannot we read God's word? Cannot we go to hear good men preach? Cannot we arrange certain seasons and hours in which to seek the Lord's face? Cannot we watch against besetting sins? Cannot we keep the door of our lips? Cannot we keep our eyes and hearts fixed upon the Lord Jesus Christ? We are told to do these things; to cultivate grace; and we make the attempt. Are we successful? If we are, it is our ignorance that makes us think so. Let us have light to see, life to feel, and spiritual discernment to know what is of God, and what is of man; what grace is, and what the work of the Spirit is; what divine feelings are, and how distinct these are from the work of the flesh; then we shall find that our heart not only does not bear food that we can feed upon to our soul's satisfaction; but cannot be made to bear it. It is a "wilderness," a wide waste, a barren sand, a desert, blown over by the Sirocco, parched by the sun, dried up and desolate, absolutely sterile and uncultivable.

Now, here in the "wilderness," we get stripped to the very bone; here we lose all our goodness, all our wisdom, all our strength, all our creature holiness, all our rags of fleshly righteousness. It is in the "wilderness" we get stripped; and till we come there, we do not know what stripping is. Then we feel poor creatures, ruined

wretches; desolate, forsaken, abandoned, almost without hope or help; in self lost and undone. We look upon the world—all is vanity, vexation, and sorrow. We look within—all is dark, wild, and desolate; nothing but sin, and that continually: unbelief, infidelity, obscenity, filth, and blasphemy; everything hideous, every thing vile; nothing but evil without and within. This is stripping work; this is "the wilderness;" this is bringing a man to his senses; this is laying the creature low; this is making him know the depth of the fall; this is plucking up his fleshly religion, tearing out by the roots all his carnal hopes, leaving him naked, empty, and bare. All his holiness gone, all his zeal withered, all his strength turned into weakness, all his comeliness into corruption; and he standing before God utterly unable to work one spiritual feeling in his own heart.

Are *you* here? Have you ever been here? Is God bringing you here? Here we must come to learn what true religion is; here must we come to see the end of all perfection, and to feel that "the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." But does the Lord leave his people here? No.

II.—Which leads us to our *second* point. The Lord brings his people there to do them good; to give them blessings; to work grace in their hearts; and to extend to them favour and mercy in a measure and degree hitherto unfelt.

But let us look at the catalogue of blessings provided for Israel when she comes into the "wilderness."

i. The first is; "I will speak comfortably unto her." It is in the margin, (and so it is in the Hebrew) "*to her heart.*" I shall take the two renderings: *first*, "*to her heart;*" *secondly*, "*comfortably.*"

1. It is in the "wilderness," then, that we learn *heart* religion. If you want God to speak to your heart, you must go into the "wilderness" for it. It is often headwork very much till we get there. Into the wilderness of human nature must we go, if God himself is to speak to our heart. And when you begin to feel what

a heart you have, you will find the necessity of God speaking to it; for only so far as he speaks, have you any feeling, any life, any power in your religion. And O, when a man begins to find and feel what a "wilderness" heart he has—how anxious, how desirous he is that God would speak to his heart! How this shuts up his religion into a very narrow compass! How it cuts off the flesh of it, and brings him and his religion too into a nutshell! How it hacks to pieces all the ornaments that have been hung around it by self and the devil, and brings him to this point, (and a very trying point it is to be brought to), 'I have no religion of self; I cannot work a grain in mine own heart; I am dead, dark, stupid; God must speak to my soul: and if he do not speak, I am utterly destitute; I have no feeling, no life, no faith, no love, no strength, no holiness; I have nothing; I stand,' says the soul, 'before God without a thread.' 'Lord,' (the poor man cries under these painful exercises, toiling and struggling in the wilderness), 'speak to my soul; drop a word into my heart.' And how anxious he is for God to speak! But how many sleepless nights have *you* passed because God does not speak to your heart? How many times do you roll backwards and forwards upon your bed because you cannot get the Lord to speak a word into your soul? Do you ever go groaning and sighing along the street because the Lord does not speak to you? or, are you gazing with a fool's eye into every picture-shop?

Now, if you are in the "wilderness," you will want the Lord to speak to your soul; and you will feel all your religion to hang upon this—that you have no more religion than springs out of God's word and work in your heart. And here you will look and wait, long, beg, and pray, 'Lord, in mercy speak to my poor soul.' The Lord has promised to do this; but he will not speak till he brings you to the spot where he has promised to do so. When he has "allured" you along into the wilderness, and got you fast there, he will now and then drop a word, give a promise, speak with soft melting whispers, make his word sweet and precious; and thus fulfil his promise, 'I will speak to her heart.'

2. But the word also means "*comfortably*." Now when the Lord

was "alluring" your soul in the way I have described, you did not know much about comfort springing out of the Lord's speaking to your soul. You could hardly tell whence your comfort came. It did not come direct from the mouth of God; the Lord did not mean it at that time to come so. Every sermon seemed at that time blessed; but now perhaps it is only one word out of it. At that time, when you went upon your knees, it seemed as though you had sweet access to the throne of grace; every hymn was full of beauty; and every child of God you could take in your arms, embrace, and feel sweet communion with. And yet, all the time, when you look back, you cannot say this sprung out of any special words or promises that God applied to your soul. There was a general sweetness, but not a particular one. It was more in the truth, in the people of God, in the blessedness of the things of God, in the doctrines of grace, than it was in special promises, or special applications of blood and love. But when you get into the "wilderness," you cannot do with what did very well in times of old. There are many children of God who love to hear a minister trace out evidences. 'O,' they say, 'this just suits me; I love to hear evidences.' But you get, after a time, beyond evidences. They will do for a babe; they will suit a child; but a man wants meat; a man can pick a bone. And so (I address myself now to those who know the "wilderness") you want something stronger, more solid, more weighty, more real, more effectual; you want testimonies, words, manifestations, a sweet discovery of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is by being stripped in the "wilderness," that we are brought to look and long for the Lord's own special comfort; for we are brought to stand in need of it; and as we cannot get a drop of comfort by cultivating our own graces, we are obliged to beg for a few grains of comfort from the Lord himself. And what a mercy it is, that he has promised to speak "comfortably;" that when nobody else can speak comfort, when we cannot speak it to our own souls, and cannot get consolation from anything, the Lord can and does, according to his promise, speak "comfortably." He whispers peace, and blesses the soul with some testimony of its interest in the precious blood and love of his dear Son. That is the first thing the Lord has promised to do.

ii. The next is: "*I will give her her vineyards from thence.*" A strange place! We should not go to Bagshot Heath or Woking Common to find "a vineyard;" and I am sure we should not go to the great Sahara, or the Arabian desert, to find grapes growing. But we might as well expect clusters of grapes upon Bagshot Heath, as fruitfulness by nature in the human heart. Here, then, is the wonder. "*I will give her her vineyards from thence.*" What! in the wilderness! when she has been trying to bring something out of her heart to please God and self with, and all her efforts are baffled! What! to give her vineyards there! Why, that is the mystery; that is the beauty; that is the blessedness; that is the sweetness—that the Lord can and does make the barren heart fruitful in the "wilderness."

Now, perhaps you have been toiling, tugging, working very hard to produce some fruit. 'Come,' say you, 'it will not do to go on like this. I must do something; I must pray more, read the word of God more, watch over my heart more, and seek the Lord more. I will do it too; nobody shall hinder me.' So some Monday morning, you begin and set to work, and take the Bible down. 'Yes,' say you, 'I will read two or three chapters this morning; I will go to prayer, and I will try if I cannot do something to be a real Christian.' All very good. But what do you get from it? What power, sweetness, or blessedness can you put into the word of God? What life and feeling can you put into your soul? Well, you have tried it again and again; and when you have cast up the account, it is nil, nothing, nought. Zero is the full amount! And you wonder where the fault is, till at last you begin to despair, and feel and say, 'I am a wretch, and ever shall be. God be merciful to such a wretch! Lord, look in tender compassion on such a monster, such a filthy creature that has done nothing, and can do nothing but sin.'

Now when the Lord is pleased to speak a word to the heart, and bless your soul with real comfort, what is the effect? It makes you fruitful. *Then* you can read the word of God—aye, and with blessedness too; then you can pray, and with sweet satisfaction

too; then you can look up, and with eyes of affection too; and then you can be holy, and that by the real sanctifying operations of the Spirit too. This is the way whereby all fruitfulness is produced; not by roller, plough, and harrow; seed basket and hoe; turning up the desert, and casting good corn there, to be like Pharaoh's ears only blasted by the East wind; but to be in the "wilderness;" to feel a needy, naked wretch, without hope or help in self, and to wait upon the Lord for him to speak a word to the soul, by his own blessed breath breathing into us a fruitfulness that our heart never could produce in itself. Here is genuine spirituality and true holiness: here is real fruitfulness. These are the graces of the Spirit, not the perishing works of the flesh.

What is thus wrought in the soul by the power of God is to the glory of God. "I will give her her vineyards from thence." Now, if you had never known the "wilderness," what a barren heart and desperately wicked nature you have, you would not have wanted fruitfulness to come from God's own mouth into your soul. The starved, withered crop that nature produces would have been reaped and gathered into your garner, and you would have been pleased with the sheaves, though they were but straw and chaff.

As time is running on, I must just hastily skim over the other blessings which God has promised in the "wilderness."

iii. *"The valley of Achor for a door of hope."* Now the "valley of Achor" signifies the 'valley of trouble.' It was the valley in which Achan was stoned. And why stoned? Because he had taken the accursed thing; because his eye had been captivated by the Babylonish garment and golden wedge, and he had buried them in the tent. This may throw a light on what "the valley of Achor" is spiritually. Perhaps you have been guilty of Achan's sin; you have been taking the accursed thing; have been too deeply connected with the world; have done things that God's displeasure is against. Let conscience speak in the bosom of each. The consequence has been, that you have got into the "valley of Achor!" Trouble, sorrow, and confusion are your lot; and you do not know whether the lot of Achan may not wait you

there.

Now it is in this "valley of Achor," or sorrow, confusion, and fear, that the "door of hope" is opened. And what is "a door of hope?" What is a 'door' literally? Is not "a door" a place of exit and a place for entrance? By "a door" we go out, and by "a door" we come in. So "a door of hope" admits the visits of the Lord to the soul; and "a door of hope" admits the going out of the soul's breathings after God. Thus, every glimpse of mercy, every beam of love, and every ray of comfort; every sweet promise that drops into the soul, every intimation from God, every testimony of interest in Christ; every dewdrop, every honey-drop that falls into a parched wilderness heart—this is opening up "a door of hope."

But why "*in the valley of Achor?*" That we may cease to hope in self; that a sound and true gospel hope may enter within the veil as an anchor sure and stedfast, and there be no hope but in the precious blood of the Lamb, and in a sweet manifestation of that blood to the conscience. This is "the door of hope" through which the soul looks into the very presence of God; sees Jesus on the throne of grace, the sprinkled mercy-seat, and the great High Priest "able and willing to save to the uttermost."

Through this "door of hope," by which Christ is seen, the soul goes forth in desires, breathings, hungerings, and thirstings after him; and through this "door of hope" descend visits, smiles, tokens, testimonies, mercies, and favours. And thus, there is a "door of hope;" no longer barred, closed, and shut back, but thrown wide open in the bleeding side of an incarnate God. And this is opened "in the valley of Achor," where we deserve to be stoned to death because we have touched the accursed thing; where we deserve nothing but damnation, the eternal vengeance of God, and to be made as Achan a monument of eternal wrath; yet, in this "valley of Achor," is opened up a blessed "door of hope."

iv. "*She shall sing there as in the days of her youth, as in the day when the Lord brought her out of the land of Egypt.*" Spring



again! only a better spring. Youth again! "They shall renew their strength as the eagle." Here is a renewing of visits almost despaired of; of joys that seemed never to return; of hopes almost extinct; of consolations remembered, but remembered almost with fear, lest they should have been delusive. "She shall sing there as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came out of the land of Egypt."

But what a place to go and get into, to learn religion. How much more pleasant it would be to the flesh to take our Bible down, get a quire of paper, have a new pen, put some fresh ink into the ink bottle, and then to draw out our religion from the Bible; to believe all we read, take down all we see, and transplant it into our heart. But that is not the way; that would only stand in the letter. It would not do for eternity, nor for a dying bed. It would exalt the creature, but would depress the Creator. It might do for an hour, but it would not do for the judgment-day. And therefore, we have to learn our religion, if we learn it at all, in a way clean contrary.

Have you learned your religion thus? If you have, it will stand. There is a reality in it; it bears marks of God's grace and teaching. But if we have learned it except in this way, what reality, what power, what blessedness is there in it? None. We shall have to part with it when we want it most. When we lie upon a death-bed, all our false religion will make to itself wings, and fly away; and when we stretch forth our hands for a little true hope, it is all gone.

Thus, we want something solid, real, spiritual, abiding; something of God and godliness, divine, heavenly, and supernatural; wrought in the soul by the almighty power, and breathed into our heart by the very mouth of God himself. That will stand, and no other will.

If the Lord has led you in his path, you have an evidence in your soul that these things are so; and you will know that this is the way; not because I say, so, nor because the Bible always says it,

## **Wilderness Hunger and Heavenly Manna**

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening, July 1, 1866

"And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. 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." Deuteronomy 8:2, 3

The book of Deuteronomy has been sometimes called the "Old Testament Gospel;" and with some reason, for it contains, perhaps, more gospel doctrines, at least more clearly expressed and more fully developed than any other book of the Pentateuch. It is true that in the latter part of the book of Exodus and throughout Leviticus we have, under type and figure, much blessed gospel preached; but the whole is deeply veiled by ceremonial rites, of which the spiritual meaning could not be fully understood till they were fulfilled by the sacrifice and bloodshedding of our gracious Lord. The book of Deuteronomy was, so to speak, the legacy which Moses left to the people of Israel before he resigned his commission and his breath, and in this respect it somewhat resembles the last speeches which our Lord made to his disciples, and of which they themselves bore this testimony: "Lo! now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb." (John 16:29.) It is filled, therefore, with holy instruction; and, whilst it abounds in promises, is replete with most powerful exhortations, mingled and thoroughly seasoned with earnest warnings, expostulations, reproofs, and directions; the whole forming what I may perhaps call a most blessed spiritual compound, precisely adapted to the state and case of the children of Israel, then upon the edge of the wilderness and upon

the eve of entering into the promised land. The warm, tender, affectionate, fatherly, and mellow tone which pervades the whole book carries with it its own evidence that it was the voice of the man of God about to yield up his parting breath; and yet the earnestness, vigour, and power shining through the whole show that "his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated." It is indeed a book which demands and would amply repay our earnest and prayerful study; for it is as full of instruction, encouragement, and warning to us as it was to the children of Israel to whom it was first delivered.

I shall not, however, dilate any further upon the character of the book of Deuteronomy, but come at once to our text, in which Moses seems to sum up the dealings of God with the children of Israel in the wilderness, and the fruits which it was the intention of God that they should reap from them. He calls upon them, therefore, to look back and remember all the way which the Lord their God had led them forty years in the wilderness; nor would this retrospect be unprofitable if they could understand and bear in mind the reasons why God had thus dealt with them for so many years; that he had a certain object to effect thereby, and that this object was to humble them, to prove them, and to know what was in their heart, whether they would keep his commandments or no. He tells them further that God suffered them to hunger and fed them with manna, a food which they knew not nor their fathers before them, and for this express purpose, that they might 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.

I have thus in a few simple words outlined the subject before us, and now let us see whether, by God's help and blessing, we may be able to gather up something this evening for our personal instruction, edification, and encouragement; something which may communicate that spiritual, solid, and abiding profit without which all preaching falls to the ground like water spilt. I shall, therefore, view the subject as having a particular and personal bearing upon our own Christian experience; and, to facilitate

clearness in treating it both for my own sake and yours, shall divide it mainly into two leading branches.

I.—*First*, the *injunction* which our text contains, of remembering all the way which the Lord our God has led us in the wilderness.

II.—*Secondly*, the *benefits* and *blessings* which spring out of the Lord's thus dealing with us, and which it is his revealed will and intention by means of them to communicate to us.

I.—"Better is the end of a thing," says the wise man, "than the beginning thereof." (Eccl. 7:8.) This is often true in natural things, but invariably so in divine. Rarely at first can we foresee what will be the issue of any matter which we take in hand. We may begin it with much hope, and find in the end those hopes sadly disappointed. We may begin it with much fear, and find from the event those fears utterly groundless. Whatever we take in hand it is very rare that our expectations are fully carried out, for we have again and again to learn that "man's heart deviseth his way but the Lord directeth his steps;" and that there are many devices in a man's heart, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that and that only, shall stand. But so far as we are amongst the family of God, and as such are under especial guidance and divine teaching and leading, whether our first expectations are accomplished or not, the end stamps wisdom and goodness upon all the dealings of God with us both in providence and in grace. However chequered his path has been; however, as Job speaks, his purposes have been broken off, even the thoughts of his heart; however when he looked for good, then evil came unto him, and when he waited for light there came darkness; whatever bitter things God seemed to write against him when he made him to possess the sins of his youth, yet sooner or later every child of God will be able to say, "O how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee;" and this will embolden him to add, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me, as they have already followed me, all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." Thus it is good sometimes at the end, it may be, of a long

profession; and there are those here who have made a long profession—I myself have professed, and I hope possessed, the fear of God for nearly forty years; it is good, I say, for such sometimes to look back through the long vista of many years, and see how the Lord has dealt with us, both in providence and in grace; yes, it is good to take a solemn review of what marks we can find of his favour, what testimonies of his teaching, what Ebenezers we may set up at various points in this path, as blessed memorials of his gracious and merciful help. We are, therefore, bidden in our text to remember all the way.

1. Now if this be so, the first point to fix our eyes upon is the *beginning* of the way—the starting point. I have long contended for a good beginning; for I know well that where there is a good beginning there will be a good ending; and there will often be a satisfactory middle. But what do I mean by "a good beginning?" I mean for God to begin with us, and not for us to begin with God. By a good beginning, then, I mean a marked epoch in our life—what I have called in one of my early sermons "a beginning felt"—looking back upon which we can more or less distinctly trace the hand of God to have been made manifest in a communication of grace to our souls. We may be—I have myself been often—tried as to the reality of the work; and I am sometimes tried to this day whether I have a single grain of grace in my heart. But I have never doubted the time when, nor the circumstances under which it began, nor what my feelings were under the first teachings of the blessed Spirit in my heart; and I have come to this decision in my own mind, if that be wrong then all is wrong; if that be right then all is right. If I began with God then God may leave me to end with myself; but if God began with me independent of any will, inclination, power, or action of my own, in a sovereign way of grace, by the implantation of his fear in my heart and the communication of divine life to my soul—if God himself thus began a good work in me, I have his certain promise that he will perform and complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil. 1:6.) Upon this we sometimes hang amidst doubt, fear, and perplexity; we hang, I say, upon God's work upon our heart as begun by himself. We have then to remember

this, and this is not very difficult, for the first work upon our conscience is sometimes as fresh in our minds as if it occurred yesterday. People tell me sometimes that I have a strong memory, but whether our memory be strong or weak, it is astonishing what an impression divine realities make upon our mind in their first communication. Often, too, God's dealings with us in providence were as marked as his dealings with us in grace. Do you think that Paul ever forgot his journey to Damascus, Matthew his sitting at the receipt of custom, Nathanael his kneeling under the fig tree, Zacchaeus his climbing up into a sycamore tree, or Peter and Andrew casting their net into the sea? Similarly with us. The providential circumstances under which the work of grace was commenced; the leadings of God to place us in a certain position, bring us into a certain state, and open up a certain path in which he fixed our feet, that he might prepare us for the communication of his grace, are usually so marked that they are fixed indelibly in our mind and memory. And besides such general leadings, I have often observed—it was my own case, and I have seen it in others—some very marked intervention of God in providence, such as a change of abode, a bringing a peculiar affliction on body or mind, an opening up of some unexpected circumstance, which, if not grace, prepared for grace; and though had it been nothing but temporal and natural would have died in the very birth, yet it so worked in the providence of God with his grace that, like links in a chain, the two were bound together. Thus the first link was a link in providence, say, for instance, some very deep and painful trial which seemed to cut the very heart-strings of life. Many perhaps have had deeper trials than we; but they only had with it the sorrow of the world which worketh death; but we had, we hope, with it the grace of life working with the trial, over-ruling it, and turning it into a gracious channel. Grace softened the heart; and though this very softening made the trial more deeply felt, yet it humbled and meekened the soul under it. As then we lay hold of this first link we find it knitted on to a second. Call the first link, if you like, a link of iron, but call the next a link of gold, for if the first were providence, the second was grace. Then as we lay hold of the golden link its thrilling touch, as with an electric power,

makes us remember how eternal realities first fell upon our mind, how the conviction of sin first entered our conscience, the guilt of sin, the burden of it, and the exercises connected with it; how the Spirit of grace and of supplications was communicated; the cries, sighs, tears, groans, wrestlings, in which we sought mercy at the Lord's hands; the separation from friends and associates which it entailed; the breaking off of sin and all connections contrary to God's mind and will, with the coming out of the world and everything worldly and the giving up of ourselves freely unto God, to be his in life, death, time, and eternity. However the Lord may have wrought with different degrees of power in our hearts, yet we may lay it down as a clear and positive truth that the effect of his dealings with our consciences was to separate us from the world and bring us unto himself. Is not this God's testimony concerning his people Israel? "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself." (Exod. 19:4.)

2. But we have to remember as another bright waymark and blessed Ebenezer on the road by which we have come, how the Lord was pleased to *manifest a sense of his mercy*, of his goodness, and of his salvation to our heart. There are two points which it is very desirable, if not absolutely needful, for a child of God to be very clear in: One, is the beginning of the work of God upon his soul—to make clear work there; and the second is, to be able to trace out any application of the blood of Christ to his conscience, any manifestation of mercy to his soul, any revelation of the Son of God to his heart, any knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins. Now, though there may be in many cases doubts, fears, and questionings as to the reality of both these points, and especially the beginning of the work, yet I do believe wherever the Lord has begun a gracious work, there will be times and seasons when a sacred light will shine upon that beginning to make it plain and clear; and similarly, if the Lord the Spirit has ever revealed Christ to our soul, and made him precious to our affections, a blessed light will at times shine upon that also, to make that plain and clear: for "in God's light we see light;" and we thus get a testimony in a good conscience, that we have been

made partakers of eternal life by a spiritual, experimental knowledge of the only true God and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. There are times indeed when we can believe nothing, and there are times when, so to speak, we can believe everything. There are times when we have to say, "We see not our signs;" and there are times when we can see every waymark and every Ebenezer. But our feelings do not alter facts; and as seeing our signs does not make them, so our not seeing them does not unmake them.

3. But we have to remember *all* the way which he has led us in the wilderness. It is not only then the bright spots which we have to call to mind: there are the *dark* spots also on which we have to look and remember. The children of Israel were bidden to remember "all the way," and therefore all the temptations of the way, trials of the way, sufferings of the way, and I may add, all their own base, rebellious conduct in the way. If, then, in looking back to the way we see here and there an Ebenezer, a token for good, a bright spot, we see spots here and there on which darkness seems to rest, and from which we would fain turn our eyes. Now this darkness may arise from two causes: 1, first, want of clear light; and, 2, secondly, a painful recollection of our own sinfulness. Thus, as sometimes in nature there is a mixture of light and darkness, producing a dim and hazy twilight, and thus obscuring spots which might be otherwise bright, so it is in grace. Let me explain my meaning a little more clearly. Upon some points of our experience we cannot be altogether clear, and for this reason, there was so much of sin and self mixed with them. Thus we can look back on various spots and places when certain sacrifices were to be made, certain things to be given up which we held very close, and to part with which seemed to cut very deeply into our flesh. It might have been an attachment, or a situation, or a prospect of getting on in life. We could not therefore through the weakness of the flesh make the sacrifice. Now this clinging to sin and self has thrown a degree of darkness upon those spots. And yet all is not dark; for a second look would enable us to view other spots and places where the Lord gave faith to make the sacrifice, come out of the world, give up



everything that nature loved and cleaved to, and cast one's lot amongst the family of God. These would be spots in one's experience which one could look back upon with some degree of satisfaction as the Lord's work. Yet in all our movements there is so much sin, so much of the flesh, and so much of self mixed up, that though what we did was performed under a divine power and contrary to the flesh, yet in looking back upon it we cannot call it to mind with perfect satisfaction. Thus it is partly light and partly dark. But even where this is not the case, unbelief, infidelity, carnal fear, and a spirit of bondage will often so work together that the whole may first and last seem buried in confusion. I cannot myself understand those people who are always ready to talk about their experience at any hour and at every hour of the day; so that if you were to wake them up at twelve o'clock at night, they would only have just to rub their eyes and they could tell you all their experience from first to last, between asleep and awake. I know myself that sometimes I have not a word to say about myself or my experience—good or bad—and am silent before God and man; but these men seem to have it all at their fingers' ends, and can wind it off from them as easily a skein of cotton, and pretty much as harsh and dry. It is, I believe, by ourselves in silence, for the most part, that we can best look back upon all the way by which God has led us in the wilderness; and if he do not shine upon the way and bring it to remembrance, "we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness." And yet when the Lord is pleased to shine, how good it is to look back upon all the way.

4. Sometimes, for instance, we see what a God he has been to us in *providence*. We trace his outstretched hand again and again, with more or less clearness and distinctness, and as our faith sees this hand, we bless and praise his holy name for having led us so conspicuously by it. I have seen much of it myself, perhaps, as much as most men, and especially during these two last years of my life, and I desire to bless God for it; yet at times it is very hard to trace the hand of God distinctly, for as he works by instruments, we sometimes fix our eyes upon the instrument and not upon the hand which holds it; which is the sin condemned by

the prophet, "as if the axe should boast itself against him that heweth therewith, or the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it." But another thing which confuses us is what I may call the zigzag of God's providence. But was not this the case also with the children of Israel? When the pillar of the cloud moved, they moved; by night or by day the camp moved, according to the movement of the cloud, as we read, "And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed." (Num. 9:21.) But in thus following the cloud, what a zigzag, in and out, backward and forward path they trod. If you were to see it traced out on a map you would wonder at the intricacy of the path and how they were directed from this station to that in a way which they could not comprehend, yet every step arranged by infinite wisdom. Thus we are to remember all the way whereby God hath led us these many years in the wilderness by his wise and unerring providence.

But we have also to remember all his *gracious dealings* with us as contrasted with our own perverseness, rebelliousness, unbelief, and base requitals of all his goodness and mercy. And thus all our trials, afflictions, sufferings, exercises, snares, temptations, wanderings, backslidings, slips, and falls—we have to remember them all, think upon them, ponder over them, examine them, lament, bewail, and confess our sinfulness in them on our part; and we have to remember also all the patience, forbearance, long-suffering, tender mercy, and rich, superabounding grace on the part of God. We have to look at these things till they enter deeply into our heart, and sink and penetrate into our inmost conscience, that our soul may be like a newly ploughed field, open to sun and rain, and broken down into mellowness and tilth, that we may indeed be "God's husbandry," and that the word of eternal life may be in our heart as the good seed which springs up and grows and brings forth fruit to his praise.

II.—But I will now pass on to consider the *benefits and blessings* which sprang out of their wandering in the wilderness, and which

they were to remember as much as the wanderings themselves.

Though their wandering so many years in the wilderness was a punishment for their sins, and especially for that sin of unbelief and rebellion which they manifested on the return of the spies, when they murmured against Moses and Aaron, crying out, "Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt," and actually proposed to make a captain and return, yet God took advantage, so to speak, of their sins and their rebellion to bring about the purposes of his own good pleasure. He did not create their sins; he was not the author of their rebellion; he did not foster their unbelief, for God cannot be the author of sin; and yet he could take occasion by their very sin to work out his own purposes. We cannot have a more striking instance of this than the crucifixion of our dear Redeemer, in which God worked out his purposes by the hands of ungodly men. How plain is Peter's testimony: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." (Acts 2:23.) It was by "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God that Jesus was delivered," or as the word means, "given up" out of the hands of God into theirs; but it was wicked hands which took him, crucified, and slew him. God's determinate counsel and foreknowledge did not make their hands wicked; and yet their wicked hands brought about his holy purposes. So it was with the children of Israel. It was their wickedness which was the cause of their long wanderings; and yet these very wanderings carried out God's purposes, and what is more, were overruled for their good. So it is with us in this wilderness world, of which that "great and terrible wilderness" was a representation. God had a purpose in permitting us to be what we are, to have been what we have been, and to have done what we have done. And what that purpose was is beautifully and blessedly opened in our text. Let us see if we can trace out some of these designs of God, as laid open in the words before us; and let us bear in mind that they are as applicable to us now as they were to the children of Israel: for "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

1. The first purpose is to *humble us*. Our heart, at least mine, is desperately proud; and if there be a sin which God hates more than another, and more sets himself against, it is the sin of pride. Though some men are more tempted, perhaps, to that sin than others, and, like a weed upon a dunghill, it may grow ranker in some soils, especially when well manured by rank and riches, praise and flattery, our own ignorance, and the ignorance of others, yet all inherit it alike from their fallen ancestor, who got it from Satan, that "king over all the children of pride." Those, perhaps, who think they possess the least, and view themselves with wonderful self-complacency amongst the humblest of mortals, may have as much or more than those who feel and confess it, only rather more deeply hid and buried more out of sight in the dark recesses of their carnal mind. As God then sees all hearts, and knows every movement of pride, whether we see it or not, his purpose is to humble us. And if we take a review of all his dealings with us, we shall see that this is the end which he has ever had in view; for until that is done we may well say that nothing is done.

But how did God humble the children of Israel? By placing them in circumstances which manifested their real character. God, as I said before, does not put his hand to wickedness: God forbid! God does not stir up by his Spirit evil in a man's heart; but he finds it there. If a wasp sting you, if a dog bite you, if you tread upon a serpent, and he turn round and fasten his poison fangs into your ankle, was it any act of yours which put venom into the wasp, sharp teeth into the dog, or poison into the snake? Was it not all there before? It was drawn forth, but there it was; and the occasion only drew it out. So if there be in the heart of man pride, as there is, and circumstances occur to draw it out; or if there be in men's hearts rebellion, and circumstances draw forth that rebellion; or if there be in man's heart unbelief and infidelity, and occasions arise to draw them forth, and those occasions occur in the providence of God, God does not create that pride, that rebellion, that unbelief, that infidelity, nor does he stir it up instrumentally; but he suffers it to manifest itself for this special

purpose, to humble the individual in whom the sin thus appears. Mark my words: I am not justifying any kind of sin in thought, word, or deed. Sin, in my eyes, is exceedingly sinful. I would desire never to sin again. I would, if I could, live perfectly holy. I would not have a sinful thought, I would not speak a sinful word, and still less would I commit any sinful action. And yet I find sin working in my mind sometimes all day long. Now what do I learn by this? Humility. But if truly humbled I cannot raise my hand against God; I cannot lift up a rebellious tongue against him and say, "Why hast thou made me thus?" for were I to do so I should have against me the verdict of my own conscience. I must fall down, then, humbly and meekly before him; I must put my mouth in the dust; I must acknowledge I am vile, because I see his greatness, majesty, holiness, purity, and perfections, and see and feel, as contrasted with them, my own exceeding sinfulness before him. This, therefore, teaches me humility; at least if I don't get humility in this way, I don't know how it is to be got. Now when I look back upon a long life of profession, how many things do I see—though with all my sins and follies, slips and falls, I hope the Lord has kept me from bringing any open reproach upon his name and cause, and God keep me to the end, for it would be a dreadful thing for me after my long and well-known profession to bring disgrace upon the truth in my last days, yet my conscience testifies of many things I have thought, said, and done, which grieve my soul almost every day in the recollection of them, and make me hang my head before God, put my mouth in the dust, and confess my sins unto him. Nor do I believe that I am singular in this feeling, for I am well persuaded that there is not a single person in this congregation who possesses the fear of God in a tender conscience who can look back through a life, and especially a long life of profession, without many cutting reflections, many painful reminiscences, and many distressing recollections that humble him in the very dust before God. At least I have no communion, and wish to have none, with any but those whom God humbles. Men of broken hearts, contrite spirits, and tender consciences I would desire to have for my companions, if I have any.

2. But God had other purposes and other ends to accomplish besides humbling. He had "to *prove them*, to know what was in their heart, whether they would keep his commandments or no."

Every man has to be proved, and every man's religion has to be proved; for every man's work is to be tried with fire; and though the trial may be delayed—though the proof may not yet seem going on, yet if you make a profession of religion, sooner or later the trial will come, and it will be made manifest in the fire of trial and temptation of what sort your religion is. Now the wilderness was meant to prove the children of Israel. They made great boasting at Mount Sinai. All that God bade them observe to do, they said that they would observe and do; and yet, when Moses tarried in the mount a little beyond their expectation, they made a golden calf. So much for the spirit of free will; so much for the resolve of the creature to keep God's commands. Now God is determined to prove what is in a man's heart, and whether he will keep his commandments or no. It is not for the purpose of proving it to himself, for he knoweth all things, but of proving it to us. Where, for instance, he plants his fear, he will prove that fear. Circumstances will arise, various things will occur in business, in the family, in a man's situation, public or private, whereby it will be ascertained whether he is possessed of the fear of God or not. He may for a time carry on his crafty practices; he may wear a mask and may deceive himself and deceive others; but sooner or later, if the fear of God be not in his soul, if he be not a possessor of heavenly grace and God has not wrought anything in his heart by his own divine power and influence, he will prove reprobate silver; he will not stand the test; his religion will be burnt up in the flame, and he himself be cast out as worthless dross. He may go on for many years, and yet the end will prove sooner or later what the man is, and what his profession is worth. But the same fiery trial will also prove what a man has of the life of God in his soul. For though, through the power of temptation, he may often reel and stagger to and fro, and be at his wits' end, yet God will deliver him out of all his temptations, and manifest in him the power of his grace. It is a day of great profession, splendid pretensions, loud talking,

presumptuous boasting, and, as men think, strong faith. I do not think so myself, but just the contrary, for it seems to me to be a day of small things with the very best, and a day of no things at all with the most. But God best knows what the day really is. He sees all hearts, searches all reins. Nothing that we are or have is hidden before the eyes of him with whom we have to do; and it is to be greatly feared that much of this strong faith will be proved to be presumption, many of these boasting claims to be downright arrogance, and much of this loud talk to be that of "the prating fool," against whom, twice in one chapter, God has recorded this awful sentence, "that he shall fall." One grain of godly fear, one sigh and cry of a broken heart, one longing look of living faith, one tender feeling of love to the Lord from a glimpse of his beauty and blessedness, are worth all this loud talk of which the wise man truly says, it "tendeth only to penury."

3. But God has to prove by the wilderness, not only the truth and reality of his work upon the heart, but whether *we will keep his commandments or no*. It is not what we talk that God looks to, but what we do. "The tongue," says James, "is a little member, and boasteth great things." To talk is easy enough, but to do is another matter. Talking brings with it no sacrifices, no self-denial, no crucifixion of the flesh, no mortification of the whole body of sin, no putting off of the old man, no putting on of the new. A man may talk and drink, talk and cheat, talk and lie, talk and live in all manner of ungodliness. But it is walking not talking, praying not prating, doing not daring, obeying not saying, which manifest whose we are and whom we serve. But what are we to understand by keeping God's commandments? It does not mean, I believe, as interpreted by the rule and spirit of the gospel, keeping the moral law, that is, the law of Moses in the ten commandments, but the preceptive part of God's word, as revealed and laid down in the New Testament, where everything that God would have us to do, and everything that God would have us not to do, are written as with a ray of divine light. It embraces, therefore, every gospel precept, every New Testament command and direction, in a word, everything which proceeds from the mouth of God as given by him in the last revelation of

his own mind and will, as the guiding rule of our Christian obedience. For you will observe that this is the test laid down in our text, "whether we will keep God's commandments or no." And where are those commandments laid down in all their clearness and plenitude but in the New Testament. Is he not our Master, whom we serve in godly fear and love, whose approbation we desire to win, whose favour we count better than life, and in the enjoyment of whose love we wish to live and die? Now with all the perplexity, doubt, or fear which may encompass your mind, through the worrying, distracting power and influence of sin, Satan, and self, if you possess the fear of God, there will be that honesty, integrity, uprightness, and sincerity wrought in your soul by a divine power, whereby you can say before God, "Lord, I desire to know thy will and do it. However I come short, however I fail or fall, my desire is to be found walking in thy ways and doing those things which are pleasing in thy sight."

But how does the wilderness prove how far we are willing to do the things which are pleasing in God's sight, and how far we are willing to keep his commandments or no? Thus. Its trials and temptations, its sorrows and afflictions, its perplexities and the exercises which spring from them, lay bare the real state of our hearts, and as they discover to us the weakness and wickedness of the flesh, so they also bring to light any good thing which God by his grace may have wrought in our soul. When we are in a smooth and easy path, flesh and spirit are alike hidden from view. Like the sea in a calm, the flesh is smoothed into smiles, and what it can be in a storm is hidden in the still yet deep water. Thus we know not what the flesh really is until worked up into a storm by the winds of temptation. Then its waves roll and it casts up mire and dirt; and then we also know the mighty voice which can say to these winds and waves, "Peace, be still." It is thus that the strength of sin and the strength of grace are brought out, and we learn which is stronger, grace or sin, the power of the flesh or the power of the Spirit, the battlings of self or the victories of Christ.

4. But to pass on. The Holy Ghost by the mouth of Moses goes on



to unfold other reasons of these wilderness dealings, setting before us both sides of the question, that we may well ponder the path of our feet. The next point then which we have to consider is God's "*suffering us to hunger.*" This, we know, was highly characteristic of the wilderness. No food naturally grew there. All the food supplied during those forty years was food from heaven miraculously supplied. But before that miraculous supply came, they were sharply hunger-bitten. Scarcely had they got into the wilderness before hunger pangs fell upon them, and they cried out, "Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger." (Exodus 16:3.) They were therefore suffered to hunger that they might have a sharp though not long taste of one of the severest of bodily pangs and human sufferings.

But this was typically instructive, and throws a broad light upon the teachings and dealings of God with the souls of his people in the wilderness now. He suffers us to hunger. We cannot feed upon husks. Worldly things cannot satisfy the immortal desires of a newborn soul. We must have divine food; we must have heavenly realities. Whatever I am, whatever men may think I am, I feel this one thing, that I must have heavenly realities. I cannot do with shadowy appearances, with make-believes and make-do's in religion. I may have but little, but let that little be real, for all else is a mockery and a delusion. Let it be the pure work of God upon my soul; let it be the breathings of his Spirit into my heart; let it be the communication of his life and the visitations of his favour to preserve my spirit. I don't want much; I don't seek great things; but I seek real things. I want a religion to live and die by; I want something to save and sanctify, bless and comfort my soul for time and eternity. I have to die; I have to face eternity. My conscience registers many sins committed against a holy God. I cannot stand before him under the weight of these sins as thus manifested to my conscience. How, then, under the weight of all my sins, known and unknown, seen and unseen? Nothing, therefore, but the manifested mercy, goodness,

and love of God can speak any real comfort to my soul, can bear me up under any trial, support me under any affliction, comfort my heart when cast down, and speak a peace to my inward spirit which the world cannot give nor take away. Therefore I want realities. And this makes me preach them to you, and insist upon them both earnestly and continually. And I believe I have a witness in your consciences who fear God that I am right in so doing, for God teaches all his people, be they strong and well established in the faith or weak and feeble, the same lesson: he makes them all alike want realities. And the way which he teaches them to want realities is by suffering them to hunger. Is not hunger a real thing? You who can always find plenty of food in the cupboard and plenty of money in the purse to go to market with, or who from various causes have but a weak and feeble appetite, perhaps scarcely for a day in your life know what real hunger is. But hunger is a reality, and you might be in circumstances to find it so. Say, for instance, you were on board a ship when provisions ran short, or on a long journey when food could not be readily obtained, or were so reduced in circumstances that you had no money to buy it, you would find hunger a reality. So it is in spiritual matters. Hunger is a reality. And have you not sometime found it to be a reality? "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." No reality in that panting? We read of the wanderers in the wilderness: "Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them." (Psalm 107:5.) No reality in that hunger and thirst, or the fainting of their soul in the very pangs of famine? "My soul thirsteth after God, after the living God." No reality in that? If you say "No" it is to deny at one and the same moment and in one and the same breath that hunger is a real feeling. Sometimes you can hardly get beyond the sigh, the cry, the longing desire, the hungering and thirsting after righteousness; but it is a reality, and a divine reality too, for it is not nature but grace which produces it. And God suffers you to hunger that you may know hunger to be a reality. If you could feed upon husks, why need you hunger? If you could, as men often bid you, take God at his word, believe the promises, rest upon the doctrines, claim God to be your Father, and walk in all the arrogance of the children of pride why

need you hunger? Not you. What do these men know about hunger or thirst either? What do they know of David's feelings or David's cry? "Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?" Why need their eyes fail or their soul faint for God's salvation when they have it all locked up in the cupboard? Locked up, do I say? No; for their cupboard has neither lock nor key, but is open all the day long to all comers. But it is because you cannot take blessings and favours God does not give; it is because your heart cries out, as Berridge says, for heavenly food; it is because you know there is a reality in the things of God, and that if God withhold them you cannot get them, that you cannot do their biddings and steal their stealings. Yes, it is your hunger which teaches you what real food is. Perhaps you have come here this evening hungering. As you walked along there might have been raised up a secret cry in your soul, "Lord, give me something this evening. I want a word. It is a long time since thou wert pleased to speak to my soul. I am in trouble. My soul is deeply tried. I want something from thyself." Here is the hunger of which I am speaking and on which I am insisting. Now God teaches you by the wilderness to feel this hunger: it is his work. The emptying us of self is his; the sifting of our souls in the sieve is his; the bringing down of our proud heart is his; the wounding of our consciences is his; the stripping of all our own goodness, wisdom, strength, and righteousness is his; the feeling of hunger then which springs from these dealings of God with our hearts is his. We know that, alike in nature and grace, hunger is not food, but it is next door to it. We know that a sharp appetite is not good meat or a loaf of bread; but what is good meat or the best of bread if there is no appetite for it? It is a blessed preparation for a feast, if it is not the feast itself. For what is a feast to a man who has no appetite for it? What the smell of roast beef is to a sickly invalid—a subject of loathing not of longing, quenching the appetite rather than sharpening it.

5. But what other dealings of God with them in the wilderness does Moses bid them remember? The *food* with which he supplied their hunger: "*He fed them with manna, which they knew not, neither did their fathers know.*" Here was a provision. What a

miracle, and what an undeniable miracle. How stupid, to say the least, must infidelity be to deny a miracle which was witnessed every day by a million of people. Could you deceive a million of people for forty years? Could manna fall every day except the Sabbath for forty years and feed a people amounting to more than a million, and all those people be deceived in their eyes, in their hands, and in their taste? Why, the very little children would rise up and testify when they saw their mothers bring home the manna which they gathered every morning, that it had fallen during the night from heaven. But as a standing and permanent evidence of the reality of the manna, was not a pot of it laid up before the Lord by the side of the ark to be kept for all generations, not only to bear witness to the miracle but to show what the manna was in itself as a visible substance? I know that there are great difficulties in belief, but I am sure that there are greater difficulties in unbelief. If to believe God's word is a difficulty, and to give full credence to the miracle of the manna seems at times to try our faith, what a much greater difficulty there is in disbelieving a circumstance which was evidenced by such undoubted proofs. If it had fallen once or twice, or in a very small quantity, there might have been more room for question; but to fall every day for forty years together and in such a quantity as to feed more than a million of people—this seems to afford a whole army of proof against infidelity and all its host. Besides which, if once we admit a forty years' wandering in the wilderness, how could that vast multitude have been sustained in it except by a miraculous supply of food from heaven, for earth could not supply it in a waste, howling wilderness? The unbelieving Jews in our Lord's time believed what our modern infidels dispute and deny: "Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat." (John 6:31.)

It was then food not known by any till God sent it. The fathers of those who daily ate it did not know it; but for their descendants God wrought a special miracle, and gave them bread from heaven—typical, as you know, of the true bread which God gives to his family, the flesh of his dear Son, as our Lord opened up the

subject in those remarkable words: "Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world." (John 6:32, 33.)

6. Now what was God's object in thus sending them manna from heaven? He could if he had pleased have sent them quails every morning; or created bread, as our Lord created it when he fed the seven thousand. He might have sent them flocks and herds innumerable. But such was not his will. He was determined to feed them by sending them a daily portion of manna from the skies, that they might learn this lesson, that "*man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.*"

This, then, is the grand lesson, dear friends, which you and I have to learn in our wilderness journey—that man doth not live by bread only, that is, by those providential supplies which relieve our natural wants. Thanks be to God for any bread that he gives us in his kind and bountiful providence. An honest living is a great mercy. To be enabled by the labour of our hands or by the labour of our brain to maintain our families and bring them up in a degree of comfort, if not abundance, is a great blessing. But God has determined that his people shall not live by bread only. They shall be separated from the mass of men who live in this carnal way only; who have no care beyond earthly possessions, and the sum of whose thoughts and desires is, what they shall eat, and what they shall drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed; who never look beyond the purse, the business, the daily occupation, the safe return, the profitable investment, and how to provide for themselves and their families. God has planted in the breast of his people a higher life, a nobler principle, a more blessed appetite than to live upon bread only. We bless him for his providence, but we love him for his grace. We thank him for daily food and raiment, but these mercies are but for time, perishing in their very use, and he has provided us with that which is for eternity. What then does he mean the soul to live

upon? "Upon every word that proceedeth out of his mouth." But where do we find these words that proceed out of the mouth of God? In the Scriptures, which is the food of the Church, and especially in Scripture as applied to the heart, in the words that God is pleased to drop into the soul by a divine power, which we receive from his gracious mouth, and lay hold of with a believing hand. That is the food and nutriment of our soul: the truth of God applied to our heart and made life and spirit to our souls by his own teaching and testimony. And see how large and ample the supply is. Look through the whole compass of God's revealed word, and see in it what a store there is of provision laid up for the church of God. How this should both stimulate and encourage us to search the Scriptures as for hid treasure, to read them constantly, to meditate upon them, to seek to enter into the mind of God as revealed in them, and thus to find them to be the food of our soul. If we were fully persuaded that every word of the Scripture came out of God's mouth, and was meant to feed our soul, how much more we should prize it, read, and study it.

But how does the wilderness teach God's people this lesson? Do not trials and temptations make God's word exceedingly precious? Luther used to say, that he did not know the meaning of the word of God before he was afflicted. God's book is written for God's people; and they are "an afflicted and poor people." When we are at ease, there is nothing in the word of God for us except indeed it be sharp rebukes and cutting reproofs. But directly we get into trial and affliction, there is something in the word of God at once sweet and savoury, suitable and encouraging.

Thanks then be to God if we know anything of living upon God's word. How the prophet knew this: "Thy words were found and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart." But through what scenes of temptation and sorrow did he pass to find the word of God to be the joy of his heart. "Why," he cried, "is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed?" and this almost in the same breath with eating the word. (Jer. 15:16-18.)

By "the word," we may understand also his Person, his work, his blood, his righteousness, his dying love, his sweet promises, his holy precepts, his kind invitations, and what he is as the Christ of God. What food there is in all this to the soul. Paul could say, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20.) And how blessedly did the Lord open up the whole mystery of the manna in the wilderness in those striking words: "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever." (John 6:57, 58.)

This then is the effect, and these are some of the benefits and blessing of a wilderness pilgrimage. We learn it in the lessons which I have endeavoured to unfold. Can you say, looking up to God with a honest heart, that you have learnt any of these lessons in the days of your pilgrimage?—learnt humility, learnt the trial of faith, learnt the reality of a hungering spirit, and learnt the blessedness of living by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord? Now if you can look back through a pilgrimage, be it long or short, and say, "Ah, if I have learnt but little, I have learnt that which has humbled me before God; if I have learnt but little, I have had my faith tried to the quick; if I have learnt but little, I have learnt to hunger and thirst after a precious Christ; if I have learnt but little, I have now and then tasted the sweetness of heavenly food; and if I do know but little, I still feel that my life hangs upon every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord." Then you can look back and remember all the way that God has led you these years, be they many or few, in the wilderness; and now that you come to look back upon it, you can see that goodness and mercy have hitherto followed you. Why then should you doubt that you shall dwell in the house of God for ever?

## **The Wine of Astonishment and the Banner of Truth and Love**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, Dec. 21, 1862

"Thou hast shewed thy people hard things: thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment. Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth." Psalm 60:3, 4

When the ever-living, ever-glorious Son of God left the bosom of the Father, in which from all eternity he had lain, to tread this vale of sin and sorrow, he came to do the will of him that sent him. Such was his own declaration even before he came into a time state. "Then said I, Lo, I come [in the volume of the book it is written of me] to do thy will, O God." (Heb. 10:7.) In a similar spirit, in the days of his flesh, he expressly said, "I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me." (John 6:38.) To understand this more clearly, it will be desirable to see what this will of God was which his only begotten Son came down from heaven expressly to do. This will, then, was, that he should obey and suffer: obey the law which we had broken, and suffer the penalty, its curse and death, its consequence, which we had incurred. But this obedience and this suffering were very closely and intimately connected, as we read "He learnt obedience by the things which he suffered." (Heb. 5:8.) And again, "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:8.) Now in order that our blessed Lord should be qualified to obey and suffer, it was necessary that he should take a nature capable both of obedience and of suffering. His divine nature was incapable of either. Deity cannot obey, as Deity cannot suffer. He, therefore, had to assume a nature that was capable of obedience and of suffering, and that was a human nature; for to the full performance of the work which he undertook, to the complete execution of the will of God, three things were necessary. First, that he should assume a



nature capable of obedience and suffering, such as the flesh and blood of the children; secondly, a nature absolutely without spot or blemish, for otherwise the obedience would have been imperfect and the suffering unavailable; and thirdly, that this obedience should be continuous, so that there should be no interruption to it from the beginning to the end. This necessity of continuous obedience and continuous suffering was the reason why our blessed Lord was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" for his sorrows as well as his obedience began from the very first. His Virgin Mother bore him as a sacred burden from Nazareth to Bethlehem, no less than seventy miles, just on the eve of her delivery, and thus he may be said to have suffered with her fatigue. When she arrived in Bethlehem there was no room for her in the inn. In a stable among the beasts, and probably unassisted by any female friend, the Virgin Mother brought forth her first-born Son. There was no cradle to lay his sacred body in. The common manger where the cattle fed was the place where the holy babe was laid, when, according to the custom of the times, she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, binding, as it were, his infant limbs even then by legal ties. We do not hear much of our Lord's sufferings during his early life, though no doubt he was obedient and suffering both as a child, a youth, and a man, for he was ever obeying the law; and surrounded as he was by sin and misery in every shape and form, his holy, spotless nature must have acutely suffered in proportion to its innate purity and his zeal for the honour and glory of God. But directly that he entered upon his public ministry the sacred record brings before us obedience and suffering. Thus, when he comes to John to be baptised of him, and John forbade him, saying, "I have need to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me?" what was his meek and lowly answer? "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." (Matt. 3:14, 15.) Immediately after his baptism he is "led," or, to use the stronger expression of Mark, "driven" "by the Spirit into the wilderness" amongst the wild beasts, where, after fasting forty days and forty nights, when his body was spent with hunger and thirst, weak and languishing through want of food and rest, he was set as a mark for the horrid temptations of Satan. When

these were overcome, and he enters more fully into the discharge of his ministry, going about doing good, he is persecuted to that degree, that he saves his life on two occasions by a special miracle. During the whole course of his ministry, he had not where to lay his head; possessing none of this world's goods, he was maintained out of the substance of his followers. (Luke 7:3.) Not a single step did he take, scarcely a miracle perform, utter a parable, or drop a word without stirring up scorn, enmity, and opposition. Nay, in what we might term his inmost circle, he still had to suffer. One disciple denies him; another betrays him; and all forsake him and flee when "he is led as a lamb to the slaughter." And when we come to the last scenes of his holy, obedient, and suffering life, what agonies our gracious Lord endured in the gloomy garden, where his anguish of soul, under a sense of the weight of sin and the wrath of God, was so unutterably great as to force the very blood through the pores of his skin and to fall in great drops upon the ground. So intolerable was the anguish of his burdened spirit, that even he, who was sent to suffer, and who came for that express purpose, was as if compelled to cry out, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" though at once obedience added the submissive words, "nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." When, too, we pursue his suffering, obedient path to the cross, and view him by the eye of faith suffering not only intolerable agony of body, but, what was far heavier to bear, unutterable anguish of spirit as made a curse for us, what a spectacle is presented to our view of obedience unto death when he, the spotless Lamb, endured the wrath of God, poured out without measure, and drank the wine-cup of God's anger to the very dregs. I may sum up the whole with a sentence from Dr. Goodwin, with which, reading it one day, I was much struck as a brief summary of our Lord's death upon the cross: "Of deaths it was the most accursed, at a time most solemn, in a place most infamous, and with company most wretched."

But there was one feature in our blessed Lord's suffering to which I wish to call attention, as it is in some way connected with our text; and that is, the holy meekness and uncomplaining patience

with which he endured all the sufferings he experienced from God and man. Truly, "he was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." Now the Lord's people have all to be conformed to the suffering image of their crucified Head; for as they are to be conformed to his glorious image above, so must they be conformed to his suffering image below; for "if we suffer with him, we shall reign with him." "If so be that we suffer with him that we may be also glorified together." (2 Tim. 2:12; Rom. 8:17.) But there is one feature in our case which we never find in that of our adorable Lord, that we rarely suffer without *complaint*. We are not like a sheep before the shearers—dumb; or a lamb led to the slaughter—open not our mouth. We are always complaining, murmuring, or repining. Now, as an instance of this, look at the language of the church here, for it is the church which speaks in the words of the text, and puts into language the complaints that God's people so often feel in union with her: "*Thou hast shewed thy people hard things.*" You never find our Lord using such language in reference to his own sufferings. "Thou hast made us to drink *the wine of astonishment.*" Are not the words so couched as if in them the church would almost reproach God for dealing hardly with her, and putting into her hand this wine cup? And yet to do her justice, her language is not all complaint, for she seems, so to speak, to recollect herself, to gather up her sleeping graces, and animated by a spirit of faith, and finding the benefit of the hard dealings, to acknowledge the goodness of the Lord, even in the very midst of her trouble. "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth."

Let us see, with God's help and blessing, if we cannot find in these words something that may instruct and, if it be the Lord's will, something also that may cheer and encourage our heart. In the hope of so doing I shall,

I.—*First*, as the Lord may enable, direct your attention to the Church's *mournful complaint*: "Thou hast shewed thy people *hard things*: thou hast made us to drink the *wine of astonishment.*"

II.—*Secondly*, the Church's grateful acknowledgment of a *distinctive blessing*: "Thou hast given a *banner to them that fear thee.*"

III.—*Thirdly*, her sense of the peculiar privilege of being a standard bearer of the Lord and his truth: "That it may be *displayed because of the truth.*"

I.—When we are in a state of nature, held down in the chains of ignorance, with the veil of unbelief wrapped in dense folds over our heart, we see God in nothing. Whatever befall us, whether adversity or prosperity, we neither see nor recognize the hand of God in either. If prosperity attend us, we ascribe it to luck, chance, fortune—as some one has called it "the Devil's trinity;" or to our own skill, industry, energy, and exertion—thus fondly sacrificing to our own net, and burning incense to our own drag. If, on the other hand, matters are against us and our ambitious schemes and projects are overturned, how "unfortunate" we are, how everything is against us, is our immediate cry; and instead of ascribing the adverse stroke or cutting disappointment to the hand of God who holds the reins of government, we look at second causes, and think if we had done so and so, or had not done so and so, if we had taken the advice of this judicious friend, or had not been drawn aside by that foolish counsellor, this mishap, this misfortune, this unhappy circumstance would not have occurred. So blind and so ignorant are we, that whether God smile or whether God frown, (I speak of his providential dealings), we see his hand in neither. But grace opens the eyes, takes away the veil of ignorance and unbelief from off the heart, reveals to us the power and presence of that great and glorious God in whom we live and move and have our being; and thus as the ungodly man sees God in nothing, so the godly man sees God in everything. The one lives without God in the world; and the other lives with God in the world. The one, like an animal grazing upon a mountain, sees nothing and cares for nothing but the grass under his feet; the other, like a man endowed as with a new sight, sees the glorious prospect spread before his eyes, and

the hand of an Almighty God in every mountain and vale, in the flowing river, the purling brook, the sky above, and the earth below. If things are adverse with him in providence, he sees the hand of God in taking away; and if things are prosperous, he sees the hand of God in giving. So whether the Lord bless him in providence, or the Lord distress him in providence, grace anointing his eyes as with heavenly eye salve, and giving divine light, enables him to acknowledge the hand of God in both. Is not this the very expression of our text? Does not the church here speak to the Lord as one to whom he has given light and sight? "*Thou hast shewed thy people hard things.*" The church does not say, "What hard things are fallen to our lot; what misfortunes are our destined portion; how unlucky we are. O how unfortunate! Why could we have been so thoughtless? What could have possessed us to have made such mistakes, and brought ourselves into such difficulties?" But, though pressed down by affliction and trouble, she still looks beyond second causes and the passing events of the day, and, directing her eyes upwards to the great Arbiter of all events, the Sovereign Disposer of all circumstances, says, in the language of faith, though, as I before remarked, in the language of complaint, "Thou hast shewed thy people hard things."

i. Having thus attempted to shew you the utterance of faith in the words of our text, and the humble acknowledgment in it of the hand of God, let us now look at some of these "hard things" which God shews his people; and depend upon it if God shew them, he means that they should see them, and that so clearly that they shall make no mistake either as to the thing itself or his intention in bringing it before them.

1. The first thing which the Lord, for the most part, shews his people is his *inflexible justice*, spotless holiness, and unspeakable purity. This he does that he may convince them of their sins by the application of his holy law to their conscience, and thus bring them to his feet by cutting them off from all creature help or hope. I set this down as the first "hard thing" which the Lord shews his people, because it makes such a wonderful revolution

in their feelings and gives them such different ideas about religion, and such different views of its real nature from those which they had entertained before this divine light and life broke up the darkness and death in which they were before immured, as a monk in a cell, or a collier in a mine. Our idea, in a state of nature, about religion is, that it is something very easy and very pleasant; that all we have to do is to repent of our sins some time or other before we die, if we have not been quite so good as we ought to be; to attend with all due regularity our church or chapel; to do our duty in that station of life to which we are called; be honest and upright, kind and amiable, moral and virtuous, truthful and sincere, and then all will be well at last. It is true, we own, that we are frail and sinful, but God is merciful; and if we only try to do our best, he will accept the will for the deed, will pardon us for Christ's sake, and take us to heaven. This is the religion which is instilled into us for the most part from our very cradle, which we drink in from our religious teachers, governors and governesses, and which is so congenial to our natural feelings and so thoroughly adapted to our reasoning mind, that it grows with our growth, and at last becomes so deeply rooted in our very heart that we would almost sooner part with our life than give it up as false or deceptive. Now this Babel religion, for with all its show and glitter it is but a Babel at best—has to be thrown down; for it is in direct opposition to the truth of God, has neither state nor standing, name nor place, truth nor reality in that word of the Lord which is to endure for ever. It must, therefore, be thrown down, that the temple of mercy and grace may be built up on its ruins. And this the Lord does usually by the discovery of his holiness, purity, majesty, his strict justice and almighty power, so as to convince us not only of our sins, our positive and actual transgressions which he lays upon the conscience, but also of our deep and desperate sinfulness in heart. It is a hard thing—a hard lesson to learn, especially in some cases, where the Lord deals—I was going to say in a very rough manner with a refractory subject; for it seems as if some of God's people needed more rough dealing than others. God indeed giveth no account of any of his matters, so that we cannot always, or indeed often, ascertain the reason why the Lord deals

with the conscience of some more severely than with that of others. But it is evident from observation, and what we hear and read of the various experiences of God's people, that some sink deeper under the law than others, and continue longer under the blow of his hand. But in every case it is a "hard thing" to learn by experience the justice of God, the purity of his nature, the omniscience of his eye, the curse of his holy law, and the condemnation under it of a guilty conscience.

2. But we have another "hard thing" to learn, and that is our *inability* and *helplessness to obey* what the law sets before us. The conscience made tender in the fear of God would obey every demand of God's righteous law, and tries hard at obedience; but is every way baffled. The eyes of the spiritual understanding are opened to see that obedience must be from the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter; and that all imperfect obedience is necessarily unacceptable in the eyes of him with whom we have to do. A divine light is cast into the mind that the law requires a perfect obedience, for none other can be accepted as commensurate with its full demands. But the convinced conscience finds itself unable to render this obedience. Sin is so mixed with all we do that it stains and pollutes every word and work, and thus renders it unfit for divine acceptance. But it is a hard thing for a convinced sinner to find that he can do nothing; that all his tears, and all his strivings and exertions are utterly fruitless, and only make him worse than before. Yet it is a lesson needful to learn, that he may know afterwards the fulness of God's grace, and that salvation is not by the works of the law but by the blood and righteousness of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son.

3. The next hard thing which the Lord often shews his people is their inability not only to obey, but to *repent*. The law does not speak of repentance. Its tenor is very simple—awfully and majestically severe—"Do and live;" "disobey and die." It never says, "If thou repent thou shalt be forgiven." This is the language of the gospel. We usually know the letter of the gospel before we know the spirit, and hear its word before we feel its power. Now, the gospel says that the way of life is "repentance towards God

and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ;" but we soon find, in the light of divine teaching, that we are as unable to repent as to obey, as helpless to believe the gospel as to keep the law. Is not this a "hard thing?" Does not this seem to mock our woe? Is it not something like a prisoner in a cell hearing a herald proclaim a gaol delivery and he still fast held under bolts and bars? But, besides this, many of the Lord's people in their early days have to work much in the dark, from the peculiar circumstances under which they are placed. Very few have the benefit of a gospel ministry. The freeness of gospel grace, the fulness of salvation, the benefits and blessings of the sufferings and death of the Son of God, the suitability of the promises and invitations to lost and ruined sinners, are rarely set before them; nor do they hear the gospel experimentally preached, the work of grace traced out, the feelings and exercises of an awakened soul described; and thus for want of a guide they have to "grope for the wall like the blind, and to grope as if they had no eyes."

4. But as these pilgrims heavenward still go on—for there is no turning back in the heavenly way—they meet with another thing in their path which they find indeed to be "hard," very hard—*God's sovereignty*. This peculiar feature of the divine character does not often flash before their eyes when they first set their faces Zionward; but as they advance onward, and get, as it were, like a man ascending a hill at daybreak, more fully into the blaze of the divine perfections, the sovereignty of God seems to meet them in a very solemn manner, and by its flashing rays upon their path appears as if it would preclude all further advance in the face of him who is a consuming fire. A man may have learnt something of the holiness and justice of God in a broken law, and something also of his own helplessness and inability either to obey, to repent, or to believe, and yet not have the sovereignty of God revealed to his conscience. But sooner or later it is made known to his heart with a divine power, and then it seems to stand in the way almost as the angel stood in the way of Balaam with a drawn sword to slay him. The prophet did not see the angel till the Lord opened his eyes; but immediately that he beheld that awful sight, "he bowed down his head and fell flat on



his face." At once he saw it was of the Lord to save or to destroy. The people of God would not believe in the sovereignty of God if they could help it; for it is a doctrine that seems at times to chill their very blood with terror, for upon it they see suspended their own eternal state. But in this matter they have no alternative, for the Scripture speaks so plainly, and the Holy Spirit shining upon the Scripture impresses it with such power upon their conscience that, in spite of their unwillingness to believe, in spite of the opposition made to it by reason, self-love, self-pity, and self-righteousness, they are compelled to fall down before the sovereignty of God as a truth that shines all through the sacred page; and they see in it the grand key to that enigma which, stamped upon the works and words of God, "frustrates the tokens of the liars and maketh diviners mad, that turneth wise men backward and maketh their knowledge foolish." (Isaiah 44:25.) Anointed with this eye salve, they see order where others see only confusion, and trace the hand of God where others view nothing but the hand of man. Thus when they look round upon the world with which they are surrounded—I mean the world of men—they see the sovereignty of God in calling some to a knowledge of the truth, and leaving others to perish in their sins, for they well know that "there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Being also thoroughly instructed into a knowledge of the inability of man to quicken his own soul, they see that if any are brought to believe in the Son of God, it must be by sovereign grace. When too they look at the dealings of God with them in providence, or specially in grace, they cannot help but see sovereignty stamped upon them both; that whatever they have, they have by divine donation; and whatever they are, they are by divine operation. Yet the sovereignty of God, as exercised in all matters great or small, is a "hard thing," especially when it touches them close; when it takes away idols out of their bosom, blights their schemes, withers their prospects, disappoints their hopes, and stands before them as a mountain of brass and a gate of iron, which they can neither pass over nor pass through. Still, they cannot get away from the verdict of their own conscience and the testimony of God in his word, that he is a Sovereign, and "doeth according to his will in

the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, "What doest thou?" (Daniel 4:35.)

5. The doctrine of *election* is another "hard thing" which the Lord shews to his people. Some seem to learn it easily enough; but it is to be feared that those who find it so easy to learn and so easy to believe were never led into it by divine teaching. Election has two aspects—one that frowns, and one that smiles. In its hand are seen two keys—one to open, the other to shut. Now, until we are brought to know something of mercy revealed to the soul, and taste the sweetness of gospel grace, the doctrine of election wears a frowning aspect; for it seems to meet us on the road with a drawn sword and to stand right across the path; and every frown it gives stamps the conviction deep in the sinner's heart, that if he is not elected he has no interest in the blood of Christ, no admission into the kingdom of God. Sin, Satan, and the reasoning mind take advantage of this conclusion, stirring up the enmity of the carnal heart until every vile lust begins to boil and rage against a doctrine which seems to shut them out of heaven's gate, and to consign them to a miserable doom. What a "hard thing" it seems to be to wish to be saved, and yet to find and feel the doctrine of election stand in the way as an impenetrable barrier. It is true that they are drawing wrong conclusions against themselves, for their very desires after salvation mark their interest in it; but until they are assured of their own election it is to them a hard doctrine. So, when turning from themselves, they look around and see how few, speaking comparatively, seem to be in the way to heaven, and their bowels of compassion melt over the members of their own family in whom they cannot see marks of divine life, their natural mind will rise against the doctrine, however plainly revealed in the word of truth, or with whatever power it may be sealed upon their conscience.

6. But again, the Lord's people, besides these hard lessons which they have to learn in the school of Christ, have to carry a *daily cross*; and as they are burdened and pressed down under its weight, they are made to say in substance if not in words, "Thou

hast shewed thy people hard things." This daily cross may and does differ in individuals, but every one who has to be conformed to Christ's suffering image has his own, which laid upon his shoulders by an invincible hand, he has for the most part to carry down to the very grave. Thus, some of God's people are afflicted in body from the very time the Lord begins his work of grace upon their heart; or if exempt from disease are shattered in nerve, depressed in spirits, and weighed down by lassitude and languor, often harder to bear than disease itself. Some scarcely ever recover the first impressions made upon their conscience by a sense of God's wrath, for as body and mind are closely allied, the one sympathises with the other. Some are tied to ungodly partners, meeting with opposition and persecution at every step; others have nothing but trouble in their family, either from the invasion of death into their circle, or what sometimes is worse than death—disgrace, shame, and ungodliness. Others have little else but one series of losses and crosses in their circumstances, wave after wave rolling over their heads until they think they shall lose their reason, be shut up in a madhouse, or die in a union. Others are full of doubt and fear, bondage and darkness nearly all their days, can scarcely ever get beyond a dim hope, or if ever favoured with any comfort are tried to the very quick whether it was genuine. O, view the family of God toiling homeward like the wreck of a broken army, some dragging along an afflicted body, others a wounded spirit; others carrying upon their shoulders dying children, or mourning over the slain in battle; others with scarcely a rag to their back or a crust in their hand, footsore, fearful in heart, trembling at a rustling leaf, a deep river to pass and a furious enemy in sight; and see how they all cry out as with uplifted hands, "Thou hast shewed thy people hard things. Lord, what dost thou mean next to do? Is this to be our earthly lot?"

"Are these the toils thy people know,  
Whilst in this wilderness below?"

ii. But we have not yet got to the end of their complaint: "*Thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment.*" Let us seek to

penetrate into the meaning of this complaint.

Wine in the Scriptures is often used as emblematic, and emblematic of various things which may throw light upon our text. In Palestine the vine grows abundantly, and as in other warm climates where the grape ripens under the hot beams of the sun, wine was, during the time of the prosperity of Israel, not as with us an expensive luxury, but the common drink of the country. Judah therefore, is said to "wash his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes"—as if wine with him were to be as free and common as water. (Gen. 49:11.) So the spouse speaks, "I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk" (Song 5:1); as if honey, milk, and wine were equally common. Wine therefore being so familiarly known, is used through the Scriptures as an emblem of various things. Taking then a general view of it in its emblematic representation, we may say it represents in Scripture three distinct things.

The first idea represented by it is of *cheerfulness, strength, exhilaration*, that being we know a leading property of the juice of the grape. It is said, therefore, to "make glad the heart of man" (Psalm 104:15), and, by a strong figure, "to cheer God and man." (Judges 9:13.) We also read of it that "wine maketh merry." (Eccles. 10:19.) "Amnon's heart was merry within him" (2 Sam. 13:28); and king Lemuel's mother bid her son "give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts." (Prov. 31:6.)

But, secondly, it represents emblematically anything which *inflames* and sets the heart on fire, as we read of those that "rise up early in the morning that they may follow strong drink, that continue until night till wine inflame them." (Isai. 5:11.)

But, thirdly, it being the custom in those countries often to drug the wine with spices or myrrh to make it more potent and intoxicating, as the bride says, "I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of the pomegranate;" and we read of

"men of strength to mingle strong drink:" wine in Scripture often represents that which *stupefies* and *intoxicates*, overpowering the heart and making the limbs to tremble.

1. In opening up the words of our text, I shall take the last meaning first; for the church, speaking in the language of complaint, in it says, "Thou hast made us to drink of the wine of *astonishment*," which might be rendered, "the wine of reeling," or "the wine of trembling," the idea being taken from the effect of wine in stupefying the mind and making every limb tremble as unable to sustain itself. In this sense wine in Scripture often signifies the wrath of God, under a sense of which the soul reels and staggers like a drunken man. Thus God bade Jeremiah take "the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it." (Jer. 15:12.) So we read, "For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them." (Ps. 75:8.) Now this wine cup of God's anger he puts sometimes in the hands of his people. So he says to the church, "Behold I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury, thou shalt no more drink it again;" which implies that she had drunk it, as he speaks in the same chapter: "Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury; thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out." (Isa. 51:17.) It is this cup called here "the wine of astonishment," of which the church complains in the words of our text; for when the Lord puts the wine cup of his anger into the hand of his people, in other words, when he reveals a sense of his anger and indignation against sin, he makes them to drink in this sense of "the wine of astonishment;" for the soul reels and staggers like a drunken man under the sense of God's wrath. The most dreadful feeling that a man can well be exercised with in this life is to have a sense of God's wrath revealed in his conscience: it is the very foretaste of hell. In this sense, the anger of God, like drugged wine, stupefies a man's mind. Like a drunken man, he hardly knows what he is about; all his clear

views are lost and gone; his very judgment is confused upon the things of God; and as in natural drunkenness nothing is felt but the effects of the wine, so in this spiritual drunkenness nothing is felt but a sense of the wrath of the Almighty. The Lord, therefore, says to his Zion, "Therefore hear now this thou afflicted and drunken, but not with wine" (Isa. 51:21); and so Jeremiah, personating the Church, cries out, "He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood." (Lam. 3:15.)

Connected with this meaning, we may take the words in another sense. Wine, especially when drugged, often brings *strange* sights and visions before the eyes. Like a person under the influence of opium, there are strange thoughts in the mind, strange sounds in the ears, strange sights in the eyes. These strange sights and sounds make it "the wine of astonishment," so that a man is, as it were, a wonder to himself.

Have you not sometimes stood astonished at the evils of your heart? As Hart says,

"Lord, when thy Spirit descends to shew  
The evils of our hearts;  
Astonished at the dreadful view,  
The soul with horror starts,"

And again,

"Shocked at the sight we straight cry out,  
Can ever God dwell here?"

Have you not viewed the evils of your heart, the corruptions of your depraved nature, the vile imaginations that work up from the bottom of the yeasty deep, until you have scarcely known what to think, say, or do? Are not these strange sights? And the murmuring and fretfulness of your heart, are not these strange sounds? Could you have believed that your heart was capable of such unspeakable baseness? Is not this to be "drunken, but not with wine, to stagger, but not with strong drink?" (Isai. 29:9.)

But look at this "wine of astonishment" from another point of view. After the Lord perhaps has manifestly had mercy upon you, and revealed a sense of his goodness and love to your soul, did you not basely wander from the Source of all your mercies? Did you not insensibly fall into a state of coldness, carnality, and death; got entangled, it may be, in some of Satan's snares, so as to bring great guilt and trouble upon your conscience? Now, when brought out of your backsliding state, did not the Lord make you drink "the wine of astonishment," by giving you a spiritual view of your baseness in forsaking him, the Fountain of living waters, and hewing out to yourself cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water? And have not you also been astonished at his long suffering in bearing with you, and his wondrous mercy in again restoring your soul?

2. But we will look at the words in another sense. Wine, as I before pointed out, not only stupefies but *inflames*. There are those whom wine sets on fire, as there are those whom wine stupefies; for it has these two opposite effects on different constitutions. So it is spiritually. When the law of God meets with the corruptions of the human heart, it does not subdue them, bring them into obedience, alter their nature, or transmute them into grace; but rather sets them on fire, as wine inflames the passions: "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging." (Prov. 20:1.) So the apostle says: "When we were in the flesh, the motions of sins which were by the law did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death;" and again, "But sin taking occasion by the commandment wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead." (Rom. 7:5, 8.) The law, then, like wine to the passions, inflames the heart's corruptions; and, as the eyes of the drunken, "behold strange women, and his heart utters perverse things" (Prov. 23:33); so, under the influence of the law, every lust and corruption are stirred up in the heart, and perverseness is conceived and uttered by it. This is being made "to drink the wine of astonishment;" for is it not astonishing that a holy law, given by a holy God, should only stir up nature's corruption; that that which is meant to produce obedience should rather stir up disobedience; and that

life put into the commandment should work a sentence of death in the soul?

3. But let me now show you another effect of Gospel wine, which is, as I have already hinted, to *gladden, cheer, and exhilarate*. In this sense we may explain the passage which I have before quoted from the parable of Jotham, where wine is said "to cheer God and man." This must be the gospel; for the obedience of his dear Son, which the gospel reveals cheered, so to speak, the very heart of God; and I am sure it cheers the heart of man. In this sense, too, it is still "the wine of astonishment;" for when the Lord by his Spirit and grace makes a wondrous change, and instead of thundering forth the terrors of the law, sounds the silver notes of the gospel; instead of revealing wrath, reveals a sense of mercy; instead of sending the sinner to his justly deserved doom, drops into his heart a sense of his pardoning love and grace; this cheering draught of gospel wine makes him to drink the wine of astonishment. For is it not astonishing that the Lord can thus "give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts," bidding him "drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more?" (Prov. 31:6, 7.) Is it not astonishing to the soul how the Lord can pardon a sinner so vile; how his grace can superabound over the aboundings of his sin; and how the blood of the Lamb applied to the conscience purges it from all its guilt, filth, and dead works to serve the living God?

Thus, whether we take the wine to represent the wine that stupefies, or the wine that inflames, or the wine that cheers and exhilarates,—take the figure in all or any of these senses,—well may we say, after we have been made to drink it, even but a few drops of it, "Thou hast made us to drink of the wine of astonishment." Let this, then, ever be deeply graven upon the tablets of our heart, that all God's doings and all God's dealings are doings and dealings to fill us with holy wonder, so that we may well say, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exodus 15:11); and with the Psalmist, "Thou art the



God that doest wonders." (Psa. 77:14.) In the law, he is full of holiness, justice, and majesty; in the gospel, he is full of grace, mercy, and truth: but whether in the law or in the gospel, we may well say of and to him, "Marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well." (Psa. 139:14.) So whether you drink the wine of his anger or the wine of his love; whether the wine cup of the law or the wine cup of the gospel is put into your hands, you may say of each, "Thou hast made us to drink of the wine of astonishment." For take this as my closing remark on this part of our subject, that it is the Lord who makes us to drink, and that neither the wine nor the draught is our own.

II.—But it is time to pass on to the *distinctive blessing* of the Church, as pointed out in the latter clause of our text; and I think we shall find a connection between her complaints and her blessings: "*Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee.*"

i. You will observe that the church here speaks of a banner being given to them that *fear* God. Now, do you not perceive a connection between the "hard things" which God shows his people and "the wine of astonishment" which he gives them to drink, and the fear of his great name? for these points are put into close association with each other. The connection, then, is this, that the "hard things" which the Lord's people are shown, and "the wine of astonishment" which they are given to drink, impress the fear of God very deep on their conscience. The fear of God is written as with the point of a diamond upon a man's heart by the "hard things" which he shews unto them. A stout heart, far from righteousness, needs some severe dealings with it to bring it down. A powerful impression is required upon such a conscience, so as to leave permanent marks there of the hand of God. Thus these "hard things" leave deep impressions of the majesty and greatness of him with whom we have to do. And is not this a blessing? You may have complained, as the church of old in our text, "Thou hast shewed thy people hard things." O Lord, what hard things thou hast made me to learn. How rough and rugged my path in providence; how strict, how severe my path in grace! In thy holy law; in the discovery of my

helplessness and the abounding corruptions of my heart; in the daily cross that so galls my shoulder; in the darkness, guilt, and bondage with which I am so continually exercised, what hard things hast thou shewed me, O Lord, and still continuest to show. Yes; and thou hast made me drink of the wine of astonishment, when I have looked up and had a view of thee, or looked down and had a view of myself. But have I learnt nothing from these hard lessons, from these tastes and sips of thy wondrous wine? Have they made no impression on my spirit? Have they wrought no good in my soul? Yes, I trust they have; for have they not caused the fear of God to take deeper root in my heart? Thus, the Lord's dealings, though they are "hard things" to bear, and the wine which he gives, though it is the wine of astonishment, yet they are both productive of the greatest blessing God can bestow, which is his fear planted deep in a tender conscience. Light things, easy things, smooth things, soft things, would not have made this deep impression. Milk and water would not have sometimes stupefied, sometimes inflamed, sometimes cheered you. Your religion would have been a religion of milk and water. Why are so few possessed of that heavenly treasure, the fear of God? Because religion is with them so light and easy; they can put it off and put it on; take it up and lay it down; have it or have it not, just as they please; therefore it is with them a thing by the bye, a secondary matter; a Sunday's task, an extra garment, an overcoat, sometimes to be worn, sometimes to be laid aside. But where God is pleased to teach the soul with a high hand and a stretched out arm, and shews his people "hard things" and makes them drink of "the wine of astonishment until they reel and stagger under his powerful stroke, these dealings drive the nail home; they plant the fear of God very deep in a man's conscience. But when the Lord has planted his fear deep in a man's conscience, he brings forth and communicates the distinctive blessing, which is *the banner*. "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee."

ii. But what is "the banner" spoken of in our text? It is, I believe, in a few words, the banner of truth and love; or, to put it together in one sentence, "the love of the truth." I think we may

prove this from two passages: one shall be the words before us, "that it may be displayed because of *the truth*." Truth, then, heavenly truth, is, according to our text, one constituent part of the banner. But we read also, "He brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love." (Song 2:4.) So we will put the two together, so as to make one inscription, which we will trace upon our banner in letters so broad and clear that he who runs may read it. *Truth in the love of it*. Does not the device of our banner correspond with what we read, "They received not the love of the truth that they might be saved" (2 Thess. 2:10); clearly implying that those who receive the love of the truth shall be saved? My friends, it is not the truth that will save us—naked, bare truth—truth in the letter without the power. It is "the love of the truth," in other words, truth received in love by the application of the blessed Spirit to the heart, making it precious to the soul, in which salvation lies. Never be satisfied with the naked letter of truth; never rest short of the truth applied to your heart in the love and by the power of God. This, then, is our banner—the banner which God gives to those that fear his name.

But what is a banner in its literal, natural signification, for we must clearly understand that to arrive at its spiritual meaning? It is a standard, or ensign, or to use simpler language, a flag. As such it is a frequent Scripture emblem, and we may consider it emblematic of three distinct things, being three purposes for which the banner is usually employed.

1. First, it is a *distinctive mark*. The first thing that is done when an army is raised is to have a distinctive flag. When the Confederates, for instance, in America, broke off from the Union, the very first thing was to discard the stars and stripes, the old national banner, and to have a separate and distinctive flag. How could it be known on which side the soldiers were to fight, unless the flags were different? In our service, I believe, every regiment has its distinctive flag. So a banner, as a Scriptural emblem, represents the distinctive mark of the people of God, by which they are distinguished from an ungodly world. When the Lord then makes his truth precious to their heart, he gives them a

banner to separate them from all others, to make and manifest them good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and to march under his guidance to certain victory. The distinctive mark of a "disciple indeed" is to know the truth, and to find that the truth maketh free. None know the power of the truth, the preciousness of truth, the liberty of truth, and the love of truth, but the family of God. The Captain of their salvation gives them this banner when he seals them his in the love of it.

2. But a banner has another emblematic signification. In the field of battle, when the trumpets sound the charge the flag has to *advance*. It is not left wrapped up in the tent, nor thrown into the baggage waggon, nor hidden anywhere out of sight, but has to wave over the heads of the advancing troops, that they may fight valiantly under its glorious folds. How many a gallant youth of England's noble blood has borne onward the British flag in the front of the enemy. So it is in grace. The church, in the Song, is said to be "terrible as an army with banners." (Song 6:12.) But why should an army with banners be terrible? Because it is an advancing foe. Their banners glitter in the sun; they are raised on high; the gallant ensign leads the way; the soldiers move rapidly after. How beautiful their array, how terrible their advance, how serried their ranks, how dreadful their charge! When a city is to be assaulted and the breach to be stormed, the first sign of victory is to plant the flag upon the battlements. The first Roman foot that trod the British shore when Caesar invaded this island was that of the standard-bearer of the 10th legion. The bold Britons lined the shore with ferocious aspect; the sea was deep and the beach high, so that the troops held back; but the standard-bearer of the 10th-legion leaped into the sea with the Roman eagle in his hand, bidding the soldiers follow him unless they would abandon their banner to the enemy. Animated by his example, they all rushed into the sea and put the enemy to flight. So God gives a banner to them that fear him; not to hide out of sight, not to conceal it in the tent, as Achan hid his Babylonish garment, but to bear it manfully on high in the very face of all their foes. And what so cheering, what so animating, as the love of the truth? If this will not nerve our hand and strengthen our

foot, what will? I hope the Lord has put the love of the truth into my heart, and the banner of truth into my hand. When the Lord "sends among the fat ones leanness;" when he "consumes the glory of his forest and of his fruitful field both soul and body," he adds, to shew the effect of the general distress, "they shall be as when a standard-bearer fainteth." (Isaiah 10:16, 18.) If, then, the standard-bearer faints, how it discourages the rest of the army. When ministers droop their heads, or turn their backs, how can we expect but that discouragement should spread itself amongst the ranks? O, ye standard-bearers of the banner of truth and love; O, ye officers in the army of the living God, be not discouraged; let not your hands droop, still less turn your back upon the foe; but go boldly on, fighting against sin and Satan even unto the death, under the glorious banner of God's truth waving over your head.

3. But, if an army receive a temporary check, or if there be fugitives from the ranks, a banner is of great use for a *rallying point*. The Lord, therefore, says, "Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain, exalt the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles." (Isai. 13:2, 3.) When troops are broken, as they sometimes are by a hostile charge, if there were no banner, no flag, there would be no rallying point. But where they see a banner or flag raised up on high, especially their own regimental flag, there is a rallying point. In our civil wars, wherever the king was there was his flag, first set up at Nottingham, and then from time to time at his various headquarters. This, then, served as a rallying point for every royalist, as the flag of the Commonwealth for the opposite side. So we poor fugitives, I won't call ourselves deserters—the Lord has no deserters from his army; but we poor fugitives often driven back, though never really defeated, when we see the glorious standard of God's truth waved on high, have a rallying point to bring us back once more under the Lord's own banner; for as Moses, when the children of Israel fought with Amalek, "built an altar and called the name of it Jehovah-Nissi," that is, "the Lord my banner," so "in the name of God we set up our banners." (Psa. 20:5.) Have you not sometimes been sadly

scattered by sin and Satan,—thoughts, words, desires, evidences, marks, tokens, all scattered in all directions, as if by a hostile charge? Still you know something of God's truth, for you have felt the love and power of it in your heart; so that if perplexed you are not in despair; if persecuted, not forsaken; if cast down, not destroyed. Love to the truth forms then a rallying point for your scattered experience. Your desires and affections are towards the Lord and his truth. You look up, you see the banner floating on high; you come back to the camp, and once more find yourself underneath the folds of that glorious gospel flag. I have read in books of travels that nothing is so cheering to an Englishman when travelling in the East as to see England's flag flying over a Consulate, or from the mast of a man-of-war. He knows whoever assault him he is safe there, for under the folds of that time-honoured banner England's aegis is thrown over him, yea, England herself, our glorious country is present, wherever her flag flies to protect all her citizens. So it is in grace: where truth is in its love and in its power, there Christ is; there is his honour, there his gospel, there his glory. This view brings us to our next point,

III.—The *peculiar privilege* of the Church of God that this glorious banner is to be *displayed, because of the truth*.

i. If, then, the Lord has given a banner to those that fear his name, and this banner is truth and love, it is not to be concealed out of sight, carried in the pocket, folded round the waist, or thrown into the baggage waggons among the women and children of the camp. It is to be "*displayed,*" that men may read the inscription, whether friend or foe. But this requires both strength and courage. A flag is not easy to carry, especially in the face of the enemy. It requires a stout arm and a bold heart. But unless it be carried on high, who can see its distinctive character or read its inscription—truth in the love of it? May the Lord enable me ever boldly and clearly to display it, and may you and all who sit under the Gospel rejoice in the testimony that the banner over you may be love; and as the Englishman feels protection under England's glorious flag, fly where it may, so when you sit under the sound of the Gospel may you feel yourselves safe under its

ample folds.

But I will tell you when it is displayed the best: when *the wind blows* upon it. On a calm day, you know, the flag hangs round the flag-post; the folds droop, and there is no reading the inscription. But let the wind blow: then how the folds are raised; the flag floats boldly forth in all its breadth and length, and the inscription can be read by every eye. So in a spiritual sense: when the heavenly gale of the blessed Spirit blows upon the heart and mouth of the standard bearer, helping him to set forth the truth in the love of it with unction and power, then the holy breeze from the everlasting hills displays the inscription to the soldiers of the cross, and every letter of it testifies to them of blood and love.

ii. But there are three things which I hope we never may be allowed to do as regards this glorious flag. You know it would grieve the heart of every true-born Englishman—and I think sometimes I am one to the very back-bone—to see any disgrace befall, or insult poured upon our national flag. I am no politician; I therefore merely quote it as an illustration. But you remember lately how we were almost on the eve of war, on account of an insult shewn to our flag: the whole country rose up as one man to resent it. If, then, we are loyal subjects to the King of kings and Lord of lords, whose name we bear, we must feel at least as much loyalty to our distinctive flag, truth in the love of it, as ever we do to our national flag. There are, then, three things from which I hope the Lord will ever keep us. 1. First, may we never *deny* it! If you were an Englishman travelling abroad, in Turkey or any other land, you would not deny your country—the country of your birth—and repudiate her flag. You would not, for the sake of a little gain or for fear of a little contempt, conceal the fact that you were an Englishman, and born under your country's banner. Would it not, then, be very disgraceful in you, after having professed a love to the truth, for the sake of a little pelf, or for a little fear of man, to deny that precious truth under which you have enlisted, and in which at times you have taken solemn pleasure? Never, then, deny the truth, as no true-hearted

## **WINTER AFORE HARVEST OR THE SOUL'S GROWTH IN GRACE**

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Lord's Day Morning, 20th August, 1837

"For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches. They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth: and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them." Isaiah 18:5, 6

No one, I think, who reads the Word of God with an enlightened eye can deny that there is contained in it such a doctrine as growth in grace. Peter says expressly, "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" **2Pe 3:18**. The faith of the Thessalonians was said "to grow exceedingly" **2Th 1:3**. And thus we read of degrees of faith, from "little faith" **Mt 6:30**, "weak faith" **Ro 14:1**, faith "as a grain of mustard seed" **Mt 17:20**, to "great faith" **Mt 15:28**, "strong faith" **Ro 4:20**, "fulness of faith" **Ac 6:8**, and "full assurance of faith" **Heb 10:22**.

Figures also and comparisons are made use of in the Word of truth which clearly point to the same doctrine. Thus the divine life is compared sometimes to the course of the sun: "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" **Pr 4:18**; sometimes to the growth of corn, "first the blade, then the ear, after that, the full corn in the ear" **Mr 4:28**; sometimes to the increase of the human body, as commencing with "new-born babes" **1Pe 2:2**, and advancing on to "little children", "young men" and "fathers" **1Jo 2:12-14**; sometimes to a race, where the runner "forgets those things which are behind, and reaches forth unto those things which are before" **Php 3:13**. The very idea indeed of life implies advance, growth, progress,



increase. Lambs grow up into sheep, vine buds into vine branches **Joh 15:5**, slips into trees **Isa 17:10 Isa 61:3**, sons into fathers **1Ti 1:18 1Ti 5:1**. Christians are not gate-posts, but palm trees and cedars **Ps 92:12**; not loungers on half-pay, but soldiers warring a good warfare **1Ti 1:18**; not idlers at home on armchairs and sofas, but travellers and pilgrims seeking a country; not careless, and at ease, like Laish and Moab **Jud 18:7 Jer 48:11**, but pressed out of measure by trials and temptations, so as at times to despair even of life **2Co 1:8**. Their grand distinguishing mark then is, that they grow; and, therefore, absence of growth implies absence of life. Hypocrites, indeed, may grow in hypocrisy, Pharisees in self-righteousness, Arminians in fleshly perfection, dead Calvinists in head-knowledge, proud professors in presumption, self-deceivers in delusion, and the untried and unexercised in vain confidence. But the dead never grow in the divine life, for "the root of the matter" is not in them **Job 19:28**.

But the question at once arises: "What is growth in grace? What is its nature, and in what does it consist? Is it the same thing as what is usually called ' **progressive sanctification**'? and is it meant thereby that our nature grows holier and holier, and our heart purer and purer? Does growth in grace imply that besetting sins gradually become weaker, temptations less powerful, the lust of the flesh less seducing; and that our Adam nature, our old man, is improved and transmuted into grace, as the crab tree of the hedge has, by long and patient cultivation, become changed into the apple tree of the garden?" No, by no means. Painful experience has taught me the contrary, and shown me that progressive sanctification has no foundation in the Word of God, and no reality in the hearts of His people.

The answer, then, to the question, "What is growth in grace?" is contained, I believe, in the text, and I shall therefore endeavour to unfold it in an experimental manner according to the ability which God may give me. The text speaks of three distinct stages in divine life, Spring, Harvest, and an intermediate state between the two which we may call **Winter**. We shall indeed find as we

proceed that the Spring is divided into two stages, the latter of which we may term **Summer**; and thus growth in grace is compared to the advance of the seasons in the year. But there is this remarkable difference between the natural and the spiritual seasons, between growth in nature and growth in grace, that the succession of seasons is not the same in each. Nature commences with blooming spring, advances on to glowing summer, ripens into yellow harvest, and dies away in dreary winter. Grace, according to the line of experience that I am about to describe, commences with **Spring**—with "the bud", and "the flower of the sour grape". Thence it advances on to **Summer**, when "the bud is perfect", and "the sour grape is ripening in the flower". Does not Harvest immediately follow? Alas! no. "Afore the harvest" another seasons comes. Between summer and it, **Winter**—a long dreary winter intervenes. Thus, the order of seasons in the divine life is not spring, summer, harvest, winter: but spring, summer, winter, harvest.

Let us see if this order agrees with the Scriptures of truth, and with the experimental teachings of God in the soul. All true religion has a beginning, and a beginning, too, marked, clear and distinct. That the entrance of divine light into the soul, the first communications of supernatural life, the first manifestations of an unknown God, the first buddings forth of a new nature, the first intercourse of man with his Maker; that all these hitherto unfelt, unthought of, uncared for, undesired transactions should take place in the soul, and the soul be ignorant of them, should know neither their time nor their place, is a contradiction. The evidence of feeling is as strong, as distinct, as perceptible as the evidence of sight. I know by **sight** that this object is black and that white. I know as certainly by **feeling** that this substance is cold and that hot. I may not be able to tell **why** the one is hot and the other cold, but I know the fact that they are so. Thus a new-born soul may not be able to tell why it feels, nor whence those feelings arise; but it is as conscious that it does feel as that it exists. It suits well the empty profession of the day to talk about early piety, and convictions from childhood, and Sunday school religion, and baptismal regeneration, and infant lispings, and the

dawnings of the youthful mind. "The privilege of pious parents, of family religion, of the domestic altar, of a gospel ministry, of obedience to ordinances, of a father's prayers, of a mother's instruction"—who has not heard these things brought forward again and again as the beginning of what is called Christian conversion and decided piety? Many of these things are well in their place, and not to be despised or neglected; but when they are held up as the almost necessary beginning of a work altogether heavenly and supernatural, they must be set aside. Thousands have had these things who have perished in their sins; and thousands have **not** had them who have been saved with an everlasting salvation. A true beginning is a beginning **felt**. I will not say that we must be able to point out the moment, the hour, the day or the week, though the nearer we approach the precision of time, the nearer we approach to a satisfactory evidence. But the season, the time within certain limits, when new feelings, new emotions, new wants, new desires arose in the heart, can never be forgotten by one who has really experienced them. To smother over, to mystify, to smuggle up the beginning is to throw discredit on the whole. If the beginning be wrong, all is wrong. If there be no divine beginning, there can be no divine middle, and no divine end; and if the first step be false, every successive step will partake of the original error. If a man, therefore, who professes to be walking in the way never knew the door, and never found it a strait and narrow one, he has clambered over the wall, and is a thief and a robber. His sentence is already recorded. "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness" **Mt 22:13**.

True religion then begins with an entrance into the soul of supernatural light and supernatural life. How or why it comes the soul knows not; for "the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit" **Joh 3:8**. The wind itself is not seen, but its effects are felt. The sound of a going is heard "in the tops of the mulberry trees" **1Ch 14:15** , where God Himself is not seen. The voice of the Lord powerful and full of majesty was heard by those who saw no

similitude **De 4:12**. Thus effects are felt, though causes are unknown. Streams flow into the heart from a hidden source; rays of light beam into the soul from an unrisen sun; and kindlings of life awaken in us a new existence out of an unseen fountain. The new-born babe feels life in all its limbs, though it knows not yet the earthly father from whence that natural life sprung. And thus new-born souls are conscious of feelings hitherto unpossessed, and are sensible of a tide of life, mysterious and incomprehensible, ebbing and flowing in their heart, though "Abba Father" has not yet burst from their lips.

A man's body is alive to every feeling, from a pin scratch to a mortal wound, from a passing ache to an incurable disease. The heart cannot flutter or intermit for a single second its wonted stroke without a peculiar sensation that accompanies it, notices it and registers it. Shall feelings, then, be the mark and evidence of natural life, and not of spiritual? Shall our ignoble part, the creature of a day, our perishing body, our dust of dust, have sensations to register every pain and every pleasure, and be tremblingly alive to every change without and every change within; and shall not our immortal soul be equally endowed with a similar barometer to fluctuate up and down the scale of spiritual life? We must lay it down then at the very threshold of vital godliness, that if a man has not been conscious of new feelings, and cannot point out, with more or less precision, some particular period, some never-to-be-forgotten season, when these feelings came unbidden into his heart, he has not yet passed from death into life. He is not in Christ, if he is not a new creature **2Co 5:17**. But the question is arising to your lips, "What are these new feelings? Describe them, if you will or can, that we may compare our heart with them, for as in water face answereth to face, so does the heart of man to man". I believe, then, that the first sensation of a new-born soul is that of light. "The entrance of Thy words giveth light" **Ps 119:130**. "The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up" **Mt 4:16**. This was the light from heaven above the brightness of the sun, which struck persecuting Saul to the earth, and of which he afterwards said,

"God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts" **2Co 4:6**.

But, together with this ray of supernatural light, and blended with it in mysterious union, supernatural life flows into the soul. "Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth" **Jas 1:18**. "You hath He quickened"—that is, made alive—"who were dead in trespasses and sins" **Eph 2:1**. Every ray of natural light is not single, but sevenfold, as may be seen in the rainbow, where every distinct ray of the sun is broken into seven different colours. And thus the first ray of supernatural light which shines into the soul out of the Sun of righteousness is really not single, but manifold. Mingled with heavenly light, and inseparable from it, life, feeling and power, faith and prayer, godly fear and holy reverence, conviction of guilt and hungerings and thirstings after righteousness, flow into the heart. And it is this blended union of feelings which distinguishes the warm sunlight which melts the heart from the cold moonlight that enlightens the head. The latter begins and ends in hard, dry, barren knowledge, like the Aurora Borealis playing over the frozen snows of the north; whilst the former penetrates into and softens the secret depths of the soul, and carries with it a train of sensations altogether new, heavenly and divine.

Thus **feeling** is the first evidence of supernatural life—a feeling compounded of two distinct sensations, one referring to God, and the other referring to self. The same ray of light has manifested two opposite things, "for that which maketh manifest is light"; and the sinner sees at one and the same moment God and self, justice and guilt, power and helplessness, a holy law and a broken commandment, eternity and time, the purity of the Creator and the filthiness of the creature. And these things he sees, not merely as declared in the Bible, but as revealed in himself as personal realities, involving all his happiness or all his misery in time and in eternity. Thus it is with him as though a new existence had been communicated, and as if for the first time he had found there was a God.

It is as though all his days he had been asleep, and were now awakened—asleep upon the top of a mast, with the raging waves beneath; as if all his past life were a dream, and the dream were now at an end. He has been hunting butterflies, blowing soap bubbles, angling for minnows, picking daisies, building card-houses, and idling life away like an idiot or a madman. He had been perhaps wrapped up in a profession, smuggled into a church, daubed over with untempered mortar, advanced even to the office of a deacon, or mounted in a pulpit. He had learned to talk about Christ, and election, and grace, and fill his mouth with the language of Zion. And what did he know of these things? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Ignorant of his own ignorance **of all kinds of ignorance the worst**, he thought himself rich, and increased with goods, and to have need of nothing, and knew not he was wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked **Re 3:17**.

But one ray of supernatural light, penetrating through the veil spread over the heart, has revealed that terrible secret—a just God, who will by no means clear the guilty. This piercing ray has torn away the bed too short, and stripped off the covering too narrow. It has rent asunder "the changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, the glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods and the veils, and it shall come to pass that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty" **Isa 3:22-24**.

A sudden, peculiar conviction has rushed into the soul. One absorbing feeling has seized fast hold of it, and well nigh banished every other. "There is a God, and I am a sinner before Him", is written upon the heart by the same divine finger that traced those fatal letters on the palace wall of the king of Babylon, which made the joints of his loins to be loosed, and his knees to smite one against another **Da 5:5,6**. "What shall I do? Where shall I go? What will become of me? Mercy, O God! Mercy, mercy! I am lost, ruined, undone! Fool, madman, wretch,

monster that I have been! I have ruined my soul. O my sins, my sins! O eternity, eternity!" Such and similar cries and groans, though differing in depth and intensity, go up out of the new-born soul well nigh day and night at the first discovery of God and of itself. These feelings have taken such complete possession of the heart that it can find no rest except in calling upon God. This is the first pushing of the young bud through the bark, the first formation of the green shoot, wrapped up as yet in its leaves, and not opened to view. These are the first pangs and throes of the new birth before the tidings are brought, "A man-child is born". "What shall I do to be saved?" cried the jailer. "God be merciful to me a sinner!" exclaimed the publican. "Woe is me, for I am undone!" burst forth from the lips of Isaiah.

This season, then, of first convictions may be called the early spring, the **March** of the soul. The weather is still cold and the winds chilling and cutting, and the bud dares not yet open its bosom, though it is pushing on in growth and vigour. The brown scales are still wrapped over it, and though swelling and enlarging, it remains as yet closed up in itself.

But after some time, longer or shorter as He sees fit, but generally bearing a proportion to the degree and depth of the convictions, the Lord, I believe, usually bestows some gleam of His smiling countenance on the soul. The cause of this glimpse of love is unknown to the soul that enjoys it. But its effects and the feelings to which it gives rise cannot be hid. The change, the revolution, which this smile creates is well nigh as great as the first awakening. With it commences that manifested growth, that opening of the bud, which I have called the **Spring** of the soul. The bud when it first pushes through the bark contains in itself the flower, the fruit, and the seed. These are not added to it afterwards, but however covered up or concealed, are in it, an essential part and portion of it, from the beginning.

Thus, when the Holy Ghost quickens the soul, He plants within it, a new creature, perfect in all its parts. The child in its mother's womb has all the limbs of a man. Nor do new-born babes of grace

differ from little children, young men, or fathers, in the number of their graces, but only in the growth and development of them. Thus in the new-born soul there is hope, which keeps it from despair; love, which at times gleams out of terror; and faith, which cleaves hard to the promise, in spite of unbelief. These buds, indeed, not being called forth by the beams of the sun, but being chilled and checked by the north wind that blows over the garden **So 4:16**, could not expand themselves, and were scarcely seen. But the first rays of the warm sun, the first genial breezes of the south wind that quieteth the earth **Job 37:17**, awaken, as it were, into a new existence these hidden, unopened buds.

The buds on all trees are formed many months before they burst forth into open leaf. The storms, and sleet, and frost do not destroy them, as in the elect, despair never swallows up hope, nor enmity love, nor unbelief faith. But they cannot unfold and expand their blossom, nor burst into growth, until "the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land". Then is the season "when the fig-tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell" **So 2:11-13**. Under this gleam, then, of sunshine, this first smile of a heavenly Father's love, the bud begins to open and unfold its bosom to meet the genial ray.

The first bud that expands itself to the sunshine is that of **faith**. But was not faith in the soul before? Yes, doubtless. And did not faith act upon and realise the things that are not seen? Most assuredly. Faith entered into the soul at the same moment as the first beam of supernatural light. Some persons are of the opinion that there is no faith in the soul whilst it is under the law, and that when deliverance comes, faith comes with it. To support their opinion they quote this text, "But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" **Ga 3:25**, where "faith" means not the grace of faith, but the object of faith—that is, Jesus Christ.



Others assert that there is no faith but the full assurance of faith, and that all that falls short of this is no faith at all. But I would ask, "Is there any difference between a soul dead in sins and one quickened into spiritual life? Are there not fears, terrors, convictions, pangs, cries, groans, and a host of feelings in the one which are not in the other? Whence arises this sense of guilt and wrath, this remorse for the past, and terror of the future?" I answer because divine faith credits the divine testimony. Before the soul was quickened into spiritual life the holiness and justice of God were the same, His wrath against sin and the curse of His righteous law were the same. But the soul did not feel them. Why not? Because the word was not "mixed with faith in them that heard it" **Heb 4:2**. A divine principle was needed to credit the divine testimony. He had heard these things by the hearing of the ear in the dead, outward letter. He had not seen them by the seeing of the eye, by an inward revelation. If the soul did not believe the word which entered it, did not credit the commandment which came to it **Ro 7:9**, how could it fall beneath the power of it? It did not formerly care for eternal realities, because it did not believe them by a divine faith. But now it receives, credits and believes the testimony of God, and this very faith is the cause of its alarm. If it could cease to believe, it would cease to feel.

But whence comes it to pass that faith acts in so different a manner when the Sun of righteousness breaks in upon the soul? Simply because faith credits just such a testimony only as is revealed to it. Faith may be compared to a hand. My hand feels just according to the nature of the object which I grasp. I touch things hot or cold, rough or smooth, hard or soft. The hand is the same, and I touch the object in the same way; but I feel differently according to the different nature of the object. Or faith may be compared to the eye, which receives different impressions according as it looks upon different things; if upon things agreeable, impressions that are pleasant, if upon things disagreeable, impressions that are painful. But the eye is the same, and the mode of seeing is the same. Thus faith is the hand as well as the eye of the soul.

If God reveal to the conscience His wrath against sin, faith is the hand to receive and the eye to see this divine testimony. If God reveal to the soul pardon and mercy in Christ, the same hand opens to receive, the same eye uncloses to see the heavenly manifestation. Paul recounts **Heb 11** the exploits of faith, such as subduing kingdoms, working righteousness, obtaining promises, stopping the mouths of lions, and performing many things of very different and dissimilar kinds. But he never tells us that the faith itself was different, or that Abel, Enoch, Noah, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, and the other saints, of whom the world was not worthy, had all a different faith according to their different exploits. When the horror of great darkness fell upon Abraham, and God said to him, "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs" **Ge 15:13**, the faith whereby he credited this divine testimony was the same as that by which he believed in the Lord, when He said, "So shall thy seed be" **Ge 15:5**, and He counted it to him for righteousness. Nay, Abraham's faith never was so strong as when it acted most in the dark, and bade him stretch forth his hand to slay his son. There is but "one faith", as well as but one Lord and one baptism. And therefore Paul says that "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith" **Ro 1:17**; that is, the righteousness of God in the law to faith in the law, and the righteousness of God in the gospel to faith in the gospel.

But whilst the soul was labouring under deep convictions, faith was not seen, nor felt to be faith. Unbelief, doubts, fears, guilt, wrath, gloom, misery, all these heavy weights pressed faith down into the bottom of the slough. Faith could not lift up its head out of all the mud, and mire, and filth, under which it lay well nigh smothered. Its eyes were dim with weeping, a dreadful sound was in its ears, its arm seemed clean dried up, and its feet set fast in the stocks. The only sign of life was that it struggled upwards, and spread forth its hands in the midst of the waves, as he that swimmeth spreadeth forth his hands to swim **Isa 25:11**.

But as the sun shines, the bud of faith expands to receive the fostering ray. Mercy now appears in the place of wrath, and infinite compassion instead of infinite justice. The thick veil which had been spread over the promises, invitations and encouragements, is taken off. The Scriptures appear a new book, the gospel a new sound, the doctrines of grace new truths, and the blood of Christ a new salvation. The soul wonders it never saw these things before, and nothing now seems more easy and simple than to believe in the loving-kindness of God. The stone has been rolled from the sepulchre, and Lazarus has come forth. The night has passed away, and the morning appears. The mists that hung over the landscape have broken off, and the good land, the land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills, lies stretched out to view. As faith credited before the divine testimony of wrath, so now it credits the divine testimony of mercy; and as the heaviness of the one before made it stoop, so the good word of the other now maketh it glad.

The second bud which expands to receive the warm sunshine is that of **hope**. It was, indeed, in the soul before. There is no new creation of this bud by the rays of the sun, but only an expansion, a development of it. In the midst of all the gloom and despondency which brooded over it, there was a secret something at the bottom of the soul which kept it from despair. When the floodgates of divine wrath are opened in the natural conscience of a reprobate, he is usually swept away by it into the blackness of darkness for ever. Saul falls upon his sword, and Judas hangs himself. In the natural conscience of a reprobate there is wrath in reality; and wrath, too, against the person as well as against the sin. In the spiritual conscience of the elect there is but wrath in apprehension; and that wrath against the sin, not against the person. Thus the vessels of wrath call upon the mountains and rocks to fall upon them and hide **them**—their persons—from the wrath of the Lamb. The vessels of mercy cry, "Pardon our iniquity; for it is great". Natural guilt drives the soul from God: "Let not God speak with us, lest we die" **Ex 20:19**. Spiritual guilt drives the soul to God: "Cast me not away from

Thy presence" **Ps 51:11**; "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens" **La 3:40,41**. A graceless professor never rides at anchor. He is moored to the shore by a silken thread. The first storm snaps his line, and drives him on the rocks of despair where concerning faith he makes shipwreck **1Ti 1:19**. Thus of these castaways some are driven to the madhouse, and others to the halter; some pine away in their iniquities, and others curse God and die.

But an elect vessel of mercy can never be wrecked on such shoals as these. To his own apprehensions, his hope may perish from the Lord **La 3:18**, and "be removed like a tree" **Job 19:10**. But it is not really lost out of his heart. He still holds faith, and has not put away a good conscience. There is a "Who can tell?" struggling for life. As Jacob said of Esau, "Peradventure he will accept me"; and as the servants of Benhadad reasoned with their master, "We have heard that the kings of Israel are merciful kings; peradventure he will save thy life", so the new-born soul under spiritual convictions hopes against hope. This anchor holds him firm. And though he often fears his cable will snap, yet the anchor, being within the veil, linked on to the throne of God by the golden chain of eternal love, can neither break nor drive.

But hope in a storm and hope in a calm, hope in the bud and hope in the flower, though they differ not in nature, differ greatly in degree. Night and day do not alter the reality of things, but they widely alter their appearance. Hope shut up in a dungeon and looking through the prison bars, and hope walking abroad in the sunshine differ much in feeling, though they do not differ in kind. But we must not cut off hope's head, nor bury him alive in his cell, because he is shut up, and cannot come forth. Neither must we say that hope is only born on the same day that he comes out in his holiday attire.

But some would treat hope as badly as they treat faith, and allow him neither place nor name, birthright nor inheritance in the regenerated soul until deliverance comes, though it belongs

especially to the poor **Job 5:16**, dwelleth in the heart that is sick **Pr 13:12**, and is the portion of those whose mouth is in the dust **La 3:29**. Such wise master-builders would allow the soldier no helmet **1Th 5:8**, the sailor no anchor **Heb 6:19**, and the prisoner no stronghold **Zec 9:12**. But if he is joined to the living he has hope; and the hope of a living dog is better any day than the vain confidence of a dead lion **Ec 9:4**.

But under the genial ray of God's smiling countenance the bud opens, and hope bursts forth. And as it expands it looks upward to heaven, and rises towards its Author and Finisher, its Source and its End. All true grace looks upward, whilst counterfeits look downward. Thus true hope centres in God; false hope centres in self. "Hope thou in God", said David to his soul **Ps 42:11**. "And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in Thee" **Ps 39:7**. "That they might set their hope in God, and not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation" **Ps 78:7-8**. But false hope is a hope in self, that is to say, natural self. It is therefore compared to a rush, which grows out of the mire, and withereth before any other herb; and to the web which the spider spins out of its own bowels **Job 8:11-14**. I never yet found anything in self—I mean natural self—which raised up a living hope. I have known plenty of things to cause despair, such as pride, lust, covetousness, unbelief, infidelity, enmity, rebellion, hardness and carelessness. I have found in self mountains of sin to press out the life of hope, torrents of evil to sweep away the foundations of hope, and clouds of darkness to hide the very existence of hope. But I have never yet found in vile self, deceitful self, filthy self, black self, and hateful self, any one thing to beget or keep alive a spiritual hope. If I could, I should fall under that terrible sentence, whose sweeping edge cuts off thousands: "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord" **Jer 17:5**.

But what a mighty revolution takes place in the soul when the bud of hope bursts forth into flower! It was well nigh covered up with despair, as the bud is hidden by the green leaves that close around it; but it springs up out of despair, and the green leaves

part asunder. Darkness, guilt, terror, heaviness, gloom, melancholy, forebodings of death and judgment brooded over the soul, like the unclean birds over Abraham's sacrifice. But hope, as Abraham of old, has driven them away. And now hope mounts upward to God. Hope has nothing to do with earth, but leaves flesh and self and the world, the servants and the asses, at the foot of the mount **Ge 22:5**, that it may have communion with Jehovah Jireh. Thus hope feeds upon the unseen things which faith realises.

Both faith and hope are engaged on the same things, but not in the same way. Faith credits, hope anticipates; faith realises, hope enjoys; faith is the hand which takes the fruit, hope is the mouth which feeds upon it. Thus a certain promise is made to Abraham that he shall have a son by Sarah. This was a revelation of divine possibility in human impossibility **Mr 10:27**, of supernatural power in creature helplessness **Ro 4:19-22**, to credit which revelation is the essence of spiritual faith. By faith Abraham realised this promise; by hope he enjoyed it. It was an unseen thing, an event to come to pass at twenty-five years distance, but faith made it present, and as such hope fed upon it. When Abraham held in his arms the newborn Isaac, the pleasure was only a fuller enjoyment of what he had before tasted. He now enjoyed in reality, in possession, what he had previously tasted in prospect, in anticipation. Thus true hope feeds upon present things, but upon present things only as pledges and foretastes of things future. It feeds upon Christ, the same yesterday, today, and for ever, and looks forward to no other salvation than that of which it now enjoys the foretaste. All other hope than this is a lie. To hope in the forgiveness of sin—of which there is no foretaste; in God—of whom there has been no manifestation; in salvation—of which there has been no pledge; in mercy—of which there has been no token; in everlasting happiness—of which there has been no inward enjoyment; is delusion and presumption. Of this building, ignorance digs the foundation, self-deceit rears the wall, and hypocrisy plasters on the untempered mortar. It is a refuge of lies, which the hail shall sweep away and the waters overflow.

The budding forth of hope and the opening of this heavenly flower, that only grows in the valley of Achor, the vale of trouble **Ho 2:15 Jos 7:26**, marg., is a season never to be forgotten. Well do I remember the place—a little garden, hidden by buildings, and overgrown with shrubs, where this flower opened in my soul. But the buildings could not hide it, nor the evergreens shade it, nor the damp close it. The bud opened, the flower burst forth, and at the same moment the eye looked up, and the mouth uttered, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee".

If time permitted, I might show how in this spring of the soul the bud of every grace expanded in a similar way.

**Love** in the bud had scarcely strength to maintain its existence against the enmity of the carnal mind stirred up by the entrance of the Law. Like a tender graft it seemed as though it must wither away and die. But love in the flower is strong and vigorous. Love in the bud was not seen nor known to be love. The colour and beauty of the flower could not be gathered from the appearance of the bud. But love in the flower is known at once to be love. Like its divine Author, it cannot be hid **Mr 7:24**, but is known and read of all men.

So amidst the legal repentance and the sorrow that worketh death, which were wrapped around it, **godly sorrow**, whilst in the bud, could scarce be seen. It lay crouching beneath the leaves, hidden and indistinct. But being looked upon by the sun, it looks in its turn upon Him whom it hath pierced, and mourneth for Him as one that mourneth for his firstborn.

**Godly fear**, again in the bud was darkened and obscured by the fear which hath torment. Slavish fear was so strong that it drew away all the sap from filial fear. Darkness and damp, lowering clouds and a threatening sky, cherished the former, whilst they checked and chilled the latter. But as the life of the one is the death of the other, godly fear, when it bursts into flower, soon outgrows the shoot of slavish dread. When Abraham makes a

feast for Isaac, Ishmael is turned out of doors. Love which casts out the fear that hath torment is the very life of that spiritual fear which is a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death.

**Prayer** is another grace of the Spirit which opens and expands its bud in this springtime of the soul. It had always been in the soul from the first entrance of spiritual light. "Behold, he prayeth" **Ac 9:11**, was the mark of regenerated Saul. But hitherto it had consisted of little else but sighs and groans. Access to God, enjoyment of His presence, sensible communion, holy familiarity, praise and blessing, and similar feelings of nearness were scarcely known. It had hitherto been more cries forced out by terror than prayer drawn forth by love. It was more the howl of the criminal, the cry of the leper, the groan of the desperate, the broken, interrupted gasping of the drowning or the dying than the soft, solemn, gentle, calm stream of nearness and access to God. There are two kinds of spiritual prayer. There is the prayer under guilt, and the prayer under mercy; the prayer of a heart overwhelmed, and the prayer of a heart overflowing; the prayer of distance, and the prayer of nearness; prayer interrupted with sobs and groans, intervals of silence and fits of sullenness, like a mountain stream rushing amid rocks and stones; and prayer flowing calmly and gently into the bosom of God, as the river of the valley glides into the bosom of the sea.

During this spring of the soul, all things connected with spiritual religion are full of sweetness. The Word of God is as honey and the honeycomb, the company of His children eagerly sought after, the ordinances of His house highly prized, and the message of His ministers gladly received. Almost every sermon brings some blessing, every prayer some refreshment, and every chapter some instruction or some consolation. Thus the soul grows up like the calf of the stall. Having tasted that the Lord is gracious, it feeds on the sincere milk of the Word, and grows thereby **1Pe 2:2,3**.

Under these encouragements the second stage of spring, the summer of the soul, comes rapidly on. This is "the perfecting of



the bud, the ripening of the sour grape in the flower"; not the ripening of the **fruit**, which takes place in autumn, but the ripening, that is, the maturing, the full completing, of the **flower**, which takes place in summer. "The perfecting of the bud" is its full expansion; "the ripening of the sour grape in the flower" is the ripening of the flower that contains the grape, not the ripening of the fruit after the flower is fallen. The fruit could not be fertilised if the flower were not perfected, but would drop off together with the flower, like the untimely figs of a fig-tree **Re 6:13**.

Thus, in this time of summer, budding hope expands into hope full-blown, faith in the shoot opens into faith in the blossom, and love in the green leaf ripens into love in the flower. In these warm days of summer, the sky is for the most part without a cloud. The peace of God keeps the heart and mind—the one from idolatry, and the other from confusion. Heaven seems at hand and eternity near; death under the feet, and hell out of sight. To him that walks in this happy path the pleasures and cares of the world, the things of time and sense, the vain pursuits of carnal men, the business of the shop and the field, the empty profession of thousands, the noise and bustle of a fleshly religion, all seem lighter than vanity. Being "transformed in the renewing of his mind", and thus conformed, in a faint measure, to Christ's image, he views things, in some degree, as the Lord Himself views them, for he has the mind of Christ **1Co 2:16**, and sees light in God's light **Ps 36:9**. Thus sin becomes hateful, the carnal mind a burden, and the earth itself a wretched abode; and the soul cries, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away and be at rest" **Ps 55:6**.

Who would not think this happy soul near to heaven, when it seems to be thus on the very borders of it? But it may be near it, and yet not enter into it; as the children of Israel were very near the land of Canaan forty years before they took possession of it; forty years of weary wandering in the wilderness, after their first pitching in Kadesh **Nu 13:26**, which was in the uttermost of the border of Edom **Nu 20:16**, and therefore close to the Holy Land.

There are lessons to be learnt, of which the soul at present knows little or nothing. There is an experience to be passed through, little, little dreamt of; a road to be travelled, as yet but little, little known. Harvest does not succeed summer in the kingdom of grace, as in the kingdom of nature. "Afore the harvest" another season comes. A long and dreary winter intervenes, and with winter comes the pruning knife of the heavenly Husbandman, who purgeth the vine, "that it may bring forth more fruit" **Joh 15:2**. "For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, He shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches." But why should this wintry season be necessary? What need of this sharp and severe discipline? Why should not the soul go on as it has begun? Why should it not proceed from strength to strength, and increase in faith, hope, and love, until its peace should be as a river, and its righteousness as the waves of the sea? **Isa 48:18**, We have indeed an abundance of preachers who tell us not only that it ought to be so, but that it actually is so. We have no lack of railway projectors, who will draw us out a line to heaven with neither hill nor dale, and scarcely an inclined place. Nor have we any want of fancy drawing masters, who will sketch us out a beautiful landscape, with heaven itself at the end, as easily as Martin paints his Egyptian colonnades and oriental palaces. But there are such persons as fire-side travellers and chimney-corner voyagers, and such architects as builders of castles in the air. Now, however pretty may be the descriptions of the one, or however beautiful the palaces of the other, the true pilgrim needs a guide who has traveled the road himself, and he that builds for eternity wants an architect who can lay a solid foundation at the first, and afterwards put every stone in its right place. We will leave, then, these speculators to their theories, and instead of speaking of things as they think they ought to be, [To be always telling us what we ought to do, is to bid us draw water with a bucket which has a hole at the bottom; and I am sure free-will never yet mended this hole.] will endeavour to describe things as they are. A little spiritual insight, then, into the human heart may explain the reason why this severe discipline is

needful, and unravel this mystery. Together with the spiritual graces that had first budded, and afterwards, under the warm beams of the sun, burst forth into flower, there had shot unperceived an **undergrowth** of self-righteousness and spiritual pride.

Counterfeits, too, and imitations of divine operations had sprung up, as the offspring of a deceitful heart, or as delusions of Satan transformed into an angel of light. Side by side with spiritual trust, fleshly presumption had imperceptibly crept up. Under the shadow of divine hope, vain confidence had put forth its rank shoots. Natural belief had grown rapidly up with spiritual faith, fleshly ardour with heavenly zeal, universal charity with divine love, and the knowledge that puffeth up the head with the grace that humbleth the heart. Above all things, pride, "accursed pride, that spirit by God abhorred", was taking occasion by the very grace of God to feed itself to the full. It was sitting on Christ's throne, exalting itself and despising others, measuring every one by its own standard, and well nigh trampling under its feet every one of David's soldiers that was in distress, in debt, or discontented **1Sa 22:2**. Forgetting its base original, when it was a beggar on the dunghill, and that a man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven, the soul was in great hazard of sacrificing to its own net, and burning incense to its own drag **Hab 1:16**. Thus pride was doing that secret work which Hart so well describes;

The heart uplifts with God's own gifts,  
And makes even grace a snare. **Gadsby's 287**

But beside these more obvious and glaring evils, we may remark that self was as yet little known, the deep recesses of a desperately wicked heart little fathomed, the helplessness, beggary and bankruptcy of the creature little felt. The unspeakable value, therefore, of Christ's blood, the breadths, lengths, depths and heights of distinguishing love, the riches of the goodness, forbearance and longsuffering of God, the depths of misery and degradation to which the Redeemer stooped to

pluck His chosen from death and hell—all these divine mysteries, in the experience of which the very marrow of vital godliness consists, were little known and less prized.

Judging from my own experience, I believe there is at this time an indistinctness, a dimness, a haziness in the views we have of Christ. Though the soul loves and cleaves to Him with purpose of heart, yet it does not see nor feel the depth of the malady, and therefore not the height of the remedy. It has not yet been plunged into the ditch, till its own clothes abhor it **Job 9:31**, nor cast into "deep mire where there is no standing" **Ps 69:2**. The fountains of the great deep of the human heart have not yet been broken up; the exceeding sinfulness of sin has not yet been fully manifested; the desperate enmity and rebellion of a fallen nature have not yet been thoroughly discovered; nor the wounds, bruises and putrefying sores of inward corruption been experimentally laid bare. And thus, as the knowledge of salvation can only keep pace with the knowledge of sin, Christ is as yet but half a Saviour.

A lesson, therefore, is to be taught which the soul can learn in no other way. Books here are useless, Christian friends of little value, ministers ineffectual, and the letter of the Word insufficient. A certain experience must be wrought in the soul, a peculiar knowledge be communicated, a particular secret be revealed, and all this must be done in a way for which no other can be substituted. This, then, is the reason why winter comes afore harvest, and why "the sprigs are cut off with pruning hooks, and the branches taken and cut down."

The discipline thus exercised by the heavenly Husbandman consists of two distinct parts;

1. The first is that which is immediately and peculiarly exercised by Himself: "**He** will cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches."

2. The second is that which He leaves to be accomplished by other agents. "They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth; and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them."

I remarked that there had shot up a secret undergrowth of natural religion, as well as a plentiful crop of pride, during the spring and summer of the soul. These are the sprigs that had grown up side by side with the bud. Now if these were suffered to continue, they would starve the bud, or overshadow it. A shoot from the old stock, if permitted to remain, will always starve the graft. It is a sucker, so called because it sucks the sap and nourishment from it, and lives and thrives at its expense. A good gardener, therefore, never hesitates for a moment, but takes out his pruning knife and cut it off close to the stem.

But it may be said, "How will this comparison hold good in the kingdom of grace? The old man and the new are not maintained and nourished by the same sap." It is true that originally they are not, but when grace visits the heart, nature will often adopt new food and take grace's provision. Old nature is not very delicate nor dainty, but will feed on anything that suits her palate or satisfies her ravenous appetite. Sin or self-righteousness, indulgences or austerity, feasting or fasting, truth or error, religion or profaneness, superstition or infidelity, a convent or a brothel, all are alike to nature. She has the appetite of a vulture, and the digestion of an ostrich. She has as many colours as a chameleon, and as "changeable suits of apparel" as an actor's wardrobe. She can play all parts, speak all languages, and assume all shapes. But all her crafts and wiles she employs for one single end—to feed and exalt herself. This is the utmost stretch of her grovelling ambition, and to effect this will compass sea and land, heaven and hell.

Thus when grace comes into the heart, nature first resists and quarrels with the newcomer, who is destined to rise upon her ruins, and set up his throne on her prostrate body. But as

opposition only makes grace wax stronger and stronger, nature soon changes her tone, and seeks to ruin him by her friendship, whom she cannot conquer by her enmity. She becomes religious, and puts in her claim for some of grace's food. If grace prays, she can pray also; if grace reads, she too can turn over the Bible; and if grace hears, she can sit under a gospel minister. Nay, she can go far beyond grace, for she has no conscience and he has, and can talk when grace is forced to hold his tongue, and get into a pulpit when can hardly sit in the pew. So the six hundred thousand who fell in the wilderness ate angels' food to the full. **Ps 78:25** So Saul was feasted on the shoulder, the choice piece that was reserved especially for the priest **1Sa 9:24 Le 8:32** . Thus nature, become religious, feeds on the provision bestowed upon grace. And this she does so slyly and secretly, that unsuspecting, guileless grace never discover the robbery. Here, then steps in the heavenly Husbandman, and begins to cut off with His pruning hook the sprigs that are pushing forth so luxuriantly at grace's expense.

In using His pruning hook, the divine Husbandman has two objects in view;

1. To cut off close to the stem the rank shoots of nature.
2. To cut down to their due proportion—their bearing length, the scions of grace. Now natural faith, false hope, and counterfeit love are utterly unable to stand against heavy trials when they are sent for the express purpose of putting us into the balance. They give way and fall to pieces. They vanish away like the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney. It is as Bildad speaks of a hypocrite's hope; "He shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand; he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure" **Job 8:15**. And as this sharp pruning hook lops off false religion close to the stem, so it cuts down a good part of that which is true.

It is true that real grace can suffer neither loss nor diminution, but its manifestations and its actings may. Who that possesses

faith is not conscious that it ebbs and flows, rises and sinks, is strong and weak, and varies from day to day and from hour to hour? Thus when a sharp trial comes, its immediate effect is to depress faith. It falls upon it like a weight, and bends it down to the ground. Faith may be compared to the quicksilver in a weather-glass or in a thermometer. The quantity of mercury in the **bulb** never varies, but it rises or falls in the **tube** according to the weight of the air, or the heat of the day. Thus faith, though it abides in the heart without loss or diminution, yet rises or sinks in the feelings, as the weather is fair or foul, or as the sun shows or hides itself.

Did Job's faith, for instance, mount equally high when "in the days of his youth"—the spring of his soul—"the secret of God was upon his tabernacle," and when "he cursed his day," and cried, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him?" Was Peter's faith as strong when he quailed before a servant girl as when he was ready to go to prison and death? Or Abraham's when he denied Sarah to be his wife **Ge 20:2**, and when with but 318 he pursued and smote the army of four mighty kings? **Ge 14**. If faith never fluctuated, never sinks and never rises, then we have at once the dead assurance of a professor; the faith is in our own keeping; then it does not hang on the smile or frown of God; then we are no more beggars and bankrupts, living on supplies given or withholden, but independent and self-sufficient; then we "have no changes, and so fear not God." But if faith ebb and flow, what is the cause? Is it in self? Can we add to its stature one cubit, or make one hair of it black or white? If not, then must its ebbings and flowings **come** from God.

But temporal afflictions do not cut down faith, hope and love, nor cut off their counterfeits so severely and closely as spiritual trials. We read of "pruning hooks," which expression denotes more than one. Thus any discovery of the holiness and justice of God, of His terrible wrath against sin and eternal hatred of all iniquity, any piercing conviction of His heart-searching eye flashing into the conscience, any setting our secret sins in the light of His countenance, any spiritual sight of self in appalling contrast with

His purity and perfection—any manifestations of this nature will most assuredly cut down to the stump the sprigs of natural religion.

Fallen nature could never yet endure the sight of God. It perishes at the rebuke of His countenance. It goes into the holes of the rocks and the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty. Natural faith never yet bore the touch of God's hand, but crumbled to pieces under it. Thus the first effect of these spiritual discoveries of God is to mow to the ground the thick under-growth of nature. And as the same stroke sweeps away all the consolation which the soul enjoyed, the feeling is as if it had lost all its religion. Like a person going out of the sun into a dark room, to whom the darkness seems greater than it really is; or like a person to whom a bad piece of news is told, who is so stunned by it that he can think of no one alleviating circumstance; so when darkness suddenly falls upon the soul, and evil tidings from heaven seem communicated to the heart, not only nature **totally**, but grace, too, **partially** sinks under the stroke. As a person who swoons away retains life in reality, though it is lost in appearance, so grace faints away under trials, and often recovers but slowly her former strength.

Such is the usual effect of sudden and severe trials. But there is another mode of using the pruning hook employed by the divine Husbandman. And that is, if I may use the figure, to cut half through the branch, and so stop the supply of sap. Many who have enjoyed the spring and summer of the soul, have felt their comfort and peace decline gradually, they could scarce tell how. It was no sudden stroke that befell them, but a gradual withdrawing of light and life, and a gradual discovery of the character of God and of their own vileness. Thus the pruning hook was so slowly and insensibly put under the lower side of the branch to cut it half-way through, that it was not seen.

But its effects were soon felt. Natural religion began to wither. A secret dissatisfaction with self began to creep over the soul. Zeal did not shoot so strong, and faith seemed to hang its head, and



hope appeared to droop. Gloom and despondency began to gather over the mind. The feeling grew stronger and stronger that there was something wrong somewhere. Suspicions as to the reality of its religion, and whether there was not something rotten at the very core, now begin to haunt the soul. Under these doubtings it goes to God to seek deliverance from Him. But all is dark there, and the heavens gather blackness. The pruning knife has cut off the supply of sap. The branches of nature wither away, and drop off from the stem; and the shoots of grace look sickly and drooping.

But there is another branch of this sentence which God does not Himself execute, but leaves to the agency of others. All things that happen flow from the divine decrees. There is no chance work or contingency in the government of God; but "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth". Nevertheless He is not the author of sin; for He "cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man" **Jas 1:13**. Thus we must divide the decrees of God into His executive decree, and His permissive decree. All that is good He executes with His own hand. All that is evil happens according to His decree, and cannot but come to pass as necessarily as all that is good, but He leaves the execution of it to an evil heart, or to an evil devil. These act unconscious of the divine decree, and think only to fulfil their own evil purposes. Thus to them belongs the wickedness, and to God the glory. Satan when he tempted Judas, and the Jews when they crucified Christ, both fulfilled the divine decree, and formed connecting links of the great chain of redemption; but God did not by any secret impulse instigate them to act wickedly.

Thus in the execution of the second part of the sentence passed upon the tree in the text, God, who cannot be the author of sin, leaves it to be performed by other agents. "They", that is the branches pruned off and cut down, "they shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth, and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them."

The portion of the sentence which God leaves to be performed by other agents is as important, I may say as indispensable, as the portion which He executes Himself. These agents are two-fold:

1. The fowls of the mountains.
2. The beasts of the earth.

We may perhaps discover who are intended by "the fowls of the mountains" by referring to the Lord's own explanation of the parable of the sower. We read in that parable **Mr 4:4** of "the fowls of the air", which came and "devoured the seed that was sown by the wayside", which the Lord thus explains: "When they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts". But there is something we must not pass over unnoticed in the word "**left**": "They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains", etc. How much is contained in the expression "left"! It is as though the soul were given up, abandoned, forsaken, not indeed fully nor finally, but cast off as it were for a time, and delivered, like Samson, to make sport for its enemies. The tree with its sprigs cut off close to the stem, with the branches that shot up from its roots cut down and taken away, and the graft itself pruned down to a remnant of what it was, stands a melancholy stump. Winter has come; the sun no longer shines. The sap has sunk down into the root; life seems pretty well extinct, and the axe appears ready to finish what the pruning hook has left undone. And now what does it seem fit for? To become a roosting place for every unclean bird. "There shall the great owl make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow: there shall the vultures also be gathered, every one with her mate" **Isa 34:15**. These keen-eyed fowls of the mountains are always watching their opportunity to alight upon a soul forsaken of God. The eagle "dwelleth and abideth on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong place. From thence she seeketh the prey, and her eyes behold afar off. Her young ones also suck up blood: and where the slain are, there is she" **Job 39:28-30**. And as the "fowls of the

mountains" seem to signify the fallen angels, those accursed spirits, whose delight is to destroy all whom they can, and to harass all whom they cannot destroy; so by "the beasts of the earth" we may understand those earthly lusts, carnal desires, and base workings of a fallen nature which war against the soul.

Now it is most difficult, if not altogether impossible, for a tempted soul to distinguish clearly and accurately between the temptations which spring from Satan and those which arise from the carnal mind. And for this reason, that Satan can only work on our fallen nature, and thus we are unable to distinguish between the voluntary lusts of our carnal heart, and those which arise from the suggestion of Satan. He tempts most when least seen. But though when under the temptation, we cannot often, nor indeed usually, distinguish between the suggestions of Satan and the spontaneous lustings of our own hearts, yet, looking at each at a distance, we may draw this distinction between them, that spiritual wickedness, what Paul calls "filthiness of the spirit" **2Co 7:1**, may be ascribed to "the fowls of the mountains"; and carnal wickedness, the "filthiness of the flesh", to the beasts of the earth. Thus all those peculiar temptations respecting the being and character of God, which are usually unknown, or at least unfelt by us in our days of unregeneracy, but afterwards often sadly haunt the soul, we may ascribe to the suggestions of Satan.

A temptation, for instance, comes into the soul like a flash of lightning. It may perhaps be an infidel doubt that starts up suddenly in the mind. This hidden poison at first perhaps has little apparent effect, as we at once reject the thought with horror. But as soon as the Word of God is opened, or the throne of grace approached, the black thoughts, the powerful questionings, the harassing suspicions which fill the mind, show us in a moment how the subtle poison is coursing through every vein. The Word of God has lost all its sweetness and power, and the voice of prayer is dumb. Darkness and disquietude fill the soul. The heavens are clothed with blackness, and sackcloth is made their covering. Well do the words of Jeremiah describe this state of soul: "I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form and void;

and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains"—the stable foundations of truth—"and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled" **Jer 4:23-25**.

I never found anything to sweep away all my religion in any way to be compared with such thoughts as these. Unbelief has often shaken it to the very centre, guilt has covered it with midnight darkness, and fears of death in sickness have cut it down to the root. But infidel doubts sweep away the foundation itself, and "if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Or, perhaps, some dreadful imagination rushes into the mind, such as Hart justly calls "masterpieces of hell". These rush in in a moment, when perhaps we are on our knees, or reading the Scripture, or hearing the word. There is something so horrible in them that a man dares not for a moment think of them, even to himself, but strives to the uttermost of his power to banish them from his mind. He will start up from his knees, throw aside the Bible, plunge his thoughts into the world, yea, even into the lusts of the flesh, rather than not drive away such fearful imaginations. It seems as if we were committing the unpardonable sin, as if God would be provoked to cut us off in a moment, and send us to hell; as if the earth itself would open its mouth and swallow up such monsters of iniquity. I will allude no farther to these thoughts than to express my belief that many of God's children are sadly pestered by them.

The great change which has befallen the soul, the mighty contrast between its present state and what it was "in months past as in the days when God preserved it, when His candle shined upon its head, and the rock poured it out rivers of oil"—this great and unlooked for revolution is of itself sufficient to kindle all the rebellion and enmity of the carnal mind. Upon these, therefore, Satan works. He and his tribe of evil spirits, these "fowls of the mountains", come flocking down with their flapping wings, and brood over the stump which God has for a time abandoned to them. They are said "to summer upon it", which expression may

signify that they spend a certain season upon the tree cut down; that their visits are not for a day or a week, but for a whole season, a definite and prolonged time. But I think the expression points also to the delight, the infernal glee with which these foul birds come trooping down to their prey. It is their summer when it is the soul's winter.

If the devil ever feels joy, it is in making souls miserable. The cries of the damned are his music, their curses and blasphemies his songs of triumph, and their anguish and despair his wretched feast. Thus when these fowls of the mountains darken the wretched stump, and spread over it their black and baleful wings, it is their summer. And as they brood over it, they breathe into it their own wretched enmity against all that is holy and blessed. Hard thoughts of God, heavings up of enmity against His sovereignty, boilings up of inward blasphemy, and of such feelings as I dare not express, are either infused or stirred up by them. It is the soul's mercy that "the holy seed, the substance thereof, is in it, though it has cast its leaves"; and that "there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again" and "through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant" **Job 14:7-9**. Nothing but divine life in the soul could withstand such assaults as these. And thus there is in the midst of, and in spite of, all the heavings and bubblings of inward rebellion, a striving against them, a groaning under them, an abhorrence of them, a self-loathing on account of them, and at times an earnest cry to be delivered from them.

But there are "the beasts of the earth" as well as "the fowls of the mountains", who sit on this forsaken stump. These are said "to winter upon them"; that is, on the remnants of the broken branches. This expression "winter" points apparently to the season of the year during which the beasts of the earth take up their abode upon it. And it seems to intimate that they and the fowls of the mountains divide the year between them. The one take the summer, and the other the winter. Thus there is change of visitants, but no respite for the tree; a diversity of temptation, but no relief for the soul.

These beasts of the earth, I observed, seemed to signify the lusts of our fallen nature, the wretched inheritance which we derive from our first parent. "The first man is of the earth, earthy." And, "as is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy" **1Co 15:47,48**. The sin of our fallen nature is a very mysterious thing. We read of the mystery of iniquity as well as of the mystery of godliness; and the former has lengths, depths, and breadths as well as the latter; depths which no human plumbline ever fathomed, and lengths which no mortal measuring line ever yet meted out.

Thus the way in which sin sometimes seems to sleep, and at other times to awake up with renewed strength; its active, irritable, impatient, restless nature, the many shapes and colours it wears, the filthy holes and puddles in which it grovels, the corners into which it creeps, its deceitfulness, hypocrisy, craft, plausibility, intense selfishness, utter recklessness, desperate madness, and insatiable greediness, are secrets, painful secrets, only learnt by bitter experience. In the spiritual knowledge of these two mysteries—the mystery of sin and the mystery of salvation—all true religion consists. In the school of experience we are kept day after day, learning and forgetting these two lessons, being never able to understand them, and yet not satisfied unless we know them, pursuing after an acquaintance with them, and finding that they still, like a rainbow, recede from us as fast as we pursue. Thus we find realised in our own souls those heavenly contradictions, those divine paradoxes, that the wiser we get, the greater fools we become **1Co 3:18**; the stronger we grow, the weaker we are **2Co 12:9,10**; the more we possess, the less we have **2Co 6:10**; the more completely bankrupt, the more frankly forgiven **Lu 7:42**; the more utterly lost, the most perfectly saved; and when most like a child, the greatest in the kingdom of heaven **Mt 18:4**.

Now, as the nature of the fowls of the mountains cannot be known by merely gazing at them as they hover in the air, so the disposition of the beasts of the earth cannot be learned by seeing

them in a travelling show, locked up in the dens of a menagerie. We know them best by feeling their talons. These wild beasts during the summer, when the sun was up, and the day hot, lay crouching in their holes and caverns. "The sun ariseth, they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens" **Ps 104:22**. The lewd monkey, the snarling dog, the greedy wolf, the untameable hyena, the filthy jackal, the cunning ape, the prowling fox, the ranging bear, the relentless tiger, and every beast of the forest that roars after its prey—all lay in the depths of the wood, unnoticed and unknown, while the sun was high in the heavens. But winter has come, and the beasts of the earth gather round the hewn-down stump.

In the first awakenings of the soul we do not usually know nor feel much of our fallen nature. We look too much to the branches, and not enough to the root; taste the bitterness of the stream more than that of the fountain, and are more engaged with the statue than the hole of the pit whence it was digged. We feel more the guilt of sin committed than of sin indwelling, and think more of the daily coin that passes through our hands than of the mint—the evil treasure of our evil heart—which stamps it with its image and superscription. Caesar's penny denoted Caesar's power, though those who boasted they never were in bondage to any man, saw not that the money which circulated among them carried with it a proof of his dominion over them. Nor do we see at first very clearly that the sin which stamps every action has the image of Adam engraved upon it. Still less do we know much about sin in the days of spiritual prosperity. The good treasure of the good heart is then circulating its gold, stamped with Christ's image. But when the day of adversity comes, and beggary and bankruptcy ensue, and the evil treasure again issues forth, we begin to look at the die, and feel—bitterly and painfully feel—that every word, look, thought, desire and imagination, as they pass through the heart, are immediately seized, cast under the press, and come forth bearing sin's coinage upon them. This bank never breaks, this die never wears out, but fresh coin is issued as fast as the old disappears. Guilt, indeed, and a tender conscience would fain stop this circulation, but they can do little else than

stand by and count, with sighs and groans and bitter lamentations, the incomings and outgoings of sin's exchequer.

But what are the effects of these trying dispensations? Such as could be produced in no other way. Whatever wonderful effects are ascribed to the letter of the Word, in this Bible-spreading and Bible-reading day, one thing is certain, that it is utterly inadequate to produce in the soul the fruits and graces of the Spirit. Humility, repentance, filial fear, self-loathing, simplicity and godly sincerity, brokenness of heart, contrition of spirit, meekness, patience, deadness to the world, spiritual discernment, boldness and faithfulness in the cause of truth, an open heart and an open hand—such and similar Divine fruits cannot be gathered out of the Bible as a man picks hips and haws off a hedge. The **notions** of them may; and in this day, notions and opinions, doctrines and sentiments, creeds and articles, ceremonies and ordinances, cant and whine, superstition and self-righteousness, formality and tradition, have usurped the place of vital godliness. But the reality, the power, the life, the inbeing, the feeling, the experience, in a word, the spiritual possession of these gracious fruits must be wrought into the soul; made, as it were, part and parcel of it, be the blood that circulates through its veins, the meat it eats, the water it drinks, and the clothing it wears. Now this the letter of the word never has done, and never can do. A peculiar experience must be passed through; and by means of this spiritual experience alone are these divine effects wrought. Thus the fair tree that shot up its boughs to heaven being pruned down to a stump, and the abandoning of it to the fowls of the mountains and to the beasts of the earth, teaches the soul:

1. **Humility.** Humility is not obtained by reading texts, and turning over parallel passages which speak of it, but by having something in ourselves, discovered to us in a spiritual way, to be humble for. Thus a man who stands as a forsaken stump of what he was, and has the devil to harass him all the summer, and his own vile heart to plague him all the winter, has something in himself to make him humble. Humility is forced, beaten, driven



into him; he is made humble, whether he will or not, and is compelled by sheer necessity to take the lowest room.

These cutting dispensations teach him:

2. His **helplessness**. A man does not learn that he is a helpless creature by reading **Ro 5:6**, as he does not learn that his heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked by reading **Jer 17:9**. A Chelsea pensioner, with both his arms shot off, or a man bed-ridden with the palsy, wants nobody to tell him how helpless he is. It is his daily, hourly, momentarily experience. Every time he wishes to eat, drink or stir, his helplessness is forced upon him by bitter experience. He cannot deny it, evade it, or escape from it. Thus a man who has had all his natural religion cut down to the ground, and the branches thereof taken away, and burnt before his eyes, needs no one to preach to him "the duty of helplessness". The fowls of the mountains come flocking down; he has no arms to drive them away. The beasts of the earth gather around him; he is palsied, and is forced to lay his body as the street for them to pass over.

From these mysterious dealings he learns:

3. **Self-loathing**. He cannot be a peacock Pharisee, spreading out in the sun the feathers of good works. He has something to loathe himself for. We cannot hate others without a cause of hatred. Nor can we feel hatred of ourselves, unless there is something in self to hate. A man who falls into a stinking puddle hates his clothes because he loves cleanliness. Thus he who has a holy principle in his heart must needs hate sin. Our modern professors hate other people's sins, but love their own. But a child of God hates himself as being so filthy and polluted before Him whom he loves. He hates the fowls that brood over him with their obscene wings and dismal croakings. He hates the beasts that roar about him for food, and grudge if they be not satisfied. And above all he hates himself, as the wretched stump to which these unclean animals resort.

It would not be difficult to show how patience, meekness, contrition of spirit, tenderness of conscience, and other similar graces are produced in the soul by this **dark experience**, which every prating fool whom presumption has stuck up in a pulpit has a bolt to shoot at.

But I hasten to an effect that I cannot pass over, and that is, that it produces a case for the Divine Redeemer in which to manifest His power, glory and salvation. With all the great swelling words about religion that are trumpeted through the land, and amongst the troops of professors that everywhere abound, there is scarcely one of a thousand who has **a case** that needs Christ's heavenly manifestations. They can all see, all hear, all believe, all rejoice, and I am sure they can all talk. They never had their natural religion stripped from them; never had clay smeared over their eyes **Joh 9:6**, nor the divine fingers put into their ears **Mr 7:33**, nor their wisdom turned into foolishness, nor their comeliness into corruption. But they say, We see, and therefore their sin remaineth. The light which is in them is darkness, and thus how great is that darkness!

A physician is useless without a case, and the deeper the case, the wiser and better physician we need. Thus a guilty conscience is a case for atoning blood, a wounded spirit for healing balm, a filthy garment for a justifying robe, a drowning wretch for an Almighty hand, a criminal on the gallows for a full pardon, an incurable disease for a heavenly Physician, and a sinner sinking into hell for a Saviour stooping down from heaven. A man with a real case must have a real salvation. He is no longer to be cheated, fobbed off, deluded and tricked with pretences, as a nervous patient is sometimes cured with bread pills; but he must have a real remedy as having a real disease. Christ in the Bible, Christ sitting as an unknown Saviour in the heavens, Christ afar off, unmanifested and unrevealed, is no Christ to him. "Near, near; let Him come near—in my heart, in my soul, revealed in me, manifested unto me, formed within me—this, this is the Christ I want. O for one drop of His atoning blood, one smile of

His blessed countenance, one testimony of His love, one gleam of His justifying righteousness!"

And thus when this divine Redeemer appears in His garments stained with blood, the sinking soul hails His approach, the fowls of the mountains take flight, the beasts of the earth slink off to their dens, the dreary stump pushes forth its shoots, and the voice sounds forth from the inmost depths of the soul, "This is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord, we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation".

And now comes that season to which all the preceding have been but preparatory and introductory—the **Harvest** of the soul. I do not understand by "the harvest" spoken of in the text the harvest at the end of the world **Mt 13:39**, the general ingathering of the elect from the four winds, from one end of the heaven to the other. But I understand by it a particular harvest; a harvest **in** the soul in time; not a harvest of both soul and body at the end of time. As there is a spring, a summer and a winter in experience, so is there a harvest in experience; and as one part of the text is experimental, so the other part is experimental also.

The peculiar mark of harvest is, that it is the season of fruit. And thus I consider the harvest of grace to consist in the production of fruit in the soul. The only fruit which God will ever acknowledge as such, is that which He Himself produces by His Spirit in the heart. "From Me is thy fruit found" **Ho 14:8**. "Working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight" **Heb 13:21**. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained **prepared**, marg. that we should walk in them" **Eph 2:10**. "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" **Php 2:13**. The market indeed is glutted with sloes and crabs. These are heaped up on every stall, and hawked about from door to door. But it is the fruit of the graft, not the fruit of the stock, that is worthy of the name, and none other will be put upon the heavenly table. The graft, however, would not bear till it was cut in. "Every

branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it"—that is, dresses and prunes it—"that it may bring forth more fruit" **Joh 15:2**.

The great secret of vital godliness is to be nothing, that Christ may be all in all. Every stripping, sifting, and emptying; every trial, exercise and temptation that the soul passes through, has but one object—to beat out of man's heart that cursed spirit of independence which the devil breathed into him when he said, "Ye shall be as gods". A man must well nigh be bled to death before this venom can be drained out of his veins. To cut down a giant into a babe a span long; to put a hunch-backed camel into a hydraulic press, and squeeze it into sufficient dimensions to pass through a needle's eye—this is the process needful to be undergone before a man can bring forth fruit unto God. Well might Nicodemus marvel how a man could enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born; and the wonder how a grown-up man becomes a helpless babe is as great a mystery to most now.

The fatal mistake of thousands is to offer unto God the fruits of the flesh instead of the fruits of the Spirit. Fleshly holiness, fleshly exertions, fleshly prayers, fleshly duties, fleshly forms, fleshly zeal—these are what men consider good works, and present them as such to God. But well may He "who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity", say to all such fleshly workers, "If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil?" **Mal 1:8**. All that the flesh can do is evil, for "every imagination of man's heart is only evil continually"; and to present the fruits of this filthy heart to the Lord of hosts is "to offer polluted bread upon His altar" **Mal 1:7**. Thus the "pleasant fruits, new and old" **So 7:13**, of which all manner are laid up at the gates of the righteous for the Beloved, are such only as the Spirit of God produces in the soul. And as He looketh not "on the outward appearance but the Lord looketh on the heart" **1Sa 16:7**, so these fruits are not so much outward as inward fruits.

It is within, in the secret depths of the soul, that the eternal Spirit works; and the outward actions are but visible signs and manifestations of His inward operations. A broken heart, a contrite spirit, a tender conscience, a filial fear, a desire to please, a dread to offend the great God of heaven, a sense of the evil of sin, and a desire to be delivered from its dominion, a mourning over our repeated backslidings, grief at being so often entangled in our lusts and passions, an acquaintance with our helplessness and weakness, a little simplicity and godly sincerity, a hanging upon grace for daily supplies, watching the hand of Providence, a singleness of eye to the glory of God—these are a few of the fruits that constitute the harvest of the soul. But why was it necessary that winter should precede? Why does the farmer break up the green sward with his plough, and turn in all the pretty daisies and cowslips, and lay bare the black soil, with all the hidden worms and maggots that lie concealed beneath the turf? Why does he drag his harrows over the fallows, and tear up the couchgrass, and gather it into heaps, and burn it to ashes? Because he wants a crop of corn to spring from seed which he himself sows, and because the natural produce of the land will not give him wheat and barley. Thus the violets and primroses of nature—the virtues of the natural heart, and all the flower of fleshly religion—must have the share of the winter plough pass beneath their roots, and be buried in mingled confusion beneath the black clods of inward corruption, that grace may spring up as an implanted crop.

By the wintry dealings I have before attempted to describe, independence has been broken to pieces, and the soul brought to hang upon Christ for everything; pride has been cut down, and humility produced; a deceitful heart has been laid bare, and spiritual integrity created; hypocrisy has been detected and sincerity implanted; a form of religion has been crushed, and power set up in its stead; an empty profession of dry doctrine has been rooted up, and a realisation of eternal things been substituted; the reprobate silver has been burnt in the furnace, and the pure gold has come out uninjured. A burnt child dreads the fire, and a broken-down soul dreads an empty profession. A

tender wound cannot bear pressure, and a conscience made tender by terrible things in righteousness cannot bear the burden of guilt. "By the reason of God's highness, it cannot endure" **Job 31:23**.

The things he has passed through have brought him into an acquaintance with God. He now knows the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent; and he has felt that God is a Spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. He can no longer endure the vain inventions of men, the formalities of a carnal Establishment, the mummeries of priestcraft, the canting whine of hypocrites, the empty babble of chattering professors, the mock holiness of Arminian perfectionists, and the cloak of religion which masks thousands of rotten hearts. He becomes a solitary character. He sets little store by loud prayers or long prayers, whether they come from the blind mill-horse in the pulpit, or his humble imitator in the pew. He finds that a secret groan is better than a long prayer, a tear of contrition sweeter than an extempore form, and a few words with God in his closet more precious than many words at a prayer-meeting, even though deacons pray.

A line of Hart's hymns relieves his soul, when a noisy choir chanting Dr. Watts loads it with a burden; and half a verse of Scripture melts his heart, when a letter preacher with a long sermon hardens it into ice. He never leaves the company of empty professors without a load, or the sweet company of God without a blessing. He feels Christ to be his best Counsellor. His love most worth seeking, His friendship most enduring, His presence most cheering, and His smiles most to be desired. Men, even the very best of them, often only wound him; the company of God's children is often burdensome; and their advice usually an ineffectual help. His heavenly Friend never deceived him, never violated his confidence, disclosed his secrets, wounded his feelings, carnalised his mind, saddened his spirit, led him into error, or treated him with neglect. But on the contrary, 'pardons his sins, forgives his ingratitude, pities his infirmities, heals his backslidings, and loves him freely.

The Christian thus learns that if he stands, God must hold him up; if he knows anything aright, God must teach him; if he walks in the way to heaven, God must first put, and afterwards keep him in it; if he has anything, God must give it to him; and that if he does anything, God must work it in him. He now "through the law"—that is, through his experience of its killing sentence—"is become dead to the law, that he may live unto God". He can no longer take a killing letter for a living rule, but is deeply conscious that it is only by being "married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that he can bring forth fruit unto God" **Ro 7:4**. Thus by the presence of God going with him, he becomes separated "from all the people that are upon the face of the earth" **Ex 33:16**.

Whilst others boast of what they have done for God, he is glad to feel that God has done something for him; whilst others are handling the shell, he is eating the kernel; whilst others are talking **of** Christ, he is talking **with** Him; whilst others are looking through the park palings, he is enjoying the estate; and whilst others are haranguing about the treasure in the Bank of England, he is pleased to find a few coins in his own pocket, stamped with the king's image and superscription. But he finds the truth of that text, "In much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increases sorrow" **Ec 1:18**. As his inward religion separates him from those who have only an outward one, he becomes a butt for empty professors to shoot at. Those whom he once would have disdained to set with the dogs of his flock, now spare not to spit in his face **Job 30:1 Job 30:10**. Every consequential Evangelical, who has not an idea about religion but what he has gleaned from Scott or Simeon, condemns him as "a rank Antinomian". Every spruce Academic, hot from Hackney or Cheshunt, who knows no more about the operations of a living faith than of the Chinese language, has an arrow stored in his quiver, feathered with a text to strike him through the heart as "an awful character". Every high-faith professor rides over his head; every dry Calvinist outruns him in the race; every Pharisee

outstrips him in zeal; every ranting Methodist thunders at him for sloth; and every doer of duty avoids him as a pestilence.

However various sects differ among themselves, they all unite in condemning him. All other religion is right, and his alone wrong; everyone else's faith is genuine, and his only is spurious. Of him alone the charitable augur uncharitably; universal salvationists cut off him alone from salvation; those that pity the heathen have no pity for him; and those who compass sea and land to make one proselyte, pronounce his case alone as past recovery. And what is his trespass and what is his sin, that they so hotly pursue after him? **Ge 31:36**. Does he live in sin? No. Is he buried in the world, head over ears in politics, heaping together dishonest gains, or eaten up with covetousness? None dare say so. Does he neglect prayer, reading the Word, hearing the truth, contributing to the necessities of saints, and living peaceably with all men? No. Why then this universal baying at him from every dog of the pack? For the same reason that Joseph's brethren hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him—the Father loves him, and has clothed him in a garment of many colours, and given him revelations which He has denied to them.

But he has sorrow, too, and opposition within, far more trying to his spirit than the evil names which malicious ignorance heaps upon him, or the unjust suspicions which Pharisaic pride harbours against him. Paul, after being caught up into the third heaven, had given to him a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure **2Co 12:7**. Go where he would, this thorn still accompanied him, rankling continually in his flesh, hampering every movement, inflicting unceasing pain, and piercing him deeper and deeper the more that he struggled against it. Ten thousand thorns in the hedge do not pain like one in the flesh. And thus ten thousand unjust suspicions of the sons of Belial, though they be "all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands; but the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear" **2Sa 23:6,7**—ten thousand suspicions, I say, from vulture-eyed professors are but as thorns in the hedge,



which only wound us when we go near them, and which a wise man will keep a due distance from. But a thorn in the flesh, driven and fastened in by the hand of God, we can neither ease nor extract.

And thus any one constant harassing temptation, which strikes into the soul of a child of God, will grieve and wound him a thousand times more deeply than a thick hedge of furze-bush professors standing by the roadside. But by these painful exercises he is kept from settling down on the lees of a dead assurance, or resting at his ease on the ground of a past experience. This rankling thorn preserves him from that vain, wretched, delusive **establishment**, falsely so-called, which, as a spreading gangrene, has infected well nigh whole churches with the dry rot—an establishment built upon length of profession, upon belief of the doctrines of grace, upon membership in a Particular Baptist Church, upon consistency of conduct, upon a general currency as a believer, upon freedom from doubts and fears, and upon an experience twenty years ago. His thorn in the flesh will not let him stand at ease, or ground his arms, as though the battle were won, the enemy vanquished, and the articles of peace signed. He cannot rest on doctrines, of which the power is not now felt; nor in a past experience, which is not continually renewed; nor in a Saviour in the Bible whose presence is not from time to time manifested; nor in promises, of which the sweetness is not occasionally enjoyed. He cannot thus cast anchor in the Dead Sea. He cannot lie stretched at his ease on this downy bed, for his thorn will not let him rest, but makes him "full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day" **Job 7:4**.

Thus his establishment consists not in a head furnished with notions, but in a heart established with grace; not in an outward union with a church, but in an inward union with Christ; not in sitting down once a month to the ordinance, but in eating the bread which came down from heaven; not in having repented twenty years ago, but in being often melted by a sense of God's goodness and mercy; not in occupying a corner in an experimental chapel, but in having a place and a name in the

church of the Firstborn. He will not indeed despise nor neglect any one of Christ's ordinances, but will look to the power more than to the form; and will think it sweeter to walk into the inner chambers of Zion's palace, and behold the King's face, than to go round about her, to tell her towers, and mark well her bulwarks.

Through the inward conflicts, secret workings, mysterious changes, and ever-varying exercises of his soul, he becomes **established** in a deep feeling of his own folly and God's wisdom, of his own weakness and Christ's strength, of his own sinfulness and the Lord's goodness, of his own backslidings and the Spirit's recoveries, of his own base ingratitude and Jehovah's longsuffering, of the aboundings of sin and the super-aboundings of grace. He thus becomes daily more and more confirmed in the vanity of the creature, the utter helplessness of man, the deceitfulness and hypocrisy of the human heart, the sovereignty of distinguishing grace, the fewness of heaven-taught ministers, the scanty number of living souls, and the great rareness of true religion. Nor are these convictions borrowed ideas, floating opinions, crude, half-digested sentiments or articles of a creed, which may be right or may be wrong; but they are things known by him as certainly, and felt as evidently as any material object that his eye sees, or his hand touches.

He has a divine standard set up in his soul by which he measures others as well as himself, for "he that is spiritual judgeth all things" **1Co 2:15**; and as he measures them with one hand, he is forced to stamp "Tekel" with the other. He looks into the granaries, and finds chaff stored instead of wheat; he holds up the notes to the light, and cannot discover the water-mark; he walks up to the fold, and sees goats penned instead of sheep; and visits the household to search for the family likeness, but finds it filled with the "sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the whore" **Isa 57:3**. All he wants is reality. All that he is in search of is something which bears the divine impress, and carries with it a heavenly and supernatural character. But instead of finding widows "indeed and desolate" **1Ti 5:5**, he is pestered with widows of Tekoa **2Sa 14:2**; and

instead of bankrupt debtors and insolvent prisoners, he encounters scarce any but wealthy merchants, with a flourishing trade and a stock in hand. His soul can, however, only unite with the poor and needy, the stripped and the emptied, the shipwrecked sailor and the shelterless wayfarer, who, from sheer necessity, from being driven out of house and home, have fled for refuge to the hope set before them in a salvation without money and without price.

And thus a little godly fear, a little living faith, a little groaning prayer, a little genuine repentance—in a word, a little heavenly reality, will kindle a union, when towering pretensions, unshaken confidence, ready utterance, a sanctified countenance, a whining cant, a gifted head, and a tongue that walketh through the earth, will freeze up every avenue of his heart. He has a needle in his soul which has been touched with a heavenly magnet; and the pole that a broken heart attracts, a brazen forehead repels.

Thus growth in grace is not progressive sanctification and fleshly holiness on the one hand, nor a false and delusive establishment on the other. The narrow path lies between these two extremes. On the one side is Seneh, and on the other side is Bozez **1Sa 14:4**, Pharisaic holiness and Antinomian security, and between these two sharp rocks lies the path "which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen" **Job 28:7**. From dashing on either of these rocks, a living man is kept only by the mysterious dealings of God with his spirit, and the internal exercises through which he continually passes. A constant acquaintance with his own vileness preserves him from a self-righteous holiness in the flesh; a daily cross and a rankling thorn keep him from careless presumption. His path is indeed a mysterious one, full of harmonious contradictions and heavenly paradoxes. He is never easy when at ease, nor without a burden when he has none. He is never satisfied without doing something, and yet is never satisfied with anything that he does. He is never so strong as when he sits still **Isa 30:7**, never so fruitful as when he does nothing, and never so active as when he makes the least haste **Isa 28:16**. All outstrip him in the race, yet he alone gains

the goal, and wins the prize. All are sure of heaven but himself, yet he enters into the kingdom, whilst they are thrust out. He wins pardon through guilt, hope through despair, deliverance through temptation, comfort through affliction, and a robe of righteousness through filthy rags. Though a worm and no man, he overcomes Omnipotence itself through violence; and though less than vanity and nothing **Isa 40:17 2Co 12:11**, he takes heaven itself by force **Mt 11:12**.

Thus amidst the strange contradictions which meet in a believing heart, he is never so prayerful as when he says nothing; never so wise as when he is the greatest fool; never so much alone as when most in company; and never so much under the power of an inward religion as when most separated from an outward one. Strange mysterious creature! He cannot live without sinning, yet cannot live in sin; cannot live without prayer, and yet for days together cannot pray; continually finds religion a burden, yet would not part with it for the world; lusts after sin as a delicious morsel, yet hates it with a perfect hatred; esteems Christ the Chiefest among ten thousand, and yet is at times tried with doubts whether He is a Saviour at all.

Such, then, is the path, however feebly or imperfectly described, in which the redeemed walk **Isa 35:9**, a path trodden by them alone, and that too, often sorely contrary to their own inclinations. To walk in this path is not the product of wisdom **Da 2:30**, the effect of talent **1Co 2:6**, nor the fruit of study. On the contrary, all that nature can do is to fight against it. Reason calls it folly, wisdom terms it madness, prudence considers it delusion, learning deems it enthusiasm, free-will counts it presumption, and self-righteousness thinks it licentiousness. Bishops and Archbishops despise it, Deans and Archdeacons abhor it, High Church clergy revile it, Low Church clergy preach against it, Bible and Missionary Societies cashier anyone the least tainted with it, and the devout and honourable expel it out of their coasts **Ac 13:50**. Graceless Calvinists abhor the sword whose keen edge gives them no quarter; Wesleyans revile the weapon that lays their proud fabric in the dust; worldly Dissenters hate the light

that makes manifest their rotten foundation; preachers made at colleges and academies detest the voice which demands their divine commission; and formalists of all grades, sects, names and denominations loathe a religion which cuts them off from eternal life, and leaves them without the shadow of a hope. One thing is to them sufficiently clear: if this be the only way to heaven, they are not walking in it. This, at any rate, they have discernment enough to see; and thus, if they would justify themselves, they must necessarily condemn the way itself, the people who are walking in it, and the ministers who preach it.

But happy are those of us who, by an Almighty hand and a supernatural power, have been put into this blessed path! We neither placed ourselves in it at first, nor have kept ourselves in it afterwards. If we have done either, we are not in the way at all, but are walking in a side path, and shall end at that door which Bunyan saw to open into hell from the very gates of heaven. He that has no searchings of soul whether he is in the way, no chilling doubts nor sinking fears ever saddening his spirit, no secret groan nor sigh to have his heart right before God, no solemn midnight cries, no anxious prospects nor gloomy retrospects, no trembling apprehensions how it will be with him at the last, no dread of self-deceit, nor suspicions of Satan's delusions—he, I say, who glides securely on without these deep exercises, manifests by his very ease that he is not in the narrow path that leads to eternal life.

By one who is spiritually sincere every step will be more or less weighed, every experience sooner or later brought to the touchstone, and every part of the road anxiously tried. He will love to be searched through and through. He will uncover his bosom to every arrow that flies from the pulpit, to see if it be aimed at him. He will love a searching ministry, and in his right mind cannot be probed too deeply. He will hate the daubers with untempered mortar, and those who sew pillows to all armholes. He will love heart and conscience work, and cleave most to him who most "commends himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God". He desires to have his path traced out, his

stumbling-blocks removed, his temptations entered into, and the dealings of God with his spirit described.

Though all condemn men of truth for bigotry and uncharitableness, he cannot think that to be a bad spirit which enters into the operations of the Holy Ghost, pulls down—false religion, tears away rotten props, hunts out lying refuges, delivers souls from hypocrisy and delusion, gives to man all the shame, and ascribes to God all the glory. However hated they be and reviled, he cannot but love those who are blessed to the healing of his wounds, lifting off his burdens, comforting him in his afflictions, and delivering him out of his temptations. He cannot speak evil of that secret power which has accompanied the word to his heart, laid bare its inmost secrets, traced out its most hidden workings, discovered its deepest thoughts, and manifested to his astonishment what he believed none could know but God and himself. Hungry men do not throw bread into the kennel; sick men do not shut the door in the doctor's face; and prisoners do not strike the arm that sets them free. And thus you who are walking in this mysterious path will love the interpreters of your experience, the guides of your path, the breasts that give you suck, and the hand that ministers to you the bread of life.

But some will say, "Oh that I had a clear evidence I was walking in this path! What would I not give to have a divine testimony that the blessed Spirit was leading me in it!" It is through these very doubts that the evidence is obtained. Doubts lead to cries and groans after a divine testimony; and in answer to these cries the heavenly witness is given. A man without doubts is without testimonies. Doubts are to testimonies what the mortise is to the tenon, the lock to the key, the enigma to the solution. Testimonies are Ebenezers, "stones of help" **1Sa 7:12**, marg.; but the stone must have a hole dug for it to stand in, and that hole is **doubt**. Doubts of salvation are to manifestations of salvation what hunger is to food, nakedness to clothing, a thunderstorm to a shelter, a gallows to a reprieve, and death to a resurrection. The one of these things precedes, prepares and

opens a way for the other. The first is nothing without the last, nor the last without the first.

Thus, next to testimonies, the best thing is spiritual doubts. To know we are right is the best thing; to fear we are wrong is the second best. To enjoy the witness of the Spirit is the most blessed thing this side of the grave; to pant after that enjoyment is the next greatest blessing. I am speaking, mind, only of spiritual doubts; that is, doubts in a spiritual man, for natural doubts are as far from salvation as natural hopes. The path through the valley of Baca is "from strength to strength"; that is, according to the eastern mode of travelling, from one halting place to another, where wells are dug, and "the rain also filleth the pools" **Ps 84:6,7**. We do not learn either God or ourselves, sin or salvation, in a day.

The question is, Have we set one step in the way? "Watchman, what of the night?" Is it even, midnight, cock-crowing or morning? **Mr 13:35**. Is it spring, summer, winter or harvest? The question is not so much whether you have **much** faith, but whether you have any. It is not quantity, but quality; not whether you have a very great religion, but whether you have any at all. A grain of true faith will save the soul; and I have known many, many seasons when I should be glad to feel certain that I had the thousandth part of a grain. A grain of mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds; and even faith as small as that can move mountains. Have I described any part of your experience, found the least echo in your bosom, unravelled one divine secret of your heart, or touched one heavenly string in your soul? Happy is he that has one divine testimony to his eternal interest in the electing love of the Father, in the atoning blood and justifying righteousness of the Son, and in the divine teachings of the Holy Spirit.

But I solemnly assure everyone who has ears to hear, that this path is the only way of salvation; and that every one who at the great day shall be found not to have walked in it will fall into the

hands of Him who is a consuming fire; and will sink into hell, to lie for ever beneath His avenging frown.



## **The Wisdom of Men and the Power of God**

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Morning, June 24, 1866

"And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." 1 Cor. 2:3, 4, 5

What a contrast there is between the experience and language of the apostle Paul, and the experience and language of thousands who profess to be servants of God and preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This may seem to some a harsh, censorious statement, but before it be hastily condemned let us see whether it be founded on truth or not. Take, then, a wide and general survey of those who call themselves and are generally considered to be the ministers of the gospel at the present day. Taking together Church and Dissent, we may safely assume that there are at least twenty thousand men in this country who profess to be servants of God and ministers of Jesus Christ. For bear in mind that they are either this or nothing, nay, worse than nothing, for if a man call himself a minister he necessarily calls himself thereby a minister of Christ, unless he would brand his own name and character as that of an impostor, and thus proclaim himself to his own shame a servant of the world and a minister of Satan. Now of these twenty thousand men, illness, old age, and infirmities, love of ease and sloth or other circumstances may furnish a quota of five thousand idlers, or unemployed, such as sinecurist rectors, silent curates, or unattached ministers of various denominations who sigh for a pulpit but sigh in vain. These, then, we will set aside as willingly or unwillingly silent, and assume that fifteen thousand are standing up this morning in the name of God to preach what they call the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now out of this numerous host, fifteen thousand men, how many, in the largest exercise of charity, could we find whose experience or whose language correspond with that of the apostle Paul as

expressed in the text? And yet I dare say we should highly offend every one of them if we even hinted that they did not preach the same gospel which he preached, or serve the same Lord whom he served. How apt most are to take things upon trust, at least in religion, without search, inquiry, or examination. Let men pass through a certain fixed course of study, let them be ordained by some competent and acknowledged authority, let them claim or assume certain titles, let them wear a certain dress, and at once they are received as ministers of Jesus Christ. The mode may differ, but in this point Church and Dissent fully agree. Hence arise the many thousands of whom I have spoken.

But such a mixed and miscellaneous company may almost remind us of Gideon's army, the thirty-two thousand men who were summoned with the trumpet to make war against the Midianites. They formed to the eye a mighty host—all of them soldiers ready for the battle. But though thus gathered together as soldiers of the Lord's army, God saw them not as men or even as Gideon saw them. The Lord therefore said unto Gideon, "The people that are with thee are too many." He next bade him proclaim in the ears of the people, "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from Mount Gilead." This at once made a clean sweep of twenty-two thousand. The conscious cowards availed themselves of this ticket of leave, and hurried off from the camp by morning light. Would not a similar proclamation, in spirit if not in the letter, were there any sufferings to be undergone, any hard fighting to be endured, any sacrifice of money, prosperity, or character to be made, have almost similar consequences with our modern host? How fearful and afraid would a large number of these warriors be of losing their reputation, or their salary, or their congregations, or of offending the world, their wives, their children, or their relations. We should soon find what a clear sweep such a proclamation would make if carried out. How many would stand the test if persecution were to be undergone, or any sacrifices to be made of property, not to say of life? But even then there were too many left with Gideon after they were departed. The ten thousand, who were more stout-hearted than their fellows, were still too many to do the

Lord's work and fight the Lord's battles. There was another sweep to be made by the trial of coming down to the water. Those that bowed down upon their knees to drink and those that lapped putting their hand to their mouth were to be distinguished and separated from one another. The former, typical of the carnal who drink of God's favours in providence recklessly and unthankfully, bury as, it were lips, mouth, and all in the stream of prosperity without the intervention of faith, were sent away every one to his place. Is it not too true that money is the chief aim of thousands who seek after the ministry? And what they thus get they receive as their right, their lawful tithes or their fixed salary, without receiving it in faith and gratitude as the gift of the Lord. Thus are they well represented by those in Gideon's host who drank by dipping their mouths in the water. And how many were left who drank by lapping the water out of their hand—typical of those who receive by the hand of faith God's favours in providence and grace, and live a life of faith on the Son of God? Why, only three hundred. Thus, out of this mighty host, there were only left at last three hundred to fight the Lord's battles. Now if all the ministers in this land who are destitute of a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who receive their salaries and incomes, tithes and offerings as their rightful due without receiving them from the hand of the Lord in faith, love, and gratitude, were similarly set apart, would not this make a mighty sweep? And though I have neither the right nor the wish, nor even the means or opportunity of making any such calculation, I can but express my opinion that it would be happy for England were there three hundred men out of all the professed ministers of Jesus Christ who could use the language of the apostle Paul as "determined to know nothing among men save Jesus Christ and him crucified;" and whose "speech and whose preaching was not with enticing words of men's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Yes, I repeat it, it would be a happy day were there as many men to preach the gospel in our beloved country as there were men to fight the battle of the Lord under Gideon amongst the Midianites.

But to leave men and come to things, for I shall neither weary

you nor myself with a longer introduction, let us then see whether we can find in our text anything that may be for our instruction, edification, or consolation this morning. The apostle tells us in it both his weakness and his strength, his fears and his hopes, what he renounced and what he held fast, what fruit he desired, and what fruit he found as a minister of Jesus Christ.

I.—See him, then, *first*, in the weakness of his *confession*: "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling."

II.—See him, *secondly*, in the honesty of his *renunciation*: "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom."

III.—See him, *thirdly*, in the strength of his *preaching*: "But in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

IV.—See him, *fourthly*, in the fruit of his *testimony*: "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

I.—It may seem at first sight surprising to us that a man of such eminent natural abilities—and I suppose few men who ever lived possessed by nature a larger mind; a man so specially called by divine revelation; a man of such deep and varied experience, as we find him when speaking of himself, Romans 7. and other passages; a man who had been caught up into the third heaven and there seen and heard unspeakable sights and words; a man so gifted with eloquence that there is scarcely his equal to be found even amongst the greatest orators of classical antiquity: that this man; so richly furnished by nature and so thoroughly qualified by grace should come before a few poor people at Corinth, all of whom were as inferior to himself naturally and spiritually, as one man could be to another, and yet be "with them in weakness and in fear and in much trembling." How can we explain this? Let us see whether we can get into the mystery; for we do not see much of it in our modern preachers. They are certainly not Pauls in preaching, whether we view their abilities,

or their gifts, or their grace. Why then should they not also be "in weakness, fear, and trembling," when they have so much less to support them in the work of the ministry than he had? It is indeed one of those mysteries which are hidden from the eyes of the wise and prudent, and revealed to babes. Some little personal experience however of the mystery will be the best clue through the labyrinth, the best solution of the enigma.

i. The first thing which this man of God felt in the exercise of his ministry was *weakness*.

1. It might have been in part *bodily* weakness. A man could hardly have passed through what he endured without its leaving some marked effects upon the body. "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus," he says to the Galatians. (Gal. 6:17.) He gives us, in another epistle, a catalogue of his bodily sufferings for Christ's sake: "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep." (2 Cor. 11:24, 25.) And after enumerating a variety of "perils," he adds those touching words: "In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." (2 Cor. 11:27, 28.) This long series of bodily sufferings must have told upon his strength and constitution, and made him prematurely old, so that in writing to Philemon, when he could not have been above 56 or 57 years of age, a time of life when many ministers are in the prime of their strength, he calls himself "Paul the aged." Knowing so much myself of bodily weakness, and feeling it at the present moment, I have perhaps, invalid-like, dwelt too long on this point, and therefore shall not press it any farther.

2. But whether this bodily weakness were little or much, it was as nothing compared with his *spiritual* weakness. And was there not good reason why he should deeply and continually feel this? Look at the continual drain upon him by the thorn in the flesh—that

running sore, of which the effect would be to drain away all his creature strength. It is true that he was so blessedly supported under his infirmities, and the strength of Christ made so perfect in them, that he could even glory and take pleasure in them; but infirmities still they were, and were felt by him as such. And what does infirmity mean but weakness? Look also at the continual conflict which he had with his corrupt nature, as described so vividly and so graphically in Romans 7. He could not go through that without its bringing down all the strength of his natural heart. Even the very manifestations of Christ and the glorious revelations with which he was so peculiarly and blessedly favoured, though he was strengthened by them to endure all things for the elect's sake, yet weakened and brought down his natural strength; for we know that any great discoveries of the love and goodness of God have a powerful effect upon the natural frame; for in its present condition, neither body nor mind can bear much excess of sorrow or joy, especially of a spiritual nature. How strikingly was this the case with the prophet Daniel: "As for me, Daniel, my cogitations much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me." So also: "Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength." (Dan. 10:8.) And again, he says, "O my Lord, by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no strength." (Dan. 10:16.) Similarly we may well suppose that Paul, in one sense, sank, though in another he rose under the weight of his glorious manifestations. There were therefore abundant reasons why he should stand before the people in weakness. But consider also the burdens he had to carry, such as the responsibility of his position as an ambassador of Christ, so deeply felt by him; the difficulties he had to contend with from within and from without, all standing in formidable array against him and the gospel which he had to preach; his sense of the value of immortal souls, to whom his ministry was addressed; the pressure of eternal realities ever abiding on his spirit, with many deep and solemn thoughts of that day in which all secrets are to be laid bare. Is there a man who knows anything of spiritual exercises who does not also know what

weakness is, from this very circumstance, that all the power of nature fails and falls when it comes into contact with divine and eternal realities? But the very nature of his message, the very subject of his preaching, the very character of his testimony were such as made him stand up in weakness. For what was it? What Mr. Hart well calls in his Experience, prefixed to his hymns, "the despised mystery of a crucified man." Yes; to let him speak in his own language: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." (1 Cor. 2:1, 2.) He well knew what this preaching would be considered to be, and that Christ crucified would be "unto the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness." Though he knew that the foolishness of God, as men counted it, was wiser than men, and the weakness of God stronger than men, yet having such a testimony to bear—so strange, so unheard of, so despised by, and so abhorrent alike to Jew and Gentile, he could not but feel the weakness of himself as a preacher of the despised cross. O that we could see more of this felt and acknowledged weakness in the professed servants of God! It would make them and their testimony far more acceptable than it now is to the living family. It is painful for the minister himself to feel. I never felt it more or perhaps so much as I do now, but it is good for the people that the minister should feel it, that he may seek and find the strength of Christ made perfect in it.

ii. But he had also *his fear*. What fear was this? Certainly not "the fear of a man that bringeth a snare;" such a carnal fear we cannot find a trace of in the man or his ministry. His fear was of another kind, and arose from quite other causes. It arose, then, partly from a solemn apprehension of the Majesty of God; a dread reverence and holy awe of that great and glorious Lord with whom he had to do. Blended with this, there was a godly fear lest he might in any way by a misplaced word, or by any unwary action, put a stumbling block in the way of any seeker after or lover of truth, or that he might not commend himself as a servant of God to the people's conscience with such authority,

power, and evidence as he would wish. Let us not forget that as a man he had all these infirmities. They cleaved to him as they cleaved to us. What he wrote to the Churches he wrote by divine inspiration, and of his ministry generally, as an apostle of the Lord, he could say, "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual." (1 Cor. 2:13.) But that he had his fears is evident from his own words: "Without were fightings, within were fears." (2 Cor. 7:5.) And that these fears did not arise from cowardice, unwillingness to suffer persecution for Christ's sake, dread of death or even martyrdom, is equally evident from his boldness under the most trying circumstances, as when he would, but for the disciples preventing him, have entered in unto the people at Ephesus, when they were like wild beasts ready to tear him to pieces in the very theatre. (Acts 19:29-31.) It was not then that he feared the cross, as to his own share of suffering, but lest the preaching of the cross should not meet with the longed-for reception. United with this, was a sense of the powerlessness of man, both in himself to give, and in them to receive any blessing from the preaching of the cross, and lest his testimony should in any way fall to the ground.

III. A sense of all these things, combined with others into which we cannot penetrate, for who can but partially read the heart of an apostle? so deeply affected him as to make him tremble, and that in no small degree. "I was with you in weakness and in fear, and in *much trembling*." Not that he trembled through any carnal apprehension of his hearers, but under a sense of the greatness of the work, his own inability rightly to perform it, the message he had to carry, and the powers of earth and hell arrayed against it. He had felt the power of God's word upon his heart, and this made him tremble. This is an especial mark of the Lord's saints and servants. "To this man will I look, even to him that is of a poor and contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." (Isa. 66:2.) "Fear ye not me, saith the Lord? Will ye not tremble at my presence?" (Jer. 5:22.) Even a sense of God's goodness makes the soul tremble as with holy awe. It was so with Daniel, for though the Lord said, "O Daniel, a man greatly beloved," yet we



read, "When he had spoken this word, I stood trembling." (Dan. 10:11.) And this made Jeremiah say, "They shall fear and tremble for all the goodness, and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it." (Jer. 33:9.) Thus Paul stood, as every servant of God will in a measure stand, and just in proportion to his knowledge of divine realities for himself, before these few poor Corinthians, "in weakness and in fear, and in much trembling." What a noble, what an honourable confession! What humility, sincerity, and honesty, what a pattern and example for every servant of God. But I may well add, what a solemn rebuke to the levity manifested in too many a pulpit in the present day. What a keen and cutting reproof, too, of that arrogance, pride, self-conceit, vain confidence, and daring presumption in which so many men stand who profess to preach the gospel of the grace of God. What? that this man, compared with whom they are but pigmies in the presence of a giant; that this man, who had more grace in his little finger, than they in all their body; that this man of such deep experience, unrivalled eloquence, and powerful gifts should be in weakness, fear, and much trembling; and that they should stand up in such arrogant pretension as if they were warranted to be strong where an apostle was weak, they to presume where a man of God feared, and they to be bold where he who had been in the third heaven trembled!

I hope I can say for myself, that I stand up before you this morning, for the first time of my visit this year, in a little of the same spirit of which the apostle speaks. In weakness of body you all know and can probably see; but in weakness too of soul, which is better felt by preacher and hearer than seen. In fear too, as feeling my own inability to preach the word of life as I would desire to preach it, and my dependence on the Lord for every gracious thought and word. The apostle could say, "in much trembling." I must omit the word "much," for I have not his experience or grace; yet would I wish to tremble at God's word. And if I do not actually tremble before you, it is not from levity, arrogance, or presumption, as I sensibly feel my inability to handle the things of God with that light, life, and liberty which I desire, and feeling in some measure the solemn matters which I

have to dispense, and the opposition raised up against them by the power of unbelief in my own heart, and the power of unbelief in yours.

II.—But we pass on to the nature and character of the apostle's *renunciation*. "My speech and my preaching was not with *enticing words of man's wisdom*."

He gives us two sides of his preaching, the negative and the positive, what it was not and what it was, what he renounced and what he held fast by.

Our present point, therefore, is what I have called the honesty of his *renunciation*.

By "man's wisdom," we may understand, all that wisdom which a man can actually acquire by his own exertions or the exertions of others, and especially that branch of it whereby he addresses himself to the art of persuasion, for the apostle speaks of "*enticing words of man's wisdom*." The word "enticing" is in the margin "persuasible," or, as we now say, "persuasive." It includes, therefore, every branch of skilful oratory, whether it be logical reasoning to convince our understanding, or appeals to our feelings to stir up our passions, or new and striking ideas to delight our intellect, or beautiful and eloquent language to please and captivate our imagination. All these "enticing words" of man's wisdom—the very things which our popular preachers most speak and aim at, this great apostle renounced, discarded, and rejected. He might have used them all if he liked. He possessed, as I have already said, an almost unequalled share of natural ability, great learning according to the learning of the day, a singularly keen, penetrating intellect, a wonderful command of the Greek language, a flow of ideas most varied, striking, and original, and powers of oratory and eloquence such as have been given to few. He might therefore have used enticing words of man's wisdom, had he wished or thought it right to do so, but he would not: he saw what deceptiveness was in them, and at best they were mere arts of oratory. He saw that these enticing words, though they

might touch the natural feelings, work upon the passions, captivate the imagination, convince the understanding, persuade the judgment, and to a certain extent force their way into men's minds; yet when all was done that could thus be done, it was merely man's wisdom which had done it; and as I shall presently show, that the faith which stood in that wisdom could rise no higher than its source, and would drop when nature dropped and fell. Earthly wisdom cannot communicate heavenly faith. He would not therefore use enticing words of man's wisdom, whether it were force of logical argument, or appeal to natural passions, or the charms of vivid eloquence, or the beauty of poetical composition, or the subtle nicety of well arranged sentences. He would not use any of these enticing words of man's wisdom to draw people into a profession of religion, when their heart was not really touched by God's grace, or their consciences wrought upon by a divine power. So to work upon their reasoning faculties, so to insinuate the truth into their judgment, so to take captive their natural intellect, so bend their neck to the gospel yoke; without their first learning of him who was meek and lowly in heart, he well knew would neither save their souls nor glorify God. He came to win souls for Jesus Christ, not converts to his own powers of oratorical persuasion; to turn men from darkness to light; and from the power of Satan unto God, not to charm their ears by poetry and eloquence; to bring them out of the vilest of sins that they might be washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God, and not entertain or amuse their minds whilst sin and Satan still maintained dominion in their hearts. This was unworthy of the position which he occupied as an ambassador of God, unbecoming the place he stood in as a minister of Jesus Christ. It was having recourse to subtlety, which was not becoming that godly profession which he maintained, that tenderness of conscience which he was possessed of, that reverence of God with which he was deeply imbued, and the way in which he desired to approve himself as God's own sent and commissioned servant. Those converts, if they were worthy of the name, who were so gained would not have stood out to the end, or eventually proved themselves to be children of God and vessels

of mercy. Fish caught in that net would have to be thrown back into the sea. Corn sown, grown, and reaped in that field when put into the mill would never become meal sufficiently fine to make bread to be put upon the Master's table. A flock brought together by such arts would have to be separated by the keen eye and hand of the great Shepherd from the fold of his own gathering and feeding. All the labour spent in bringing together a church and congregation of professing people by the power of logical argument and appeals to their natural consciences would be utterly lost, as regards fruit for eternity; for a profession so induced by him and so made by them would leave them just as they were, in all the depths of unregeneracy, with their sins unpardoned, their persons unjustified, and their souls unsanctified. He discarded therefore all these ways of winning over converts as unbecoming his position, as unworthy of the office he occupied, as deceitful to the souls of men, and as dishonouring to God. It required much grace to do this, to throw aside what he might have used, and renounce what most men, as gifted as he, would have gladly used: for he occupied a peculiar position. He spoke at Corinth amongst a people highly cultivated, and to whom such a ministry would have been very acceptable. It was at this period the grand metropolis of Greece, famed for its commerce, as most beautifully and conveniently situated between two seas; and though not equal to Athens as a place of philosophy, poetry, and the higher arts, yet as a great commercial entrepot, it was thronged both with inhabitants and visitors from all parts of Greece, Italy, and Asia; and as wealth increased so did luxury and refinement, not only in vice but in the cultivation of the arts and sciences of that day. It was therefore of all places one of the most difficult to which to come as Paul did, with a simple, unadorned testimony of a crucified Christ; for "the Greeks sought after wisdom," and prized oratory and eloquence in a degree of which we now have little conception. They possessed a most expressive and beautiful language, adapted above all others to oratory, whether to convince the intellect, sway the passions, or charm the ear. What a temptation therefore to Paul to employ this weapon and to win them over by meeting them on that ground on which he was so well qualified to

stand. But no; grace had taught him that it was not by human might or creature power, but by the Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.

What a lesson is here for ministers. How anxious are some men to shine as great preachers. How they covet and often aim at some grand display of what they call eloquence to charm their hearers, and win not souls to Christ but praise and honour to self. How others try to argue men into religion, or by appealing to their natural feelings, sometimes to frighten them with pictures of hell, and sometimes to allure them by descriptions of heaven. But all such arts, for they are no better, must be discarded by a true servant of God, and he must be willing and desirous to know nothing among men save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

III.—But we will now endeavour to show the *affirmative* side of the question—what Paul's ministry *was* as opposed to what it *was not*—what I have called the *strength* of his preaching: "My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but *in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.*" Let me endeavour to unfold the meaning of these words, and show how widely and blessedly they differ from the "enticing words of man's wisdom."

1. What, then, first, are we to understand by the expression "*demonstration of the Spirit?*" By the word demonstration we generally understand a mode of proof so complete that there can remain not a shadow of doubt that the point is proved beyond all possibility of its ever being disputed, much more overthrown. It is a mathematical term; and those who have learnt even the first principles of mathematical reasoning fully understand what demonstration means; for in that science not a single point is advanced, nor a step taken in the argument, which is not fully and clearly demonstrated, that is, proved beyond the shadow of a doubt. The apostle, therefore, in addressing himself to a people who thoroughly knew the meaning of the term, for mathematics were much studied in that day, adopts that word and applies it to spiritual things; in other words, he lays it down as a fundamental

truth, that there is such a demonstration by the power of the Spirit of the things of God to a man's soul, that he is as certain of the truth and reality of those things as a mathematician can be satisfied with the demonstration of a mathematical problem. It is perfectly true that whole mode of proof differs both in its subject, nature, and end. Nothing can more widely differ than nature and grace, reason and revelation, the teaching of man and the teaching of God, the properties of an angle or a circle and the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. But the soul requires proof as well as the mind, the heart as well as the head, the conscience as well as the intellect—different indeed in kind because they so widely differ in nature, but agreeing in this, that neither is fully satisfied unless the point is so fully settled, so completely and thoroughly determined, that no doubt whatever can rest upon the matter. In human reasoning, demonstration cannot usually be obtained except in mathematics, but not so in divine. There grace outshines and exceeds nature, for the teaching and testimony of the blessed Spirit is always demonstrative, that is, convincing beyond the possibility of doubt. Even in his first work as the conviction of sin his proof is demonstrative. None who have felt the guilt, weight, and burden of sin can doubt that they are sinners, none who have felt the anger of the Almighty can doubt his wrath against transgression and transgressors. Indeed nothing short of the Spirit's illuminating power, his vivifying, renewing, and regenerating grace, and the authority with which he accompanies the word of God to the soul, can ever produce that demonstration of eternal realities, whereby we believe them as beyond the shadow of a doubt.

But if this be true, whence comes it that so many of the family of God, except at favoured moments, are tossed up and down on a sea of doubts and fears, so that what they believe they seem hardly able to realize with such clearness and certainty that it is put beyond the shadow of a doubt? This does not arise from divine teaching. It is not the work of the Spirit to produce doubts and fears, but to overcome them. And yet we are continually subject to them. Infidel thoughts fly across the mind; doubts and questionings suggest themselves; Satan is busy in plying his

arguments; a guilty conscience falls too readily under his accusations; painful recollections of past slips, falls, and backslidings strengthen the power of unbelief, so that to come to a spot wherein there is not the least shadow of a doubt of divine realities, and, what is far more, of our own interest in them, is a rare circumstance, and only attainable at those favoured moments when the Lord is pleased to shine into the soul and settle the matter between himself and our conscience. But these very doubts, these very questionings, these cutting, killing fears, these anxious questionings work together for good, and are mercifully overruled for our spiritual benefit. What else has brought us to this point that nothing short of demonstration will satisfy the soul really born and taught of God? It must have demonstration: nothing else will do. We cannot live and die upon uncertainties. It won't do to be always in a state that we don't know whether we are going to heaven or hell; to be tossed up and down on a sea of uncertainty, scarcely knowing who commands the ship, what is our destination, what our present course, or what will be the end of the voyage. Now all human wisdom leaves us upon this sea of uncertainty. It is useful in nature but useless in grace. It is foolish and absurd to despise all human learning, wisdom, and knowledge. Without them we should be a horde of wild, wandering savages. But it is worse than foolish to make human wisdom our guide to eternity, and make reason the foundation of our faith or hope. What you thus believe to-day, you will disbelieve to-morrow; all the arguments that may convince your reasoning mind, all the appeals to your natural passions, which may seem for the time to soften your heart, and all the thoughts swaying to and fro which may sometimes lead you to hope you are right and sometimes make you fear you are wrong,—all these will be found insufficient when the soul comes into any time of real trial and perplexity. We want, therefore, demonstration to remove and dispel all these anxious questionings, and settle the whole matter firmly in our heart and conscience; and this nothing can give us but the Spirit by revealing Christ, taking of the things of Christ, and showing them unto us, applying the word with power to our hearts, and bringing the sweetness, reality, and blessedness of divine things

into our soul. It is only in this way that he overcomes all unbelief and infidelity, doubt and fear, and sweetly assures us that all is well between God and the soul. It is therefore not demonstration simply, not demonstration of the word, as if there were some innate proof and power in the word itself to demonstrate its own truth, though doubtless it is so when the Spirit shines upon it, but it is "the demonstration of the Spirit." This is very necessary to observe, for you will often hear the word of God spoken of, as if the Bible possessed not only demonstrative proof of its own inspiration, but was able to give that demonstration to the souls of men. But the demonstration not of the word but of the Spirit in, through, and by the word, is the thing wanted to convert sinners and satisfy saints. This is proof indeed, not cold and hard like mathematical demonstration, but warm, living, softening, and sanctifying, being the very light, life and power of God himself in the soul. Now Paul's preaching was this demonstration of the Spirit. The Spirit of God speaking in him and by him so demonstrated the truth of what he preached that it came, as he elsewhere speaks, "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance." (1 Thess. 1:5.) There are now no Pauls; and yet, unless we have a measure of the same demonstration of the Spirit, all that is said by us in the pulpit drops to the ground; it has no real effect; there is no true or abiding fruit—no fruit unto eternal life. If there be in it some enticing words of man's wisdom, it may please the mind of those who are gratified by such arts; it may stimulate and occupy the attention for the time; but there it ceases, and all that has been heard fades away like a dream of the night; and, as regards the family of God, we may apply to all such preaching the words of the prophet: "It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite." (Isa. 29:8.) But anything which is communicated by the Holy Ghost, which is demonstrated by the Spirit to your soul, which is brought into your heart with light, life, and power, sealed and witnessed by that sacred Teacher and divine Comforter *that* abides; you take it home with you; it comforts you, not only at



the time, but when you look back to it in days to come; it is a bright spot in your soul's experience, when you can believe that then and there God was pleased to bless his word to your soul, and seal it home with a sweet influence upon your conscience. This is "demonstration of the Spirit."

2. And where there is this, there is "*power*:" for the apostle adds, "and of power." The grand distinguishing mark of the kingdom of God is, that "it is not in word, but in power." Thus power is given to believe in the Son of God—and we cannot believe truly and savingly in him till power is put forth; power to receive the Lord in all his covenant characters and gracious relationships in the gospel of his grace; power to believe that what God has done he does for ever; power to come out of every doubt and fear into the blessed light and liberty of the truth which maketh free. To feel, enjoy, and realise this power is what all the quickened saints of God are really seeking and longing for. And though some of them may not be able exactly to express what their souls are in search of, and without which they feel they are of all men the most miserable, yet they are inwardly sighing, seeking, and longing for power to attend the word of God to their souls, to lift them out of their darkness, doubt, and fear, and give them some sweet assurance that their sins are pardoned, their backslidings healed, and they themselves saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.

IV.—But we now come to our fourth and last point—the anticipated *fruit* of the apostle's testimony. It was that the faith of those to whom he thus preached in demonstration of the Spirit and of power "should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

1. You see from this that there is a faith which "stands in the wisdom of men." Such a faith as this Paul would have nothing to do with. He knew how deceptive it was, and that it was a mere imitation of the faith of God's elect. He perfectly knew that such a faith was wrong in its beginning, wrong in its middle, and would be wrong in its end. If our faith have no other beginning than the

wisdom of men, it can no more rise above that wisdom than water can rise above its level. A stream must always resemble its source, and can never be purer or clearer than the fountain whence it springs. Thus, the faith which springs from human wisdom will at every part of its course be of the same nature as its fountain. And as its beginning and its middle, so will be its end. It will die with us when we die; it will come to an end with all human wisdom; it will perish with all the fruits of human intellect; when poetry, philosophy, eloquence, and oratory perish, then the faith which stands in these arts and artifices will perish with them. We may lay it down as a fixed axiom, that is, a certain and indisputable truth, that whatever is produced by the wisdom of men will die when human wisdom dies. Now what can all the wisdom of man do for us in the solemn concerns of eternity? How helpless, how powerless is man's wisdom when we come to deal with God and conscience. A faith, therefore, which stands in that wisdom can endure no real trial. It vanishes on a bed of sickness. The least display of the anger of the Almighty, the least burden of guilt upon the conscience, the least fear of death burns it all up, and leaves it neither root nor branch. But what a miserable faith this must be to leave us just at the moment when we want it most. How dreadful the thought that we have been nursing a faith which, when we are stretched upon a bed of sickness, affords us no God to believe in as our Father and our Friend; no Christ to look to as a Saviour who has washed us from all our sins in his precious blood; no Holy Ghost to apply that precious blood to our conscience, and bring the promises home with sweetness and savour to our heart. What a state to be in, and have little else but darkness, confusion, fear, and dread shutting us up in distress and bondage.

2. But now look at the other side of the question. Let me assume that you have a faith which stands in the power of God, a faith which he was pleased at the first to breathe into your soul with his own mouth to communicate with his own heavenly breath, and raise up by his own powerful hand. Now this faith, though it may have been weak, and may still be weak, yet has had this peculiar mark attending it from its first implantation, that it has

always stood in the power of God. As you were not able to give it yourself, you were never able to draw it forth into any living exercise. When it was weak, you could not strengthen it; when it was languishing, you could not revive it; and when you wanted to make use of it, it was not in your power to enjoy it to any satisfaction to your own mind, to any peace or rest in your own conscience. But it stood in the power of God. When he was pleased to draw it forth, then it acted; and when he revived it, then he lifted up its head. Such a faith as this stands in the power of God; and as standing in the power of God, it will have another mark of its coming from Him; it is a faith which will always be *tried*, and that to the utmost. If our faith stood in the wisdom of men, we could always make use of it, and should never be tried about it. It would be like every other fruit of human skill or industry. Anything, for instance, that I may know, any knowledge which I may have acquired, I can always use. Ask me any question on any branch of learning or study, I can give an answer at any time, assuming that I know it. It is always at hand, ready for use, and I can take it out, and give you the time by it, as easily as if it were the watch in my waistcoat pocket. Similarly, you who are professional men, or engaged in business, whatever it be, or skilled artisans and mechanics, can always turn your hand to it; can always make use of the skill you possess or the knowledge you have acquired. Unless indeed you could do this, you would soon be without business, employment, work, or wages. Now a faith which stands in the wisdom of men, is just what your knowledge or skill, ability or dexterity is in natural things. You find, therefore, people who can always believe just in the same way as you can always exercise your skill in business or work, or answer any question put to you which is connected with it, or deal readily and summarily with any matter with which you are acquainted, and which lies within your peculiar province. So these people can always believe, because they believe in the same way as you understand your trade or profession, and can make use of it in the same way. But the children of God cannot do this, because their faith does not stand in the wisdom of men. If their faith stood in the wisdom of men, they could always use it, never be at a loss about it, and bring it forth into active and

profitable employment, as a banker employs his capital to profitable use. That their faith is not thus at their own disposal, is so trying to the partakers of the faith of God's elect; and yet it is a strong proof that their faith stands in the power of God. It is blessed enough when that power is put forth; but where and what are they when that power is suspended? Tried, deeply tried. They feel put into circumstances of great difficulty. They want to use their faith, and they cannot. If it stood in the wisdom of men, they could make use of it; but they find that they cannot make use of it. Why? simply from this circumstance—God has wrought a conviction deeply in their soul from the very first, that no other faith can do them any good but what stands in his power. The blessed Spirit taught them this lesson when he first convinced them of unbelief, and his lessons are for life. They are indelible, ineffaceable. They have tried the other kind of faith, for this they had, and plenty of it, in their days of unregeneracy, and found it wanting. Now those who have not this faith, the faith of which Jesus is the Author and Finisher, have not spiritual discernment to see what true faith is. They think they have faith. "Why should they not," they say, "have as good a faith as you? Why should they not believe as well and as rightly as you? Is there not the same God for them, and the same Christ, and the same grace as you claim for yourself, as if a privileged person, and if you were a partner in a monopoly of saving religion? Why should they not believe just as acceptably to God, just as savingly to themselves? Who are you to come and judge them, and say they have no faith? Why, they are as good as you, and better too any day, for they live above doubts and fears, in which you are muddling all your days!" Aye, but God has taught you a little secret, which he has not taught them. He has taught you what faith is, and has made you to see that faith stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. And though you are often sadly pressed down with a sense of creature weakness, yet you know there have been times and seasons in your soul when you have felt the power; when you could say, "My Lord and my God;" when Jesus was revealed to you and in you; when you could take hold of him by faith, embrace him in the arms of love and affection, and feel him near, dear and precious to your soul. Those seasons taught

you that your faith stood in the power of God. But you would like it always to be so. You don't like to come into states and circumstances when you cannot have the full command of your faith. You are like a man who has a large business and a small capital; you cannot get the money when and as you want. You are therefore hedged up here and hedged up there, and cannot do as other people do, because you have not the capital which they have. Here is your neighbour with a large capital and a flourishing, daily increasing business. He carries the day, whilst you with your small capital can hardly get on. But, he after a time may be in difficulties, whilst your sinking head may be held up and you may come off with flying colours when he may have to put up his shutters. So it is in grace. These men with their strong faith are like some of our banks and discount houses in the late panic. Who doubted their stability? The Bank of England was thought no safer than one of them. But a sudden blast came upon them and down they fell like a house of cards. So some of these strong believers may go down some day like the banks lately broke, and for the same reason. They have been financing, trading with borrowed capital, and speculating with the wisdom of men, instead of depending upon the power of God. When such strong believers, as they count themselves and others count them, fall, it sadly stumbles many a child of God, as fearing in this general crash perhaps he may go next. But the Lord is the strength of his heart; and his faith stands in the power of God and not in the wisdom of men. Thus, though it is the most trying place we can be well put into, to have a faith we cannot make use of when we want, yet after all it is turned into a blessing; because the Lord comes in at those times when all our creature faith comes to nought. It is the unspeakable mercy of the saints of God that, at such seasons, the Lord sometimes comes in with his mighty grace and draws the faith which stands in his power into living exercise, revives it, puts fresh life into it, and smiles upon it with his own smile of approbation. It will be found in the end that the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, but that victory over every foe and every fear is assured to the poor, needy children of God.

The apostle had a large view of these things which I have this morning attempted to bring before you. I can only handle them with stumps; he could handle them with fingers. I can only drop a few fragmentary remarks just to cast a little light upon these two kinds of faith; but he had a large view of these matters, and a deep, spiritual insight into the difference between them both in their nature and origin, their course and their end. He was therefore determined, in the strength of God, to renounce all enticing words of man's wisdom, and seek for the power of God in his preaching and in their faith. Gladly would I walk in his footsteps, and discard all flattering operations, come to realities, solid bullion, sterling gold, and deal only with those matters which save the soul. We may think it strange that a man of his abilities, learning, and great acquirements should stand before the people in weakness, fear, and in much trembling, and not use his intellect and employ his eloquence, or, as he might have done, carry all before him by the force of his words. But we see how the grace of God shines in him thereby. He dropped into that place where God should be all in all and he himself be nothing. And what was the fruit of this self-denial and this faith? We see how God honoured his testimony, what a church of living saints was raised up in Corinth, who came behind in no gift of knowledge or utterance, and were called unto the fellowship of the Son of God.

I stand before you this morning in weakness and in fear, but with a sincere and earnest desire that my speech and my preaching may have been in some measure in a like demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith may not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

## Deliverance from the Power of Darkness

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stanford, on Lord's Day Morning, May 2, 1851

"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." Col. 1:12, 13

Religion must be with us everything or nothing. In religion, indifference is ruin; neglect is destruction. Of all losses the loss of the soul is the only one that is utterly irreparable and irremediable. You may lose property, but you may recover the whole or a portion of it; you may lose health, but you may be restored to a larger measure of bodily strength than before your illness; you may lose friends, but you may obtain fresh, and those more sincere and valuable than any whom you have lost; you may lose reputation, but, like the sun behind a cloud, your character may shine with brighter lustre than ever; you may lose life itself, as the blessed martyrs lost it in the flames of Smithfield, and yet find it, as the Lord himself declares—"He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." (Matt. 10:39.) But if you lose your soul, what is to make up for that loss? What does the Lord himself say? "For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26.) Do you ever feel what a tremendous stake heaven or hell is? Have you ever felt that to gain heaven is to gain everything that can make the soul eternally happy, and to lose heaven is not only to lose eternal bliss, but to sink down into unfathomable, everlasting, unutterable woe? It is this believing sight and pressing sense of eternal things; it is this weighty, at times overpowering, feeling that they carry in their bosom an immortal soul which creates and keeps alive the exercises of the children of God, often makes them view the things of time and sense as mere toys and baubles, trifles lighter than vanity and pursuits empty as air, and gives them to feel that the things of eternity are the only solid, enduring realities.

"The Apostle in the text, filled with a sense of these eternal realities, lifts up his heart in holy adoration, and calls upon the

saints to join with him in thankfulness to the God of all their mercies, for what he has done for those who fear his great and glorious name, whom, by an act of sovereign, distinguishing grace, he has plucked as brands from the burning, and given a title to, and meetness for eternal bliss:—"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." Who are these whom the Apostle thus calls upon to give thanks unto the Father? Who are these whom he addresses as made meet to be partakers of this glorious inheritance?—as delivered from the power of darkness and translated by a divine act into the kingdom of God's dear Son? It is "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ" to whom the epistle is addressed, of whose "faith in Christ Jesus and love to all the saints" he had heard, to whom the word of the truth of the gospel had come, and in whom it was bringing forth its blessed fruit."

In opening up the words before us, I shall, with God's help and blessing—

I.—*First*, show what is the *power of darkness*, and how God *delivers* us from it.

II.—*Secondly*, what the *kingdom of God's dear Son* is, and how the Lord *translates* us into it.

III.—*Thirdly*, what is *the inheritance of the saints in light*, and how God *makes us meet* to be partakers of it.

IV.—And *lastly*, how an experimental enjoyment of these divine blessings makes us *give thanks unto the Father* who hath wrought these wonders for us and these marks of his grace in us.

And the Lord enable me so to speak that his own power and unction may accompany the word with a divine blessing to your hearts.

I. The Apostle speaks of "*the power of darkness*." I shall, therefore, with God's blessing, explain first what "darkness" is, and then enter into the meaning of the expression "*the power of darkness*."



i. By "*darkness*" we may understand several things, according to the testimony of the inspired record and the various meanings which it bears therein.

1. First, "*darkness*" is often used in the scriptures to signify *ignorance*, and especially that ignorance of God and godliness into which all men have been cast by the transgression of our first parent. Used in that sense, it denotes that absolute, complete ignorance of everything spiritual, heavenly, and divine, that black and gloomy cloud of worse than midnight, deeper than Egyptian darkness, which broods so thickly and settles so densely over the minds of men. Thus the prophet speaks—"Darkness shall cover the earth and gross darkness the people." (Isaiah 60:2.) And again—"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." (Isaiah 9:2.) So also—"And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." (John 1:5.) In all these passages—and there are many more such in scripture—the word "*darkness*" is used to signify that dense ignorance which broods over the minds of men, so that they cannot see or know, understand or feel anything of the power of God's truth. Well has David described their state, "They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness." (Psalm 82:5.)

This is the state described by the prophet as quoted by John, "Therefore they could not believe, because Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." (John 12:39, 40.) In this state all men are by nature, and in this state thousands live and die, ignorant of the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, and therefore destitute of eternal life.

2. But "*darkness*" has in scripture another meaning,—that of *sin*. Thus the Apostle speaks—"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." ( Eph. 5:11.) We know that darkness favours sin; that when the sun goes down and night covers the earth, that is the time for the sinner to creep abroad to practise his deeds of wickedness. Just as the owl, when the sun declines and the shades of night fall, comes out of her ivy

tower in quest of her prey, so does the ungodly sinner come forth in the evening gloom or the midnight hour to commit, under the veil of night, those deeds that shun the light of day. There is in man a natural conscience. There is in people generally an approval of what is morally right and a disapproval of what is morally wrong; and there are laws founded upon these innate principles of right and wrong which punish, and that most wisely and justly, evil doers. To avoid, therefore, these heavy strokes of human justice, for they fear nothing else, the thief, the murderer, the midnight prowler issue forth to do their deeds of darkness.

3. But the Holy Spirit uses the word as indicative of a still further meaning. We read of "the rulers of the *darkness* of this world." (Eph. 6:12.) And the Lord said to those who came to apprehend him—"This is your hour and the power of darkness." (Luke 22:53.) Satan is emphatically "the prince of darkness." For as "God is light" (1 John 1:5.) and "dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto," so the enemy of God and man is the ruler of darkness, and when cast out of his present usurped dominion as the prince of the power of the air, will be shut up in the blackness of darkness for ever. The darkness of ignorance and sin in which men walk favours his deep designs. The blindness of man allows him to set his snares unperceived, and the mad love of sin hurries the poor blinded wretch into them. Satan was once an angel of light, a pure and bright seraph shining in the courts of heaven as the morning star in the Eastern sky, resplendent in beauty and glory; but pride and disobedience hurled him down and turned him into a foul fiend, and now holds him in chains and darkness unto the judgment of the great day. (Isai. 14:12; Jude 6.)

4. But there is still another meaning of the word "darkness"—namely, *eternal misery*; as Jude speaks, "To whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." In darkness itself there is something naturally miserable. If you were walking across a common on a dark night, when no stars twinkled in the sky and no moon gave its friendly light, and you wished to get home, but stumbled every step you took and had utterly missed your way, were there no other causes of anxiety and fear, such as inclement weather, fatigue, or hunger, the very feeling of darkness would be sufficient misery of itself. As light contains in its bosom the seeds of joy and happiness, so darkness enfolds in its breast the

very elements of wretchedness and misery. To be shut up in a railway tunnel for an hour is very disagreeable; to be there all night would be perfect misery. But to be shut up in the blackness of darkness for ever and ever, O, what heart can conceive or tongue express the weight of that woe? The unfathomable misery of being cast into outer darkness, where no beams of mercy and grace ever shine, but the lightning flashes and devouring thunderbolts of God's eternal and unappeasable wrath for ever beat upon the sinner's head; to be for ever shut out of heaven with all its bliss, and crushed into hell with all its horror and all its despair—language fails to give utterance to so fearful a doom.

ii. But the Apostle speaks of the "*power* of darkness." It is not only from darkness such as I have described, but from the *power* of darkness that we are delivered. To bring this more clearly before you, I shall take up those four meanings which I have thus far opened up, and explain individually the power of darkness in them all.

1. *Ignorance*: what power there is in ignorance! That "knowledge is power," has passed into a proverbial maxim; but it has been overlooked that ignorance is power also. What can you do with an ignorant man? You want a difficult and delicate piece of work to be done, and you get hold of an ignorant workman—what can you do with him? His ignorance will beat your skill, clever as you are. If he cannot comprehend what is to be done or how to do it, what a power there is in that ignorance! Is it not stronger than all your knowledge? Or take another case—that of a man completely ignorant of business—how unpleasant, how all but impossible it is to transact business with him! His ignorance is a barrier which you can neither push down nor get through. There is, then, the power of ignorance as well as the power of knowledge. Men speak sometimes of "the pride of knowledge." Doubtless there is a pride of knowledge; but is there not a pride of ignorance? Are not some men as proud of their ignorance as others are of their knowledge? Some think that the poor cannot be proud; but I have known them every whit as proud as the rich; nay, I have seen ignorant men more proud of their ignorance than learned men of their learning. Now the power of ignorance as regards the things of God is amazing. You can do something with a man who is willing to be taught; you can instruct one who is desirous to learn; you can communicate knowledge to one of a childlike, teachable

spirit. But a man who is shut up, and that with the strongest self-conceit and self-complacency, in ignorance, and will not listen, has a barrier in his ignorance thoroughly ammunition-proof to the reception of all knowledge. I have sometimes both sighed and smiled at the contented ignorance of persons into whose company I have been thrown—sighed at their folly and smiled at their conceit. And how the power of ignorance in the mind of man especially shows itself as regards religion, and what strength and influence it possesses! What prejudice, what enmity, what obstinacy, what unbelief, what self-righteousness, what desperate determination never to give way to any conviction or lend an ear to any instruction it manifests! I have been in this town more than twenty years preaching the gospel and showing the way of salvation from the unerring word of God; my sermons and writings have been spread far and wide in this country, and yet how few, speaking comparatively, in this town have received the love of the truth so as to be saved thereby! In fact, so great is the power of darkness over the minds of men, that nothing but the power of God can deliver them from it. No man ever delivered himself; no man ever delivered another. God alone, by his mighty power, as the Apostle declares in the text, delivers from it the children of the kingdom.

2. But darkness, I have just hinted, signifies also *sin*. The power of darkness is then the power of sin as well as of ignorance; and this is a power unfathomable and indescribable. The great strength of sin consists in this—that it is a subtle and secret influence pervading and permeating every thread and fibre of the human mind, and acting in a way that must be felt to be known. It is like a river, deep and rapid, such as the Danube, but flowing along so quietly and noiselessly that, looking down upon it, you could scarcely believe there was any strength in the stream. Try it; get into it. As long as you let yourself float with it you will not perceive its force; but turn and swim or row against it; then you will soon find what strength there is in the stream that seemed to glide so quietly along. So it is with the power of sin. As long as a man floats down the stream of sin, he is unconscious of the power that it is exercising over him. He gives way to it, and is therefore ignorant of its strength, though it is sweeping him along into an abyss of eternal woe. Let him oppose it. Or let a dam be made across the river that seemed to flow along so placidly. See how the stream begins to rise! See how it begins to rage and

roar! And see how soon its violence will sweep over or carry away the barrier that was thrown across it! So with the strength of sin. Serve sin—obey it: it seems to have no strength. Resist it: then you find its secret power, so that but for the strength of God, you would be utterly carried away by it.

3. But I intimated that darkness signified *Satan*, because he is the Prince of Darkness. And thus the "power of darkness" is the power that Satan exercises over the human mind. Satan has access to every avenue of the human heart. He is a spirit of amazing wisdom and knowledge; and in addition to all the power of angelic intellect, which he retains, though fallen, having had the experience of nearly six thousand years, he has become thoroughly acquainted with all the propensities of our mind, and with what I may perhaps call the weak side of man. He knows exactly where to lay siege—where to place his traps and snares. He knows how to darken the mind, to stir up its lusts and passions, to strengthen the innate force of sin, and so to work upon the pride, prejudice, enmity, infidelity, unbelief, and self-righteousness so deeply imbedded in the human heart, as to give them all a power that they would not have but for his secret operation and influence. He therefore is said to be "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience."

4. And then there is the power of *hell*, the visitations of despondency and despair, the gloomy doubts and fears that sink many awakened souls into an apprehension of wrath to come; under a feeling sense of guilt upon the conscience. Now these four things combined make up "the power of darkness." Who can deliver us from this power? Nothing short of an Almighty hand—nothing but the invincible grace of God.

iii. But how does the Lord deliver us from the power of darkness? I will show you. He delivers us by a work of grace upon our heart. And he may be said in a sense to deliver the very moment that this grace commences its divine and blessed operations. There is, if I may use the expression, an initial deliverance—deliverance in its beginning; not carried on, not completed, but commenced. I will illustrate this by taking the figure of Joseph in the prison. Joseph was in prison, and there the iron entered into his soul. Was there any hope of Joseph's coming forth except to experience the death that the King's baker met with—to be hung

upon a gallows—for a crime imputed to, but not committed by him? But when God put the chief butler and the chief baker into the same prison, he began to work a plan for Joseph's deliverance; and especially when he put it into the heart of Pharaoh to dream a dream which none of the wise men could interpret. Joseph was still in prison; but when the messenger came from Pharaoh to summon him into the royal presence to interpret the dream, that was the manifested commencement of his deliverance. But Joseph had not shaved himself. The Egyptians did not wear their beards like the children of Israel. Joseph could not therefore go into the King's presence with his beard upon his face. Besides, he was in his coarse prison dress, his hair was matted with filth, and his clothes were soiled with the dirt of the gaol. He could not go forth until he had washed himself, had his beard taken off, and suitable clothes put upon him. But even when he was taken out of prison he was not fully delivered, because he might have to go back. But when he had told the King his dream, and Pharaoh took off his ring and put it upon his hand, arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, laid a gold chain upon his neck, made him ride in the second chariot, and set him as ruler over all the land of Egypt, then Joseph's deliverance was accomplished. You will, therefore, see that in Joseph's case there was initial deliverance before accomplished deliverance. So it is in grace. The first ray of light, life, and divine teaching that enters the soul out of the fulness of the Son of God, is an initial deliverance. It is delivered thereby from the power of darkness. The darkness of ignorance no longer holds it down. Light has broken in to destroy that power.

Take it in nature. The earth is immersed in darkness. How is that darkness to be done away? Suppose there were a council of wise men called to devise means whereby it might be dispersed. They might propose various plans to illuminate the darkness, such as moderator lamps, gas, the electric light, an imitation sun to be suspended in the sky by poles and ropes; but all their plans would end in disappointment. The power of darkness would beat them. They might illuminate a room, a street, or a town; but all their tapers and wax lights and illuminations would never enlighten the face of the whole earth. But when, in the midst of all their plans and lamps, tubes, pipes, zinc, and vitriol, the sun began to cast his first dawning beams across the morning sky, and those beams were refracted by the atmosphere over our

globe, then the power of darkness would begin to be destroyed; the strength of the night which had held the earth down in obscurity would be broken; and long before the sun himself rose the shades of gloom would have fled, as if frightened and dismayed by the approach of their mighty and glorious and irresistible conqueror.

So in the things of God—the weighty matters of salvation. The first dawn of grace upon your soul—the first breaking in of divine light, destroys the power of darkness. It shows you the majesty, justice, holiness, and power of God; it convinces you of your lost, ruined condition; it discovers the dreadful evil of sin; it lays you low at the footstool of mercy; it makes you beg for some manifestation of pardon and salvation to your soul. And not only so, but it breaks the pride as well as the power of ignorance; makes you teachable and childlike; and, showing you your blindness and folly, leads you to ask wisdom of God, and seek constant guidance and direction from him. You now see what a prejudiced, blind bigot you were, and with all your knowledge and profession had not one glimmer of saving light in your heart. You turn from error and bend towards truth, like a plant to the light. Is not all this a delivery from the power of darkness?

2. So with the *power of sin*. When a man begins to feel the burden of sin, to cry out under its guilt, to be deeply exercised as to the state of misery and condemnation into which his transgressions have brought him, and to fear lest his awful iniquities should be a millstone round his neck to sink him into the depths of hell, he begins to be delivered from the power of sin. He breaks off his old habits and from his old companions; the outer branches at any rate of sin are lopped off; and he is delivered from the power of those practices in which he lived heedlessly, thoughtlessly, without guilt for the present or fear for the future. If not yet delivered from the guilt and condemnation of sin in his conscience, he is delivered from its outward practice and performance. And as the Lord carries on the work begun he is delivered in due time, by the application of atoning blood, from its guilt, and is saved by the love of God shed abroad in his heart from its reigning dominion and power.

3. He is delivered also from the *power of Satan*. The strong man armed once kept his palace, but the stronger than he has come

upon him and overcome him. The Lion of Judah delivers from the power of the dog. (Psal. 22:20.) The eagle soaring in the sky will not suffer the vulture to come near. Jesus Christ drives back the Prince of darkness, and says—"This once slave of thine is now mine—my property and my possession; I have redeemed him by my blood; he shall be an eternal trophy of my victory over sin, death, and hell. Satan, avaunt! Touch him not. He is a chosen vessel; thou hast no longer power over him." It was so with Joshua, the High Priest, whom Zechariah saw standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. "And the Lord said unto Satan, the Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" (Zech. 3:1, 2.) What could Satan say or do in the presence of that sore, and great, and strong sword with which the Lord has declared he will punish leviathan, the crooked serpent, and slay the dragon that is in the sea? (Isai. 28.)

4. And then there is the last power of darkness, "*the blackness of darkness for ever,*" a power which will never cease to hold fast the sons and daughters of perdition, but which will never close its mouth upon any who know, fear, and love God. The grave will indeed for a while hold their earthly tabernacles that they may return to their native dust; but Jesus, the resurrection and the life, has conquered for them death and hell, and they shall all stand before the throne of his glory with palms of victory in their hands; shall all sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, and shout "Victory, victory through atoning blood!"

II. But I pass on to show what it is *to be translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son*. God the Father has given his Son a kingdom; and this kingdom he appointed to him before the foundation of the world. Nothing can be more plainly revealed in the Scriptures of truth than these two points—

1. That Christ has a kingdom.

2. That his people have a portion in it. How plainly does the Lord speak—"And I appoint unto you a kingdom as my Father has appointed unto me." (Luke 22:29.) This is the kingdom spoken of in Matt. 25., where the King says unto those on his right hand, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for



you from the foundation of the world." (Matt. 25:34.) This kingdom Christ received from his Father's hands when he said unto him—"Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." (Psal. 2:8. ) In this gift God gave him a people in whom he should be eternally glorified; Christ received this people at his Father's hands, and thus became their King and head. And this is called in Scripture "the kingdom of God's dear Son." It is the kingdom spoken of in Daniel, which is to be erected upon the ruins of all the other monarchies—"Which shall never be destroyed, but shall stand for ever." It is therefore said of it, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever" (Psal. 45:6); and that "his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away." (Dan. 7:14.)—This kingdom is present and future; the kingdom of grace here and the kingdom of glory hereafter. Nor will any one share in the glory who does not partake of the grace. This kingdom, therefore, must be an internal kingdom, as the Lord told the Jews—"The kingdom of God is within you;" and is described by Paul, in language most expressive of its inward blessedness—"The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the holy Ghost." (Rom. 14:17.)

But there is a being "translated into this kingdom." The word "translated" means a transferring, a removal, a bringing a man out of one state and putting him into another. Nor can this mighty act of God's grace, this work of sovereign love and power, take place without some experience of it in a man's own heart. It is impossible for a man to be translated by a divine work upon his conscience from a state of darkness to a state of light—from a state of condemnation to a state of justification—from a state of guilt to a state of pardon—from a state of misery to a state of happiness—from a state of the dominion of sin to a state of the dominion of righteousness, without his being sensible of it, without his having had an experience in his soul when and where and how it was done. To be translated, then, into the kingdom of God's dear Son is to be brought out of that darkness, death, guilt, misery, and condemnation arising out of a sense of the curse of the Law, and transferred by a mighty act of his victorious and invincible grace into the kingdom of his dear Son, that he, and he alone, may reign and rule in the heart. Though an act of power, it is no act of violence. God does not translate us into the kingdom

of his dear Son in spite of ourselves, or contrary to the inclinations and desires of our heart. "Thy people," he says to Christ, "shall be willing in the day of thy power." (Psal. 110:3.) He first shows us by his Spirit and grace the misery of sin, and makes us long for pardon and peace, for reconciliation and acceptance. He shows us the wretchedness of a state of alienation from Himself, the Fountain of all happiness and holiness, and makes us long for the shedding abroad of his love to bring us near, and to enable us to love him with a pure heart fervently. He gives us to see what bond-slaves we have been to sin and Satan, and makes us long for that holy liberty wherewith he makes his people free. He shows us what guilt and misery we have brought upon ourselves through our own transgressions as well as that of our first parent. He works a repentance of these sins, a self-abhorrence on account of them, a departing from them and a fleeing to the blood and obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ, to hide in him from every storm. When, then, in answer to prayer and supplication, he reveals to the soul, the Person and work, grace and love, of the Lord Jesus Christ, and raises up a living faith in his blessed Majesty, by virtue of that faith it passes from death into life, from condemnation into justification, from bondage into liberty; and thus becomes feelingly and experimentally translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, that he may reign and rule in the heart as its only God and King—its rightful Sovereign and enthroned Lord. None but God, the Holy Ghost, by his Almighty power, can thus take a poor sinner in all his guilt and filth, rags and ruin, in all his condemnation, misery, and wretchedness, and by applying the word of his grace with power to his soul, by sending a sweet promise home to his heart, by revealing Christ in his blood and righteousness, and shedding abroad his love, can translate him feelingly and experimentally into that kingdom of Jesus Christ, which is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. And this God is doing, has done, or will do for all who are really and truly his. No strength of the creature, no arm of the flesh can avail here. Mercy and grace do it all; love and power combine, and reaching down, as it were, their arms from heaven, lift up the sinner from the power of darkness and bear him into the kingdom of light, and life; and liberty, where Jesus is all in all.

III. But I must now show what it is to *"be made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."* And first a few

words to point out who these saints in light are.

I understand these saints to be the same as those whom Paul calls (Hebrews 3:23) "the spirits of just men made perfect;" those glorious spirits before the throne who departed in the faith, and hope, and love of Jesus—who have dropped their earthly tabernacle, and are delivered from all the miseries, sorrows, sins, and infirmities of this present time-state; and who now, with their immortal souls purified from all spot and speck of transgression, in the realms of bliss see the Lamb face to face. These are they whom he is leading to the fountain of living water, who are singing upon their golden harps the praises of Immanuel, who are ever drinking at those streams that make glad the city of God, and in one ceaseless noonday of immortal happiness are clothed with an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. These are "the saints in light" spoken of in our text whose inheritance is God himself; for the saints are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. As God gave the Levites no portion among their brethren, because he was their inheritance (Deut. 10:9); so God is the inheritance of the saints in light. His love, his presence, his glory, a view of him in the Person of the glorified Immanuel, and the holy bliss and ravishing delights that flow into their immortal spirits from their union with the Father and the Son, perfecting them in happiness and holiness—this is the inheritance of the saints in light in the realms above. O, what a contrast with the portion of the eternally lost! Look at the inheritance that sin gives as compared with the inheritance of the saints. "The wages of sin is death." Hear the groans of the damned in hell; mark the despair that ever gnaws their tortured spirits; see them weltering in fire and brimstone, under the tremendous displeasure of an incensed Jehovah look at outraged Justice darting down flames of lightning upon them from above, whilst a sea of fire from below rolls over them its burning billows, and hell with its iron bars closes over them for ever shutting out all hope and all end. Contrast this eternal sense of misery and woe, this fearful doom of the lost spirits in hell, with the happy lot of the saints in light, singing upon their golden harps, without a cloud of sin or sorrow, the praises of God and the Lamb.

You must be one or the other—saint or sinner; and you will be either singing the praises of God in heavenly bliss, or howling for ever and ever in unutterable woe. But we are to be "*made meet*

to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." If the Queen were to send you an invitation to attend her levee or to dine with her in her royal palace, would you not seek some becoming garment in which to sit down at the table of majesty? If you are a labourer or a mechanic, would you go in your working clothes, with all the dirt and filth of the field or the workshop upon them? You would need to be made meet or fit for such a presence and such company. So it is with those who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. There is a being made meet for the inheritance. In what consists this meetness?

1. First, you are to be *washed*. As the high priest could not go into the tabernacle unless he had first washed himself from head to foot in the brazen laver, so no soul can enter the courts of heaven unless he be washed. As the Apostle says—"Such were some of you, but ye are washed." (1 Cor. 6:11.) You must be washed in the blood of the Lamb: all your sins and transgressions must be washed away in that fountain which was once opened for all sin and all uncleanness in a Saviour's wounded side, or you will never partake of the inheritance of the saints in light. The blood of Jesus must be applied to your conscience; pardon must be sealed upon your soul; Christ must be revealed to you as having washed you from all your sins in his own precious blood, or you cannot join in that glorious anthem, "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood." (Rev. 1:5.)

2. Again, you must be *justified*. "Whom he called, them he also justified." We read of one who came to the marriage and had not on a wedding garment, and we hear the fearful sentence passed by the King upon that man—"Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Such was the sentence of the man who presumed to sit down to the marriage supper without a wedding garment—a type of Christ's righteousness; for we read of the Lamb's wife, that she was arrayed in "fine linen, clean and white," which is declared to be "the righteousness of saints." (Rev. 19:8.) As Joshua the high priest had his filthy garments taken from him, so you cannot be made meet for the inheritance unless you have your filthy garments taken off, and, like him, "be clothed with change of raiment." (Zech. 3:4.) To be found so clothed was Paul's desire—"And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through

the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." (Phil. 3:9.)

3. The third requisite, is to be *sanctified*. You will find the three requisites all named in one verse by Paul—"And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6:11.) To be "sanctified" is to be made a partaker of that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; to be made a new creature; to "put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness"—in a word, to be "made a partaker of the divine nature," and thus have the holiness of God breathed into and communicated to the soul. Without this inward sanctification, none can enter the gates of heaven. What would heaven be to you if you had not an inward meetness for it? Suppose you could be washed in atoning blood and clothed in justifying righteousness, and were taken to heaven (if it could be so, which is impossible), having no new heart, no new spirit, no inward element of holiness breathed into your soul by the Spirit of God. In such a case, heaven would be no heaven to you: you would want to get out of it; the presence of a holy God would appal you; the saints in bliss singing the praises of the Lamb would be so foreign to your every feeling, that you would say—"Send me to hell, for I have no heart to enjoy heaven. Let me go to hell, where I can curse and blaspheme, hate and howl, for I cannot love and praise: hell, hell is the only fit place for me." To be made meet, therefore, for the heavenly inheritance, you must have a heavenly heart and a praising, adoring, loving spirit; you must delight yourself in the Lord as being so holy and yet so gracious, so pure and yet so loving, so bright and glorious and yet so condescending and sympathising. Now this meetness for the holiness, happiness, and employments of heaven is communicated at regeneration, in which the new man of grace, though weak is still perfect. Look at the thief upon the cross: what an instance is he how the Spirit of God can in a moment make a man meet for heaven! Here was a vile malefactor, whose life had been spent in robbery and murder, brought at last to suffer the just punishment of his crimes; and as we are told that "they which were crucified with him reviled him" (Mark 15:32), we have reason to believe that at first he partook with his brother malefactor in blaspheming the Redeemer. But sovereign grace—and what but sovereign grace?—touched his heart, brought him

to see and feel what he was as a ruined sinner, opened his eyes to view the Son of God bleeding before him, raised up faith in his soul to believe in his name, and created a spirit of prayer that the Lord of heaven and earth would remember him when he came into his kingdom—perhaps the greatest act of faith we have recorded in all Scripture, almost equal if not superior to the faith of Abraham when he offered up Isaac on the altar. The dying Redeemer heard and answered his cry, and said to him—"To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Spirit and life accompanied the words, and raised up at once in his soul a meetness for the inheritance, and before the shades of night fell his happy spirit passed into Paradise, where he is now singing the praises of God and of the Lamb. Many a poor child of God has gone on almost to his last hours on earth without a manifestation of pardoning love and the application of atoning blood; but he has not been suffered to die without the Holy Ghost revealing salvation to his soul, and attuning his heart to sing the immortal anthem of the glorified spirits before the throne.

IV. This leads us to my last point, which is the "*giving thanks unto the Father*" for all these visitations of his grace, for all these blessed manifestations of his goodness and love. Have you any hope, any inward testimony, that the Lord has by his Spirit wrought these miracles of mercy and grace in your heart? As I have been describing the work of grace, has there been any echo in your bosom which made you believe that you have been delivered from the power of darkness and been translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son; and though you do not find all that meetness for heaven that your soul could desire, the Lord has given you such a measure of faith, hope, and love as makes you feel that you could enjoy the holiness of heaven if the Lord were pleased to bring you there? O, what thanks and praises are due to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, if he has wrought these things in your soul, for his unspeakable mercy in stretching forth his hand to save you! What would have been our gloomy case, even as regards this time-state, and what would have been our still more gloomy case as regards our eternal condition, if God had not stretched forth his hand to deliver us from the power of darkness, until we had sunk into the blackness of darkness for ever. We should have loved and hugged and been proud of our darkness, and have fallen, as thousands fall, self-

deceived and miserable victims to the ignorance, pride, and self-righteousness of our fallen nature. But God was determined to break in upon our benighted souls, and when he broke in, darkness fled. When he appeared, Satan fled, and when he shone, light and life burst in, And thus the Lord was pleased to deliver us from the power of darkness and translate us into the kingdom of his dear Son. And shall we not render thanks and praises, and adore his blessed Majesty for these acts of his grace, these manifestations of his mercy, goodness, and love?

But I cannot conclude without dropping a word of warning to those who are still under the power of darkness. Though I know they cannot deliver their own souls, yet the Lord may, by a word spoken from my lips, carry conviction to their mind. The Lord may use me as an instrument to show them their state by nature; and may—I pray that he may—in his infinite mercy raise up that sigh and cry in their souls, which will lead in his own time and way to a blessed deliverance into the kingdom of his dear Son; and then they with us will join in ascribing praise and honour, power and glory, to God and the Lamb for ever.

## The Woman at the Well of Samaria

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning, July 28, 1844

"If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." John 4:10

What a strange chain of providential circumstances is connected with the calling and justification of every vessel of mercy! Could we take a review of all the links in that widely extended chain, even as far as each of us is individually concerned, we should be astonished at their number, connection, and variety; and we should see that God's dealings with us in providence to bring us to the appointed spot where he first met with our souls, were no less remarkable than his subsequent dealings with us in grace. What a remarkable illustration have we of this fact in the calling of the woman of Samaria! What a chain of providential circumstances was connected with the Lord's meeting her at the well of Sychar!

Let us endeavour to trace out a few of the links of this marvellous chain which brought a poor adulteress into living union and communion with the Son of God.

1. The *first link* in the chain, as recorded by the Spirit, was the envy and enmity of the Pharisees. We read, "When the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, he left Judea, and departed again into Galilee." (Ver. 1-3.) The envy and hatred of the Pharisees, excited by the success of the Lord's ministry and the increasing number of his disciples (his "time being not yet come"), drove him, so to speak, out of Judea into Galilee.

2. "And he must needs go through Samaria." This is the *second link* which the Holy Ghost has recorded. What was this "*needs be*" that he should go through Samaria? There were two reasons. One



was because Samaria lay in the road, and intervened between Judea and Galilee; so that, without taking a long circuit, Jesus could not reach Galilee without passing through it. That was the *natural* "needs be." But there was a *spiritual* "needs be" beyond any geographical reason, and that was, *because he had to meet a vessel of mercy there.*

3. "Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there." His reaching a city of Samaria, called Sychar, and the well being there, was the *third link* of this providential chain. In fact, we may carry our thoughts back to the very digging of the well; and beyond that, to the purchase of the land by Jacob of the sons of Hamor (Gen. 33:19); for had not Jacob bought the land and dug the well, there would have been a link wanting in this divine chain. But the Lord coming to the city where this well was, was another link of this chain of everlasting love.

4. "Jesus, therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well." Here is a *fourth link* in the chain of predestination—the weariness of the Son of Man. And what a subject of contemplation does this open to us! The weariness of Jesus! How it shews us that he had a nature like our own; not, indeed, a sinful, fallen nature, but one that hungered, thirsted, was wearied, wept, agonized, bled, and died!

5. "There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink." Here we have a *fifth link* of this divine chain—the woman coming out to draw water. And we may observe that there was something unusual in her coming out at this time. We read, "it was about the sixth hour," that is, twelve o'clock, or what we call noonday. It appears from another part of Scripture that this was a very unusual time for women to come to draw water. Thus, we read, Gen. 24:11, "And he made his camels to kneel down without the city, by a well of water, *at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water.*" The evening being the cool part of the day, was the time in those

countries when the women went out to draw water for their households and cattle; and therefore we read, Gen. 29:7, 8, that Jacob said, "Lo, it is yet *high day*, neither is it time that the cattle should be gathered: water ye the sheep, and go and feed them. And they said, we cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together, and till they roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep." Now, what a remarkable circumstance it was, that this woman should depart from her usual custom, so as to come and draw water at this early part of the day! What some call a very trifling "accident" might have been connected with it: it might have been an impulse on her mind; or even the circumstance of one of her children or herself having upset the pitcher; such a trifling occurrence as this might have brought her to the well at this unusual time, and been the hinge on which the salvation of her soul turned.

6. "Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink." The Lord of life and glory asking her for water, (O what condescension!) was another link of this chain.

7. "For his disciples were gone away into the city to buy meat." Here we may observe a further link; for their absence gave him an opportunity to converse more freely with the woman.

8. Then comes the conversation, which forms the last link that I need point out, arising from the woman expressing her surprise that he, being a Jew, asked drink of her, who was a woman of Samaria; "for the Jews," the Apostles informs us, "have no dealings with the Samaritans." And this leads us at once to our text, where we find the Lord saying to her, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water."

Three things seem observable in the text. We find, *first*, what we may call a *Preliminary*; (observe that I do not use the word *condition*;) "*if thou knewest* the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink." Then follows, *secondly*, what would have taken place if she had known it, a *Request*, "Thou

wouldest have *asked* of him." And then, *thirdly*, *The granting of the request*; "He would have *given* thee living water." If the Lord, then, enables me thus to go through my subject, I shall endeavour to trace out the words of the text in the way I have pointed out.

I.—We will look then, *first*, at the *Preliminary*. "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink." Now, you will observe, that the Lord did not reproach her for not knowing these two things. He did not say, she ought to have known them; he did not reprove her for the want of this knowledge. But he merely tells her, if she had known them, then certain circumstances would have followed. So he speaks with respect to the destruction of Jerusalem, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." (Luke 19:42.) He did not reprove Jerusalem for not knowing; he did not say, "It was her duty to have known." He merely said, "If thou hadst known," then this and that would have followed. So we may thus paraphrase what the Lord said to the woman of Samaria, "If thou knewest the gift of God!"—if it had been thy mercy to have known its value; if the Lord had opened thine eyes to see it, and given thee a heart to feel it; if this preliminary had been wrought in thy heart and conscience, then there would have followed two things—"thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water."

Now, what did the woman not know? She did not know, *first*, *the gift of God*; and *secondly*, she did not know *the Person* of him that spake to her. Thus, to know these two things—the gift of God, and the Person of Jesus, are the two grand preliminaries in order to ask of him, and in order to a spiritual reception of the mercies and blessings which he has to bestow.

1. What is meant, then, by the expression, "*the gift of God*," of which this poor woman was ignorant? We read, Rom. 6:23, "the wages of sin is death; but *the gift of God is eternal life* through Jesus Christ our Lord." The "gift of God," then, is eternal life; and

this is that which every quickened soul is taught by the Spirit first to seek after; as Bunyan represents his Pilgrim stopping his ears, and running across the plain, crying, "Life, life, eternal life!" Eternal life was the prize he had in view; that was the goal to which he was directing his steps.

But what is meant by the expression, "*eternal life*?" Is it something future, something in dim prospect, something to be enjoyed in heaven, and not to be known here below? It is true that eternal life is to be enjoyed in heaven; it is true that the full manifestation of it is reserved for the other side of the grave. But "eternal life" begins below. "He that believeth on me hath," (not, *shall have*) "everlasting life." (John 6:47.) "I give unto my sheep," (not, *I shall give*) "eternal life." (John 10:28.)

But the Lord himself tells us what "eternal life" is in those remarkable words, "This is life eternal; that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3.) "The gift of God," then, is eternal life in the soul. It is not something reserved for the future, but something felt, known, and enjoyed in this time state. And we may define it in one short sentence as *the life of God in the soul*, the communication of grace, mercy, and truth out of the fulness of Jesus. This is the "*gift of God*," not obtained by human merit, not earned by creature doings, not to be clambered up to by the ladder of our own righteousness; but a free grant to the objects of mercy, according to those words, "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give *eternal life to as many as thou hast given him*." (John 17:2.)

Now, this "gift of God" the woman of Samaria knew not; she had never received a divine communication of it to her soul; she had never known its nature, felt its sweetness, or experienced its power; nay more, she had never seen or known even the necessity of it. And therefore, on the one hand, having never felt its operation; and, on the other, having never felt her need of its operation, she was carnal, sensual, and dead in sin.

Thus, the first grand preliminary to ask of Jesus what he has to bestow, is, "to know the gift of God." But before we can know the "gift of God," we must be brought to feel that eternal life cannot be attained to by the exertions of the creature. Till we are brought to know it is "*the gift of God,*" we can never succeed in the first great preliminary; we can never utter one request, except hypocritically, that God would give it us. To this point, then, God brings all his elect people—to know and feel that they cannot by anything they have done, or can do, obtain eternal life. Their prayers, tears, fastings, good deeds, alms givings, resolutions of amendment and obedience—all these things are utterly ineffectual to bring eternal life into the soul. We cannot by them regain the paradise we have lost. And this is not to be merely learned as a doctrine in the brain, but it must be experienced, and wrought with divine power as a certain truth in the conscience. As such it is usually learnt through a succession of failures; by trying to obey the precepts, and finding spiritual obedience impossible; endeavouring to be holy, and discovering little else but sin and corruption; labouring to keep the law, and hearing its curses sounding continually in the ears; striving to please God, yet daily and hourly doing those things that the conscience testifies against as most displeasing to him. So that, under divine teaching, (and there is no other worth the name,) by a long and painful succession of failures and bankruptcies, the soul learns at last that eternal life is *the gift* of God. It is a grand point to be taught this. To have our free-will smashed all to shivers, our self-righteousness shattered to a thousand pieces, and we brought helpless and hopeless to feel, "that in us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing:" what a profitable lesson is this! For want of this divine teaching in the soul, there is so much of the leaven of pharisaism even in the hearts of God's people, so much lurking Arminianism, so much talk about doings and duties, independent of, and distinct from the work and grace of God in the conscience.

But we must go a step beyond this. We must advance beyond the mere knowledge, through the want and absence of it, that eternal life is the gift of God; we must know something of *its nature* by

the divine reception of it into our conscience. In a word, we do not know what "the gift of God" really is, till we have it in our hands; we do not know what eternal life is, till it is felt operating with a divine power in our consciences. It is in grace, as in nature; there are many things of which we have heard, and thus can form some idea of them: but we do not really know them till we have seen them. We may read, for instance, in books of travels, of foreign countries, and their beautiful prospects, noble towns, and fine cathedrals; but what do we know of them till we have seen them with our own eyes? So spiritually, we may know, in the judgment, that salvation is all of grace, that "the election hath obtained it," and that eternal life is the gift of God. But what is all that, if we get no farther? No more than knowing about some foreign country by reading a description of it in a book, or representing to ourselves a building by merely looking at an engraving of it. We cannot know the *nature*, though we may know the *necessity*, of the gift of God, till we experience its power as revealed and shed abroad in our soul. *Then* we know some measure of the gift of God when we feel eternal life flowing through our spiritual veins. How do I know I live naturally? Is not my participation of natural life known to me by an internal consciousness that I possess it? I know I live, because I feel that I live. And so, if we have spiritual life, there will be, at times and seasons, an internal consciousness that we have it; we shall feel the spiritual heart beat, and the spiritual lungs breathe, and the spiritual eyes see, and the spiritual ears hear: in a word, we shall be internally conscious of those emotions and sensations which are peculiar to the life of God in the soul. Spiritual life will be seen in its own light, felt in its own power, and shine forth in its own testimony. The little that we do know (and it is indeed for the most part but a little) makes us long for more of it. If ever we have received "the gift of God" into our conscience; if ever we have felt the mysterious operation of divine life in our hearts; if ever we have known the sweet emotions and peculiar sensations by which it manifests itself, it has killed us to all other religions. We say of this inward life with Mr. Hart on another subject:—

"May I be always thus devout,

Be this religion mine."

When once, by the operation of the Spirit on our conscience, we have been stripped of formality, superstition, self-righteousness, hypocrisy, presumption, and the other delusions of the flesh that hide themselves under the mask of religion, we have felt the difference between having a name to live while dead, and the power of vital godliness; and as a measure of divine life has flowed into the heart out of the fulness of the Son of God, we want no other religion but that which stands in the power of God; by that alone can we live, and by that alone we feel that we can die. And, at last, we are brought to this conviction and solemn conclusion, that there is no other religion but that which consists in the continued teachings of the Spirit, and the communications of the life of God to the soul.

But let us look a little deeper into the life of God, and in what it consists. The Lord himself tells us, that it mainly consists of two branches, the knowledge of "the only true God,"—and of "Jesus Christ whom he has sent." To know, then, God the Father by some manifestation of his solemn presence to our hearts; to fear his great and terrible Majesty; to stand in holy awe and godly reverence of his dread perfections; to worship him in spirit and in truth; to feel his heart-searching eye looking down into our very conscience; to believe that he is about our path, and around our bed, and spieth out all our ways; to see that he is holy, just and righteous, and will by no means clear the guilty—is to "know," in a measure, *"the only true God."* But specially to know him as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, by a personal discovery of his superabounding grace to us in the Son of his love, is to fill up the measure of this first branch of eternal life. And the other branch is, to *"know Jesus Christ whom he hath sent."* To know, then, by a divine revelation, the glorious Person and finished work of Christ; to know his dying love and atoning blood; to know him as suffering and agonizing for our sins; to know the sympathy and compassion of his broken heart; to know the glories of his divine nature shining through the veil of his flesh; to know who and what the Son of God is by a special manifestation

of him to the heart and conscience,—this is the second branch of eternal life.

And with this eternal life are connected all the actings of faith in the soul, all the anchorings of hope in the heart, and all the flowings forth of love; nay, every tear of genuine contrition that flows down the cheeks, every sigh of godly sorrow that heaves from the bosom, every cry and groan under a body of sin and death, every breath of spiritual prayer that comes from the heart; every casting of our souls upon him who is "mighty to save;" all submission to and reception of him; all communion with him, all enjoyment of him, and all the inward embracements of him in his covenant characters, suitability, and preciousness—each and all of these actings of the soul toward him spring from a knowledge of him, and issue from, as well as end in eternal life! And the soul that is privileged to enjoy these communications, is an "heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ."

Now, this poor creature at the well of Sychar, living in ignorance and sin, did not "know the gift of God." She came there merely to draw water, thinking perhaps of her children, or of the world, of her dead husbands, or living paramour, but at any rate buried in sin and self; and if she had any notion about religion, superstition, formality, and ignorance ("Ye worship ye know not what") was the sum and substance of it all; therefore she knew not the gift of God. Do you and I know it? That is the point. Do you and I know it, not only by the want of it, but by the possession of it? not only as seeing ourselves lost without it, but by the internal feelings which this gift creates wherever it is shed abroad?

2. But there was another thing that she knew not. She was ignorant of *the Person* of him who said unto her, "Give me to drink." The veil of darkness was over her heart. She perceived not Deity shining through the veil of the humanity; for her eyes were holden that she saw not the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. She was not favoured to behold his glory, "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."



(John 1:14.) She knew not who Jesus was; she probably thought him to be some poor travelling Jew, some itinerant mechanic, as the Lord doubtless appeared in her eyes. She was surprised indeed that he should break through that rigid prejudice of the Jews against the Samaritans, and ask her to give him drink; but she saw nothing beyond this. But had she known who he was; had God the Spirit, in mercy, anointed her eyes with divine eye-salve; had he, in love, stripped the veil from off her heart, shone into her soul, and revealed to her who he was that spake to her at the well, then she would "have asked of him." But from her ignorance of his Divine Person, she had no request to make; for the needful preliminary was wanting. Nor can we make any request of Jesus, till we know who he is. And how can we know it except by divine revelation? For there is no truth more certain than this in God's word, "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." (Matt. 11:27.) We may have floating ideas in our mind about Christ; his name may be often, even to fulsomeness, upon our lips; but we cannot know him, except by a personal discovery of him to our heart and conscience.

But let us see more particularly what she was ignorant of. She did not know, first of all, *his Divine Person*. That is a point for which latterly I have been led very much to contend, because I see so much of vital godliness wrapped up in that glorious mystery, "God manifest in the flesh." And if a man does not know, by a divine discovery, something of the Person of Christ, he is wandering here and there altogether in the dark; and knows not whither he goeth, for darkness hath blinded his eyes. Now, the glorious Person of Christ consists in the union of his divine to a human nature; not a sinful nature, God forbid; may that heresy sink to the lowest hell; but a holy, spotless nature, according to those words, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also *that Holy Thing* which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35.) Blessed be God for those words! What a bulwark they are against error and heresy on this vital point! That holy nature never had any existence independent of, or previous to, its union

with the divine Person of the Son of God. It is not therefore a *person*, but a *nature*, a body prepared (Heb. 10:5); a "Holy Thing," begotten by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and taken into union with the divine Person of the only-begotten Son of God. Jesus thus became Immanuel, "God with us;" perfect Deity and perfect humanity in one glorious, undivided Person. Now this is the great "mystery of godliness;" and he that errs here errs everywhere; he who stumbles here, stumbles at the very foundation-stone; he that denies this is not taught by God the Spirit; and if he live and die denying it, or ignorant of it, will never be where that glorious Immanuel now is, at the right hand of the Father. The "Christ of God," is not the Christ of the Pre-existerian, of the Arian, or of the Sabellian. Nor is he a Son by office, or by covenant engagements; but a son by nature and essence, "the Son of the Father, in truth and love," who came forth from his bosom to take a spotless human nature, in which he could suffer, bleed, and die.

But this poor creature, for the want of divine illumination, did not know this glorious Immanuel. He was to her, as the Prophet speaks, "a root out of a dry ground, without form or comeliness, and there was no beauty in him that she should desire him." (Isa. 53:3.) He appeared to her but as a poor despised Jew, as he is to thousands and millions in our day. Had she seen *who he was* by the eye of faith, and been favoured by a special revelation of his glorious Person, her faith would have received the great mystery of godliness, her hope would have taken firm anchorage in his glorious Person, and the love and affection of her soul would have flowed out to him as the glorious Immanuel "God with us." But she knew not who the Man of Sorrows was, and perceived not Deity shining through that visage more marred than any man's. Depend upon it, Satan will ply all his arts and arms against the Person of Christ; depend upon it, if you are wrong here, you are wrong everywhere; if you are right here by the teachings of the Spirit, you are right for eternity. If you have received into your heart, by the special revelation of God the Spirit, a knowledge of Christ's glorious Person, you are an heir of glory; but without it, eternal destruction will be your portion. How firm are the

Scriptures here. "If ye believe not that I am, ye shall die in your sins." (John 8:24.) "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also." (1 John 2:23.) "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." (4:15.) "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." (5:12.)

But again. She knew not, from the want of divine teaching, that he was *the divinely appointed Mediator between God and man*. She did not know that he had come forth from the bosom of the Father, where he had lain from all eternity, and had come down to this world to save his Church and Bride from the lowest hell. She did not know and feel in her heart that he who stood before her at the well was the only Mediator and Intercessor between God and man. She did not see that the weary traveller was the Great High Priest over the house of God, in whom it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell, and that out of his fulness all his people should receive, and grace for grace.

Now, my friends, no sooner has living faith embraced the Person of Jesus (and that is the first object which faith lays hold of), than it embraces him as the divinely appointed Mediator. And how sweet and suitable is such a Mediator to a poor, sinful, crawling reptile, a wretch defiled, morning, noon, and night, with everything foul and filthy, who has broken the law of God a million times, and cannot keep it a single moment! 'How can I,' argues the soul, 'so full of sin and depravity, how can I approach with acceptance the great, glorious, and holy Jehovah? I cannot, I dare not!' But when it sees, by the eye of faith, a divinely-appointed Mediator, a glorious Intercessor, a great High Priest over the house of God: One that has shed his blood to put away sin; One who has righteousness to justify, and has a fulness of grace and glory to give to the poor, needy, and naked: as faith sees, as hope embraces, as love enjoys this, there is a coming to God through this divine Mediator; as the Apostle saith, "Through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." (Eph. 2:18.) "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and

men, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Tim. 2:5.) "Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God." (1 Peter 1:21.) Our only access to God is through the Mediator whom he hath appointed. All your prayers, tears, sighs, and groans; all your religious thoughts, acts, and words, are worthless, utterly worthless, unless perfumed by the intercession of the only-begotten Son of God. See to this point: and I would, in all affection, charge it upon your conscience, that you look well how you approach the Father. Do you approach him through the Son of his love? Is there a solemn feeling in your heart, when you draw near to the throne, that you approach only through Jesus? Is there a believing reception of his atoning blood into your conscience as the only sacrifice that purges away sin, and of his justifying righteousness as the only robe of acceptance before God? See to it well, examine your conscience well upon this matter, for it is vital ground. See that you approach the Father through the Son of his love, and through him alone; for depend upon it, if you approach in any other way, you are but a presumptuous professor; there is no holy fire burning on the altar of your soul; nor will any answer come down but through this divinely appointed way.

Nor did this poor sinner at Jacob's well know what stores of mercy and grace were locked up in the bosom of Jesus. She did not know him, as full of love, sympathy, and compassion. She did not know him as tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. She did not know that he was able and willing to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. She did not know his great and glorious name as "mighty to save." She did not know the pity, kindness, gentleness, and tenderness that beat in his heart, and flowed out from his bosom towards every vessel of mercy. He was no austere Pharisee, nor rigid law-giver, but a tender-hearted Saviour. But this she knew not.

II.—There are two grand preliminaries, then, to every spiritual request. "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him."

All spiritual prayer, then, and supplication, depends upon a knowledge of these two things—a knowledge of the gift of God, and a knowledge of the Person of Jesus. What a light this casts upon what spiritual prayer is! How many persons satisfy their conscience with what they call prayer! They get up in the morning and lie down at night, and say a few words, which they call prayer, without thought or care to receive an answer of mercy and peace. Like persons in the habit of taking laudanum, they are uneasy till conscience has had its morning and evening dose of reading and prayer. Nay, even some of God's people are here. Their consciences are too much like the stomach of the opium-eater, or of the crying child which the mother stills with Daffy's Elixir. I am not against regular seasons of reading and prayer, for I try daily to practise them; but I cannot rest in the mere form. True prayer is far beyond time, posture, or place; it is something deeper, something higher, and something more spiritual and supernatural. In a word, it is the gift of God, who alone can pour upon the heart "the Spirit of grace and of supplications." Wherever God the Spirit is our Teacher, he shews to us that spiritual and eternal life is the gift of God, and raises up in our minds a divine craving after a personal enjoyment of it. He also shews us the Person of Jesus as a divinely-appointed Mediator. And the same Spirit that thus reveals him in the heart, is also "the Spirit of grace and of supplications;" and teaches us how to pray, and what to pray for; as we read, (Rom. 8:26,) "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Thus, when we begin to feel what the gift of God is; and to know by divine teaching something of the glorious Person and work of Jesus, we begin spiritually to ask. And O, what a field of wants becomes opened up to the child of God, when the Spirit causes him to walk in the field of spiritual requests! The reason why there is so little prayer is, because there is so little felt necessity. It is necessity that forces prayer out of their hearts. It is when we feel certain that we cannot communicate a wished-for blessing to ourselves, yet are sensible God can bestow it upon us, and that in a moment, that makes us spiritually groan our desires into the

bosom of God. And this is the reason why God's people have to walk in such paths of tribulation, and have to wade through such heavy afflictions, temptations, and perplexities; and why they feel the way to heaven to be so rough, rugged, and narrow. It is to draw out the desires and petitions of their heart, that they may spread them before the throne. If a man can stand up, in a pulpit or out of it, without any necessities, or any feeling sense of his own ignorance and helplessness, and the deep depravity of his nature, how can he, with any consistency or an honest conscience, utter a word of prayer before God? This is the reason of so many mill-horse prayers in the pulpit, the pew, and the parlour. But just in proportion as the Lord the Spirit leads us into a knowledge of these two things—a knowledge of our wants, and of the supply of those wants; a knowledge of our malady, and of the appointed remedy; a knowledge of our ruin, and of the glorious salvation of the Son of God, just in proportion as the Spirit of God leads us into a knowledge of these two branches of divine teaching, will spiritual prayer rise up in our hearts. And out of our bosoms these two things can never be separated or dissociated. Men may say "We must not look at our depraved and sinful hearts; Christ is all in all." But what is Christ to me, except in connection with my wants? If I never feel my sinfulness, what do I want of his blood to purge my conscience? If I never feel my helplessness, how can I want his strength to be made perfect in weakness? If I never know myself to be a blind, ignorant fool, can I want him to be my manifested wisdom? If I am never harassed by Satan's temptations, if I never groan under the body of sin and death, should I want smiles from his countenance, and words from his gracious lips? Men dare not in word dethrone Jesus; they take care not to do that: but they will take away everything that makes him precious to a believer. They dare not say that he is not the Son of God, that his blood does not purge from sin, that his righteousness does not justify, and that a sweet enjoyment of his love is not to be felt in the soul: nay, these things they advocate, and pretend to make their boast of. But when we come to the wants, the maladies, and the necessities of the soul, to which all Christ's glorious perfections are suited, "O," say they, "we do not want to hear about corruption." But what are such

speeches but really to dethrone Jesus? Why is he now sitting on a throne of mercy and grace? Is it not for the poor and needy, the helpless and the hopeless, the lost and undone? Is it not for the sin-sick and the self-sick? Is he not sitting on his mediatorial throne on purpose to save and bless such? If, then, you slight and despise the malady, you slight and despise the remedy also. To ridicule and condemn the sighs and cries of God's distressed people is to help Satan to remove Christ from his throne of mercy and grace, and dispossess him of his glories as the ever-living Mediator between God and man. When I walk through the streets of this city, and see the medicines in the chemists' shops, do I not know there are maladies to which they are suited? If sickness and disease were to cease in the nation, would not these drugs be needless? If there were no maladies, would not all the chemists' shops be closed at once? And would not all medical aid and skill cease too with the absence of the diseases they are employed to cure? So spiritually: if I have no maladies, no sins, no griefs, no temptations, no afflictions, no sorrows, what do I want to know of God's appointed remedy? If I have no felt sense of my misery and ruin, Christ is to me but a name, as he is to many who have him continually on their lips. So that, to speak against all experience of the malady, and brand it with the name of "corruption," is nothing but a device of Satan to dethrone the Lord of life and glory, and to thrust him from the right hand of the Father as the Saviour of the lost.

III.—If this woman, then, had known these two things, she would have asked of Jesus. The necessities of her soul would have burst forth, and she would have asked of him that which her soul longed for. And what would he have given her? "Living water." This is the last point which time allows me to treat of. What does the Lord mean by "living water?" No doubt, he meant the same thing as "the gift of God," the life of God in the soul, eternal life, for that is what Jesus is divinely appointed to bestow. "Living water!" I was speaking last Lord's Day of the teaching and operation of God's Spirit being set forth under the figure of water. We may, therefore, observe, that the life of God in the soul is pointed out by this striking figure. And the Lord calls it "living

water," in opposition to dead, stagnant, and I might say, stinking water.

Now, doubtless, this woman, if she had been asked, how she expected to be saved, would have answered, "by *good works*," although she was living in fornication. I have not the shadow of doubt, if the question had been asked her, "*good works*" would have been the words on her lips, though all the while she was living in open sin.

*"Living water!"* "Living water" is opposed to such as is dead and stagnant: therefore, to all hypocrisy, formality, self-righteousness, presumption, resting on an arm of flesh, or trusting to our own good deeds. This "living water," is the life of God in the soul, "springing up," as the Lord speaks, (verse 14,) "into eternal life." This the Lord would have given her. Had she asked for bread, he would not have given her a stone; and had she asked for a fish, he would not have given her a serpent. And had she asked for water, he would not have given her the dead, stagnant water of formality, but "living water," ever flowing, ever bubbling and springing up, ever watering her soul, bedewing her heart, refreshing her conscience, reviving her spirit, and drawing up her affections towards heavenly things. He would have given her "living waters," that her soul might live for ever, and not die; yes, live when time should be no more. He would have given it to her freely, graciously, and abundantly. He wanted no good resolutions for the future; he wanted it not to be purchased by alms-deeds, sighs, prayers, or tears. But he would give it, "without money and without price," out of his covenant fulness, out of his ever-flowing and overflowing love. He would have bestowed this "living water" upon her as an act of free and sovereign grace, whereby she would have been sealed as an heir of glory.

How blessed a thing is vital godliness! That is the thing I always wish to contend for. Not for forms and ceremonies, or doctrines floating in the brain, but for the life of God in the soul; the only thing worth knowing; the only thing to live by, and I am sure the



only thing to die by. How different is vital godliness received into the heart and conscience, by the operation of God the Spirit, out of the fulness of Christ—how different is this fountain of living water from the stagnant dead water of lip service, formality, and hypocrisy! And sure I am, if our souls have ever been baptized into a spiritual knowledge of this heavenly secret; if ever we have tasted the sweetness, felt the power, and experienced a measure of the enjoyment of vital godliness in the heart and conscience, we shall want no other but living water. If we hear a preacher, we shall say, "Does he bring forth living water? or is he merely a man of strife and contention, sound in the letter, a very hair-splitter in the doctrines, but drawing out of an enlightened judgment, or an old and stagnant experience, a muddy draught that we have had to drink a thousand times over; or is there living water in his heart, and do its streams flow out of his lips, to water and satisfy our thirsty souls?" If we read books on religion, our eyes will be looking through their pages to see if we can find any living water bubbling and gurgling through them. If we converse with those who profess to love Jesus, and bear his name, our eyes will be looking, our ears will be listening, and our hearts searching if we can discover any streams of living water rising up in their soul. Nay, in all that we do for the Lord, or for those that fear his name, in every prayer, in every ordinance, we shall be, more or less, looking out for living water. Are we, who profess to be in the wilderness, like the thirsty traveller in the deserts of Arabia, panting after the wells and the palm trees? Do we know what it is, after long seasons of drought, when the living water has sunk well nigh out of sight, to find its streams again springing up in the conscience? How living souls thirst after these revivings! We cannot now be satisfied with lip religion, pharisaical religion, doctrinal religion, a name to live while dead, the form of godliness without the power. A living soul can no more satisfy his thirst with mere forms and ceremonies, than a man naturally thirsty can drink out of a horse pond. He must have living water, something given by the Lord himself springing up in his soul.

But, does not the Lord say, that he will give it to those that ask it? "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to

thee, Give me drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." Shall we not ask, then, and seek for it? And will he deny us? Has he denied us in time past? Will he deny us in time to come? Has he not the same loving and compassionate heart now, as beat in his bosom towards this poor sinner at the well of Samaria? He still emboldens us to ask. He is now seated upon the throne of grace and mercy as the Mediator between God and man. And if, through mercy, we know something of the gift of God; and if through divine teaching, we know something of the glorious Person of Jesus, and have enjoyed a measure of its sweetness in our heart, sure I am, we shall ask, and our souls will receive the testimony of God in our conscience, that he will not deny, us, but give unto us "living water!"

## WONDERS SHOWN TO THE DEAD

Preached on Thursday Evening, June 24, 1841, at Zoar Chapel,  
Great Alie Street, Whitechapel

"Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee? Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave, or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark, and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?"  
Psalm 88:10-12

This Psalm, as appears from the title, was written by "Heman the Ezrahite." We have little information in the word of God who this Heman was. But there are two persons of that name whom we find mentioned in the Scriptures. We have one in the first book of Chronicles **1Ch 2:6**, a grandson of Judah. "And the sons of Zerah; Zimri, and Ethan, and **Heman**, and Calcol, and Dara; five of them in all." And in the same book **1Ch 15:17** we have another Heman, who lived in the time of David; "So the Levites appointed Heman, the son of Joel." There seems little doubt that the Heman here spoken of, is the Heman that lived in the time of David; a fellow-singer with Asaph and Ethan, both of whom are authors of Psalms; and though we have little else mentioned concerning him, except that he was noted for his wisdom **1Ki 4:31**, and was one of the singers who sang in the temple **1Ch 15:19**, God the Holy Ghost has seen fit to leave upon record the lamentation which he poured out under the Lord's afflicting dealings with his soul.

It is remarkable, that in the other Psalms, and I believe in most of the other parts of Scripture where saints are pouring out their lamentations before God, there are blessed gleams and rays of hope, that shoot athwart the darkness under which their souls were labouring. You will scarcely find one of David's Psalms, in whatever mournful key it may be pitched, where there are not some notes of hope—some strains even of faith and confidence. For instance, when he has been crying—"Why art thou cast down,

O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me?"—he goes on to say—"Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God" **Ps 42:11**. So, in that bitterest of complaints contained in the third chapter of Lamentations, we find Jeremiah, who was there pouring out his afflicted soul into the bosom of God, still saying **La 3:57**, "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee; thou saidst, Fear not." But if we look at this Psalm of Heman, there appears only one little gleam like a ray of the sun that for a moment bursts through the clouds; and that little gleam is contained in the first verse: "O Lord God of **my** salvation!" That little word "**my**" opens for a moment a space between the clouds, through which the Sun of righteousness casts one solitary beam. Generally speaking, you will find, that when the Psalm begins with lamentation, it ends with praise; like the sun, which rising in clouds and mists, sets brightly, and darts forth its parting rays just before it goes down. But here the first gleam shoots across the sky just as the sun rises, and no sooner has the ray appeared, than thick clouds and darkness gather over it; the sun continues its course throughout the whole day enveloped in clouds; and sets at last in a thicker bank of them than it ever had around it during the day. "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness." In what a dark cloud does the sun of Heman set!

We gather, then, from the Scriptures, that the saints of God, however deeply they may have to wade in soul trouble (**and few of God's people ever went deeper into trouble than the author of this Psalm**), yet that they are scarcely ever without something which keeps them up; they are very rarely without the secret support of "the everlasting arms;" and it will be difficult to bring forward any continued lamentation of the saints in Scripture, which is utterly destitute of some actings of faith upon God, and some small gleams of hope, whereby their soul was supported. And we gather from the Scriptures also, that notwithstanding these gleams of hope, and these actings of faith in the soul, it may go down into the greatest depths of spiritual distress—into those depths of which Heman speaks, when he

says, "Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves" **Ps 88:7**.

There are few of us, I believe, who can fully enter into this Psalm; the sea is too deep for our stunted stature. We may, perhaps, find some shallows in it, wherein we may wade; but I believe few of us have ever gone into those depths of soul affliction, of which Heman speaks here so feelingly, and under which he groans with such deep lamentation. In the verses that I have read to you the water appears to be somewhat more shallow than the generality of the Psalm; and I dare say some of us here present, who know something of what it is to have darkness of soul and trials and exercises of mind, and have some acquaintance with that charnel-house of corruption that we carry about with us, if we cannot go all lengths with this deeply taught saint, yet may be able, perhaps, to travel with him a little way along the road.

"Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee? Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?"

In these verses we find mention made of four things on the part of God: "wonders," "loving-kindness," "faithfulness," and "righteousness." These were four attributes of the blessed Jehovah, which the eyes of Heman had been opened to see, and which the heart of Heman had been wrought upon to feel. But he comes, by divine teaching, into a spot where these attributes seem to be completely lost to him; and yet, **(so mysterious are the ways of God!)** the spot in which he was was the very place where those attributes were to be more powerfully displayed, and made more deeply and experimentally known to his soul. The Lord led the blind by a way that he knew not into these spots of experience, that in them he might more fully open up to him those attributes of which he had already gained a glimpse; but in leading him into these paths, the Lord brought him in such a mysterious way, that all his former knowledge of them was baffled. He therefore puts up this inquiry to the Lord, how it was

possible that in those spots where he now was, these attributes could be displayed or made known?

Now, it will be my business, with God's blessing, to trace out some of those spots in which the Psalmist was, when he breathed forth this anxious inquiry; and to show how the very attributes, concerning which he was exercised, are suitable, and suitable only to those particular spots in which he was at the very time that he poured forth this piteous complaint.

1. He begins—"Wilt thou show wonders to the dead?" He is speaking here of his own experience; **he** is that "dead" person, to whom those "wonders" are to be shown. And being in that state of experience, he considered that every act of mercy shown to him where he then was, must be a "wonder."

All God's people are brought by the Spirit's operations upon their souls, sooner or later, to be in that spot where Heman was. Paul was there, when he said—"I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I **died**." Then, surely, he was "dead;" that is, he had been killed, slaughtered in his feelings by the spirituality of God's law made known in his conscience—killed, as to all hopes of creature-righteousness—killed, as to all expectation of fleshly holiness—and killed, as to any way of salvation which the creature could devise.

But the word "dead" carries with it a still further meaning than this. It expresses a feeling of utter helplessness; not merely a feeling of guilt and condemnation, so as to be slain to all hopes of salvation in self, but also to feel perfectly helpless to lift up his little finger to deliver himself from the lowest hell. If a man is never brought there, he will never want a miracle to be wrought; and God's people now need miracles to be wrought in their souls, just as much as the lame and the blind and the deaf and the dumb wanted miracles to be wrought in their bodies whilst Christ tabernacled upon earth. Whenever, then, the Lord shows any token of mercy to one who lies dead in his feelings before him, it is a wonder, a miracle, which is displayed in his soul; and he

looks upon it as a most astonishing wonder, that ever the Lord should speak to him one word of mercy, that he ever should; give to him one "token for good," that he ever should pass by him as he lies "in his blood," an outcast and an alien, and bid him live; that he ever should "spread the skirt of his garment over him, enter into covenant with him, and call him his" **Eze 16:6-8**.

But if we look at the expression as it simply stands, it seems to be uttered by one who is passing under the sentence of death before the wonder is displayed. It does not run in the past tense, "**Hast thou shown** wonders to the dead?" It is not couched in the present tense, "**Art thou showing** wonders to the dead?" The language is not the language of praise for the past; nor of admiration for the present; but that of anxious inquiry for the future: "**Wilt thou show** wonders to the dead?" Is it possible? Am I not too great a sinner? Is not my case too desperate? Have I not transgressed too deeply? Have I not incurred thy righteous wrath too unpardonably? Am I not a sinner to so aggravated an extent and of so black a dye, that mercy never can reach my soul? "Wilt thou show wonders to **the dead**?" Oh it would be a "wonder," if ever thou couldst cast one glimpse of mercy on such a dead wretch.

But there is another meaning which the words will bear, which is of a soul, after it has received some testimony of mercy from the Lord, and been indulged with some tokens of his love and favour, through the wiles of a deceitful heart, the idolatrous alienation of depraved affections, and the secret baits and traps of Satan, falling into a state of carnality, barrenness, deadness, and helplessness towards God. When a man has got there, it seems to him that it would be as great a wonder that ever he should have a revival of spirit, and that as great a miracle must be wrought in him a second time to bring his soul into any life and liberty and feeling and contrition before God, as ever it was a miracle, and an act of wondrous mercy, in the first instance, to quicken him into spiritual life. God will teach his dear people that the day of miracles is not past. The day of miracles is no more past, than the day of the Holy Ghost's effectual work is gone by;

and those that deny spiritual miracles in the soul, may just as well deny that the Holy Ghost exercises his sovereign operation in the church of God below. God will teach his people, that he is still working miracles; aye, he will bring them to that close spot in soul feeling, that nothing but a miraculous salvation can deliver them from going down into the chambers of death. And he will effectually convince them that he must stretch forth his hand in their soul as manifestly in a spiritual sense, as when he was upon earth, he stretched forth his hand, and delivered the lepers, the lame, and the blind from their bodily diseases.

And that the Psalmist does mean this, seems evident from the next clause of the same verse, "Shall the dead arise and praise thee?" This is not the language of a soul dead in trespasses and sins, but it is the breathing of a living soul struggling and grappling with death. What a difference there is, where there is life working in and under death, and where death reigns absolutely! between the quickened soul and that in which there is nothing but death, death without one spark of spiritual life, death without one ray of heavenly teaching. There is no groan, no sigh, no lamentation, no piteous inquiry, no pouring out of the heart before God, where the soul is utterly dead, any more than there is life and breath in a corpse in the tomb. But wherever life is implanted in the soul from the Fountain of life, that life groaning under death. It sighs from out of the grave; it gasps for breath, under the corpse which overlies it; and seeks to heave itself up from that dead weight, from that superincumbent mass of carnality which clasps it in its rigid and chilling embrace; it endeavours to uplift and extricate itself from that body of sin and death which spreads its cold and torpid mass all round it so that it is unable to arise. Do you know the workings of life in this way? the heavings, the gaspings, the uprisings of the life of God in your soul, pressed, overlain, overwhelmed, and all but suffocated by that carnal, dead, barren, earthly, devilish nature, which lies as a weight upon you? Depend upon it, friends, if you have never known what it is to gasp, and pant, and groan, and sigh under the weight of a body of sin and death, you know nothing of the vital operations of the Holy Ghost in your conscience.



What then, "shall the **dead** arise and praise thee?" What! the dark, stupid, cold, barren, helpless soul, that cannot lift up one little finger, that cannot utter one spiritual word, that cannot put forth one gracious desire, that cannot lift up itself a hair's breadth out of the mass that presses it down—"shall it **arise**?" and more than that, "**praise thee**?" What! can lamentation ever be turned into praise? Can complaint ever be changed into thanksgiving? Can the mourner ever shout and sing? Oh! it is a wonder of wonders, if "the dead" are to "arise;" if "the dead" are to "praise thee;" if "the dead are to stand upon their feet, and shout victory through thy blood!"

What a different thing the religion of the Bible is from that superficial, flimsy, cobweb religion, which is spread in every direction in the professing world, like the threads of the gossamer on the autumn fields! The warp and weft of the Holy Spirit's teachings, what a strong, weighty, substantial, closely-woven web it is, compared with these gossamer threads that glisten in the dew, and which the step of a child can break by thousands! Why, people think that they have only just to read about Christ, and then they can believe in Christ, and rejoice in Christ, and stand fast in Christ, and take of the things of Christ just as easily as a man comes to his breakfast table, and takes the loaf and cuts himself as much as he wants. But look at the religion of the Bible; look at the experience of the saints there recorded, mark the helplessness that is stamped upon their feelings; see the mighty work that they travel through in their souls; hear the groanings of their exercised hearts; listen to the sighs they pour forth out of their complaining lips. Is their religion of a flimsy texture? Is their hope a spider's web? **Job 8:14** And is it not the divine pattern to which our religion, if it will stand the trying day, must be conformed? Oh! the Spirit of the Lord speaking in the Scriptures, blows away the flimsy gossamer web of the present day, like the chaff out of the summer threshing-floors. And let a man talk as long as he will about Jesus Christ, and his salvation, his blood and righteousness, he knows nothing, absolutely nothing about them, until he is brought into some of those straits

and trials into which God brought Heman: and when he is brought there, he will begin to know how suitable they are to him, and how suitable he is to them. He will begin to feel what a miracle, what a mighty miracle of mercy and grace must be wrought in his soul, to make him an experimental partaker of "the truth as it is in Jesus." But our Calvinistic preachers have laid down such a railroad, have so filled the carriages, and start with such locomotive speed at the head of the train, that the real "mourners in Zion" cannot travel with them. But there is no making a new road to heaven; there is no levelling and relaying that road which the Holy Ghost has cast up. It is over hills and down valleys and among rough stones, a way of tribulation, a road that galls the weary traveller's feet.

2. But we pass on to another attribute of God, which is manifested in another spot of the saints' experience: "Shall thy loving-kindness be declared **in the grave?**" We have come a step lower now. We had been communing with "the dead"—we had been sitting by the corpse; but now we must go a step lower. We must go to the sepulchre; we must follow it to the tomb; we must accompany the corpse to the grave. For he says, "Shall thy loving-kindness be declared **in the grave,**"

Now, what does this signify spiritually? What is "the grave" but the place where corruption riots, where putrefaction and rottenness reigns? But the grave of which Heman was speaking, was no literal grave. God does not show loving-kindness there. Not but that he regards the ashes of his saints; not but that a day will come, when their bodies will be raised and re-united to their souls, that as they have borne the image of the earthly, they may also bear the image of the heavenly. But "the grave" of which Heman speaks here, is the internal grave—the inward sepulchre of known and felt corruption.

Heman, then, could talk about corruption. He was one of the "corruption preachers" it seems. He was not for setting aside a knowledge of internal pollution, he was not for standing upon the lofty mountains of presumption, having cast aside his corruptions,

as the snake casts its slough, in the valley below, and elevated above all sense and feeling of his carnal nature. If he were not in "the grave," why need he ask the Lord to manifest his loving-kindness there? But he is shut up in that gloomy abode, a living inhabitant of "the grave" of internal corruption and felt pollution. Those former virtues of his, which once were sweet and fragrant, had now become a stench; those hands, which once could take hold of natural religion, were now not merely dead and unable to move, but fast sinking into putrefaction and corruption; that mouth which once could pour forth its natural prayers, and that heart which once could devise natural imaginations, were not merely stopped in death, but also turned into the loathsomeness of the grave.

Here, then, is a striking figure of what a living soul feels, under the manifestations of the deep corruptions of his heart. All his good words, once so esteemed,—and all his good works, once so prized,—and all his prayers, and all his faith and hope and love, and all the imaginations of his heart, not merely paralysed and dead, not merely reduced to a state of utter helplessness, but also in soul feeling turned into rottenness and corruption. Now, were **you** ever there? Did your prayers ever stink in your nostrils? Was your righteousness ever a stench? And are all your good words, and all your good works, and all your good thoughts, once so esteemed, now nothing in your sight but filthy, polluted, and unclean? It is one thing to be there in doctrine; it is another thing to be there in soul feeling. When we are there in soul feeling, we are brought where Heman was, when he said, "Shall thy loving-kindness be **declared** in the grave?" What! wilt thou manifest thy love to a stinking corpse? what! is thy love to be shed abroad in a heart full of pollution and putrefaction? Is thy loving-kindness to come forth from thy glorious sanctuary, where thou sittest enthroned in majesty, and holiness, and purity,—is it to leave that eternal abode of ineffable light and glory, and enter into the dark, polluted, and loathsome "grave?" What! is thy loving-kindness to come out of the sanctuary into the charnel-house? "Shall it be 'declared' **there**—revealed there—spoken there—manifested there—made known there?" For nothing else

but the **declaration** of it there will do. He does not say, "Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the Scriptures?" "Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in Christ?" "Shall thy loving-kindness be declared by the mouth of ministers?" "Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in holy and pure hearts?"—but he says, "Shall thy loving-kindness be **declared**," uttered, spoken, revealed, manifested, "in the **grave**?" where everything is contrary to it, where everything is unworthy of it,—the last of all places fit for the loving-kindness of an all-pure God to come.

Now, till a man gets there, he does not know what loving-kindness is. He cannot. How do we measure the strength of a person's affection? Our wife, our relations, our friends, tell us they love us; but how do we know their love? Why, when a trial comes, then we measure the strength of their affection. When a wife can go with her husband into prison, accompany him even to death, stand by him when covered with ignominy and shame, and follow him all over the world, then we say, "There is conjugal affection—there is deep and unshaken love." And so with the loving-kindness of God; the place to have it manifested in is "the grave." That proves the strength of the affection; that shows the depth and the wondrous nature of the love. Never say that you know what it is to enjoy experimentally the loving-kindness of God in your soul's, if you have never been in that spot where the loving-kindness of God is here said to be "declared;" if the stench of the charnel-house has never infected your nostrils, and if you have never gone down in soul feeling into these chambers, never think you know the length and breadth and depth and height of the loving-kindness of God.

But here reason is lost; nature staggers; and all the wisdom of man gives up the ghost. God loves to pour contempt upon human pride, and to bring to nought all the wisdom of the creature; and therefore he brings his people into such spots as show forth the greatness of his loving-kindness. And thus, while he saves them with an everlasting salvation, he makes that salvation precious, by revealing it in such spots and places, that nothing else can suit their case, or deliver their souls. But see the paradox. What! the

companion of worms, he that feels himself to be a sepulchre, he that knows himself to be infected with all the pollution of the tomb for **him** to desire the loving-kindness of a Triune God—that **he** should want the holy Three-in-one to come, not merely to the outside of the grave, but to the inside of the grave—not merely to come to the marble doors of Lazarus' tomb, but to pass spiritually through the doors into the very place where Lazarus lies, to shed abroad the fragrance and odour of eternal love amidst the putrefaction of the sepulchre, what a mystery is here! But nothing else can satisfy a living soul. He wants testimonies, enjoyments, sweet revelations, and blessed discoveries. Yet, look at the wonder. Not merely a creature, but a ruined creature—not merely a poor dead sinner in his feelings, but a putrefying sinner in his feelings,—for him to want love kisses from the lips of spotless purity, that the loving-kindness and the majesty and the glory of the Godhead should be declared and manifested in **him**! Were it not the deepest humility, it would be the highest presumption. Did not the Spirit kindle the prayer, it would seem like the ravings of a maniac.

3. But we pass on to another attribute of God, spoken of in our text: "Or thy **faithfulness** in destruction?" Heman was exercised in his soul concerning other attributes of the Lord besides his showing **wonders**, and declaring **loving-kindness**. What, then, is this "**faithfulness**" of which Heman speaks? It is, I believe, in two different branches; faithfulness to the promises that God has made in his word of truth—and faithfulness to his own witness and his own work upon the souls of his children. Thus, in his inspired word, where he has externally revealed himself, God has given many absolute promises to his people in Christ. But there are other promises which are addressed to them only as placed in certain situations,—as taught certain lessons, and as standing in a certain experience. For instance, he has promised blessings to the "poor and needy," and to those that "hunger and thirst after righteousness;" that "he will regard the prayer of the destitute;" and will "look down from the height of his sanctuary to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those that are appointed to death." He has filled his word with promises to those that sigh

and cry, to the mourning penitent, the heart-broken, the sin-sick, the asking, seeking, and knocking inquirer; and he is bound by his own eternal attributes to be faithful to his own word. Heman, therefore, says to him, "Wilt thou show thy faithfulness in destruction?" There is the point. "Destruction" seems to contradict faithfulness, and yet it is destruction which more fully manifests it. God has so wonderfully ordained and tempered matters, that the very things which seem most to contradict his divine attributes, are the very things that he makes use of to manifest them. Heman would seem to expostulate with God thus: "Hast thou not destroyed my hopes? hast thou not blasted my fond expectations? hast thou not cut away every prop on which I could lean for support? hast thou not ruined everything to which I could look for comfort? Is this 'thy faithfulness' to thy promises? Is it thus that thou dost adhere to thine own revealed word?" Instead of answering my prayer, thou only keepest thyself more distant; instead of relieving my wants, thou only seemest to repel me farther from thee; instead of appearing when I call, thou only hidest thyself behind a thicker cloud; instead of leading me up to the spot where I wish to be, thou only seemest to thrust me farther from thy kingdom.

Have we ever been there? Have we ever found that the more we try to get near the Lord, the more he seems to thrust us away; that the more we endeavour to get hold of salvation, the farther off we are driven from it; that the more we want to realise our interest in Christ, the sweetness of the promises, and the teachings of the Holy Ghost, the more destitute we feel of them? We are tempted then to say at such times, "Showest thou thy 'faithfulness in destruction'—is this the way that thou manifestest thy faithfulness?" "Why, thy faithfulness would bind, but thou woundest; thy faithfulness would bring near, but thou drivest farther off; thy faithfulness would revive the soul with some drops of heavenly sweetness, but thou puttest a cup of gall and wormwood into our hands." The way in which reason would say that God's faithfulness would be shown is just contrary to these dealings. Nature and reason argue, "I am 'poor and needy,' I am crying unto the Lord, I am seeking his face, I am the very

character that he has promised to bless; but so far from fulfilling his word, so far from confirming and acting up to his promise, he only seems to push me farther from him." Well, then, here is the trial of faith, that God's faithfulness is shown in this destruction, because it is in it that his faithfulness is manifested, in never suffering the soul to be tried and tempted more than it can bear, but making a way to escape that it may be able to bear it.

But again, the Lord's faithfulness consists in strict adherence to such testimonies as he has not merely written in his word, but as he has engraved upon his people's hearts. The Lord said to Jacob, that "he would be with him to keep him in all the places whither he went"—that was the solemn promise he made to him at Bethel. Did he keep him? Did not Laban change his wages ten times? Was he not cheated in that affair which was nearest his heart? He might say, "Lord, didst thou not promise to keep me in all places? Art thou then faithful? Showest thou thy faithfulness in this destruction?" But when at last he came to his death-bed, he doubtless saw that the Lord had been manifesting his faithfulness in this apparent destruction; that those very sufferings and ill treatment were the means, in God's hands, of driving him out of the place of exile, and bringing him to his own land. Thus, the very persecutions that he experienced from Laban's hands, in which God did not seem to fulfil one branch of his original promise, that he would "keep him in all places wheresoever he went," were made the means of the second branch of promise being fulfilled, that he would "bring him again to his own land." The Lord, perhaps, may have dropped a promise into your soul, that he would be your God, and that he would bless you, and keep you, and teach you, and uphold you, that he would not let you be tempted more than you can bear: and sometimes when the Lord does not seem to fulfil his promise, you are ready to pour forth the passionate and unjustifiable language of Jeremiah: "Wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?" But it is in this destruction that the Lord manifests his faithfulness. Because what is the Lord's object? It is not for our natural comfort that he is concerned, but for our spiritual profit. The Lord has destroyed your idols; but by destroying your idols,

has he not set up himself in your hearts as the only object of worship? He has destroyed, perhaps, some of your property, made you poor in this world's goods, but he has destroyed it, that he might make you lean more strongly upon the arm of Providence. He has put you into those circumstances whereby you have lost your former highly prized character amongst men **(I mean not your character in the eyes of God's children)**, but you have lost the esteem and good opinion of the world and of the professing church, and you are now branded with that black badge of "Antinomian." But in making you an outcast, he has separated you from the enemies of truth, has brought you nearer to his dear family, and closer, perhaps, to his own bosom, as well as stamped his own image more visibly upon you. The Lord has destroyed your false religion, your natural hopes, your fleshly prayers, your imaginary piety, your mock holiness, and those things in you which were not of himself, but which were of the earth earthy, and were drawing you aside from him; and has made you a poor, naked, empty, stripped wretch before his eyes. But it is in these very acts of destruction, that he has shown his faithfulness—his faithfulness to his covenant, his faithfulness to his written word, his faithfulness to those promises which he has dropped with power into your heart. And the time will come, when you will see faithfulness stamped upon every dealing of God with you in providence and in grace; and I will tell you where you will see his faithfulness to have been manifested most,—in destruction. You will see God's faithfulness to his covenant most clearly evidenced in destroying your false religion, in order to set up his own kingdom in your soul; in destroying everything which alienated and drew away your affections from him, that he alone might be enshrined in your hearts; and you will say, when the Lord leads you to look at the path he has led you, in after years, "Of all God's mercies his greatest have been those that seemed at the time to be the greatest miseries; the richest blessings which he has given me, are those which came wrapped up in the outside covering of curses; and his faithfulness has been as much or more manifested in destruction, than in restoration."



4. "Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?" Here is another attribute of God about which Heman was exercised. His "righteousness." God's righteousness, I believe, here and elsewhere does not mean only Christ's righteousness, hut also the righteous acts of God in dealing with the soul in a way consistent with his own equitable character. Righteousness does not only mean the glorious righteousness of imputation, but often also the righteousness of God's righteous dealings. It is indeed true that Christ's righteousness is shown in the land of forgetfulness, but there is another kind of righteousness there equally manifested, such a righteousness as we read of in the song of Deborah and Barak: "There shall they rehearse the righteous acts (or "righteousnesses)," **margin** of the Lord, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel." And I must say that the righteousness of God in this sense, though the Scriptures are full of it, is much overlooked by many preachers and writers.

This land of forgetfulness seems to imply two things—our forgetfulness of God, and God's apparent forgetfulness of us. We often get into this sleepy land of forgetfulness toward God; we forget his universal presence, forget his heart-searching eye, forget his former benefits, forget his ancient mercies, forget his past testimonies, forget the reverence which belongs to his holy name, forget everything concerning him; which above all things we have desired most earnestly to remember. It is then, in this land of forgetfulness, in this dull and heavy country, when, like the disciples in the garden, we sleep instead of watching, that God is still pleased to show forth his righteousness. God's righteousness runs parallel with Christ's atonement, for therein is his intrinsic righteousness manifested, that is, his strict compliance with equity and justice, because equity and justice have been strictly fulfilled by the propitiation of the Son of God. Therefore, the soul says, "Wilt thou show thy righteousness in this land of forgetfulness—where I have forgotten thee, where I turned aside from thee, where I have let slip out of my memory all thy previous dealings with me—and shall thy righteousness be

manifested even there? that is, thine equity in showing forth mercy, because for me a sacrifice has been offered, thy righteousness running parallel with the atoning stream of Christ's blood, that this righteousness shall not be forfeited by my forgetfulness. What! canst thou, when I have forgotten thee, and forsaken thee, and turned my back upon thee, can thy righteousness be there manifested? What! Righteousness running side by side with mercy? and righteousness still preserving all its unbending strictness, because this very backsliding of heart, this very forgetfulness of soul, this very alienation of affection, this very turning my back upon thee, have all been atoned for, blood has been shed for them, the price of them has been paid; and righteousness can be still shown in the land of forgetfulness, because all my sins committed in the land of forgetfulness have been atoned for by redeeming blood." But the land of forgetfulness often means forgetfulness **on God's part**—God seems to forget his people. "Zion has said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me" **Isa 49:14**. "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" Does it not seem, at times, as though the Lord had utterly forgotten us, would take no more notice of us, slights us, rejects us, and would not cast one look, or bestow one word upon us? Oh, how often have you and I had to go to a throne of grace, and try to get the Lord's ear, try to cling around the Lord's feet, and ask him for some manifestation of mercy, for one word of comfort to our souls, for one token, for one smile; and come away just as empty as we went; no sweet appearances, no heavenly manifestations, no divine whispers, no blessed token, no soft intimations of his mercy and loving-kindness to us. He seems, at such seasons, with reverence be it spoken, to be in the land of forgetfulness, for he takes no notice of us. Can he, then, show his righteousness there? What! can righteousness be on my side, when he seems to have forgotten me? Can it be consistent with his righteousness to reveal himself? For a child of God knows that he cannot be acquitted except justice is satisfied; nor does he want the integrity and uprightness and holiness of God to be lowered; he dares not wish for any blot or tarnish to come over God's essential justice; and therefore he says, "Can it be

consistent with thy righteousness and thy justice to give me a smile, and favour me with a token for good? In other words, is my name in the book of life? Has blood been shed for my sins? Have my iniquities been freely pardoned? and so righteousness is on my side as well as mercy." As Hart says,

**"Justice is now for me."**

If righteousness and justice are not on your side, as well as mercy, you will be lost for ever. Unless justice has been fully satisfied for your sins, they will be counted in full tale upon your guilty head. God will never pervert justice for the sake of mercy, nor suffer it to be distorted. Nay, a child of God would wish these two attributes of the great Jehovah to remain in his bosom in all their original purity in all their eternal uprightness, and not to be sullied or distorted one by the other! Has the Lord ever brought your souls to this solemn spot? and have we ever known what it is, I do not say in all its depth, but in a measure, to be led into this spot of experience, which the Holy Ghost has here traced out?

My friends, why has God left on record this experience of Heman? Is it to swell the Bible into a larger size; or to give us some more Sunday reading or set before us a little variety that there may be something interesting or entertaining in the Scriptures? Oh, no. But the things written aforetime are for our instruction that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope **Ro 15:4**. There is no use, then, talking of our knowledge, and of our religion, and our church membership; how highly persons think of us, how diligently we read the Scriptures and have our family prayer with such regularity, if we are destitute of heart-work. I am well convinced that we can only get at the secrets of vital godliness by travelling in the paths of God's marking. They are not to be picked up, and plucked out of the word of God, as a man walking in a garden will pluck a rose here, and gather a tulip there. We cannot walk in the garden of Scripture, and pluck a pretty text, and stick it in our button-hole, put it to our nose, and inhale the fragrance of it. But we must walk in those paths which

God has laid out in his word; and that is, to be brought by the hand of God into certain exercises, certain trials, certain spots, and when brought there, to cry out of the depths of a broken heart, for the manifestation of those blessings which we see in the Scripture? and feel our deep need of, but the power, unction, sweetness, and divine application of which "we want to feel in our heart." Look at your religion, then; look well that it is from God. If it is his work it will stand the test. You need not fear what such a worm of the dust as I can say; you need not tremble for your religion, for if it is worth anything, if it is good, it will bear to be put in the scales. You need not fear to put down a good sovereign. It will bear to be well chinked upon the counter. The clerk at the Bank of England will not take out the brand and stamp "forged" on a good note. You need not fear a few searching questions, if your religion is of the right sort. Well, how did you get it? Did you come at it as Heman did? Have you any of his deep exercises in your souls before God? If so, you know a little of the power of vital godliness; your eyes are opened to see a little of what true religion is; and as the Lord leads you into real soul-exercises, you begin to feel and to say, "What a flimsy, empty, superficial, delusive thing the dry Calvinism of the present day is;" and you are calling out from the bottom of your souls to the God of all grace to give you power, and to grant you sweet manifestations, and to bring Jesus into your hearts in all his love and glory; to afford you a sure testimony of your interest in him, and to lead you into the length and breadth and height and depth of his love that passeth knowledge. Thus you get inwardly and outwardly separated from all dead, dry profession; and are led by the Holy Ghost into the very marrow and fatness of the gospel; and there you feel how different it is to live under the anointings of the blessed Spirit, get your religion from the mere mouth of man, or learning it merely out of the letter of God's word, without the sealing application of truth upon the heart. May the Lord, if it be his will, bless this testimony to your soul's good, and his own eternal glory.

## THE WORD OF GOD'S GRACE

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road, London, on Tuesday Evening, September 4, 1846

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

I do not know a more affecting portion of God's word than that which is contained in **Ac 20:17-38**. There are two verses especially which one of tender feelings can scarcely read without the tears stealing to his eyes: "And they all wept sore, and fell upon Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more." What tender affection is displayed on both sides! what sincerity shines through the whole address of Paul! what noble simplicity! what zeal for God's glory! what real desires for the spiritual welfare of those with whom he was parting! Surely if crimson shame could ever cover her cheek, Infidelity must be put to the blush, if she could but read this striking portion of God's word, and then deny there is stamped upon it every mark of genuineness, and an indescribable truthfulness and reality, which so conspicuously shine through every line.

But there is something far deeper in Paul's address to the elders of the church at Ephesus than natural pathos, or even the noble disinterestedness which forms in it so prominent a feature, that we should think even a natural man with tender feelings could scarcely read his parting words without some emotion in his heart. Apart from all this, though in itself unspeakably beautiful, when we read it in the light of the Spirit, we see contained in it a fund of spiritual and experimental truth, and especially in the verses which form my text.

In this way, then, with God's blessing, I shall consider the words before us this evening; not making any formal divisions, but

taking them up as they lie before me, and looking up to the Lord that he would be to me mouth and wisdom, and enable me so to speak from them, that God may have the glory, and his people the profit and comfort.

I.—For the space of three years had the apostle Paul laboured at Ephesus: and during that time he had warned the disciples night and day with tears. He thus clearly manifested that their spiritual interests lay very close to his heart: that he was bound to them by the strongest ties of union and affection. Carrying, then, in his own breast, a deep sense of his weakness and depravity: but at the same time experimentally knowing the rich supplies of God's grace, and how the strength of Christ is made perfect in weakness—while he sorrowed, in seeing beforehand the snares, trials, afflictions, and temptations that lay in their path, yet was he encouraged by knowing the rich provisions of covenant mercy and love.

Arriving therefore at Miletus on his way to Jerusalem, he sends to Ephesus **about thirty miles distant**, and calls the elders of the church, wishing to lay before them the things of God. These elders were the pastors, or ministers, whom "the Holy Ghost had made overseers" **literally, "bishops"** over the flock, "to feed the church of God which he had purchased with his own blood." But Paul looked forward with prophetic eye into the future, and saw that "after his departing grievous wolves would enter in among them, not sparing the flock." He saw the cloud of persecution which was about to burst upon them; he heard the distant howlings of "grievous wolves," which should soon "enter in among them," those wolves that for a time had been kept back by a divine hand, but were ready to spring upon the flock, and, if God did not interpose, tear them to pieces.

But there was something that lay still closer to his heart. Not merely did he see the **external** dangers awaiting them; his prophetic eye not only descried the dim form of ravening wolves on the distant mountains, but it looked into the very centre, the very body of the church itself. And what a sight there met his

eye! He saw that even out of this little body—out of this feeble flock, **most cutting stroke of all!** out "of **their own selves** men would arise speaking perverse things:" and **their object being to set themselves at the head of part** would "draw away disciples after them."

Looking thus at the church of Ephesus, and seeing external and internal dangers drawing near, he knew and felt that nothing but the power of God could keep them. Feeling, then their interest so warm upon his heart, he says. "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood." But this feeling, doubtless, was in his mind. 'Of what use are my exhortations? Can you keep them? Are you **able** to watch? Can you preserve yourselves? Can **you** protect the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers? No.' Deeply acquainted with the helplessness of the creature, he turned away as it were from them, and as if despairing of all human strength or wisdom, he took them up in his arms, and laid them down at the feet of God himself. When he had warned them to the utmost of his power: after the tears had flowed in copious streams down his cheeks; after he had exhausted every topic of exhortation: then, feeling the nullity of all without God's special blessing, he tenderly adds, "Now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

The apostle was well acquainted with the **sinfulness** of the creature. He knew by painful and personal experience the fountain of evil that dwells in a sinner's bosom, and how that evil fountain perpetually sends forth its corrupt streams. He knew, therefore, that this inward stream of evil, but for the grace of God, would break forth and sweep away every dam that could be formed against it in their own strength. And is not this our feeling too, if we have any knowledge of the fountain of wickedness that

we carry within? Has it not broken through all resolutions, all tears, all sighs, all vows, all promises? Has not sin been so strong in our carnal mind as effectually to break through every wall that nature could build, and flow over every dam that human arm could set up? Knowing, then, their **sinfulness** as depraved creatures, he lays them down at the footstool of sovereign grace.

He also knew their complete **helplessness**: not only that they were sinful, deeply sinful: wicked, desperately wicked: but helpless, thoroughly helpless. He knew that he might warn them night and day with tears: that he might spend his breath and life in exhorting them to live to God's glory, and to watch against every inward and outward enemy. But he was well convinced, from personal experience, of the **helplessness** of the creature; and therefore, as the tender mother takes her helpless babe, and puts it into the cradle out of which it cannot fall, so he takes them up in his arms, and lays them in the cradle of mercy, in the ark of the covenant—as safe as the ark of Noah, when "the Lord had shut him in."

He knew also, that they were, for the most part **little acquainted with the deceit of the enemy**; that they had too little experience of the snares that Satan was laying for their feet; too little knowledge of the power and prevalence of besetting sins. Knowing, therefore, by his own experience the perils of the spiritual campaign; not being "ignorant of Satan's devices," he commends them in an especial manner to the eyes and heart of the great Captain of their salvation, putting them as it were into his tent and under his banner.

But, leaving this figurative language, we may enquire, **how** he commends them to God?

1. First, **as to a kind Parent**. Where should the child be taken but to the father's arms? Is not the father its natural guardian, bound to it by the closest, strongest ties? The father's eye, the father's heart, the father's arm, all concur in its protection. The earthly tie of parent and child, with all its tender affectionate



love, is but a representation of the heavenly tie between God and his people. He is their Father and their God. And thus the Lord sent to comfort his mourning disciples: "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" **Joh 20:17**.

2. He would commend them also to his **omniscient eye**. We know little of ourselves, and less of one another. We know not our own wants, what is for our good, what snares to avoid, what dangers to shun. Our path is bestrewed with difficulties, beset with temptations, surrounded with foes, encompassed with perils. At every step there is a snare, at every turn an enemy in wait. Pride digs the pit, carelessness bandages the eyes, carnality drugs and intoxicates the senses, the lust of the flesh seduces, the love of the world allures, unbelief and infidelity paralyse the fighting hand and the praying knee, sin entangles the feet, guilt defiles the conscience, and Satan accuses the soul. Who under these circumstances can come alive out of the battle? Who can "stand every storm, and live at last?" Only he who walks under that all-seeing eye which never slumbers nor sleeps, "the Lord do keep it: I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." "Kept by the mighty power of God." "The Lord is thy keeper." "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

3. He commended them further to his **all-powerful hand**. The eye to watch, the hand to guide and protect. "I taught Ephraim to go, taking them by their arms." "When I said my foot slippeth, thy mercy held me up." "Underneath are the everlasting arms." We cannot stand alone. Not a right step can we take except as held up and guided by almighty power. This made the saints of old cry, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." "Keep me as the apple of thine eye." "Leave not my soul destitute." In commending them therefore to God, he commends them not only to the eye that never slumbers, but to the hand that never droops.

4. But, above all, he would commend them to the **affectionate, loving heart** of God. Thence comes the watchful eye, thence the protecting hand. Love, eternal love, unchangeable love, is the fountain whence all the streams of mercy and grace flow down to the church, and every individual member of it. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." "Love never faileth." Paul might depart, wolves might arise, heresies might prevail, apostates might fall away, thick clouds might cover the church, all might be confusion without and within. But one thing would not fail the elect of God—the love that embraced them from eternity to eternity. In commending them to God he would commend them therefore to that love which knows neither beginning nor end, increase, decay, or variation.

Thus did Paul commend them to God; and in this should every minister of the gospel imitate him. Every rightly-taught servant of the Lord, when he comes amongst, or leaves a people, never dares for a moment entertain the thought, that anything **he** can say can profit their souls. He comes, if he comes rightly, depending on God for a blessing to follow the word; and he leaves, if he leaves rightly, beseeching the Lord that a blessing may follow what has been spoken in weakness. Thus, no rightly-taught servant of the Lord can dare to go amongst the people of God trusting in his own wisdom or ability: but desires to bear them up in his arms before the Almighty, and look up with an eye of faith that the Lord would bless the word. In his inward thoughts he would "commend" them to God as alone able to work in them that which is well-pleasing in his sight.

II.—But not only did Paul thus "commend" them "to God" he commended them also in an especial manner "to **the word of his grace.**" There is a difference between "grace." and "the word of his grace." Nothing but grace can save the soul: nothing but superabounding grace can blot out and hide from the view of justice our aggravated iniquities. But "the word of his grace" is that word which brings this grace into the heart—which communicates life and power to the soul—which the Spirit by his

inward teaching and testimony seals on the conscience—and by which he reveals and sheds abroad that favour of which he testifies. This is what the Lord's people want. It is "the word of grace" that reaches their soul. It is not reading of grace in God's word that brings peace into their hearts; it is "the word of his grace," when he is pleased to speak that word with a divine power to their souls, that brings salvation with it.

Now, the Lord's people are continually in those trying states and circumstances, out of which nothing can deliver them but "the word of God's grace." If the soul has to pass through severe trials, it is not hearing of grace that can deliver it out of them. If it be beset with powerful temptations, it is not reading about grace that can break them to pieces. But "the word of his grace," when the Lord himself is pleased to speak with his own blessed lips, and apply some promise with his own divine power, supports under trial, delivers from temptation, breaks snares to pieces, makes crooked things straight and rough places plain, brings the prisoner out of the prison-house, and takes off the yoke by reason of the anointing.

Thus, when the apostle had said, "I commend you to God," he does not leave them there; but he takes them on to the spot where they would have some communication of God's grace to their heart, where there would be some manifestation of his favour to their souls, some special dealings with their consciences. It is as though he was not satisfied with laying them at God's feet. He commends them to his "grace," and specially to "the word of his grace" in their souls. If I may use such a figure, we may fancy a mother in distressed circumstances **I condemn the deed, though I use the illustration**, who is not able to sustain her infant: she takes it. therefore, and lays it at a rich man's gate: she watches the door to see it open, and the infant taken in. She has no relief till she sees the servant come and take the babe safely in. As long as the child is lying outside, anxiety fills her bosom; but when the door is opened, and the child safely housed, the object of her maternal solicitude is accomplished. So the apostle takes the church, as the mother might take her babe,

and lays it at the Lord's feet. But "the word of his grace" takes the child up into his house and heart, opens the door of his bosom, and spreads the skirt of love over the infant cast out in the open field in the day that it was born. Ye trembling ones at the footstool of mercy, is not this what your souls are longing after? To be merely brought to the footstool of mercy does not satisfy you. To be merely commended in prayer to God does not ease your anxious heart. But when "a door of hope" is opened in the valley of Achor; when the Lord speaks a word of peace to your soul, applies his gracious promises to your heart; through the word of life communicates grace, and blesses the soul with a taste of his favour and mercy, then your desire is accomplished.

III.—But speaking of this "word of his grace," the apostle says, it is **"able to build you up."** A foundation had been laid in their hearts; they had been brought off the sandy bottom of self; their Babel righteousness had been dashed to pieces, and its brick and slime scattered to the four winds of heaven. Christ had been laid, by the blessed Spirit, as a foundation in their souls. To him they had come as poor wretched sinners: on him they had laid hold; his Person they had viewed by the eye of living faith; his blood they had felt to be exceedingly precious; under his righteousness they had sheltered themselves; a measure of his dying love had been shed abroad in their hearts. This placed them upon a solid foundation—the Rock of Ages! On him therefore they stood, and "out of his fulness received grace for grace."

They were then to be built up upon this. And there was but one thing which could so build them up—"the word of God's grace." Why? Because we really have nothing in our hearts from first to last spiritually good, but what "the word of God's grace" communicates. It is by "the word of God's grace" we are first brought off the sandy foundation: it is by "the word of God's grace" we are laid upon the Rock of Ages; it is by "the word of God's grace" that every stone is fixed in the spiritual building; and it is by "the word of God's grace" that the headstone is at last brought forth with shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it!"

Now, this is a lesson, which usually we have to learn very painfully. We are very eager to put our hands to work. Like Uzzah, we must needs prop up the ark when we see it stumbling; when faith totters, we must come to bear a helping hand. But this is prejudicial to the work of God upon the soul. If the whole is to be a spiritual building; if we are "living stones" built upon a living head, every stone in that spiritual temple must be laid by God the Spirit. And if so, everything of nature, of creature, of self, must be effectually laid low, that Christ may be all—that Christ, and Christ alone may be formed in our heart, the hope of glory. How many trials some of you have passed through! how many sharp and cutting exercises! how many harassing temptations! how many sinkings of heart! how many fiery darts from hell! how many doubts and fears! how much hard bondage! how many galling chains! how often has the very iron entered into your soul! Why? That you may be prevented from adding one stone by your own hands to the spiritual building.

The apostle tells us, that "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid," even Jesus Christ. He then speaks of those who build "wood, hay, and stubble," as well as of those who used "gold, silver, and precious stones;" and that the "wood, hay, and stubble" must be burned with fire. It is after the Lord has laid a foundation in the sinner's conscience, brought him near to himself, made Jesus precious to his soul, raised up hope and love in his heart, that he is so apt to take materials God never recognises, "wood, hay, stubble," and rear thereby a flimsy superstructure of his own. But this gives way in the trying hour: it cannot stand one gust of temptation. One spark of the wrath to come, one discovery of God's dread majesty, will burn up this "wood, hay, and stubble," like straw in the oven. The Lord's people, therefore, have to pass through troubles, trials, exercises, and temptations, doubts and fears, and all that harassing path that they usually walk in, that they may be prevented from erecting a superstructure of nature upon the foundation of grace—"wood, hay and stubble" upon the glorious mystery of an incarnate God.

But "the word of God's grace" is "**able**" to build them up. Have you suffered from temptation, and been delivered out of it? It was "the word of God's grace" that built you up. Have you been in severe trial, and the Lord has blessed you in it, and brought you out of it? It was "the word of God's grace" that built you up. Have you been entangled in some error, and the Lord snatched you out of that error by applying some portion of his truth to your soul? It was "the word of God's grace" that built you up. Have you been entangled in the lusts of the flesh, cast down by some snare of the devil, and the Lord has delivered you out of it? It was "the word of his grace" that built you up. We are not built up by fleshly holiness, by creature piety, by long and loud prayers, by the doings and duties of the flesh; no, nor even by sound doctrines floating in our brain; but by "the word of God's grace" applied with a divine power to the heart.

But that very "word of grace" is made suitable to our souls, for the most part, only as we are brought into those circumstances to which it is adapted. Is not grace free favour? and is not "the word of God's grace" the instrument through which this free favour is manifested? Can I then learn the heights, the depths, the superboundings, the freeness, the sovereignty, the almighty power of grace, except by wading into those circumstances to which it is suitable? Must I not feel a guilty sinner before grace can be sweet? Must I not know the aboundings of internal sin before the superaboundings of God's grace can be precious? Must I not know something of that fountain of evil, which I carry within, and have my breast laid bare with its hidden abominations before I can know the grace that covers, pardons, and heals? And this grace I can only know by "the word of God's grace;" in other words, by the sweet manifestation, unctuous application, and divine revelation of the gospel of the grace of God.

Thus the apostle did not lead them to rest upon their own strength and wisdom, but to live upon the fountain-fulness of the great and glorious risen Mediator. This is the only way to know anything of grace. I may hear of grace all my days, and yet die ignorant of it. I may sit under ministers who preach nothing but

grace, and yet be as devoid of it in my heart as Satan himself. But if "the word of God's grace" drop into my heart: if the Lord the Spirit be pleased to send his own precious truth into my soul, and through that word to communicate a sense of his superabounding grace—then, and then only, is it mine. Nor is there any other way of being spiritually built up. Doctrines cannot build you up: corruptions cannot build you up: doubts and fears cannot build you up: trials and exercises cannot build you up: temptations cannot build you up: heavy losses in providence, and cutting afflictions in grace, cannot build you up. They pull down: they lay low: they disperse the "wood, hay, and stubble" to the winds: they leave you in a wild, naked desert, in a waste howling wilderness. But it is "the word of God's grace," communicated to the soul out of Christ's inexhaustible and divine fulness, that alone builds up. All other building is a baseless fabric, a house of cards, a castle in the air, a mist driven before the wind.

IV.—But there was something still further: **"And to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."** There is a people, then, that are sanctified, that is,

1. set apart in the covenant, in God's eternal decrees: and
2. sanctified by the work of the blessed Spirit upon their hearts, whereby they are made meet for "the inheritance of the saints in light." By the first they were separated by the original decree and purpose of God. This made them "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people." To "sanctify" is to set apart as the special property of God. So God says to Moses, "Sanctify unto me all the firstborn" **Ex 13:2**, which he explains **Ex 13:12** as "a setting apart unto the Lord." So God sanctified the seventh day by setting it apart from the other days of the week as the Sabbath. This is the only original root and spring of holiness. Men do not make themselves holy by an act of their own free choice, and by that holiness recommend themselves to God and obtain heaven. That is popery.

Holiness does not consist in a certain amount of duties to be performed, prayers to be said, sacraments and ordinances to be

attended, alms to be given, passions to be subdued, garb to be worn, tears to be shed. Fruit to be fruit must grow upon a tree, be fed by sap, be ripened by sun, be refreshed with showers, be a living product elaborated by a divine mechanism. Flowers and fruit may be modelled from wax, and so beautifully as to be scarcely distinguishable from genuine. But they want scent, sap, and taste. Such is human holiness—a modelled, painted, artificial imitation of "camphire and spikenard, calamus and cinnamon, and the pleasant fruits" that grow in the Beloved's garden. Christ is the Holy One of Israel. The head of the church is holy, intrinsically, eternally such; the members are holy because united to that head. A holy head cannot have unholy members. Thus Christ is the church's sanctification, she being holy in his holiness, as well as righteous in his righteousness. This is the root. Thence comes personal, inward sanctification by the regenerating work of the Holy Ghost. He gives the new heart and new spirit: communicates holy desires, affections, breathings, enjoyments, with every gracious fruit, working repentance and godly sorrow for sin, brokenness of heart, and contrition of spirit, tenderness of conscience, faith, hope, and love, meekness, resignation, humility, prayerfulness, watchfulness, departing from evil, cleaving to all good; and all those outward fruits of righteousness, which are to the glory of God. This is gospel holiness, holiness as the especial gift and work of the Holy Spirit, the only true and acceptable holiness, and without which no man shall see the Lord. These that are thus sanctified have an eternal inheritance, being heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. All other holiness is the holiness of the cowl and the cloister, a monkish pharisaism, of which superstition is the root, ignorance the prop, pride the fruit, and the curse of God the end.

How different is that divine work and operation which melts your heart and breaks it, dissolves it, lays it low in adoration at his feet who loved you and gave himself for you. This is "an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." Those who were set apart in God's eternal purpose were chosen unto the enjoyment of this inheritance. These have the first-fruits of the Spirit, which "the word of God's grace" dropping into the heart, communicates. For



this brings light, life, liberty, love, conformity to the image of Jesus, a renewal in the spirit of the mind, a separation from the world and all its perishing vanities and charms, and stamps upon the heart a measure of Christ's blessedness. And all this wholly, solely, by "the word of God's grace." Does not this suit the sinner?

Supposing it were **God forbid it should be so for a moment!** that I must by my own exertions, in the first instance, bring grace into my heart, and thus lay the foundation; and that I, by my own exertions, must carry on the work, and so raise the superstructure; must I not fail, utterly fail? But when grace does all from first to last; when it is grace which wrote the names of God's people in the book of life; when grace gave them to Jesus to redeem; when grace in God's appointed time quickened their souls; when grace manifested the cleansing efficacy of Christ's blood to their conscience: when grace will bring them safely through all their trials and temptations; will perfect that which concerneth them, and must and will reign through righteousness unto eternal life; how suitable, how more than suitable is this to a poor, guilty sinner, who has nothing, and feels he has nothing in himself but rags and ruin! "The word of God's grace," in the hands of the Spirit, lays the foundation. "The word of God's grace" makes Jesus known in the everlasting gospel, and thus raises the superstructure; "the word of God's grace" bears through the arms of death, and thus puts on the coping-stone; and heaven's arches will eternally sound the praise of the glory of that grace which made them "accepted in the Beloved." Every living desire after the Lord; every realising sense of his grace and glory; every melting affection towards his lovely Person; every reception of him into the heart as the Christ of God; every act of faith, hope, or love; every breathing out of the soul into his bosom, is a sign, and more than a sign, an undeniable evidence of the grace of God being in a sinner's breast. And if the grace of God is in a sinner's breast, he is in Christ, one with Christ; and "the word of his grace" will build him up more and more, and give him deeper draughts of his eternal "inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

There may be here some poor, tried, exercised, tempted children of God to whom this news seems almost too good to be true.

But whence proceed, what is the main subject of their trials and exercises? Is it not this? The evil heart that they carry in their bosom. Is it not the pride, unbelief, infidelity, darkness, temptations, doubts and fears, sins and iniquities, and the many burdens and difficulties which they have to encounter at every step? Hampered and burdened with so many inward and outward trials, they seem unable to realise either the grace that is in them, or the glory that awaits them. Their hands hang down, and their knees totter. But how suitable to such is "the word of God's grace"! Is not grace the very thing for them? Is there not a fountain-fulness of grace in the bosom of the Redeemer everflowing and overflowing? And does not this flow fully and freely through "the word of his grace," which they have in their hearts and hands? How else should it come to them but freely? Have they no grace but what they work for? And is grace dealt out cautiously, niggardly, stingily, like money from a miser's purse? No; God "giveth liberally, and upbraideth not: the grace of God, and the gift by grace, hath abounded unto many."

Jesus gives, as a King, "of his royal bounty," as Solomon to the Queen of Sheba. Be honest to yourselves; be honest to what God has given you. Have you never felt Jesus precious? Have you never poured out your heart at his feet? Have you never had a glimpse by faith of his lovely Person? Have you never felt anything of the efficacy of his atoning blood? never seen his suitability? never felt him near and dear to your soul? never tasted that spiritual-mindedness which is life and peace? If you have, you have an "inheritance among all them which are sanctified." For how are we "sanctified"? Is it not by the word of truth? as the Lord said, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." And have you not at times felt the word of truth to produce holy, heavenly sensations and emotions in your heart? Is not this sanctification?

But you say, 'I cannot deny that I have experienced this;' but "if so, why am I thus? why so dark for weeks and months together? why so cold in my affections? why so dead in my frame? why so often shut up in bondage? why so harassed by Satan? why so plagued by an army of doubts and fears? why is the Lord so absent? why sin so present? why does he shut out my prayer? why does he leave me to stumble in darkness like those that long for the morning?" To these complaints may we not too often reply, "Hast thou not procured this to thyself? The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save. nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear: but our iniquities separate between us and God, and our sins make him hide his face from us." Are there no Achans in the camp? no golden wedge, nor Babylonish garment under the tent? no secret sin indulged, no idol set up in the heart? But if matters are straight here. it may be to shew you your weakness: to burn up your "wood, hay, and stubble?" to bring you more needy and naked to his feet: to cut up your self righteousness and carnal wisdom: and break to pieces the right arm of creature strength.

Those very exercises, doubts, fears, temptations, difficulties, and burdens that your soul is so harassed by, are to empty, that God may fill; to strip, that he may clothe; to bring down, that he may raise up; to make you nothing, that Christ may be all in all. Have you never had something in your soul that felt like this—that the lower you sank in self, the more suitable and precious the Saviour appeared? Have there been no moments when, amidst your exercises, there was that coming in of light and life, liberty and love, that you were able to clasp Jesus in the arms of a living faith, and felt that you could die in peace under such feelings? You have had the inheritance. What is this but the inheritance—the very kingdom of God in the soul, which "is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost?" And what brought it to you? Your promises, vows, resolutions, exertions, doings, duties? No; it was "the word of God's grace:" some sweet promise just suitable to your case; some portion of scripture opened up to your heart; something which you almost put away, because you felt how undeserved it was for God even

to look upon such a wretch as you. Yet this "word of God's grace" it was that brought this foretaste, this pledge of the inheritance above into your soul below.

If, then, you can find in your soul's experience any of these divine marks, these "white stones," love tokens, betrothment pledges, it is well with you for life and death, time and eternity! Let me hold up again these tokens of espousal, these bridal rings, and compare them with your experience. If, then, Jesus was ever precious to you; if you ever felt the efficacy of his atoning blood in your conscience: if ever your soul was melted down in sweet affection at his feet; if ever he blessed you with one word of grace from his own lips, he has given you "an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." If you have had heaven here, you will have heaven hereafter. If you have ever seen Jesus by the eye of faith below, you will see Jesus hereafter by the eye of sight above.

With what better words can I, then, leave you at the close of my present visit than what the apostle used upon an almost similar occasion? Not that I dare for a moment compare myself with him: or indeed you with them: yet, in our feeble way, with what better words can I take my leave of you than to "commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified"? And may this be our increasing experience—to hang more simply, more fervently on the God of all grace, and to receive from time to time sweet communications of "the word of his grace" into our heart. And then, as we have met here around the throne of grace, we shall meet hereafter around the throne of glory; as we have rejoiced in "the word of his grace" here, and felt a measure of the "inheritance of the saints" below, it is a prelude, an earnest, a foretaste of the eternal weight of glory above. There may the Lord bring us for his own glorious and precious Name's sake.

## **THE WORK OF HIS MINISTERING SERVANTS**

Preached at the Zion Chapel, Calne, Anniversary Services on July 20th, 1862.

"Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people." Isa.62:10

Two cities are spoken of in Scripture, both alluding, to the church of God; one in her militant state, the other in her triumphant state. The description in Revelation 21 & 22 of the New Jerusalem shows the state of the church triumphant; that in Isaiah 26:1-3, the city for which God hath appointed salvation for walls and bulwarks, represents the church militant. The New Jerusalem, seen in vision, had three gates on each side, which differed from the gates which the church militant has now to enter. These gates are now entered consecutively. First, as in ancient citadels, the barbican, which admits into the outer court; then the second; then the gate into the citadel.

This Scripture is a voice. To whom? "Ye that make mention of the LORD" (ver.6). By whom addressed? Addressed by God to his ministering servants, whom he has sent to go before his flock, and instrumentally to lead them into green pastures. To these he gives five commands, which I shall speak of as laid down in the text. I. "Go through, go through the gates." How emphatic this repetition by the Lord, showing how necessary that ministers should have themselves proved the reality of the truths they bring before their hearers! They must go through before they can lead others through. Who would trust his life with a captain who did not understand navigation? Who would trust a pilot to pilot him up mighty Thames unacquainted with its meanderings? Who would trust his life in a train with an amateur for a driver? So no one can truly ministerially obey this Scripture who has not himself experimentally passed through these gates. No human education or advantages will help a man through. I had my share of them;

but Oxford could not teach me my religion, nor could aught short of God the Holy Ghost.

The first gate, then, that both preachers and hearers must through is *Regeneration*, which is indeed a strait gate. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way" (Matt.7:14). This is illustrated, among other illustrations, by Bunyan's dream of the desirable state of the saints at Bedford, and the strait narrow space he had to squeeze through; so that at last, after much squeezing, he sidled in, as he graphically expresses it. The next gate is *Faith*. This reflects light on the first gate, and is intimately connected with it.

The next is *Hope*. You will say, "Should not hope be placed first?" No! How can we hope for what we do not believe? How can hope enter within the veil unless we believe in Jesus there entered? The next is *Love*. The door of faith, the door of hope, and the strait gate are spoken of in Scripture; but love is not directly spoken of as a door; yet it is entered. John saw a door opened in heaven, and the God of love, and the objects of his love there. And experience proves that when new life, faith, and hope are realized, love also will be known and felt. And this will be manifested by a deliberate, advised, and affectionate aim to keep his precepts. This important part of the gospel, the precepts, I am grieved to say, is so little dwelt upon by preachers; yet the keeping of them is the proof of love.

II. "Prepare ye the way of the people." This is another work God gives his servants ministerially to do. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. To prepare this way is to set him forth as the sinner's only hope, his only salvation, his All and in all, as the Scriptures testify of him, and as the Holy Ghost reveals him to the soul of the poor and needy self-destroyed sinner who is drawn to him; showing from the Scriptures the work of Jesus, what he came to do; describing the characters, and the characteristics of those for whom he came to do this mighty work, in dying the just for the unjust; and showing that *sinners* need just such a Saviour, and he is just suited to such sensible

sinners. This is preparing *the*, not *a*, way for the people.

III. "Cast up the highway." We see in wet lands and muddy roads, in Wiltshire and in Berkshire, a way made higher than the muddy wet roads, in order that travellers may travel with comfort. And it is the same in many places referred to in the Bible. This requires spade and mattock, with persevering strength and assiduity. This has its parallel in the third work God sets his ministering servants to do. It is done by showing that, though the road lies through much perplexity, much temptation, felt failures, fouling one's garments, and many and heavy troubles, yet the everlasting love of God, the watchful care and providence of God, and the restoring power of God, are still in exercise on the behalf of both great and small, who are really in the way, or passed through the gates; in showing that his everlasting love will surely carry on and perfect what he has begun; in inciting to filial confidence in him, by scripturally and experimentally showing his watchful care, his everlasting love, and his wondrous display of it in the Person and work of his Son, in the promise and possession of the Holy Ghost, in his continuous leadings, and in his precious promises; this is casting up the highway. Ministers must show the everlasting love, watchful care, and unalterable purpose of God to bring his redeemed ones safe to glory. Though the way is rough, yet all the promises are Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus (2 Cor.1:20).

IV. "Gather out the stones." That is, ministerially expose errors and heresies. Some roads have large stones; yea, some, in some countries, have boulders in them. To gather out these requires Herculean strength, levers, bars, &c.; but they must be gathered ministerially out of the way of the simple. On our knees we must use the lever, pickaxe, &c. Love would make me alight, as well as duty, from my carriage, to endeavour to remove the boulder, lest my dear wife and children should be capsized. Some men (nay, demons, I call them), have put stones on the railway lines to send numbers into eternity. But, shocking as this is, what is this diabolical act compared to that of those who propagate errors, such as deny the Godhead of Jesus, and his eternal Sonship; God's everlasting love to his people, and their certain enduring to

the end; the chastisement of God's people for their sin, &c.? We must get on our knees effectually to use the lever of God's Word, so as to root up these boulders, and thus make a plain path; and then fill up the hole left with truth in the love of it.

Other stones are difficult and perplexing Scriptures, and knotty and seemingly contradictory experiences. To explain these, as God enables us, in the light of other parts of the Word, and one's own experience of God's delivering hand, comparing spiritual things with spiritual, is to instrumentally gather out the stones. And as literally, sometimes, where Macadam is not followed, the obstacles are weighty, so are the stones hinted at. God help you to remove them.

V. I cannot say much about lifting up the standard for the people. I will only say that a standard is used as a rallying point. It has other uses, which I cannot now enter into. The banner or standard is love. I appeal to you who are ministers. Have you passed through the gates of regeneration, faith, hope, and love? Are you preparing the way of the people? Are you casting up the highway? Are you gathering out the stones? Are you lifting up the standard for the people? If so, as of the ability that God giveth, God bless you in your deed. I claim no authority over you, though I thus appeal; but, being a fellow-labourer who has long been in the way and ministry, and having in my own soul proved these things, I in love exhort you and stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance. God bless his Word.



## **The Word of Men and the Word of God**

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

"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." 1 Thess. 2:13

If we examine the features of the New Testament churches as reflected in the inspired page, and seek to gather from that mode of internal evidence the spiritual condition of each, we shall find that though in Christ Jesus all were one, yet in grace and gift, in state and standing, in knowledge and experience, in walk and conduct they widely differed from one another. Thus the church at Rome seems to have been distinguished above her sister churches for the strength of her faith. "I thank my God," says the apostle, "through Jesus Christ for you all that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." (Rom. 1:8.) So conspicuous and eminent was the faith of the Roman believers that they had become an object of universal mention and thankfulness among the churches. And this seems to be one reason why the apostle in his Epistle to the Romans dwells so fully and largely upon justification, they being able above other churches to enter experimentally into the glorious doctrine of justification by faith in the righteousness of the Son of God. Thus the whole church to the end of time profits by the strength of their faith; for had they been weak in faith they could not have received an epistle so fully declaring the way whereby a sinner stands justified before God by the imputation of the obedience of Christ without the works of the law. The Corinthian church was particularly favoured with the gifts of utterance and knowledge, as the apostle declares: "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in everything ye are enriched by him in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you; so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ." (1

Cor. 1:4-7.) These gifts indeed had their attendant perils, for we find the apostle warning them against being puffed up thereby, and assuring them that they might speak with the tongues of men and of angels, have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and yet be nothing. (1 Cor. 8:1; 13:2.) The Galatian churches had unhappily become "removed from him that called them into the grace of Christ unto another gospel," which the apostle declares was really "not another," as not being worthy of the name of gospel, but was a perversion of the gospel of Christ. (Gal. 1:6, 7.) They had thus strayed from the green pastures and still waters of gospel grace, and got upon the barren heath of legal service; had left the warm sunshine of Mount Zion, and become entangled in the smoke of Mount Sinai. The church at Philippi was suffering under persecution, for to it we read "was given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on him but also to suffer for his sake" (Phil. 1:29); and yet it continued firm in "the fellowship of the gospel from the first day until now." (Phil. 1:5.) There was also in it a great spirit of love and liberality; for no church communicated with Paul as concerning giving and receiving but it only. (Phil. 4:15.) The wealthy Corinthians allowed him to preach to them the gospel of God freely, suffering the poorer church at Philippi to supply that which was lacking to him (2 Cor. 11:7-9); proving, as is often the case, the greater willingness of the poor than of the rich to give to the cause and servants of God. The churches of Ephesus and of Colosse seem to have been further advanced in knowledge, and more fully and firmly established in the truth than most of the other New Testament churches, the former especially having had the benefit of Paul's personal ministry for three years. They were therefore better qualified to receive those deep epistles which were severally addressed to them, in which the grandest and most glorious mysteries of our most holy faith are unfolded with a wisdom and a power which seem to leave us ever learners and never able to grasp them fully to our satisfaction. The church at Thessalonica, to which we now come, was inferior to that at Rome in faith, to that of Corinth in gifts, to that at Ephesus in knowledge, and yet was one of the most favoured in the New Testament. The two epistles which Paul sent them were the first

which ever issued from his pen, and were written to them in the early days of their profession, about a year after the gospel had "come to them not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance." They had been much persecuted for righteousness' sake, and had "received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost." (1 Thess. 1:5, 6.) There was also one feature in their Christian character which shone forth with distinguished lustre—*brotherly love*—according to the apostle's own testimony: "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.) Blessed mark of heavenly grace! The apostle also seems to have been peculiarly attached to them, for he says, "So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us." (1 Thess. 2:8.) The reason of his great love to them appears to have been, first, the power which he felt in his own soul in preaching to them the word of life, for he calls to their mind, "Ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake;" and, secondly, the way in which they received the word from his lips, which made him say, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy." (1 Thess. 2:19, 20.) When we look at the character of this eminent apostle of the Gentiles, as drawn as if unconsciously by his own pen, what a pattern, what an example he sets for Christian ministers! How his whole soul was in the work! What ardent love to the souls of men, what singleness of eye to the glory of God! How delighted he was to find power attending the gospel he preached, and a harvest of living souls falling beneath the sickle of the word as he thrust it into the crop! We may perhaps say that four things gladdened Paul's heart in finding the power of God resting so abundantly upon his word: 1, the glory of God, which was above all things dear to his soul; 2, the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ in his Person and work; 3, the rich harvest of souls gathered by his instrumentality; and, 4, the seals and evidences afforded thereby of his being a servant of God, an apostle of Jesus Christ. O that the Lord would raise up men after his own

heart upon whom some measure of the spirit that we see in Paul might rest; men blessed with his simplicity and godly sincerity, favoured with his singleness of eye to the glory of God and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus, and whose speech and preaching, like his, might be "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Then indeed we should see that the faith of those who received their testimony would stand not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Cor. 2:4, 5.)

But let us now, with God's help and blessing, approach our text, in which I think we may see these four leading features:—

I.—*First, "the word of men" as contrasted with "the word of God."*

II.—*Secondly, that there is a receiving of the gospel as the word of men, and a receiving of the gospel as the word of God.*

III.—*Thirdly, the evidence and proof of the reception of the gospel as the word of God: its effectually working in them that believe.*

IV.—*Fourthly, that it is a matter for unceasing thanks and praise; "for this cause also thank we God without ceasing."*

I.—As far as the apostle was a man, speaking with human lips and using ordinary human language, his word was necessarily the "word of men." Indeed, it could not possibly be otherwise. God does not speak to his people with a voice from heaven, does not use the instrumentality of angels to reveal his mind and will to the sons of men. He speaks to man by men of like passions with their fellow men, and in a language which they mutually understand. Otherwise it would be as Paul says, "There are, it may be, so many kind of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me." (1 Cor. 14:10, 11.) In that sense, therefore, the word that the servants of God speak is

"the word of men;" and yet in another sense it is "the word of God," clearly establishing a vital, essential distinction between them.

i. Let us seek then to enter a little more closely and fully into the distinction between the word of men and the word of God, as intended by the apostle, for upon that point the force of the text mainly turns.

1. By "the word of men" we may first, then, understand that general mode of communication between man and man, by which every transaction of human life is carried on. I need not explain that everything in the way of communication between man and his fellow is carried on by words; for if writing is used, it is only words in another form. The use of language to communicate thought is one of the grand distinctions between man and the brute creation, and without its continual use and exercise the whole frame of society would fall to pieces like a ship cast by a storm upon the rocks. This, then, is the province of the word of men, to communicate to each other their mutual thoughts, and to link society together by a participation of mutual interests. As long, therefore, as the word of men is engaged in its regular province, it is what God meant it to be; what he who devised language and gave us power of thus uttering and making known to others our thoughts, wants, plans, and intentions, and of understandings those of our fellow men, designed it to accomplish. The apostle is not disparaging or discarding the word of men and thus engaged in its natural province of communication between man and man, or even its higher employment when used as the instrument of preaching the gospel. As long then and as far as these words of men are words of truth and uprightness, words of integrity, sincerity, and honesty, they fulfil a purpose without which the world itself could not stand or society be carried on.

But when we approach the domain of heavenly things; when we leave earth, with everything earthly, and come to heaven and things heavenly, there the word of men necessarily fails. Words

are but the expression of thought or the communication of knowledge. But what can man, as man, think or know of the deep mysteries of God? Are they not completely out of his sight and out of his reach? "It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? Deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth and broader than the sea." (Job 11:8, 9.) As, then, God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and his ways not our ways, what can we know of them but by a divine revelation? Thus everything concerning God, and especially his existence in a trinity of Persons and Unity of Essence; everything connected with the co-equality and co-eternity of his dear Son; everything connected with his acceptable worship, or how a sinner can be saved; everything connected with a future state of happiness and misery; in a word, every doctrine we find in the Scriptures is beyond all the comprehension and conception of man's heart by nature. And as it is beyond his conception, it must be beyond his expression. We see, therefore, from this, that there is a need of something beyond the word of men to communicate to us a knowledge of that which concern our eternal and immortal interests. The word of men, then, is good as far as it is connected with the things of men; but there is a necessity for something beyond the word of men, if we are to know anything of those heavenly truths and divine realities which are not only for time but for eternity.

2. Here, then, comes in the necessity and the nature of the word of God; for though God uses in it human words, yet he communicates by them what none could have known but by divine revelation. Besides, then, the use of "the word of men" as the instrument of ordinary speech, there is a higher sense in which "the word of men" is made a means of communicating the word of God. The knowledge, the thoughts, the inspiration are divine; but the words in which they are expressed, though dictated by God, are as human language and so far only the words of men.

Now the apostle was sent to preach the word of God. To do this was the end and object of his life; and that what he preached as

the word of God should be received as the word of God, was the joy and delight of his soul. But how came he to know it was the work of God? What evidence had he in his bosom that the gospel he preached was not the word of men; that there was something in it supernatural and divine; and that in a way so pre-eminent that it was as much the word of God from his lips, as if God himself spake it. To see this, let us look at the apostle's call when the Lord himself appeared to him at Damascus' gate, and hear what was the commission which the very Jesus whom he was persecuting there and then gave him:—"But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee." (Acts 26:16.) This commission was renewed three days after, when Ananias came with a message from the Lord. "The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard." (Acts 22:14, 15.) Here, then, we have Paul's own clear, indubitable testimony that there was something spoken to him by God; that there was something supernatural and divine which he had seen, which he had heard, which he had tasted, felt, and handled, and which he was to declare as a special revelation from God to him, not only for his own soul, but also for the souls of others. In an almost similar way he speaks in his epistle to the Galatians: "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Gal. 1:11, 12.) He therefore speaks in a similar way in the first Epistle to the Corinthians: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." And to show that the very words wherein he spake to them were given from above, he adds, "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth: comparing spiritual things with spiritual." (1 Cor. 2:9, 10, 13.) Is it not

evident from these testimonies that what Paul spake in the name of God, he spake as the very word of God? As God spake *to* him, so God spake *by* him, and what he uttered by his lips was in fact uttered by the Holy Ghost through him; that divine and heavenly Teacher making use of his tongue to express the things revealed to his soul. He therefore declares of his preaching that it was "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." (1 Cor. 2:4.)

Now without this inspiration which was thus given to the apostle and to the other writers of the Old and New Testament, we have no evidence or certainty that the Bible is the word of God, and as such contains a revelation of his mind and will. The whole matter lies in a very narrow compass. The Bible is either the word of God or not. If it is the "word of God," it is not the "word of men;" if it is the "word of men" it is not the "word of God." Surely those who received it as the word of God, must have known whether God did or did not speak unto them. And see what a conclusion we must come to if we deny this. Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and all the prophets of the Old Testament, and the apostles of our Lord in the New, must either have received words into their heart directly and immediately from God, when they said "the word of the Lord came unto them," and that God spake unto them, or they must be the veriest impostors that ever lived. There can be no other conclusion but one of these two. They must either be what they profess, prophets and apostles, inspired of the Holy Ghost, and receiving their message direct from God, or they must be the veriest deceivers, and the worst of impostors, in pretending that God spake unto them, when he never spoke to them at all. Thus, whatever men may say against inspiration generally, or against verbal and plenary inspiration in particular, we are brought to this point, that these men of God must either have been what they said they were, inspired of the Holy Ghost with a message from God, which they have delivered to us, or else must have been some of the basest impostors the world ever knew.

To this point then we are come, that the gospel which Paul preached was not the word of men, that is of natural,



unenlightened, uninspired men, but the word of God. This you will say might have been true of the gospel which Paul preached when he preached it. But Paul is dead; and what evidence have we that we have Paul's gospel now? Our evidence is, that the same Paul wrote the Epistles who preached the gospel; so that what he once spake by his tongue, he now speaks by his pen. He therefore says to the Corinthians, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." (1 Cor. 14:37.) He also says to the Romans, "I long to see you that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift." (Rom. 1:11.) Now that spiritual gift which he would impart to them by his mouth, he imparts to us by his hand. We have therefore the same gospel, the same word of God in his writings which the Thessalonians had in his words.

II.—But I pass on to consider our next point, in which I proposed to show what it is to *receive the gospel* as the word of men, and what it is to receive the gospel as the word of God.

The apostle in our text evidently draws a very plain line between these two things. "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God." From this we evidently gather that there is a receiving of the gospel as the word of men; for had they received this gospel only as the word of men, there would have been no cause for rejoicing in his heart.

i. Let us then look at this point, what it is to receive the gospel as *the word of men*; for you may receive the gospel as the word of men, without receiving it as the word of God. And this is the case with hundreds and thousands. They receive the gospel, they believe it to be true, and in very many cases make a profession of their faith, and yet do but receive it as the word of men. Thus we read of those who "for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away." (Luke 8:13.) So we find that "many believed in Christ" in the days of his flesh, who never believed in

him to the saving of their soul, but were of their father the devil. (John 8:30, 44.) Truth has in it a commanding power. When Jesus spake, "the people were astonished at his doctrine, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes." (Matt. 7:28, 29.) Even Simon Magus is said to have "believed," and was baptized upon that faith, continuing with Philip and wondering as he beheld the miracles and signs which were done. And yet he "had neither part nor lot in this matter;" for "his heart was not right in the sight of God;" and with all his faith, and all his baptism, he was still "in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity." (Acts 8:13, 21, 23.) Truth, as I said, has a commanding power; and now I will endeavour to show you the effect it has as such when received as "the word of men."

1. First, then, it is received into the *natural understanding*. There is a light which attends the gospel. We read, therefore, that when the Lord went and dwelt in Capernaum, that "the people which sat in darkness saw great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death, light sprung up" (Matt. 4:13, 16); and yet this very Capernaum which was "exalted unto heaven" by Christ dwelling there as the light of the world, was "to be brought down to hell." (Matt. 11:23.) There is also a beauty, a harmony, and a self-evincing evidence in the truth which often commends itself to men's minds; and under this influence many receive the word into their judgment, their intellect, their understanding, who never felt and never will feel the power of truth in their hearts, as attended with divine light, life, and efficacy to regenerate their soul.

2. Again, there is a receiving of the gospel as the word of men into the *natural conscience*; for there is a natural conscience as well as a spiritual conscience. This is very evident from the language of the apostle when speaking of 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 excusing one another." (Romans 2:15.) And do we not read of those in the case of the woman taken in adultery, who were "convicted by their own conscience, and went out one by one,

beginning at the eldest, even to the last." (John 8:9.) The apostle also speaks of "commending himself to every man's conscience, in the sight of God." (2 Cor. 4:2.) Now as he preached to thousands, he could not have done this unless there was a conscience in every man, as well as in every good man. Scarcely any thing seems to approach the work of grace so nearly as this; and yet we see in the cases of Saul, Ahab, and Herod, that there may be the deepest convictions of conscience and yet no saving conversion to God. Thus there is a receiving the gospel into the natural conscience, producing moral convictions, and a work that seems at first sight to bear a striking similarity to the work of God upon the soul; and yet the whole may be a mere imitation of grace, a movement of nature floating upon the surface of the mind, and at times touching upon the domain of conscience, yet not springing out of the word of God as brought with a divine power into the heart.

3. But there is a going even beyond this. There is a receiving of the gospel as the word of men into the *affections*, that is, the *natural* affections. This seems indeed to be the nearest approach possible to a divine work; for "to receive the love of the truth" is given in Scripture as a mark of salvation. (2 Thess. 2:10.) And yet, there is a being "zealously affected, but not well." (Gal. 4:17.) There is a love to a minister, so that "if possible, there would be a plucking out of their own eyes, and giving them to him;" and yet an apostle may justly stand in doubt of such. (Gal. 4:15, 20.) So sweet may be the sound of the gospel, that a minister may be unto a people "as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice;" and yet they may "hear his words and not do them." (Ezekiel 33:32.) Does not the Lord speak of the stony ground hearers who "receive the word with joy" and yet "they have no root, which for a while believe and in time of temptation fall away?" (Luke 8:13.) Herod heard John gladly, and did many things: yet could command his head to be cut off at the word of a dancing girl. All these things show us that there is a receiving of the gospel into the natural affections, having a liking, even what we may almost call a love to it, and yet all be deception and delusion.

This then is receiving the gospel as "the word of men." Thousands never receive it in any other way, nor does it ever enter further, or penetrate deeper, than what I have described, or is it ever attended with saving power to them. The similarity indeed is so great, and the correspondence so close between the two, that it is the hardest possible thing for a minister to draw the nice line of distinction between a child of God in his worst state and a hypocrite in his best, between the lowest work of grace and the highest work of nature. But there is a line, though it may be such as "no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen," which I shall now endeavour to draw, by describing what it is to receive the gospel, not as the word of men, but as "the word of God."

ii. God speaks in and by his word, the Bible, which we have in our hands, and I hope some of us in our hearts. When the apostles preached, theirs was then the word of God; for God spake *in* them as he now speaks to us *by* them. Bear then this in mind, that there is no other way whereby God speaks to the souls of men but by his written word. As this contains and unfolds the gospel of his grace, it is especially in and by this gospel that his voice is heard; for it is the same gospel which Paul preached, and of which he says in our text that it is the word of God. Now he tells the Thessalonians that this gospel "came not unto them in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance." (1 Thess. 1:5.) This is the same distinction which I have sought to draw. It comes to some in word only. They hear the word of the gospel, the sound of truth; but it reaches the outward ear only; or if it touch the inward feelings as I have described, it is merely as the word of men. But where God the Holy Ghost begins and carries on his divine and saving work, he attends the word with a peculiar, an indescribable, and yet an invincible power. It falls as from God upon the heart. He is heard to speak in it; and in it his glorious Majesty appears to open the eyes, unstop the ears, and convey a message from his own mouth to the soul. Thus it comes "not in word only but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."

As then I have drawn the line of distinction between nature and grace, and endeavoured to show the way in which the gospel is received as "the word of men," I shall now take the counterpart, and attempt to point out how it is received as "the word of God." And you will observe that in almost every point there is a resemblance, and yet a distinctive difference.

1. First, then, under the teachings and operations of the blessed Spirit, it is received as the word of God into an *enlightened understanding*. That the understanding is spiritually enlightened is evident from Paul's prayer: "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened." (Eph. 1:17, 18.) A peculiar light attends the gospel as brought into the heart by the power of God. Of this light the apostle thus speaks: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 4:6.) It is this peculiar shining of God into the heart which distinguishes this light from the mere enlightening of the natural understanding. Our blessed Lord therefore calls it "the light of life." "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John 8:12.) It is also of this light that John speaks: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John 1:7.) It is by this light shining upon the Person of Christ that those who received him "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." To have this light is to be "filled with a knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;" and by this we are "delivered from the power of darkness, and are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son." (Col. 1:9, 13.) This is a very different thing from what is called "head knowledge;" for it is attended by regeneration, or "a putting on of the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." (Col. 3:10.) The apostle therefore says, "Ye were

sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord."

2. Again, under this divine power the gospel is received as the word of God *into the conscience*. God speaks in and by the word particularly to the conscience; and when he so speaks the soul falls under the power of the word, for the conscience is as it were its vital, tender part. Some hear the gospel as the word of men perhaps for years before God speaks in it with a divine power to their conscience. There has been sometimes a touching of the string of natural feeling. They thought they understood the gospel; they thought they felt it; they thought they loved it. But all this time they did not see any vital distinction between receiving it as the word of men and as the word of God. But in some unexpected moment, when little looking for it, the word of God was brought into their conscience with a power never experienced before; a light shone in and through it which they never saw before; a majesty, a glory, an authority, an evidence accompanied it which they never knew before; and under this light, life, and power they fell down with the word of God set home in their heart, as the apostle speaks in his Epistle to the Corinthians. (1 Cor. 14:25.) Here is the beginning of the work of grace, for this divine light and life produce spiritual convictions of sin, godly sorrow, working repentance to salvation not to be repented of; with a sense of the Majesty of Jehovah as the great Searcher of hearts and of our ruined, lost condition before him. For God speaks to the conscience; that is the special domain of the Holy Ghost; that is the special seed-bed of the word of God—the soil in which it takes root, grows, and thrives.

3. But as I am now chiefly speaking not of the law but of the gospel as the power of God unto their salvation, I must pass on to a third point, whereby it is distinguished from the "word of men." Whenever the gospel is brought with a divine power and an unctuous evidence into the heart as the word of God, it is *received into the spiritual affections*. Thus as we have a natural understanding for the word of men and a spiritual understanding for the word of God, and as we have a natural conscience for the one and a spiritual conscience for the other, so we have natural

affections to like the word and spiritual affections to love the word. "Set your affections," says the apostle, "on things above." We read of some who "received not the love of the truth that they might be saved;" clearly implying there is a receiving of the truth without receiving a love of the truth, and that whenever there is a receiving of the love of the truth, there is a salvation in it. When then Christ speaks in the gospel to the heart; when he reveals himself to the soul; when his word, dropping as the rain and distilling as the dew, is received in faith and love, and he is embraced as the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely, by the power of the gospel he takes his seat upon the affections and becomes enthroned in the heart as its Lord and God. This is receiving the word of God into the *affections*, as before it was received into the understanding by a divine light, and into the conscience by a penetrating power. And it is "*received*." Before it was rebelled against, shut out, repelled; or if received, it was but skin deep, floating upon the surface; a sort of passing light, or transient conviction, or momentary affection; nothing solid, nothing abiding, nothing vital, nothing really divine or spiritual; but a mere rising and falling, a heaving and sinking of natural feeling, which left the understanding really unenlightened, the conscience really untouched, and the affections really unmoved, unrenewed, unchanged. Thus, though there is an imitation of the Spirit's work upon the soul, which seems as though it embraces these three things, light, life, and love; yet the levity, the superficiality, the emptiness stamped upon all who merely receive the gospel as the word of men is sufficient evidence it never sank deep into the heart, never took any powerful grasp upon their soul. It therefore never brought with it any real separation from the world; never gave strength to mortify the least sin; never communicated power to escape the least snare of Satan; was never attended with a Spirit of grace and supplications; never brought honesty, sincerity, and uprightness into the heart before God; never bestowed any spirituality of mind, or any loving affection toward the Lord of life and glory or to the people of God. It did its miserable possessors no more real good than any science, or art, or manufacture, which they might have learnt naturally. It was merely nature in

another form, and was but the reception of truth in the same way as we receive mere scientific principles, or learn a language, a business, or a trade. But where it is received as the word of God, it takes such an effectual hold of a man's understanding, heart, conscience, and affections, that it never lets him go till it lands him safe in heaven. A man can never escape, nor ever wishes to escape out of the eternal arms, which are underneath him in the word of God, as made life and power to his soul. Nor does he ever get out of the gospel net, for it has encircled him with the bands of love, and will ever hold him fast. Nor does he wish to escape from the eye of God, or get away from the sound of the gospel, or leave that Lord who has made himself precious to his soul. His concern and anxiety rather are, that he knows so little, feels so little, and enjoys so little of the gospel of the grace of God, and it would delight his very soul if he had more light in his understanding, more tenderness in his conscience, more love in his heart. He does not "say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways" (Job 21:14); but on the contrary is ever desiring for the Lord to come nearer and nearer to him. Nor is he contented with the form of godliness while he denies the power; for he is ever sighing after the power, ever wants the teaching of the Spirit, ever struggles under a body of sin and death, longs for nothing so much as liberty, love, communion, spirituality, and enjoyment of divine things in his own bosom, to walk worthy of his vocation, live a life of faith and prayer, and thus manifest himself as one taught and blessed of God.

Thus though it is hard for a minister to describe the nice distinction between nature and grace and show how far a man may go and have no real religion, or how far a saint may sink and seem to have less than even a base hypocrite, yet there is a vital difference which distinguishes the precious from the vile, and that not only visible to the eye of the great Searcher of hearts, but obvious also to our more dim sight. We cannot but carry at times in our bosoms a clear evidence of the distinction between receiving the word of God as the word of God, and receiving it as the word of men. Even the gracious hearer sometimes listens to



the gospel as the word of men. He knows that it is truth which is sounding in his ears, but no life or power, dew, savour, or divine influence attends it to his soul. He is not shaken as to the doctrines which he holds, and which he hears boldly, faithfully, and clearly preached; the experience described corresponds with what he has felt, tasted, and handled of the word of life; but there is something lacking, what I may well call the main thing; for if "the kingdom of God is not in word but in power," not to feel the power is to fall short of a vital apprehension and a living enjoyment of the kingdom of God in one's own soul. At these times then the word of God is to him but the word of men, for there is no voice in it beyond the voice of the preacher. But there are times and seasons when the gospel is made the power of God unto salvation; when it comes not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance. And though he may be scarcely able to describe his feelings—for many well taught Christians are very unable to describe what they experimentally enjoy and know—yet he has an inward, indubitable evidence that God has spoken to him in the gospel, and brought a message of reconciliation, of pardon, of mercy, of peace, of salvation into his breast. The power that he has thus felt under the gospel is such as carries with it its own evidence. He cannot explain it to others, or understand its nature himself; but when he has once felt it, he can always afterwards recognise it, and is conscious of everything distinct from it, and that falls short of it. Thus though the children of God may be often exercised, how far they may go and prove wrong at last, still each carries in his own bosom more or less of inward evidence that he has at various times received the gospel, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God.

III.—I pass on to our next point, the proof and evidence of receiving the gospel, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God: *it effectually worketh in them that believe.*

Receiving the word as the word of men works, as I have shown, certain effects; but it does not *work effectually*. That word "effectually" stamps the difference between the two works with

God's own stamp-mark. If what I have said be correct; if I have traced out with any degree of truth and clearness the work of nature and the work of grace, you will see that receiving the gospel as the word of men works in the understanding, in the conscience, and in the affections, that is, so far as they are natural; but it does not work effectually so as to bring forth salvation. There is nothing really done thereby; no good is actually communicated, nothing wrought in or brought forth that will stand for eternity; in fact, even as regards visible effects, there is no effectual work where there is no grace. There is no effectual separation from the world; no effectual repentance; no effectual faith, hope, or love; no effectual prayer or supplication; no effectual cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart. It is all shallow, all superficial, deceptive, and hypocritical. But where the gospel is received as the word of God, though it may be in a small measure, it is in an effectual measure. God's word, like God's work, must have a reality in it. When God said, "Let there be light," light burst forth at his creative fiat, and was effectual light: it existed at once as day. When God commanded the day-star to know its place, the sun to shine in the sky, or bade earth produce its living creatures, its grass, its fruits, and so on, God's word was effectual. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." (Psa. 33:6, 9.) But the word of man is not effectual. I might go forth on a night like this and say, "Wind change! rain fall!" but my words would be the words of an idiot. Let God only command the bottles of heaven, and they will drop their full store upon the earth after the long and trying drought. Let God only speak, and nature smiles or nature withers according to the word of his mouth. So it is in grace. When God speaks, he speaks effectually, and his word has an effectual operation. Thus, if he give conviction, it is effectual conviction, and never wears off till it ends in effectual consolation. If he bring the soul effectually under Mount Sinai, he will bring it effectually under Mount Zion; if he convince effectually of unbelief, he will give effectual faith; if he effectually kill, he will effectually make alive; and if he effectually bring down, he will effectually bring up. This is the

great distinguishing mark of receiving the gospel as the word of God: that it is thorough work. When God called Abraham, there was no delay: he went out into the land which he knew not. Compare the going out of Lot from Sodom with the going out of Lot's wife. Lot went out effectually. Lot's wife followed the steps of her husband; but she turned back; there was no effectual leaving of Sodom, and therefore she fell under the destruction of Sodom. We read of one who said, "I go, Sir," but he went not. There was no effectual going. The other said he would not, but afterwards repented and went. That was effectual going. So when Abraham was called on to offer Isaac, he rose up early in the morning and went unto the place which God had told him of. God worked effectually in him by his word, and by the power of that word in his heart he was enabled to offer up Isaac. Thus, even if you have but a small measure of grace, yet if you have received the gospel into your heart as the word of God, it has wrought in you effectually. It may not have been a very deep work, or of long standing; you may have much yet to learn both of yourself and of the Lord, of your misery and his mercy, of your weakness, and of his strength, of your sin to condemn and of his mercy to save. Your faith may be weak, your hope dim, and your love but scanty; and yet if they have been wrought in your heart by the power of God through his word and the gospel of his grace, they have been wrought in you effectually. There is a vast difference between a still-born child and a living babe. The living babe may not be so fine a child, judging from appearance, as the still-born. Many babes we know that live are born very weak and feeble, and some have even been laid aside to die who have revived through careful nursing, life being discovered in them, and grown up into strong men or women. So you must not measure the work of grace in your own soul or in that of others by its depth or strength, but by its vitality. Is there life in your bosom? Has power attended the work? Is the grace of God really in your heart? Has God spoken to your soul? Have you heard his voice, felt its power, and fallen under its influence? It may perhaps at present not extend much beyond the conviction of sin, the confession of your transgressions and iniquities, covering you with confusion and shame of face before God, some attempt to

call upon his holy name, and seek his face by prayer and supplication. At present you may have little effectual operation of his word upon your heart, except to make you in earnest about the salvation of your soul, separating you from the world, and bringing you as a humble hearer under the preached gospel. Your views of the Person and work of Christ, of his suitability to your wants and woes, of the compassion of his loving heart, of his heavenly blessedness may be but dim and feeble, and yet they may be so far spiritual and real, as to draw forth a measure of faith toward him and of hope in him. There may be all this weakness in your faith and hope, and yet there may be truth and vitality in them. I would not speak a word to encourage the presumption of a vain, confident professor, but I certainly would not put forth my hand to quench the smoking flax, or break the bruised reed. I would seek if this be the last time I speak in your ears, to encourage the faintest, feeblest work of grace, while I would equally endeavour to stamp out all sparks of false fire, that you may have kindled to warm your hands at. But though I thus speak, yet I know that it is the hardest part of the Christian ministry to draw this narrow line so as to strengthen the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees of real believers, and yet not strengthen the hands of self-deceived professors.

ii. I say "real believers;" for now look at the characters in whom, according to our text, the word of God effectually works, "*in them which believe.*" Faith is the eye whereby we see light in God's light; faith the ear whereby we hear the word of God, and faith the hand whereby we receive out of Christ's fulness grace for grace. Thus the word of God worketh effectually in them that believe, and in them only; for where there is no faith there can be no effectual work; and I may add that it works effectually in exact measure and proportion to our faith. If our faith be weak, then the power that works in us is weak; or, to speak more correctly, if the power that works in us be weak, our faith, corresponding to that power, will be weak also. As we believe, it is done unto us. Strong faith brings strong consolation; weak faith brings weak consolation. We have all of us the same hand, the same number of fingers, the same way of using them; but the hand may be the

hand of a babe or the hand of a strong man. The babe may grasp the same object as the man; but O the difference of strength wherewith the tiny fingers of a babe grasp an object, and the muscular hands of a stout man! So the hands of the feeblest babe in grace may take hold of the Person and work of Christ, and receive out of his fulness; but compare that feeble hand with the strong hand of the man blessed with sweet assurance and a holy, happy confidence, enabling him to rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

IV.—But it is time to advance to our last point, the cause that there is for *unceasing thankfulness* that God has a people who have received the word of God not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God: "*For which cause also thank we God without ceasing.*"

O there we sadly fail! What an ardent flame of heavenly love burnt in the breast of this man of God. He was praising God without ceasing for the blessing that rested upon his ministry. Here we come short; here we see how scanty is our measure of grace, compared with that of the apostle. And yet every Christian minister, every servant of God, must have deep cause for thankfulness in seeing and believing that there is a people who have received his gospel, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God; and in having proofs and evidences how effectually it works in them that believe from beholding the fruits of faith as manifested by their lips and in their life. John could say, "I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth" (2 John 4); and again, "I have no greater joy, than to hear that my children walk in truth." (3 John 4.) So Paul could say to the Thessalonians: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy." (1 Thess. 2:19, 20); and again, "Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith; For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord." (1 Thess. 3:7, 8.)

I hope, though I would wish to speak of myself humbly and

modestly as becomes me,—yet I would fain hope that the Lord, not only here, but elsewhere, has caused the gospel I have preached to be received not as the word of men, but as it is, the word of God. And I hope there are those underneath this roof this evening who can set to their seal that they have received what I have said from time to time from this pulpit, not as the word of men, but as the word of God. They have felt at various times a power in the word, as if God himself were pleased to speak to their hearts by it; and from the effects realised by it, in the peace and joy it has communicated, in the liberty which it has brought, in the comfort which it has given, in the sweet assurance with which it has been attended, in the abiding effects which it has wrought, and the permanent effects which it has produced, they can look back and recognise it as having been to them the very voice of God. Now, my dear friends, this will stand, and stand for ever. If you have received what I have spoken to you for these many years only as the word of men, when I am gone all will be gone, and I and it as much forgotten as if I had never preached in your ears the word of life. It will be as vain, as fleeting, as useless as the foam upon the water when stirred by a breeze, will all pass away as the smoke out of a chimney, or as the chaff of the summer threshing floors. Nay, worse, for where the gospel is not the savour of life unto life, it is the savour of death unto death (2 Cor. 2:16); and if our gospel be hid it is hid to them that are lost. (2 Cor. 4:3.) It will little profit you in the great day to have heard the gospel for many years if it has not been made the power of God to your salvation. Nay, it cannot but increase your condemnation to have seen the light and rebelled against it, to have heard the truth, and yet inwardly or outwardly, in heart or in life to have turned aside to lies.

But you who have received the gospel from my lips as the word of God, and found and felt its effectual power in your heart, will stand every storm and live at last. What you have thus heard and received has been for eternity. It has saved and sanctified your soul, and it will be owned of God at the last day as his voice through me to you. The faith raised up in your heart by the power of this word, the hope that has been communicated, and the love

shed abroad by the Holy Ghost through it will all have his approbation in the great day when Christ shall come and all his saints with him. Then you who by his teaching and testimony have believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God, even you who can only say you desire to fear his name, be you weak or strong, will be found in him in that day accepted in the beloved. O that we may now be blessed with a sweet assurance that we shall then enter into the joy of the Lord; when all the infirmities of the flesh shall be forgotten, all the sins of our nature lost and buried in the grave, and we stand before the throne, with palms in our hands and everlasting crowns upon our heads, and all sorrow and sighing for ever fled away.

## **The Work of Faith, the Patience of Hope, and the Labour of Love**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, March 1, 1862

"Your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope." 1 Thess. 1:3

When our blessed Lord rose from the dead and went up on high to appear in the presence of God for us, as our personal Representative and interceding High Priest, he "received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." (Psa. 68:18.) Now these gifts which he received on our behalf were twofold:—First, "*gifts*," in the usual sense of the term, that is, the extraordinary gifts of the blessed Spirit, which were principally vouchsafed for the edification of the Church; and, secondly, the *graces* of the Spirit in his quickening, sanctifying power, whereby the people of God are made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Now we find the word of truth drawing a very clear distinction between these two things—the gifts of the Spirit and the graces of the Spirit.

But in order to set before you this distinction in a clearer light, I will read to you the testimony of the word to the "gifts" of the Spirit as distinct from his "graces:" "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues; but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every one severally as he will." (1 Cor. 12:8-11.) And again, "And God hath set some in the Church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues?



do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts." (1 Cor. 12:28-31.) We see from these passages the nature of these gifts—that they were more for the edification of the Church than the personal benefit of their owner; that some of them, in particular, as prophecy, the gifts of healing, and of tongues, were strictly miraculous, and therefore temporary and transient, passing away when not absolutely needed; that they did not necessarily constitute their possessor a partaker of grace, though he might be so, and in most cases was so; and that they differed much from each other in operation and administration. (1 Cor. 12:4-6.) The end and object of these gifts was the building up of the Church on her most holy faith, as the apostle so clearly and beautifully explains: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Eph. 4:11, 12.)

But in examining more closely the nature of these gifts, we must draw a distinction between those which were miraculous and those which were not. The miraculous gifts, such as prophecy, healing, speaking with tongues, passed away with the apostolic age, and ceased when the canon of scripture was closed. But the gifts of the ministry, as of "pastors and teachers," still abide, and will do so as long as there is a necessity for "the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ;" in other words, whilst the Lord has a people upon earth. But whether these gifts passed away as strictly miraculous or whether they still abide in the Church for the work of the ministry, they possess alike this distinctive feature, that they are but for time, not for eternity; for the edification of others, and are neither saving nor sanctifying to the possessor; that when accompanied with grace, they are highly to be prized, but should be jealously watched over lest they puff up with pride and issue in a terrible downfall.

But the *graces* of the Spirit, as distinct from his gifts, are of a very different nature. This made the apostle say, "But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet show I unto you a more

excellent way." (1 Cor. 12:31.) What was "the more excellent way"—a way excelling all the best gifts of the Spirit? The way of grace; and more especially the way of that prime grace, "charity" or love. And why more excellent? Because, unlike gifts, it never fails, but abides for ever and ever. Thus he says, "Charity [or love] never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part." And then he adds: "And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." We thus gather up one distinctive feature of graces as opposed to gifts, and especially of the three leading graces—faith, hope, and love—that they *abide*, their seat being the heart, which the Lord claims as peculiarly his own, their Author and Finisher the Lord of Life and glory, and their end the salvation of the soul.

But there is another distinguishing characteristic of these three graces, faith, hope, and love, which is, that they are what I may call *working* graces. It is a great mistake to think that a Christian is not a worker. There is no man who works like him. As Hart justly says,

"The Christian works with all his power,  
And grieves that he can work no more."

And yet with all his working it is not he that works, but the grace of God which is in him, as said the apostle of himself, and in so doing well expresses the experience of every real Christian: "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." (1 Cor. 15:10.) Thus though the Christian works, it is not really he who works but the grace of God in him, and it is this which makes a Christian such a paradox; that is, such an apparent contradiction both to himself and to others. At one time, none more earnest, more diligent, more active, more zealous, more bent upon every good word and work; and yet at another, how slothful, how indifferent, how cold, lifeless, and dead, as if he

had neither a grain of grace nor a spark of feeling. Sometimes he is as watchful as a sentinel in the face of an advancing enemy, and anon drops asleep in the sentry box, overcome with weariness and listlessness. Sometimes so filled with the Spirit of prayer and supplications as if he would seize heaven by storm and take the kingdom of God by violence; and then seeming scarcely to have a breath of prayer in his soul. Sometimes he loathes and abhors himself in dust and ashes as exceedingly vile, the very worst and basest of all sinners; then again is puffed up with a sense of his own importance as if there were no such saint as he, or if a minister, no minister like him for gifts and abilities, usefulness and acceptance. Sometimes his affections are so fixed on things above, that it scorns as if he had no care and no desire for anything but the presence, love, favour, and glory of God; then at another time his heart is as cold as ice and as dead as a stone. Sometimes the things of eternity lie so weightily and yet so warmly upon his breast, that it seems as if nothing else were worth a single thought; and then come trooping in the cares and anxieties of this present life to engross his mind and carry him away to the very ends of the earth. Thus the Christian is a contradiction to himself; and yet with all this, the point still remains good, that every grace of the Spirit in him is a *working* grace. And not only so, but every grace of the Spirit has its *own work* to perform and its own end to attain.

Look, for instance, at the words of our text, to which these remarks are meant to be introductory. We read there of "a work of faith, a labour of love, and a patience of hope." See how the apostle brings before us these three abiding, these three working graces, and how he assigns to each its particular office. He tells the Thessalonian believers that he "remembered without ceasing their work of faith, and their labour of love, and their patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of God and their Father;" being persuaded, from what he saw of those Christian graces in them, and their activity and energy, that they were the people whom God had blessed: "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God."

In endeavouring, with God's help and blessing, to unfold the mind and meaning of the Spirit in these words, I shall seek to describe, as the Lord may enable,

I.—*First, "faith" and its "work."*

II.—*Secondly, "hope" and its "patience."*

III.—*Thirdly, "love" and its "labour."*

You will observe that I have rather inverted the order of these two last Christian graces, for as they stand in our text love precedes hope. My reason for so doing is that this is not only the spiritual and experimental order in which these three graces succeed each other in the heart, but that in which the apostle has himself arranged them in another place: "Now abideth faith, hope, love; these three, but the greatest of these is love."

I.—Let us first, then, look at *faith and its work*; and in so doing I shall attempt to show you faith under these six distinct aspects:— 1, faith in its *nature*; 2, faith in its *work*; 3, faith in its *opposition*; 4, faith in its *examples*; 5, faith in its *victory*; and 6, faith in its *fruits*. For I wish to bring before you as clearly as I can a living, breathing, speaking portrait of this heavenly grace as featured in the word and as drawn upon the heart of the child of God, that you may have some testimony in your conscience whether you are the favoured partaker of it or not.

i. Now in examining the *nature* of faith, we may direct our first glance at its *birth* and *origin*, and in so doing shall soon see from the word of grace and the experience of the family of God that, like Paul's call to the apostleship, it is "neither of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead." (Gal. 1:1.)

Are we not expressly told that those who received Christ (and how could they receive him but by faith?) "were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of

God?" (John 1:13.) And so declared our Lord when he said, "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6.) We may lay it down, then, as a most certain truth, that faith is a plant which does not grow in the native garden. Does not our Lord say, "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up?" (Matt. 15:13.) If, then, faith is not to be rooted up, in other words, if it is to be an abiding grace, it must be planted by the Father's hand, and thus testifies also James: "Every good gift and every perfect gift" (and is not faith both a good and perfect gift?) "is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James 1:17.) Faith, then, is an exotic, a tender plant from heaven's own warm, happy clime, where no cold blasts chill, no frost or ice destroys, no blighting east wind withers the flowers that ever bloom and the fruits that ever grow in that celestial paradise. If faith, then, be of this divine origin we shall seek for it in vain among the children of this world. And such is the Lord's testimony to ancient Israel, even those whom he had brought out of Egypt, and who therefore had the strongest reasons to believe: "And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith." (Deut. 32:20.) Nay, the Lord the Spirit says even more than this of that generation which witnessed Christ's miracles: "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." (John 12:37-40.) But besides this scriptural testimony, we have only to appeal to the experience of every saint of God whether he does not carry in his own bosom the inward conviction that faith, true faith, saving faith, the faith of God's elect, the only faith worthy of the name, is the pure, special gift of God. In fact, such is the express language of the Holy Ghost: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is *the gift of God.*" (Eph. 2:8.)

And again: "Unto to you it is *given* in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." (Phil. 1:29.) You will also find amongst the fruits of the Spirit, of which we have a blessed catalogue by the apostle, "faith" expressly mentioned: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith." (Gal. 5:22.) And if a fruit of the Spirit, how clear the conclusion that her birth and origin are not of the flesh.

But now having thus hastily glanced at faith's celestial origin, we may be better prepared to examine its *nature*; what it is in itself as a peculiar and distinct grace of the Spirit. And I think that to determine this we cannot do better than take the apostolic definition given in Hebrews 11:1: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Two things are here said of faith which I shall separately consider. 1, That it "is the substance of things hoped for." By "substance" I understand what we call subsistence; in other words, that faith gives a substantial existence to those things in which the soul hopes, making them real, clothing them, as it were, with life, and enduing dim and distant shadows with a present and positive existence. Not that, like a magician's wand, faith alters the nature of things, or makes that to exist which did not exist before, but it gives them an inward subsistence, so that they are as if actually present—handled, tasted, and enjoyed as personal realities. Now faith does this in several ways which we shall see better after we have considered what are—"the things hoped for." These are twofold—present grace and future glory. Thus the work and witness of the blessed Spirit, with his teachings, support, and consolations; the forgiveness of sin, a sense of God's favour, his hand to be with us all through the various scenes and changes of this mortal life, a peaceful deathbed, and a triumphant entrance into the kingdom of God, with a blessed expectation of when Christ appears to see him as he is and to be made like unto him, are "things hoped for." Now faith gives to these things thus hoped for a solid subsistence in the bosom in various ways. First it *convinc*es us of their *reality* by

mixing itself with the promises, as Abraham believed the word of promise: "Thus shall thy seed be." Then it gives the soul a taste of the sweetness and blessedness of the things hoped for, for by faith we taste that the Lord is gracious, and "Unto you which believe he is precious." (1 Pet. 2:3, 7.) "O taste and see that the Lord is good." (Psa. 34:8.) As the word by which faith is raised up in the heart is "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," the eternal realities thus revealed have a peculiar weight, a weight in some degree proportionate to their importance, and this gives them a substance compared with which all earthly things are but a shadow. Be assured that if your faith do not give eternal things a deeper place in your heart, a stronger hold on your conscience, and a warmer claim upon your affections than the things of time and sense, your faith is not the substance of things hoped for, nor the faith of God's elect. Faith also gives an *earnest* of the things hoped for, for they are revealed to faith, and as this earnest is attended with the witness and the seal of the Spirit it brings joy and peace. The apostle, therefore, says, "Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:22); and so testifies Peter: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." (1 Pet. 1:8, 9.) Thus we see that faith is not a notion, an opinion, or a fancy, but a most solid, substantial blessing, and as such gives eternal realities an abiding place in the heart.

But, 2. faith is also "the evidence of things not seen." What are those things not seen? Such divine things as the mystery of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in the Unity of the divine Essence; the glorious Person of the Son of God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the blessed Spirit; the complex Person of Immanuel, God with us: the efficacy of his atoning blood as purging a guilty conscience; the suitability of his glorious righteousness as "justifying from all things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses;" his resurrection from the dead; his ascension up on high; his personal intercession at the right hand of the Father, his second coming in glory with all his

saints and angels. These are some of the things not seen. As the apostle speaks, "The things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." And so, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for those that love him." But faith sees them, as our Lord said to his disciples: "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also." (John 14:19.) But how did they see him except by faith? the same faith as that whereby Moses "endured as seeing him who is invisible." (Heb. 11:27.)

Thus faith has an inward evidence, a spiritual testimony that the things unseen to mortal eye are true; and as thus endued with spiritual sight, it penetrates the veil spread over all things here below, and entering into the very presence of God, brings down the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven as personal realities. Such, then, is a short description of the nature of faith; this being its leading, its distinguishing feature, that it credits God's testimony, believes what God has said on the sole authority of his word as made life and power to the soul by the blessed Spirit.

ii. But now we come to faith's *work*; for faith is not an idle, sluggish, indolent grace. It has much to do; yea, it has everything to do, for without it nothing is done to any purpose, for "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (Rom. 14:23.)

1. But what is faith's chief work? It is to *believe in the Son of God*. "This is the work of God," said our blessed Lord when asked, "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." (John 6:28, 29.) And we have a testimony to the same effect from the pen of holy John, where he says, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." (1 John 5:13.) But you may say, "Why, this is not such hard work." This would not be your language if you knew anything of the difficulty of faith, or if you knew the difference, the solemn, eternal difference, between a



faith that is merely natural and historical, founded upon reason and argument, and the faith of God's elect which embraces for itself, under a divine and heavenly power, the Person and work of the Son of God as a living reality, and draws a holy influence out of his glorious fulness to purge the conscience from guilt and filth, and to fill the soul with all joy and peace in believing. But this difference which you know not is deeply wrought in the heart and conscience of the people of God. They well know you might as well attempt to create a new sun and launch him in the sky, as to raise up a living faith in the soul in and upon the Son of God by your own strength and power. They know it through a deep and abiding sense of the unbelief of their heart by nature, and its utter inability to raise up a faith which works by love, purifies the heart, overcomes the world, gives free access to God, obtains answers to prayer, and is attended with the sensible approbation of the Almighty.

2. But not only is it the work of faith to believe in the Son of God, but to *live a life of faith* upon him; not merely to penetrate into the presence of God and apprehend the Person of Christ within the veil, but also day by day to live upon his glorious and ever-flowing, overflowing fulness—as the apostle so sweetly describes his own experience in this matter: "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20.) This, then, is faith's work, to be ever looking to the Son of God as the Way, the Truth, and the Life; to be ever living upon his fulness, ever receiving out of it supplies of heavenly grace. But as this can only be done by prayer and supplication, it is faith's work to call upon his holy name, though sometimes it may be from the very ends of the earth; to plead with him, and talk with him as a man talketh with his friend; and thus, in the active operation and living exercise of this heavenly grace, to wrestle with him as Jacob wrestled with the angel, so as to bring down into the heart a blessing from his mouth.

3. But again, another part of the work of faith is to *stand*; for by faith we stand. (2 Cor. 1:24.) And what is it to stand? When we

consider what there is in sin and self to carry us away, O to stand in the evil day, and having done all to stand! is not this the work of faith? Yes; to stand upon our feet against the floods of error which are sweeping as in a torrent round the Church; against the floods of evil which are streaming over the world; against the deluge of the iniquities of our own vile heart; against the floods of temptation out of the mouth of Satan; still to stand, and stand firmly on the ground of truth and a good conscience where the Lord has placed us,—this, this is indeed the work of faith.

4. But again the work of faith is to *fight* as well as to stand. We are called upon to "fight the good fight of faith;" and we are told that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." So we are provided with a heavenly suit of armour, and above all with a precious shield, "the shield of faith, whereby we shall quench all the fiery darts of the wicked;" for, as Hart says,

"Christians are called not to play, but fight."

Our daily experience is more or less an experience of conflict. We have to fight against besetting sins; against the snares and temptations laid every moment for our feet; against the daily unceasing influence of an ungodly world; against the very things that our carnal heart most fondly loves; and against the workings and arguments of our natural mind, which are all opposed to a life of faith. All these things we have to fight against, and to resist even unto blood, striving against sin. But we shall see, perhaps, more clearly what the work of faith is, by examining, in the light of the word and of Christian experience, our next point;

iii. The *opposition* which faith has to encounter. Now we have to measure a man's work, not only by what he does, but by the difficulty which he has to encounter in doing it. It is like ploughing two different kinds of land: you must not measure how much work a man does in a day merely by the number of furrows he can draw; you must consider whether he is ploughing stiff clay, or

light fen soil. So we must not measure the work of faith with power by the quantity executed, but by the difficulties to be encountered in doing it. It seems at first sight an easy thing to believe in the Son of God, an easy matter to live a life of faith upon him, an easy task to fight the good fight of faith. But when we come to measure the work of faith by the opposition it has to encounter in doing these things, then we find that it requires the power of God in a man's soul to enable faith to do the work assigned to it. For look at the opposition offered to it.

1. Look, first, at the *unbelief* of man's heart. O what an opposition is made to every act of faith by the unbelief which is, as it were, the very life-blood of our natural mind! Have you never sighed, cried, and groaned under the unbelief of your heart? Have you never felt it such a heavy load and presenting such a mountain of difficulty, that when you tried with all the power of your soul to believe in the Son of God and to raise up a living faith to apprehend him in his blood and obedience, there was an opposition raised up in your heart to the actings of faith by the weight of unbelief that pressed it down? By this opposition, then, you may know something of the power of faith which is needed and the work of faith as exercised in that power to surmount this unbelief.

2. But there is also the opposition of the *reasoning* mind; for the reasoning mind of man is thoroughly opposed to all the actings of living faith in the soul. There is not an argument against the truth of God which the reasoning mind of man does not at times raise up and seek to employ against all that God has revealed in his holy word; for well nigh everything in the word of God, I will not say is contrary to, but is above reason. The mystery of the Trinity; the complex Person of Christ; his work upon the cross; his atoning blood and obedience; his resurrection from the dead; his ascension on high; and his being now in heaven at God's right hand, with the whole work of the Spirit upon the heart,—all these truths are not contrary to reason: they would not be truth if they were: but they are above it; as the Lord says, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways,

and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isai. 55:8.) Now our reasoning mind is opposed to these truths, because it cannot bring them down to its own level; and not being able to apprehend them by the exercise of its own faculties, it is opposed to the exercise of faith upon them.

3. But look again at another source of opposition. How *Satan* can work upon the carnal mind, and what suggestions he can and does make use of to oppose the work of faith with power. How subtle his arguments; how strong his suggestions; how artful his insinuations; and how all are directed against the work of faith to lay hold of and live a life of faith upon the Son of God. Sometimes he insinuates, "How can these things be true?" Sometimes, "How do you know you have any interest in them?" Sometimes he magnifies the greatness of our sins before we were called by grace, and sometimes the sins we have committed since, urging from them both, "For you there is no hope, for you have sinned beyond the reach of mercy." Thus there is an opposition to the work of faith with power, not only from the reasoning of our natural mind which falls in with these suggestions of Satan, but also from the strong and subtle temptations of the wicked One, even on the ground that the very things are true which he has just before denied.

4. But there is another source of opposition still, and that is a *guilty conscience*. Nothing hardly seems more opposed to the work of faith with power than a guilty conscience; for that is closely connected with an unbelieving heart, which made the apostle say, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." (Heb. 3:12.) And why is it "*an evil* heart of unbelief" but because it is accompanied with "*an evil*," that is, a guilty "conscience?" Nor can the voice of faith be heard except as this guilty conscience is purged by the application of atoning blood; which made the apostle say, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." (Heb. 10:22.) But the conscience, even when it has been once purged, often, through

fresh contracted guilt, sinks down into depths out of which it seems as if it could not emerge, and thus loses sight of the Person and work of the Son of God.

iv. But we pass on to our next point, which, with God's help and blessing, may give a clearer light still on this work of faith—namely, the *examples* which God has given in his word of the power of faith; and we will take two, which the Lord has especially afforded for our instruction. One is that conspicuous example, the faith of Abraham; for he is set before us as "the father of all them that believe," who are therefore said to "walk in the steps of that faith which he had being yet uncircumcised." (Rom. 4:11, 12.) Now just for a few moments take a glance at Abraham's faith, and see its nature, end, and object. The instance to which the apostle especially refers of Abraham's faith is where the Lord appeared to him in the dead of night and said, "I am thy shield and exceeding great reward;" and then took him forth and bade him behold the stars in the sky, saying, "Thus shall thy seed be." Now we read that "he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness." (Gen. 15:1, 5, 6.) That was therefore, an act of justifying faith. He believed the promise of God, its coming home to his soul with divine power. But this is the point to which I wish to draw your attention, that his faith, though it was a justifying faith, yet it was of such a nature that it was believing against hope. "Who," he says, "against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform." This, then, was Abraham's faith. It was a firm credence in the promise of God made to him, and yet a faith that lived under opposition, hoping against hope, and being fully persuaded that what God had promised he would perform. Our faith, then, if it be genuine, must resemble that of Abraham. It must anchor in the truth of God as made life and spirit to our

soul. It must meet with every opposition from without and within; from sin, Satan, and the world; from nature, and flesh, and reason all combined against it. But in spite of all, it must hope against hope, and be fully persuaded that what God has promised he is able to perform; and thus by perseverance and patient waiting obtain the victory. Take one more example, that of Moses: his faith was of this nature. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." (Heb. 11:24, 25.) The peculiar character of the faith of Moses was this, that though he was highly exalted and might have enjoyed all the treasures and pleasures of Egypt, yet he deliberately preferred to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy all that wealth could offer or carnal pleasure present; "having respect to the recompense of reward."

v. Now I pass on, having shown these examples, to point out faith's *victory*; for if we are to be saved, our faith must gain the day; we must have a faith that shall triumph over death and hell and gain a glorious conquest over every internal and external and infernal foe; as John says, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." This is just the state, then, in which the matter stands: we must either conquer or be conquered; we must either gain the day and be crowned with an immortal crown of glory, or else sink in the strife, defeated by sin and Satan. But none of God's people will be defeated in the fight; and yet they often seem, as it were, to escape defeat by the very skin of their teeth; yet faith will sooner or later gain the day, for Jesus is its finisher as well as its author. He will crown the faith of his own gift with eternal glory. He will never suffer his dear family to be overcome in the good fight of faith, for he will give strength to every weak arm and power to every feeble knee, and has engaged to bring them off more than conquerors. Thus as the Lord the Spirit is pleased to work in the soul by his living energy, he strengthens faith more and more to believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God, to receive more continual supplies out of his fulness, to wrestle more earnestly with God for a spiritual

blessing; to stand more firmly in the evil day against every assaulting foe; to fight more strenuously the good fight of faith, and never cry quarter until faith gains its glorious end, which is to see Jesus as he is in the realms of eternal day. Your faith may be weak; it may seem at times to be reduced to its lowest point; but as sure as Jesus has fought the battle, won the day, and is now crowned with honour and glory, so surely he will bring you off more than conqueror, as being the purchase of his atoning blood; for no member of his mystical body shall perish, but all shall be saved in him with an everlasting salvation.

vi. Now just one word about the *fruits* of faith. The grand fruit is the salvation of the soul: for this is the end of faith, "receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your soul." But every spiritual fruit hangs round faith, in rich, ripe clusters: for a faith without fruit is a faith dead before God. A faith that does not live to God's praise, walk in God's fear, delight itself in the Lord, and bring forth to his Honour and glory, does not wear the stamp of heaven upon it. It is not accredited as being the faith of God's elect, nor does it bear a single mark of being coined in heaven's mint as bearing Christ's image and superscription.

II.—But let me now direct your attention to the second of these three abiding graces, which is another part also of our education for eternity—*hope* and its *patience*. You will observe that each of these three Christian graces has its peculiar office and operation. Faith has its work, hope has its patience, and love has its labour. To illustrate these different features, we may perhaps avail ourselves of a comparison:—Faith is like a young man in the beginning of his strength, with all the activity, and energy, and agility of youth. Hope is like a man past the activity and agility of youth, and yet possessed of a strong power of endurance of hard work, and bodily labour. And love may represent a man still further advanced in life when his constitution being inured to hard work, and he being now a thoroughly skilled workman, is able to go labouring on beneath the burning sun or amidst the winter frost without flagging or weariness.

I proposed to show you "hope and its patience." But as on a late occasion when preaching upon the gates of the city I spoke at some length on the nature of hope, and how it was raised up in the heart, I shall not now enter on that part of the subject, but shall confine myself chiefly to the description of its work which is here called "*patience*."

1. Now "patience" in Scripture not only means *patience* in the ordinary sense of the term,—that is, meekness, quietness, and gentleness, submission and resignation to the will of God, without murmuring, fretfulness, or rebellion, but it also signifies, and that more usually, what is generally understood by the term *endurance*. This we shall perhaps by and by more clearly see to be the peculiar work of hope, and one more adapted to it than the more familiar meaning of patience, as implying resignation and submission. In religion, we want not only to commence but to go on—to end well, as well as to begin well. Hence the need of endurance.

Now when we examine the passages in Scripture which speak of "patience," we see that in them all this faculty of "endurance" is chiefly intended. The apostle says, for instance, "Let us run with *patience* the race set before us." (Heb. 12:1.) Now what quality is chiefly needed in running a race? You will perhaps say, "Swiftness of foot." It is true. But suppose the race is a long one—one of some miles. Is not something else needed then? Surely; and what but endurance—staying power, strength of wind and limb, perseverance, and that firm determination not to be beaten which would sooner die than yield? Is not this quality more needed in running a race, especially a race which is to last a whole life, than quiet submission to affliction, or what we generally understand by the word, "patience?" Take again what is said of Job by the apostle James: "Behold we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." (James. 5:11.) I would just remark that the words translated, "endure" and "patience," are the same in the original, so that we might read it thus: "Behold we count them happy which endure. Ye



have heard of the endurance of Job." Job was not very patient, for he cursed the day of his birth, but was wonderfully enduring. How he bore up under the loss of all his children, the destruction of all his property, the fierce assaults of Satan, the taunts of his wife, the sore boils from the sole of his foot unto the crown, and, worse than all, the arrows of the Almighty drinking up his spirit. How he endured the greatest sufferings of body and mind, and by endurance proved that "the root of the matter" was in him. This "endurance," then, is the peculiar work and province of hope. We see this sometimes naturally as well as spiritually. Many a man is very active, agile, and alert, but has no power of endurance, no hard muscle, no reserve of strength. He can do a measure of work at first, but when it comes to long toil, hard labour, and unwearied endurance of exertion, his muscles being weak and flaccid, and he possessing no strong stamina of constitution, he breaks down under the load. This, then, is the peculiar office, I might almost say the special beauty and blessedness of hope, that it is an enduring grace; a grace that wears, lasts, and holds out, and, however tried, never gives way. Have you not often found this, that give up what you may, you never can give up your hope? There you do well; for to give up hope is to fall into despair; and observe that as it is the work of faith to believe against unbelief, so it is the work of hope to hope against despair. Hope in scripture is compared to an anchor, and said to enter within the veil. Now what is the chief virtue and value of an anchor? It is not to do, to do; to work, to work; its duty is to lie still and never move; never to break, never to drag, never to come home. The anchor does its work in the dark; it sinks quite out of sight into the sand, and is so constructed that the stronger the ship pulls, the deeper it buries itself, and the harder it holds. This tenacity, this stiff obstinacy, this hard, unyielding gripe [grasp, control] is the peculiar excellency of an anchor, without which it would be altogether useless. If it be well made, if the iron be tough and well hammered, it will bite the ground and bite hard; and if the cable be equally strong, so as not to part asunder, the ship will safely ride out the heaviest storm. Such an anchor to the soul is hope—power to endure, never to break, never to give way, being its chief excellence as well as its peculiar

work.

But now look at the connection between faith and hope. Faith gives to things hoped for a subsistence, and then hope takes hold of the things that faith thus realises, and anchors in them with tenacious grasp as if it would not, could not, must not, dare not let them go, for to let them go is to be lost altogether. If ever you have had a promise applied to your mind with divine power; ever had a revelation of Jesus to your soul; a word from his mouth; an application of his atoning blood to your conscience; or any shedding abroad of the love of God in your heart, hope lays firm hold of the blessing thus communicated, and will not let it go. Just as the anchor lays firm hold of the ground, and by firm holding saves the ship; so the grace of hope saves the soul, (for "we are saved by hope." Rom. 7:24), by not letting go any spiritual blessing that ever the Lord has dropped into the heart.

2. But hope has its *opposition* as well as faith, for as faith is opposed by unbelief, so hope is opposed by despair. Despair is a most dreadful feeling, but it is one by which the family of God are often beset. We must seek relief against it by hope.

"To cause despair's the scope  
Of Satan and his powers;  
Against hope to believe in hope  
My brethren must be ours."

Here, then, we want the anchor. The storms of apprehended wrath that beat upon the soul; the strong current of guilty fear; the tide of unbelief rising higher and higher; the rocks of open perdition that lie in sight, with breakers covering them with surf, and dashing against them so many wrecks; the fears of the mariner lest the cable should part or the anchor should come home,—all this well represents what hope has to endure, and how by endurance it overcomes all opposition. So David encouraged his soul still to hope in God when cast down within him, under the sweet assurance that he should still praise him. (Psa. 42:11.) Hope of salvation is our helmet (1 Thess. 5:8), as faith is our

shield, truth our girdle, righteousness our breastplate, and the word of God our sword. Let us, then, keep our helmet on, for to put it off is to go bareheaded into the battle.

3. But hope has its *end* as well as faith; and what end is this? all that we want and all that we desire—fruition, or enjoyment; for as faith will be swallowed up in sight, so hope will be lost in fruition.

4. And not only has hope its end, but its *fruits*; for it would indeed be inconsistent with such an eminent grace of the Spirit as hope if it were a barren tree, or, like Ephraim, bore fruit only to itself. John gives no countenance to a barren, unfruitful hope: "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." (1 John 3:3.) Now the fruits of hope are twofold—*inward* and *outward*.

Patient *expectation* is the chief *inward* fruit of hope, as the apostle speaks: "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.) To stand, then, upon its watch-tower, looking out for the Lord's appearing, who is "good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him," is a special fruit of hope, as we read: "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." (Lam. 3:26.)

To *submit* to God's will; to sit alone and keep silence, humbly confessing sin, and putting the mouth into the dust, is another fruit of hope: "He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him." (Lam. 3:28, 29.)

To *take* the Lord as our satisfying portion, knowing that in his favour is life, is another inward fruit of hope: "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him." (Lam. 3:24.)

And to add another berry to the cluster, let me just name one more inward fruit of hope—a humble *recollection* of past *miseries*

and mercies: "My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope." (Lam. 3:20, 21.)

And hope has its *outward* fruits also, such as separation from the world; a cleaving close to the family of God; a living not to sin and self but to the Lord; and a conduct and conversation becoming such as profess to be waiting for the Lord's appearing.

III.—But as time presses, I must hasten on to the last of the three abiding graces, and the greatest of the three, which therefore I have placed last: "Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." But love in the words of our text has a "*labour*" as well as faith a "work," and hope a "patience."

i. But *what* is love? for as I have defined the nature of faith and hope, so now I must speak a few words upon the nature of love. But how can I describe it, how dissect and anatomise this heavenly grace; how pourtray her beautiful features, or paint her lovely, engaging form? Love cannot be described; it must be felt to be known; but as a help to understand its nature, you may consider some of the features of earthly love. Love delights to be with the beloved object; to see the face; to hear the voice; to be near the person; to be kindly addressed by; and above all to revel in the delightful consciousness of loving and being loved again. Such is a slight sketch of some marks of earthly love; and heavenly love, in a higher and purer sense, in those points much resembles it. Wherever the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost and the Lord makes himself dear, near, and precious, there will be a delight in the Lord's company; in looking upon the Lord's face; in hearing the Lord's voice; in enjoying the Lord's presence; and above all things, in the sweet consciousness that the Lord loves us as we love him.

ii. But this love has a "*labour*." It is not a cold, dead, sluggish grace which has no work to do and no heart to do it. It has to labour, and that very hard; for a love that will not work is a love

that must not eat. But what is love's labour? Chiefly twofold, inward and outward.

1. The inward labour of love is to labour against the coldness, deadness, and hardness, and especially against the enmity of the carnal mind. For as "the work of faith" is to strive against unbelief, and "the patience of hope" to endure and bear up against despair, so "the labour of love" is to toil and struggle against the enmity and opposition of the carnal mind.

But it has also to labour under and against the *suspensions*, the jealousies, the disappointments, the denials of the smiles and presence of the beloved Object. Often, too, has it to labour in the dark, without one cheering word or encouraging look; often to sigh, mourn, and endure sharp pangs, cruel fears, and tormenting suspicions through the delay of the coming of the Beloved. "Why," it cries, "is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariot?" Truly this love has to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things; for love never faileth. Like the fire from heaven on the brazen altar, love once kindled is never suffered to go out. Thus love has to labour and sometimes very hard, in order to secure the promised blessing, and reap its choicest fruit—the sweet consciousness and enjoyment of the Lord's love. But as in the case of faith and hope, love has its peculiar *opposition*; and the labour of love is made manifest in proportion to the opposition it encounters and the triumph it obtains over it. If there were no enmity of the carnal mind, no doubts and fears, no coldness, jealousy, suspicion, or disappointment, there would be no labour of love to work against them. But by this very labour it becomes manifested as an operative grace—as "a loving, not in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

Another inward labour of love is to *please* the Object of its love, by submission to his will, by patient suffering under the weighty cross, by obedience to his precepts, and a fixed determination to make his word its rule, his glory its supreme object, and his favour its highest and only reward.

2. But love has its *outward* labour as well as its inward, as we read: "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed towards his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." (Heb. 6:10.) "The love of Christ," says the apostle, "constraineth us;" and to what? "That we should not henceforth live unto ourselves but to him who died for us and rose again." (2 Cor. 5:14, 15.) Separation from the world; living to the praise and glory of God; walking in his fear; a desire to please, a dread to offend our best, our only Friend; a seeking to do good to the souls and bodies of men; a godly obedience to every precept and every ordinance for the Lord's sake; adorning the doctrine with a consistent, unblameable walk, conduct, and conversation—all this will be the outward labour of love; for all these fruits show the reality, the earnestness, and the depth of that love to Christ, which is the peculiar feature of one born of God. And as love will thus labour for the Lord, so will it labour for the Lord's people; for wherever this love is there will be a desire for their good, carrying them warmly upon the heart, sympathising with them in trouble and joy; bearing and forbearing with them in tender affection, and seeking their spiritual benefit and profit. Love will not encourage a spirit of strife and division, but rather will desire to walk in sweet union with all the family of God in a spirit of meekness, avoiding all that may grieve or stumble. This is love's labour; for all this will meet with every kind of opposition from without and within; yet love, true love, can and will conquer all.

But to draw to a conclusion, these three graces of the Spirit have each their separate work in order to keep them alive and healthy. It is in grace as in nature—with the soul as with the body; it must have air and exercise. What is our body without these two things?

Can health be maintained without them? A man may lie upon his bed or sleep in his chair till he can scarcely walk from indolence and indigestion. It is air and exercise that keeps the body healthy. So it is spiritually. The graces of the Spirit need to be

often exercised and well aired to keep them healthy—aired with the pure breath of heaven, and exercised with the operations of the Holy Ghost drawing them forth into activity and energy. And just as in nature a man gains health and strength by using his limbs and working his muscles, so in spiritual things these graces of the Spirit gains strength by use and exercise. Faith by working hard; hope by enduring much; and love by labouring long in the face of difficulties, become each more strengthened, more confirmed, more active, healthy, and energetic. It is a false faith to sleep all day in the sluggard's arm-chair; it is the hypocrite's hope who endures nothing for Christ's sake; it is love in lip and tongue and name that undergoes no labour to please the beloved Object. Look at these things in the light of your own experience. See whether you can find not only faith in your heart, but its work; not only hope, but its patience; not only love, but its labour. The apostle remembered without ceasing their work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope. His eye was fixed not so much upon their Christian graces as their exercise of them. As, then, he looked upon them and saw their faith working diligently, their hope suffering patiently, and their love labouring unweariedly for the glory of God and the good of his people, he was satisfied they were the graces of the Spirit wrought in their heart by a divine power. And well may I add in the spirit of the apostle, that there is nothing more satisfying to a minister's eye or comforting to his heart than to look round amongst his people and see not only their faith, but their work of faith; not only their hope, but their patience of hope; not only their love, but their labour of love. I leave those things to your conscience, that you may examine for yourselves how far you know them by a vital experience of their truth, their reality, and their power.

## **The Work of Faith with Power**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, Sept. 19, 1859

"Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Thess. 1:11, 12

It is scarcely possible to read with an attentive eye the epistles of Paul in the New Testament without seeing what a spirit of prayer dwelt in his breast, and that not only for the saints of God generally, but for those churches particularly to which the Holy Spirit inspired his pen to write. Since he has said, "Be ye followers of me even as I also am of Christ," (1 Cor. 11:1) we may well ask ourselves whether we walk in the same spirit, whether we tread in the same steps. Alas! no. In this as in every other grace we fall painfully short of the bright and heavenly example which he has set us. Often, too often, when we find it hard to pray for ourselves. How much harder, then, to pray for others! Persons frequently ask me to pray for them. I usually make them no answer, for I feel that unless the Lord lay them on my heart I can no more pray for them than I can for myself, unless I have the Spirit of grace and supplications poured out upon me. I may indeed use words on their behalf, as I might on my own; but what are words without the Spirit's interceding breath in them, whether for one's self or for other's? But this blessed man of God had such a continual spirit of prayer dwelling in his breast, that when he fell upon his knees before God to supplicate his heavenly Majesty to supply his own pressing wants, the various churches with which he had been personally connected, and even some, as those at Rome and Colosse, that he had never seen face to face in the flesh, were so brought before his mind and laid with such weight and power upon his



heart, that he could not rest satisfied until he had poured forth his soul in prayer and supplication on their behalf. But whence came it that *his* soul was thus continually engaged in prayer and supplications for the churches when we bear them up so rarely and so feebly before the throne of God? The answer is obvious: it was because he had so large a measure of the grace of God in his bosom; for prayer in the soul is a kind of spiritual barometer which indicates the rising and falling of the life of God in the believer's bosom, as the quicksilver in the tube marks by its upward or downward movement the increasing or diminishing weight of the air in the atmosphere. Or I may perhaps with better reason call prayer a spiritual thermometer, for not only, like the barometer, does it register the rising and falling of the life of God in the soul, but it marks the degree of warmth that there is in the heart. Now when prayer is down to zero point, and as a consequence, if not a cause, frost and snow seem to chill every spiritual faculty, you will find that the low state of prayer in your soul is a faithful index of an equally low state of every other part of the divine life. Coldness in prayer as much indicates weakness of faith, faintness of hope, and declension in love, as the sinking of the barometer foretells rain, or the fall of the thermometer marks the diminution of heat. Blessed mark is it in us and for us when prayer begins to rise in the heart! It indicates that "the winter is past, the rain over and gone;" that "the voice of the turtle will soon be heard in the land," and that the Sun of Righteousness is about to rise through the dark clouds which have hidden him from view.

But apart from this abiding spirit of prayer in the apostle's bosom which could only find vent in pouring itself out before God, were there not abundant reasons why he should thus besiege the throne of grace on behalf of the churches? Yes; from deep and personal experience, he knew well what dangers, snares, and temptations beset the path of the people of God; he knew also their weakness to withstand temptation, their helplessness against such foes and fears as beset every step of the way, and how surely they would fall a prey to their teeth unless they were held up by the mighty power of God. He knew also the grace that

was in Christ Jesus—what a supply for all their wants was laid up for them in the inexhaustible fulness of the risen Son of God. Seeing, therefore, the dangers of the way, the trials and temptations of the wilderness, the persecutions which they would have to endure, the foes that they would have to meet, and the sorrows which they would have to suffer, and seeing too what a provision there was laid up in Christ Jesus to support them under every trial, and bring them off more than conquerors over every enemy, his very soul went up unto God in earnest prayer and supplication on their behalf, that he would pour down upon them the blessings which he felt they so deeply needed.

Our text, it will be observed, contains a prayer on behalf of the Thessalonian church, and stands in intimate connection with the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This second coming of Jesus he holds before them under two distinct aspects—that of terror and vengeance to the foes, and that of comfort and deliverance to the friends of the Lamb. "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." (2 Thess. 1:7, 8, 9.) What a day will that be when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance—on whom? The thief, the drunkard, the blasphemer, the murderer? Doubtless. But on these only? Look at the character here given of those on whom the Lord Jesus takes vengeance, and whom he punishes with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power. It is all those—and O what a countless multitude it embraces!—"that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

But the same glorious and triumphant King of kings and Lord of lords, who comes from the shining heights of heaven arrayed with vengeance against the unbelieving and the disobedient, appears to the consolation and joy of his friends, for he comes to

be "glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." Looking forward, then, to that great and solemn day, the second advent of our glorious Lord, the apostle lifts up his heart unto God on behalf of those to whom he was writing this epistle, that he would vouchsafe to bestow such blessings upon them, that the name of Jesus might be glorified in them and that they might be glorified in him: "Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

In opening up and laying before you, as the Lord may enable me, the treasures of divine truth stored up in these words, I shall, with God's blessing,

I.—*Firstly*, bring before you *the subject matter of the prayer itself*; which you will find to consist of *three petitions*.

II.—*Secondly*, what would be the *effect and fruit* of that prayer being registered in the court of heaven, and being *answered in the experience* of the saints to whom he writes.

III.—*Thirdly*, the *source* whence all these blessings must come, and the *power* by which they must be wrought.

I.—I hinted just now that if we looked at the subject matter of this prayer which the apostle put up for the church of God at Thessalonica, we should find it to consist of three petitions: 1. the *first* is that "God would count them worthy of this calling" 2. the *second*, that "he would fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness;" 3. the *third*, that he would complete "the work of faith with power." These three petitions we have, with God's blessing, then severally to consider.

i. And first, "*that our God would count you worthy of this calling.*"

The Scripture speaks much of "calling;" and well it may, for divine calling is the foundation of every other divine blessing. It is the first introduction into the grace of God, and therefore the chief pivot upon which the whole work of God in the soul turns—the main root from which every other blessing grows. We need not, then, wonder that the Holy Spirit in Scripture speaks much of calling, when we consider that it is a new birth into the kingdom of heaven, a turning from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that short of it all is darkness and death here, and endless misery and woe hereafter; that to be made a partaker of it is to be an heir of God and a joint heir of Christ, and that to live and die without it is to be a vessel of wrath, a child of the devil, an heir of hell.

But we must bear in mind that the same Holy Spirit who speaks so much of calling has laid down in an emphatic manner that there are two kinds of calling. The Lord himself, for instance, says, "Many are called, but few are chosen." There the Lord makes a distinction between calling and choice; evidently implying that not all who are called are chosen, though all who are chosen are called; in other words, that there is a calling which is not effectual, which is not saving, which does not prove and evidence the reality of a person's being chosen according to God's eternal purpose unto eternal life. Family bereavements, bodily sickness, especially if the illness be dangerous or severe, advancing age and infirmities, heavy strokes in providence, strong convictions of conscience, desires to repent and turn to the Lord, fears of death and hell, sitting under the sound of truth, witnessing the happy end of those who die in the Lord, the counsel and example of godly parents, the terrors of the Lord in a broken Law, and the invitations of mercy in a preached Gospel; all these are so many calls wherein and whereby Wisdom "crieth at the gates at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors, Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men." (Prov. 8:3, 4.) But we well know that all these outward calls are ineffectual until the Holy Ghost puts forth his secret and sacred power upon the heart. This external calling, therefore, was not the calling of which the apostle speaks in our text, and the

power and efficiency of which he prayed that the Thessalonian church might realize in their own breast. There is another calling, which, to characterize by a distinct name, is termed an *effectual* calling; that is, a calling which does not begin and end with those marked visitations in providence of which we have spoken, that have a voice if men could and would but listen to it—"Hear ye the rod and who hath appointed it." (Micah 11:9.) Nor is it a calling outwardly by a preached gospel or by any such temporary convictions and alarms of conscience as do not end in the eventual possession of eternal life; but it is a call of that peculiar nature that God himself, by his own voice and by his own power, puts forth in the soul; and therefore, being God's own special call, is made effectual to its salvation and sanctification. This is the call spoken of by the apostle as springing out of eternal predestination, accompanied by present justification, and issuing in future glorification—"Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." (Rom. 8:30.) This calling, therefore, being so determinate in its origin, so blessed in its course, and so glorious in its end, is spoken of in the word of truth as possessing very blessed and distinguishing marks of its source, its nature, and its issue.

1. It is spoken of, for instance, as a "*high* calling," as in those words of the apostle where describing his experience and the warm breathings of his soul, he says, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:14.) It is a "high calling" for two special reasons.

First, on account of its *source*. It comes from on high; it comes down into the soul out of the fulness of Jesus as the first fruits of his resurrection and ascension, and a choice pledge and foretaste of those good and perfect gifts which are from above. The voice of the preacher sounds but below; to call effectually he must speak who dwelleth on high. And is not our great High Priest the author of it?—for a risen and exalted Jesus is "the author" or beginner, as well as "the finisher of our faith." Is not he out of whose grace it comes and to where it leads, enthroned in the

highest courts of heaven? Thus was he addressed in the spirit of prophecy long before his actual resurrection and ascension—"Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men: yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." (Psa. 68:18.)

Again, it is a "high calling" because it *calls* the Lord's people to *the enjoyment of high things*. Everything upon earth, as viewed by the eyes of the Majesty of heaven, is low and paltry. Earth is after all but a huge clod of dust, and as such, apart from its having been once the place of the Redeemer's sufferings and sacrifice, being now the habitation of his suffering people, and to be hereafter the scene of his glory, as insignificant in the eyes of its Maker as the small dust of the balance or the drop of the bucket. What, then, are its highest objects, its loftiest aims, its grandest pursuits, its noblest employments, short of the grace of the gospel, in the sight of him who inhabits eternity, but mean and worthless? Nay, even in our eyes is there not one consideration that when felt stamps vanity upon them all?—that all earth's pursuits, whatever high attainments men may reach in this life, be it of wealth, rank, learning, power, or pleasure, end in death? The breath of God's displeasure soon lays low in the grave all that is rich and mighty, high and proud; for "the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low." (Isaiah 2:12.) Thus that effectual work of grace on the heart whereby the chosen vessels of mercy are delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son may well be termed a "high calling," for it calls them out of those low, grovelling pursuits, those earthly toys, those base and sensual lusts in which the children of men seek at once their happiness and their ruin, unto the knowledge and enjoyment of those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. This made the apostle say, "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." (Col. 3:2, 3.) To enjoy fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ; to feel the mind drawn up to high and heavenly things; to have the

heart weaned and separated from the poor, grovelling, miserable cares of this time-state; to have the soul solemnly engaged with the realities of a never ending eternity; to live a life of faith on the Son of God; to be spiritually minded which is life and peace; to be dead to the law, to sin, to the world; to seek happiness in knowing the will of God and doing it; and to be looking forward to the end of the race as giving a crown of glory,—surely there is something in this vital experience of the child of God that does, under the power and influence of the blessed Spirit, elevate his soul beyond this poor, wretched vale of tears—this miserable scene where everything is stamped with vexation and disappointment.

2. It is also termed a "*heavenly* calling," (Heb. 3:1) because those who are made partakers of it are thereby put into possession of a sure title to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for them as kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. (1 Pet. 1:1, 5.) To this they are begotten again by the quickening power of the Holy Ghost in their heart, and when favoured with a living hope can read their title to and their interest in it. It is true that when it is under the law, the soul, quickened to feel little else but guilt and bondage, is unable to realise its interest in this heavenly inheritance. Faith is not yet given to believe in the Son of God so as to receive deliverance from guilty fears, and whilst in this state the child of grace cannot realise his title to his heavenly inheritance. But it is his, though he cannot claim it or even understand it. So the infant heir of a vast estate—say, the eldest son of a wealthy duke—when lying on his nurse's lap, is little aware of the wealth and rank to which he is born, or of the title which he even then bears. But it will not always be so with him. He will in due time have Christ revealed, his atoning blood sprinkled, his righteousness brought near, and his love shed abroad in his heart, and he will then rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and find and feel himself a partaker of a heavenly calling.

3. Again, it is a "*holy* calling." "Who hath saved us and called us with a holy calling" (2 Tim. 1:9); and again, "God hath not called

us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness." (1 Thess. 4:7.) The author of it is the Holy Spirit: he breathes holy desires into the soul, communicates holy feelings, inspires holy affections, and works in us by his own power and grace that inward holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. (Hebrews 7:14.) In my judgment, there is no greater mark of the lax, loose, Antinomian spirit of the present day than the disuse and neglect of the word "holiness." Men are afraid of the word as if it were bordering on legality. That holy life for which our Puritan ancestors so contended, and of which they gave so bright an example, is rarely enforced and rather sneered at as if it were Pharisaic self-righteousness. But they may live to prove the truth of those solemn words, "he that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." (Rev. 22:11.) Let men then say what they will, and act how they may, the calling of the Holy Ghost is a high calling, a heavenly calling, a holy calling, and the end of it will be the salvation of the soul and an eternal weight of glory.

But the apostle prayed that "God would *count them worthy* of this calling." Does he mean thereby to lay down that man has any worth or worthiness in him before he is called by grace, and that out of respect to this goodness in him, God counts him worthy of being called? The experience of a babe would give the lie to this explanation of the words. The first teachings of the Spirit in the conscience of one who is effectually called would manifest the falsehood of this view of the subject; for if there be one truth more than another which the Holy Ghost writes upon the heart of a called vessel of mercy, it is his sinfulness, his unworthiness. We cannot therefore for a moment admit that the apostle meant there was any worth or worthiness in the object of this calling, which moved God favourably on his behalf and influenced him to make the call effectual. Would this view of the text apply to Paul himself? Where was his worth when, exceedingly mad against the saints, he neared the gate of Damascus? And yet, with his own experience flashing in his face, he prays that "God would count them worthy of this calling." But observe to whom he was writing.



Were they called or uncalled, dead in sin or alive unto God? That point will settle the question. They clearly had been already called, for their "faith grew exceedingly, and their charity (or love) toward each other abounded." And yet, in a sense, there is a worth in the saint of God. But where? Not in himself; but in Christ his covenant head: he alone is worthy to receive all the praise, whether it be of their being called, or justified, or glorified. Because Jesus then is worthy of all honour and praise, God sends his Spirit down into the hearts of those who belong to Jesus, and thus counts them worthy of this calling. He is the head, they the members; he the bridegroom, they the bride; he the stem, they the branches; and therefore for his name's sake they receive the blessing. Thus, in this sense, viewing with ineffable delight and complacency the covenant worthiness of his dear Son, what he is in the courts of heaven as the great and glorious high priest over the house of God, when looking down upon his suffering members here below, as ever one with the Son of his love, God counts them worthy of this calling. Is not this the song of heaven, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing?" (Rev. 5:12.) And as worthy to receive power, is it not that he may make his people willing in the day of his power? Have you any testimony that God has called you by his grace? Is there a root to your religion? Was there a period never to be forgotten when God was pleased to call you powerfully and effectually unto the knowledge of himself? If so, you know for yourself it was not for any worthiness in you; that your past life, let it have been what it may, was anything but what could recommend you to God's favour; that if not stained by open ungodliness, yet there was everything in you that the eye of God must abhor—worldliness, pride, carnality, self-righteousness; that even if your life was not defiled with actual sin, nor polluted with what men call crime, yet there was an utter absence of all righteousness. You must renounce then, first and last, all idea of worth or worthiness either before or after divine calling. It is not to be named upon earth in the breast of a child of God, much less in the courts of heaven where Jesus fills the throne.

But we may give the words another sense, which I believe is the apostle's meaning, and which we gather up from the marginal reading. The word "count worthy," means also to "*vouchsafe*," that is, "kindly deign," "mercifully grant;" in other words, that God would of his infinite mercy put them into possession of all the benefits and blessings that spring out of a heavenly calling; for you will bear in mind that the persons to whom he writes had been already called; the Holy Ghost had begun his work upon their conscience; they had already, according to the apostle's own testimony, "turned from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven." (1 Thess. 1:9, 10.) The calling therefore respects here not so much the past as the future, not what they were called from, or the mere fact of their having been called, so much as what the calling was unto, what it ends in. Thus we read, "that ye may know what is the hope of his calling." (Eph. 1:18.) And again, "the prize of the high calling." (Phil. 3:14.) There calling is spoken of as containing here a gracious hope and hereafter a glorious prize. Apply this to the text and see whether it does not bring out a blessed meaning. He had been speaking of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the glory to be revealed in that day. Then bearing up in the arms of prayer his dear Thessalonian friends, he begs of God that he would kindly deign to put them into the experimental possession of this gracious hope here, and the enjoyment of that glorious prize hereafter, so that having been called by his grace, when the Lord Jesus Christ was revealed, he might be glorified in them; that they, with him, might be witnesses of his second coming, and that in anticipation of that joyful day they might even now lift up their hearts with joy as washed in his blood and clothed in his righteousness. He thus prays for them that God would deepen his work of grace upon their souls, give them clearer evidences, make them more manifestly meet for the inheritance of the saints in light; and thus letting down into their hearts all the blessings connected with their high and holy and heavenly calling, would enable them to live under the enjoyment of his gracious presence, to be daily contemplating their glorious inheritance, to have their affections loosened from earthly objects, and walk as redeemed and regenerated children of God. He would thus lay

before them every constraining motive for all holy and godly obedience. To revert to my figure, if parent or master saw the heir to a splendid property, a nobleman's eldest son, associating with plough-boys and companions unfitting his rank and station, he would say, "Remember, it is not becoming your present and future place in society to make friends and playmates of these rude boys; you are called to something beyond them: to an education which they cannot have, and to a property and a title which they cannot share with you; walk then and act in a manner worthy of the station in which you are placed." So it may justly be said to a saint of the Most High, "God has called you with a high and holy and heavenly calling: walk worthy of that vocation; adorn the doctrine in all things; live to his praise; act in his fear; set your affections on things above. Do not be swallowed up and buried in the poor, low objects of this earthly scene, in the perishing things of time and sense; but lift up your hearts to him that sitteth in the heavens, that he would kindly vouchsafe to bestow upon you a sweet foretaste of those heavenly blessings to which you are called by his grace, and of which he has already given you a sure pledge and earnest, in turning you from darkness to light."

ii. The next petition offered upon their behalf is, that God would *"fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness."*

1. How good God is! How supreme in benevolence, loving-kindness, and tender mercy! And it is this feature in the Divine character that softens and melts the heart when sensibly brought under its influence. "The goodness of God leadeth to repentance"—not the severity of God against sin, not the justice of God against transgression, not the law of God with all its fearful terrors; but his "goodness," the kindness of his heart, the compassion, the tenderness, the mercy that ever dwell in his breast. When a sense of this is revealed by the Holy Ghost, it breaks the heart asunder, it melts it all to pieces, it softens the conscience, it makes the eyes overflow, it brings with it an unspeakable feeling of self-loathing and self-abhorrence, and fills the heart with that godly sorrow for sin which needs not to be

repented of. O, the goodness of God! And when we view this goodness in contrast with our badness, our unworthiness, sinfulness, baseness, blackness, and vileness, it is so surpassing all thought that if ever contrition, brokenness, humility, sincerity and godly simplicity, desire to please him, and fear to offend him are sensibly felt, it is at such a moment. But we here read of "the good pleasure of his goodness." God's goodness is directed by God's will. It is not indiscriminate goodness, a pouring out of goodness without its being determined by a ruling principle which guides it. We see sometimes persons naturally very kind and benevolent, but they have no judgment: they give liberally, but have no wisdom to know how to give, nor to whom to give; and thus worthless characters abuse their bounty, and their gifts often do more harm than good. Goodness therefore requires, so to speak, a guiding principle, or you may throw away money upon a wretch who will only squander it in profligacy, as, say, give a sovereign to a drunkard, who will be drunk with it for a week. Thus, though God is full of goodness, he is not so indiscriminate or unwise, for his "good pleasure" or eternal will and fixed decree guide and rule it, and through them as a bounding channel his goodness flows. And as the good pleasure of his eternal will regulates his goodness, so it causes that it cannot be checked or held back, as is the case with earthly goodness. You may perhaps have shown great kindness to some individual by whom it has been badly requited. This ingratitude has cut you deeply, and has perhaps for a time dammed back the flow of goodness in your soul. You say, "I see it is of no use giving money with the view of doing good; it is so abused; people are so ungrateful; and what I give is either squandered away or is requited with the basest ingratitude. I will keep my money to myself." Now these miserable feelings hold back, at least for a time, the flow of your liberality. But God has "a good pleasure" which guides his goodness, and his goodness being thus guided is not checked in its flow out of his bosom by any such considerations as I have hinted at. His eternal goodness is consistent with every other divine attribute, with the highest wisdom, with the most far-seeing providence, with the most fixed decree, and with the most absolute predestination. "The good

pleasure of his goodness" is therefore not merely goodness supreme in all its beauty and blessedness as the pouring out of his unspeakable benevolence and love, but it is so guided and directed by his infinite wisdom, that whilst it flows in an abounding stream of grace, it does not overflow the banks set to it by the eternal determination of his will.

But because the goodness of God is thus bounded and regulated by his infinite wisdom, it may often wear an aspect very contrary to your expectation. Thus it may be the good pleasure of his goodness to lead you into a path that to you may appear anything but good: as, for instance, into many severe temptations, trials, sufferings, and afflictions; for in calling you by his grace, God has called you to suffering, that you may be conformed to the suffering image of his dear Son. "Unto you," says the apostle, "it is given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake" (Phil. 1:29.) And again, "If so be that we suffer with him that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8:17.) But God calls his people also to self-renunciation, self-denial, taking up the cross, mortifying the whole body of sin, putting off the old man, and putting on the new. As it was the good pleasure of his goodness that his dear Son should become "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" so it may be his good pleasure to call you to the experience of much sorrow, that you may have fellowship with Jesus in his sufferings. As, then, it was the good pleasure of God to lead his dear Son into affliction's thorny maze; to make him a curse for us; to allow Satan to tempt, and the world to hate and persecute him; as he himself withdrew the light of his countenance from his tortured soul and taught him obedience by the things that he suffered, so it may be the good pleasure of God's goodness to lead you into a very trying path, that you may drink of Christ's cup and be baptised with his baptism. And whilst thus leading you his "good pleasure" may so obscure his goodness that it is not seen or believed. But it is the good pleasure of God's goodness still and you will one day be able to say, "Truly goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life."

2. But the apostle prayed that God would "*fulfil* all the good pleasure of his goodness." There is a ripening of the purposes of God, a fulfilling of his all-wise decrees, a thorough performance of his all-gracious designs. Thus he first tried Job and then doubly blessed him; put the feet of Joseph in the stocks and then set him over all the land of Egypt; let David be hunted like a partridge on the mountain and then placed him on the throne of Israel. But it was goodness first and last. Job among the ashes and Job when his latter end was blessed more than his beginning; Joseph in the prison house and Joseph riding in Pharaoh's chariot; David in the cave of Adullam and David in his house of cedars, were equally proving the goodness of God, though to sense and reason his dealings were so contrary. Goodness must mark the whole of the path, or how could all things work together for good to those that love God? "I will not leave thee," said the Lord to Jacob, "until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." (Genesis 28:15.) Thus it is goodness to begin the work, goodness to carry it on, goodness to accomplish it; goodness to wound, goodness to heal; goodness to kill, goodness to make alive; goodness to sink you by a sight of self, goodness to raise you by a sight of Jesus; goodness in taking away and goodness in giving; goodness in stripping and goodness in clothing; goodness in the thorny paths in providence, as well as in the intricate mazes of grace; yet all this goodness ruled and directed by God's good pleasure. So he will fulfil in you that fear his name all the good pleasure of his goodness. Have you not already had some proof of this? Can you not sometimes look back and see the various trials and temptations through which your soul has been led and bless God for them; and yet when passing through them no friendly light shone upon your path? But a light has since shone upon it. A beam of living light, a ray of gospel grace has fallen upon the road; and now you see that the whole of your path was unmixed goodness, goodness first and last. Goodness brought you into birth and being; goodness preserved you from a thousand deaths during the days of your unregeneracy; goodness called you by grace when the set time came to favour Zion; goodness held you up and held you on during your soul's travail

under a burden of guilt; goodness delivered you from the curse of the law; goodness revealed Christ to your soul; goodness keeps you still waiting upon God, hoping in his mercy and cleaving in faith and love to his dear Son. And as he has thus far fulfilled all the good pleasure of his goodness, been faithful to every promise, never left you quite destitute of cheering hope, broke into your soul when most deeply sunk, and held you up to the present hour, so will he go on to fulfil it down to Jordan's brink, and beyond Jordan up to the realms of endless day. O the mercy of being a child of God, an heir of heaven! O the unspeakable blessedness of having the goodness of God on our side, to experience his good pleasure fulfilled in our hearts, so as to live under the smiles of a God so good, under the open hand of a Benefactor so bountiful, under the teaching of an Instructor so wise, under the guidance of a Friend so unerring! May we not lift up our hearts with our hands unto God in the heavens that, in strict accordance with the apostle's words, "he would fulfil in us all the good pleasure of his goodness"—not give us our evil pleasure, but his good; not let us walk in our paths, but guide us into his own; not let us have our own way and our own will, but let us have his way, that we may know his will and do it upon earth, so as to see him face to face in heaven.

iii. The third petition put up by the apostle is that God would fulfil *"the work of faith with power."* Faith is God's gift: it is a grace of the Holy Spirit. It is not in the power or gift of the creature, but springs wholly and solely from the operation of God's grace in the heart. This is a fundamental truth, and one which every child of God can ratify by his own personal experience. But there is "the work of faith;" for grace in the soul is not idle. I have no faith naturally in idleness. An idle man, an indolent woman, is a useless man and often a worthless woman. We were not sent into this world to be idle. To earn his bread by the sweat of his brow is the appointed lot of man. An idle man is the sure prey of Satan. Industry is necessary as well as becoming in all walks of life, and in the lower walks idleness justly brings a man to rags. Never think of the grace of God as fostering idleness and laziness, whether master or man, mistress or maid, husband or wife,

parent or child; but fill your varied situations in life with honest industry, praying God to bless with his kind providence what your industrious hands are put to, be the implement high or low. I can say for myself that I am a hard worker, though I neither plough nor dig, neither handle the trowel nor wield the hammer. I labour by pen and tongue, and hard too, for much work lies upon me—more sometimes than suits my weak health and frail tabernacle. And I am sure that in grace there is no idleness. The graces of God's Spirit in the soul are not indolent graces, folding their hands and ever crying with sluggard's voice, "A little more sleep, a little more slumber—a little more folding of the hands to sleep." They are active, working graces and there is no more active grace of the whole than that of busy faith. And indeed it must be so, for it is the main wheel of the whole machine, which, set in movement by the blessed Spirit's breath, carries on every part. If faith did not revolve in the soul, every wheel and cog would stand idle. But when faith is blessedly acted upon by the power of God and revolves in its appointed circle, every cog and wheel of the soul move in accordance with it.

But what particularly is the work of faith, and that with power, of which the apostle here speaks? What is the main work of faith? To believe in the Son of God. "This is the work of God," said our blessed Lord, "that ye believe in him whom he hath sent." (John 6:29.) To believe in the name of Jesus Christ—that is the work of faith. You may say, "That is easy enough." Yes, for you it may be; but not for a man who knows what the human heart is; who has a deep sight and sense of the innate unbelief and infidelity of the carnal mind; who is exercised with doubts and fears, darkness, and bondage; and who knows he might as well attempt to make a new sun and plant him in the sky as to raise up a grain of living, saving faith in his own soul. The man who knows what the deep and desperate unbelief of his heart is knows best what a spiritual, supernatural, divine thing faith is; that it must be freely communicated to his soul by the grace of God, and kept alive by the same power that first gave it. But faith is never inactive—no, not at its worst state. It may not be exercising itself upon the Person of the Son of God so as to obtain a manifest deliverance,



but it is trying at something. It is trying to believe, though its attempts are baffled; it is struggling upward, though its feet are in the miry clay (Ps. 40:2); it is crying out of the belly of hell and looking toward the holy temple, though the weeds are wrapped about its head (Jonah 2:2, 5); it turns its face toward the wall, though its eyes fail with looking upward (Isaiah 38:2, 14), and trusts in him which raiseth the dead, though it has the sentence of death in its bosom. (2 Cor. 1:9.) It is like a bird tied by the leg that longs to soar on high, but the twine prevents its rising; or like an eagle in a cage, that flaps its wings and beats its breast against the bars, but cannot get out. But the very beating of the bird's wings against the bars shows that it longs for liberty, that it wants to soar on high, look at the bright sun and drink in the pure breath of heaven. So the believing soul is sometimes tied by the leg with the cord of unbelief, or shut up in the cage of darkness and despondency. But its very struggles show that it is not dead, but alive—that, like the imprisoned bird, it longs to mount upward but cannot.

3. Now God alone can fulfil this work of faith by his own spirit, and grace. He begins the work, carries it on, and brings it to perfection. The apostle therefore adds, "*with power.*" It is not merely faith, but "the work of faith," and not merely the work of faith, but "with power," which draws it forth into living exercise, sets it into vital movement, and enables it to act upon the truth of God, and more especially on the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We may view faith without the power of God as a steamless, smokeless locomotive upon a railway. There is every capacity for movement in it. It is made to move, and not only move itself but a whole train of carriages attached to it. So faith is made to move, and that not itself only, but a whole train of heavenly graces which it draws after it. But there it stands: the fire wants lighting, the water heating, the steam generating, the cylinders filling, the pistons working, that the engine may fly along at its wonted pace. So there is already faith in the breast of the child of God, but it wants power; it needs the steam; it lacks the breath of God upon it; and when it gets that, it can run the way of God's commandments, as the locomotive upon the

railway. Have you not felt this powerlessness of faith to act? Is it not sometimes with you like a ship at sea: the sails are all raised, but flapping idly against the mast; harbour in sight, but no power to reach it; the tide strong, but sensibly carrying the vessel from its course; nothing wanting but the breeze? So when becalmed in soul, you look and hope for the breeze to come, saying, if not in words, at least in thought, "Come, thou north wind; and blow, thou south." Now when the Holy Spirit is pleased to breathe upon the soul, his influence is felt; the ship moves on; every sail bellies to the wind; the flag of free grace flies aloft at the mast-head; land is in sight, port is in view, and on the ship sails, and anchors in the desired haven. So it is with faith as acted upon by the power of God. Don't you long that it may be so with you when brought to a death-bed? When you spread the sail and see the harbour, will you not long for a favouring gale that you may enter with flowing sheet and cast anchor in the haven of eternal rest and peace? God can do this for you and everything else, for he can and will fulfil the work of faith with power. May we ever be looking up to him to give us power to believe, to hope, to love, to suffer, to endure, and above all to know and do his will, until we reach the heavenly shore. Is he not able to do all these things for us? Why else should the apostle have begged of him to give the church these three blessings unless he knew they were in the heart and hand of God to bestow? The very circumstance of the Lord being asked to give them shows that the apostle knew not only how deeply the church needed them, but knew the exceeding riches of God's grace, that he was able and willing to do for them exceeding abundantly above all that they could ask or think.

II. But we have now to consider what would be *the fruit and effect* of those three petitions being answered: "*the name of our Lord Jesus Christ would be glorified in them and they in him.*"

1. All that God does he does to his own glory. There can be no object so dear as this to the great and glorious self-existent I AM. Why was heaven, with all its bright seraphic intelligences; why was earth, with all its inhabitants, created, but for the glory of

God? He could have no other final object or end but the manifestation of his own glory. We therefore read, "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psal. 19:1); and again, "But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." (Num. 14:21.) But besides this declarative glory of God as manifested in the works of his creative hand, he has designed from all eternity in an especial manner to glorify his dear Son. And though in the riches of his grace, the glorifying of his dear Son harmonises with the salvation of an innumerable multitude of sinners, yet let us not forget that he is glorified in the lost as well as the saved. As he spake in prophecy, "Though Israel shall not be gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord." (Isai. 49:5.) And thus the glory of the Father and the glory of the Son meet together in the Person and work of Christ. What said the blessed Lord in the opening of that touching prayer (John 17.)?—"Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee." And God did glorify him. He sent him into the world that he might assume a nature in which, by becoming the Father's servant, he could do the Father's will; and thus glorify him by a pure and spotless obedience. He made him a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief that he might be glorified in his humiliation; he delivered him up to the cross by his determinate counsel and foreknowledge, that being crucified by wicked hands he might glorify him by meekly suffering that agonising and ignominious death, and thus make his soul an offering for sin; he glorified him by raising him from the dead and setting him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, that he might be the great High Priest over the house of God; he glorified him on the day of Pentecost when he sent the Holy Spirit to testify of him by signs and wonders done in his name; and he glorifies him still by revealing him to his people and thus making him precious and glorious in the hearts of all that believe. There is, then, no object dearer to God's heart than the glorifying of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: and thus the bringing forth of the blessings for which the apostle prayed, such as being counted worthy of a high and heavenly calling, the fulfilling of all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power, would all eventuate in the glorification of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that

in you and all to whom he is made experimentally known.

2. But what are we to understand by "*the name of our Lord Jesus Christ?*" The name of Jesus signifies every perfection of the Son of God which is revealed in the Scripture, such as his true, proper, and eternal Sonship; his co-equality and co-eternity with the Father and the Holy Ghost; his glorious Person as Immanuel, God with us; his atoning blood as cleansing from all sin; his justifying obedience as our only righteousness before the throne; his dying love, displayed in the garden and on the cross; his holy example in obeying and suffering all the will of God; in a word, all that he ever has been, all that he now is, and all that he will be when he comes a second time without sin unto salvation: all this is summed up in "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;" that name which is above every name; that name which is as ointment poured forth; that name of God which is ever in him as it was in the angel sent before the children of Israel. (Exod. 23:21.) This name is to be glorified in us; the perfections of Jesus Christ are to be glorified in our souls. His blood and righteousness; his death and resurrection; his presence and his power; his love and mercy; his grace and glory; his strength and wisdom; his priesthood and intercession; his advocacy and mediation; his holy example on earth; in a word, what he is in himself as the Christ of God—all this is to be glorified in our hearts and in our lives: in our hearts as wrought upon by a divine power, in our lives as guided and governed by the blessed Spirit, according to the revealed will and word of God. Why has God a people upon earth? Why does he call them by his grace? Why count them worthy of being so called? Why does he fulfil in them all the good pleasure of his goodness and the work of faith with prayer? That the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in them: that they may be witnesses for Jesus in their day and generation; that what Jesus is in himself may be manifested in them—in their experience inwardly, in their life and conversation outwardly; that what Christ is as the Son of the Father in truth and love, may be made known to the sons of men by there being upon earth living witnesses to the power of his resurrection, to the efficacy of his grace, and to the revelation of his glory.

Now do you seek in your daily conversation that his name may be glorified in you? Are you daily conscious of being a professor of this holy religion, with the eyes of God, of saints, and of sinners upon you, and all expecting that the name of Jesus Christ is to be glorified in you, by a personal experience in your own breast of his love and grace and blood, and the manifestation of that experience in a holy, upright, consistent life? Is the glory of God dear to you? Have you a single eye to it, and do you ever beg of God that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ might be glorified in you, whether by life or death?

3. But not only is Christ glorified in his saints, but they are "glorified *in him*." As grace is the beginning of glory, the pledge and the foretaste of it, even now by their personal union with Christ the saints are glorified in him; but they will be peculiarly and especially glorified when he comes a second time in the glory of his Father with his angels. (Matt. 16:27.) Then will be accomplished the Lord's prayer, when he said, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am: that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." When he comes he will bring all his saints with him; they will be glorified in him and shine forth in the brightness of his glory; for their immortal souls and immortal bodies will both be conformed to the glorious image of their risen Head.

III. But we come next to our third point, on which I must not detain you long—*the eternal spring and the maintaining power of the whole: "According to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."* Whatever blessings God bestows are according to his grace. Man being what he is, can have no claim upon God. All therefore that he receives he receives as the pure gift of his grace. If we have not learned this, we know nothing as we ought to know. But in giving freely, in giving graciously, God can bestow upon us every blessing that can be for our good and his own glory. And as grace is the source, so it is the guiding rule of every divine blessing, for all that is given is "according to the grace of

our God." From such an ever-flowing, overflowing fountain, all may draw who hunger and thirst, who are weary and heavy laden, who in themselves are without strength, wisdom, righteousness, hope, and help; for the God of all grace will supply all their need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. It is therefore according also to "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," for as co-equal, co-eternal with the Father, he has a blessed share in this grace; for though the Father is the source, yet the Son is the stream which comes from the Father, through whom all grace and glory come down. Thus every mercy and every blessing, for time and eternity, are freely bestowed "according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ;" to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be ascribed everlasting honour, power, and praise.

## **The Work of Faith with Power**

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Tuesday Evening, July 31, 1849

"Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power; that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Thess. 1:11, 12

There is one very remarkable feature in the Apostle Paul; I mean, the spirit of prayer which dwelt in his breast for the churches. I believe there is scarcely an epistle, with the exception of those to the Galatians and the Hebrews, where we do not find the Apostle expressly mentioning how he prayed for the church to which he was writing. The moving cause of these prayers he himself gives us, "Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." So deeply interested was this man of God in the prosperity of Zion, and the care of all the churches lay with such weight and power upon his mind, that it forced, as it were, prayer continually out of his breast. He says, therefore, in another place, "praying always for you." (Col. 1:3.) His soul was continually engaged in lifting up itself in prayer for those who were dear to his heart as living members of the body of Christ.

But the subject matter of the Apostle's prayers is as remarkable as the spirit of prayer itself. And would we know whether we pray aright for ourselves or for others, we should lay down our prayers side by side with those put up by the Apostle Paul for the churches; for he says expressly of himself and of his brother apostles, "We have the mind of Christ." We may be sure, therefore, that he asked after the mind of Christ; that he prayed, as he wrote, "in the Holy Ghost;" that the Spirit of God interceded in him and for him with groanings which could not be uttered.

Thus the subject matter of his petitions is deeply important, and should be well weighed and examined by us. Our prayers for ourselves, and those who are spiritually dear to us, should be compared with them, that we may gather from the comparison how far the same Spirit that wrought in Paul is working in us; and whether the same kind of prayer which that blessed Intercessor wrought in his soul is wrought in ours by the same Almighty power.

In considering the words before us this evening, I think we may observe,

*First; the subject of the prayer itself; in other words, what the petitions were which the Apostle Paul here put up for the church of God at Thessalonica.*

*Secondly; what would be the effect and result of these prayers being answered. And,*

*Thirdly; the source whence all these blessings must flow—the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

I.—Let us then endeavour to dive a little into the meaning of the Spirit here when he wrought in the Apostle's breast such earnest desires for the welfare of the church at Thessalonica. There were *three* things that he begged of God to do for them; and we may be sure that these were three very important and very blessed things. For having access to the throne of mercy, being permitted, encouraged and enabled to spread his petitions there, we may be sure that he would ask for such things as were in themselves deeply important; and such as if answered, would prove signal blessings to those for whom the petitions were made.

i. The first branch of his petition to God was, "*that He would count them worthy of this calling.*" Are we to gather from these words that there was anything like worth or worthiness to be found in them? That either before calling, or after calling, there



was something in them which would merit the favour of God? No; if we were to conclude anything of this nature, we should entirely misapprehend the mind of the Apostle. The persons to whom he was writing had been called by the grace of God. Nay more; they were signal Christians. There is no church in the New Testament that flourished so much in grace as that of Thessalonica. In almost all the other epistles we find reproof mingled; but in those to the church of Thessalonica we find especial mention of their "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope." It cannot, therefore, mean that the Lord saw any worth in them prior to calling; and from seeing this goodness in them as natural men and women, that he therefore bestowed upon them the riches of his grace; for they had been already called. Thus that view is entirely precluded; nor can this be meant, that because they had improved so much the grace of God; and had in every respect acquitted themselves so worthily and becomingly, therefore for that reason there would be a mighty increase of the grace of God. No; that is not it. But the meaning of the expression, I believe, we find in the margin—that "He would *vouchsafe*." The word does not convey an idea of worthiness on the part of the creature; but simply this, that God would "deign" to bless them; the worthiness not being in them, but in himself. So a Sovereign is said to 'deign to do this,' and 'vouchsafe that,' to 'condescend' to grant a favour; the whole spring being in the bosom of the Sovereign, he being the source of all dignity, honour, worth, and worthiness. The subject is favoured in receiving what the Sovereign bestows; the good pleasure of the King being the fountain head of every favour and dignity conferred. Thus, when the Apostle prays, that God "would count them worthy of this calling," he means that the desire of his heart was, that God would kindly vouchsafe, would benignantly deign, would graciously condescend, to make their calling more and more manifest in their souls. There is an expression of almost a similar kind in the epistle to the Ephesians, where the Apostle prays that they might "know what is the hope of his calling;" that is that their calling might be made clear to themselves; that the fruits and benefits resulting from this calling might be made manifest to their hearts; that they might realize and know the

blessings in prospect springing out of that calling; that thus they might be trained up for the enjoyment of the inheritance whereunto God had called them. It is as if he addressed them as branches of the seed royal. The heir of a crown is educated with a view to the kingdom which he is to possess; the whole tenor of his training and education being to prepare him to be king of the realm which he will be called upon one day to govern. In our country, the Prince of Wales has tutors and governors, and an education designed to fit and qualify him for the post he is one day in the providence of God to occupy. This, then, is the meaning of the Apostle, when he prays that God would "count them worthy of this calling;" that he would 'vouchsafe' to give them clear views and blessed manifestations of the grace and glory to which he had called them; that thus their minds might be trained, as it were, and educated for the inheritance of the saints in light; that they might not grovel here below in the cares and anxieties of this mortal scene; but having a bright prospect of what God had called them unto hereafter, their heart's affections might be lifted above the poor perishing things of this time-state, the trifling toys of earth, and be fixed where Jesus sits at God's right hand.

But with respect to the word "*calling*," what does it imply? That God calls them to certain blessings. We may summarily say, that in calling, God calls his people to a knowledge of himself here, and to an enjoyment of himself hereafter. When the Apostle, then prays "that God would count them worthy of this calling," it is, that he might bless them with some testimony of what he had called them to enjoy, know, and feel in their experience below, as an earnest of what he had called them to enjoy eternally above. Thus, when God calls a man, it is to accomplish in him a certain purpose; his call is preparatory to something to be revealed in his heart. It is the first link in divine religion; it is the first budding of immortal glory; it is the first touch of the finger of God upon the conscience; it is the begetting of the soul into a life that shall never die. But when we are called, in the first instance we know little else but convictions of sin, the curses of a broken law, the terrors of conscience, the dread of hell, and the fears of eternal damnation. We can no more see what this calling is intended for,

than a prince, while a babe in arms, can see he is designed to be the monarch of a mighty empire. We are blind to the future, and know not what God means by it. But as the Lord, in due time, begins to take off the shackles, and drops into our souls some knowledge of himself as he brings his precious gospel near, shews us the blood of sprinkling, gives us to taste of his mercy, and to feel something of his favour; then our eyes become enlightened and anointed with divine eyesalve to see what we are called unto—"to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent;" to taste his love; to enjoy a sense of his goodness; to be delivered from the filth, guilt, bondage, and power of sin; and thus to experience a sense of God's mercy and love to such undeserving wretches as we see and feel ourselves to be.

Now, the Apostle, praying for the believing Thessalonians, desires, "that God would count them worthy of this calling;" that is, would make it more and more manifest to their souls; would bring into their hearts more and more the blessings connected with it; would set before their eyes the prospect of that bright inheritance to which he had called them by grace, by giving them stronger and clearer views of their interest in the blood of Christ, laying eternal things with greater weight and power upon their minds, and showing them more and more of the riches of his mercy and love in the Person of his dear Son; and by counting them worthy of this calling, would unloose, unfetter, and deliver them from the bondage of sin in all its various shapes and forms, and the cares and anxieties of this life, and thus set their affections on things above.

This, then, appears to be the subject matter of the Apostle's first prayer for his beloved Thessalonians.

ii. The second is, *"that He would fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness."* Perfect goodness is an attribute of God. "Why callest thou me good?" said the Lord to one who called him "good Master," as though he would take the man upon his own assumption, 'How canst thou call any man good?' He does not deny that he is good; but he takes the man upon his own word,

'Why callest thou me good if thou merely believest me to be man? for there is none good but one, that is God.' "Goodness" is an eternal attribute of Godhead. He cannot cease to be good any more than he can cease to be God. By "goodness," I understand his kindness, his benevolence, his love, his tenderness; that disposition in him to bestow favours fully, freely, and bounteously, because it is in his heart to do so. The "goodness" of God is made manifest in all the works of creation; it is made manifest in his various dealings and leadings in providence; but it is made more particularly manifest in sending his own dear Son to save them that believe.

But the Apostle speaks here of "the good pleasure of his goodness." If I may use a figure to illustrate his meaning, it is as though the goodness of God were dwelling in him eternally, and yet a channel was needed through which it was to flow. We may conceive a river ever flowing, and sending down to the sea a perennial stream; but if a channel were cut from that river, the waters would issue by it and irrigate the land; then all the blessings contained in the stream would flow freely on the pastures, and "make them rejoice on every side." Something like this seems intimated in the expression, "good pleasure of his goodness." Goodness is in the bosom of God eternally and unceasingly. It is a part of his holy nature; an attribute of the divine essence; but there is a way in which he has seen fit to make it manifest. Angels know he is good; and that it is his very nature to be such; but sinners, redeemed sinners, not only know his goodness, but the "good pleasure of his goodness." He has been pleased in his eternal mind to manifest that goodness in a certain way, and cause it to flow in a particular channel unto certain predestinated objects.

Thus, the Apostle does not pray that they might simply know the "goodness of God," but the "good pleasure of his goodness," in the channel through which that goodness is manifested, the Person, blood, love, and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, the image of God. His desire was that they might know him as the divinely consecrated medium of all communication, the Mediator between God and man, through whom, as an

Intercessor, all divine goodness flows into the soul. And thus, that they might know the "good pleasure of his goodness," by the mercy, favour, tenderness, compassion, and lovingkindness of God flowing into their souls through this consecrated medium, the Person of the God-Man, Immanuel, God with us. This is because we cannot know the goodness of God abstractedly. If we were pure as first created, we might know the goodness of God as dwelling eternally in his glorious Essence; but as fallen sinners that door is barred against us; and his goodness is now only known in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Mediator, the only Mediator, between God and man. When Christ, then, is made in some measure known to our souls, we view him as God's anointed One, as the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his Person. And when we see him as the God-Man, the glorious Immanuel, and feel a measure of the goodness, mercy, and love of God flowing into our hearts through him as the Mediator between God and us, this is tasting and knowing something of the "good pleasure of his goodness."

But there is something more than this. "The good pleasure of his goodness," not only points our eyes to the Mediator, as the divinely consecrated channel, through which all blessings flow; but it also directs our sight to the objects to whom God is pleased to shew goodness. It is "according to his good pleasure." This goodness does not flow out to man as his goodness flows out towards angels. This goodness flows through the Lord Jesus Christ, as an Intercessor, to certain definite objects, and comes into the heart of certain chosen, predestinated individuals. When we can view the love of God not only in the Person of Christ, through his blood and obedience; but also receive it into our hearts as vessels of mercy set apart of God from all eternity, as predestinated to experience his love, then we begin to taste something of "the good pleasure of his goodness." This is not merely to know that God is good; but to see also that there is a pleasure "in his goodness, that he delights in mercy." This is knowing the "good will of him who dwelt in the bush." As, then, your minds are led into this truth, that the goodness of God not only flows in a glorious channel, Immanuel, God with us; not only

flows into certain hearts which have been set apart in God's predestinating purpose and love; but also flows at such times, in such ways, and through such means, as depend upon the "good pleasure of God;" you will then see that there is not only a person to receive, but also a time in which that goodness is to be known; that the ways and means are all of God's devising, through which that good pleasure should be displayed. Thus, such a minister is appointed to preach such a sermon from such a text, by which the good pleasure of God is revealed to the soul; such a path is allotted in providence as unravels the "good pleasure of God;" each having his own peculiar path in which God leads, as though he were the only individual God had to guide. As, then, we receive not only "the goodness of God," but also "the good pleasure of his goodness;" as we see the Person through whom it flows, and feel it flow into our hearts as objects of God's mercy; as we view the various means which God has appointed to make that good pleasure known, overruling every circumstance and event that takes place in providence or grace, and opening up as it were a path for his goodness to flow into:—as we are led to see and feel these things, then God is pleased to "fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness" in our heart's experience. This, then, is what the Apostle prayed that these believing disciples might enjoy at Thessalonica, that God would fulfil in them all "the good pleasure of his goodness;" that all those treasures of mercy which he had designed for them, the aboundings of all that blessedness and love which was stored up in his bosom and intended to issue forth at certain times, certain seasons, and in certain ways, might so flow into their heart, that God would in each individual fulfil "the good pleasure of his goodness."

iii. The third blessing that he prayed for them was—"*the work of faith with power.*" What is the "work of faith?" It is that work in and upon the soul whereby faith is brought forth into living exercise. And not only so, but also the work which faith has to do when it is brought into exercise.

Thus, by "the work of faith," we may understand two things; 1, the operation of God upon the heart whereby from time to time

faith is raised up, and brought forth into living exercise upon the things of God; and 2, the work that faith has to do when thus raised up and strengthened in the soul.

Every grain of true faith is from God. Living faith is the work of God, and stands in "the power of God." Whatever faith we may have had in times past, or think that we have had, we have no power whatever to raise it up again in our souls. We are in this matter completely dependent upon the good pleasure of God. He that was pleased at first to give faith must communicate it afresh, raise it up, strengthen it, and bring it forth into lively exercise. And in doing all this, he fulfils "the work of faith with power." Of this the children of God have a living testimony in their own conscience, feeling, as they all do, an evil heart of unbelief; being as unable to raise up living faith as to create a new sun in the sky; being utterly powerless to deliver themselves from the temptations that beset them, or to bring sweet and precious views of the Lord Jesus Christ into their souls. Thus all the family of God, each in his measure, are convinced that true faith is of the operation of God; and must be wrought in their soul by his almighty power. When this is felt, it cuts the sinews of all creature faith; it lays the axe to the root of freewill; it brings a man to his right place—to be a poor, dependent sinner, hanging as a pensioner upon God's mercy and love. Until the sinews of creature faith, human strength, and legal righteousness are cut, we do not fall into our right position,—to have nothing but what God gives; to be nothing but what God makes; to know nothing but what God teaches; to feel nothing but what God inspires. Until we are brought into this completely helpless, needy, dependent position, we know nothing experimentally of the "work of faith with power." For God is a jealous God. And until we are thoroughly powerless, we do not find the working of God in us "to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Thus, by "the work of faith with power," we understand that operation of the blessed Spirit upon the soul, whereby he influences us to receive what God has revealed in his word; to believe in his dear Son; to look to his blood and righteousness; to

trust in his grace; to hang upon his promises; and to wait at his blessed footstool, until he in due time blesses, comforts, and enlarges our soul. And not only so; but every act of faith whereby we see our interest clear; whereby the spirit of love is brought into the soul, casting out that fear which hath torment; every real gospel hope; every blessing that works solid peace and satisfaction in the heart—all come from the same bounteous Author, the giver of every good and perfect gift.

This is "the work of faith with power;" because only so far as we feel the power of God in our souls, do we find any faith to believe. When the word of God is applied with power, it raises up faith; and when the power of God is felt, then faith is drawn forth to believe what is presented to it. But when the power of God is not put forth; when the operations of the Spirit, according to our view and feeling, are suspended, we are left (as we are often left) to grapple with the hardness, darkness, unbelief, and infidelity of our fallen nature, and feel as utterly unable to raise up a single spark of faith in our souls as to create a world. But when power is felt; when the word of God is applied; when the operations of the Spirit are experienced; when the things of God are brought near; when Christ is revealed and made precious; when the blood of sprinkling is made known; when the love of God is shed abroad; then as power is felt in the soul, faith is raised up, and we are enabled to believe, receive, embrace, and cleave unto all that God thus freely and blessedly makes known.

This is what the Apostle desired for the church of God to whom he was writing, "that he would fulfil the work of faith with power."

But, as I before hinted, faith has a work to *do*. Faith can do nothing till it is raised up. To use a comparison; it is like a steam engine. Put together the wheels and the cogs, the cylinder and piston, and all the various appurtenances of the machine. But what will the engine do without steam? Take away the motive power, and what are the cogs and wheels, and all the beautiful arrangements? But let the motive power be given, and then the cogs and wheels, rods and beams, work harmoniously together,



and the effect produced is such as the designer meant when the engine was erected. So it is spiritually. The grace of faith is never extinguished in the soul. A man to whom God has given faith never loses that faith out of his heart; but it is as powerless to any operation, as to any active experience, as to any work, or bringing forth of anything spiritual, as the steam engine is powerless, except there be the motive power, steam, applied to it. But when the motive power comes, when the steam is raised, then it begins to work. So it is with faith in the soul. Faith is powerless till God is pleased to breathe upon it, and draw it forth into exercise. Then, as he works upon it, and the motive power is applied, it begins to act according to its nature, and do the work which God has appointed it to perform.

1. It is the work of faith to *believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ. ("Dost thou believe on the Son of God?")—to believe in him as our Righteousness, our Mediator, our Saviour, our Friend, our Lord, and our God. We cannot raise up faith to see and believe he is all this to us. But if the Lord is pleased to give us faith, and draw it forth by the operations of his Spirit in our soul, then faith spreads forth its wings, lays hold of this precious Saviour, and brings him down into the heart. And this is "the work of faith with power."

2. Again. There is a *promise* in the word very suitable to your state and condition. But you feel you have no power to lay hold of it. There it is in God's word, very sweet and very suitable; but you cannot touch it; or, if you touch it, you cannot bring any sweetness, blessedness, or comfort out of it. But when the Lord is pleased to bring that promise near, to operate upon your soul with divine power, and so raise up and draw forth living faith upon the promise, what is so easy as to believe? I have often said, that faith is the hardest thing in the world, and the easiest thing in the world. There is nothing so hard, nothing so impossible, as to believe when the Lord does not give faith, is not raising it up, and drawing it forth by his almighty power. But when the Lord is doing this, or in any measure blessing the soul, bringing the truth near, applying the promise, dropping it in with

sweetness and savour, then nothing is so easy as to believe: it is then so simple, so sweet, so easy; there is no effort about it: it seems to come in and flow out freely as God gives it. And when this is the case, it is "the work of faith with power," to receive the promise; to suck its sweetness; to take it warm into the heart, and believe that God will accomplish it.

3. So with *the precepts*. God has given us precepts; and we would desire to obey them. We see a beauty and a blessedness in them; we admire them, and desire our lives to be conformed to them. We dare not set them aside. On the contrary, we take them as an integral portion of God's word; and see at times as great a beauty, as deep a necessity, and as real an importance in them as in the promises. But we are as powerless to perform the precept spiritually, as we are powerless to believe the promise spiritually, except as the Lord works in us "to will and to do of his good pleasure." The promise is a part of God's word; but we want faith to believe it; and the precept is a part of God's word; but we want faith to perform it; God works in us to believe the promise; God works in us to perform the precept. "Love your enemies," says the precept. "If smitten on the one cheek, turn the other." Can I do either of these things? Not spiritually, except so far as faith is wrought in my heart. I may do it in the letter, or hypocritically. But what real performance of the precept is there except as the Spirit who gave the precept works in us to obey it from the heart, from spiritual motives, to do it under divine impulse, or perform it under gracious operations; and thus obey the precept, not merely in conformity with the letter, but in spirit and in truth?

4. The "work of faith" is to fight against unbelief. But how can I fight against unbelief if I have no faith, and unless God fulfil "the work of faith with power?"

5. The "work of faith" is also necessary to overcome sin, to subdue the flesh with its desires and carnal lusts; to put off the old man, and put on the new. But, it must be "the work of faith with power:" for God must fulfil that work in me, if I am to fight

to any purpose. He himself must put the sword in my grasp, must teach my hands to war, and my fingers to fight. It is, then, "the work of faith" to crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts; but this can only be done by having faith brought with power into the heart. The old man can only be put off and the new put on by the manifestations of the love and mercy of God to the soul. If I abhor self, it must be by my conscience being made tender in the fear of the Lord. If I love the Lord Jesus Christ, it must be by his love being shed abroad in my heart.

Thus, we can believe no promise, perform no precept, mortify no sin, except so far as the Lord is pleased to fulfil "the work of faith with power."

II.—But we pass on to our second point, which is, what the *effect and fruit* would be of God doing all this.

i. First, "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ would be glorified in them." By "*the name* of the Lord Jesus Christ," we are to understand everything revealed in the word of God concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. For instance, I am known by a certain name, and you the same. When my name is mentioned, all that I am in bearing that name is brought before you. So with "the name" of God. It means what God has revealed concerning himself; the character of God as made known in the Scriptures. Thus, "the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" signifies all that is revealed concerning Christ. It is the character of Christ; all that is made known concerning the Son of God. Now the effect and result of God's fulfilling this prayer would be, "that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ would be glorified in them;" that is, everything which the word of God has revealed concerning Jesus would be glorified in their hearts. For instance:

1. There is the *Person* of Jesus, the object of our affections. Now, if the Lord "would be pleased to count them worthy of this calling, and to fulfil the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power," then the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ would be glorified in them. The answer that these prayers would bring into their souls would be such sweet manifestations of the Person

of Christ, that the glorious Immanuel, God with us, would be glorified in them. They would see his Person by the eye of faith, and feel his glory shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost.

2. The *blood* of Jesus is a part of his name. It is revealed to us as cleansing from all sin. And thus, if God fulfilled the petitions, the blood of Jesus would be glorified: that is, there would be that manifestation of the blood of Jesus applied to their conscience, and sprinkled upon their heart, that they would see a divine glory in it; they would see what precious blood it was, and how it flowed from him as the God-Man; they would experience the cleansing, healing, purging, pardoning efficacy of it; they would feel it as a rich stream of atoning blood flowing forth from the glorious Mediator between God and their souls, whereby sin was for ever blotted out. Thus would "the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" be glorified.

3. His *righteousness*, also, is a part of his name. When the Apostle speaks of the name of Jesus, it is to set forth what he is. He is "our righteousness." (1 Cor. 1:31.) "Thus is the name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our righteousness." (Jer. 23:6.) Now when we get a view by faith of his righteousness, we see a glory in it; we view it as the glorious robe of righteousness with which the church is covered. And thus, when this glorious righteousness is made known to the soul, "the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is glorified" in it.

4. So with his *love*. This is a part of the name of Jesus—the infinite love and mercy that dwelt in him. When this is made known to the soul, and revealed to the heart, his name is glorified. There is a glory seen in that eternal love of Jesus, which brought him down to suffer, bleed, and die.

5. His *suitability in all his covenant offices*; his mercy, his tenderness, and all that He is as Mediator between God and man,—all this is "the name of Jesus," whereby he is known and glorified in the soul. There is a glory and a beauty seen in it which surpasses everything, and can only be known by being felt.

ii. But there is another effect which would flow from the petition the Apostle puts up, "*And ye in him.*" Not only the effect of his prayer being granted would be, "that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ would be glorified in them" but they would also "be glorified in him." How does this take place? In this way. As we get a view of the Lord Jesus Christ, and behold his glory, that view conforms us to him; as the Apostle speaks, "We all beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3:18.) As Moses, when upon the mount he saw the glory of God, in his face reflected that glory,—the glory shining upon him, casting its own image and reflection upon his forehead: so as we see the glory of Christ by the eye of faith, and as that glory shines into the soul, it will create a resemblance to it in our heart. There will be not only the glory of Christ shining into the soul, but there will be a conformity to the Lord and his glorious image—a changing from glory to glory. Thus, the greater the view we have of Christ's glory, the more the mind is transformed into the same image; and by this we get separate from the world; for as we see the glory of Christ, that glory transforms us into his likeness. What then, is this poor, dying world? What are all the honours, riches, treasures, emoluments, and pleasures of this transient state? They all fade away. We only love these things as we lose sight of Christ. The glory of the world lays hold of our affections just in proportion as the glory of Christ loses its grasp upon us. Let the glory of Christ be seen; let his love be felt; let his glorious Person be made known; let the kingdom of God be set up with power; let a ray of divine favour shine into our hearts out of his eternal fulness; let us see light in God's light—then in that light we see the true value of the world. What, then, are all the men and women in the world? Moths, worms, caterpillars, crushed in a moment. What are all its honours and popularity worth? All are as insignificant as the atoms that dance in the sunbeam. We can then write, vanity upon all, and say, 'These things can yield us no solid profit or pleasure: none but Christ can really make us happy.' Thus, when we see his beauty, and taste his love, we have neither heart nor relish for the creature. This is the effect

and thus we are "glorified in him."

III.—And this leads me to the third point, on which I must be very brief, the crowning source of all—"According to the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ." He does not mention creature strength, creature wisdom, creature righteousness; but directs our eyes and hearts unto the fountain head of all—"according to the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ." Grace beginning; grace carrying on; and grace finishing; grace devising the original plan of redemption; grace bringing it forth and accomplishing it; grace predestinating; and grace applying predestinating mercy to the objects of the Father's choice. Thus grace must have all the glory. Grace first, grace middle, grace last. All to the glory of God's grace.

Thus feebly have I attempted to set these things before you. Now what do we know of these things? Upon what is our dependence? Upon what we are doing for God, or upon what God is doing for us? If we hope to do anything by the strength of the creature, that hope will fail; but if our hope rests upon the free grace, sovereign mercy, eternal goodness and distinguishing love of God, that hope will not fail us. Can we, then, lay down our heart's desires step by step with those of the Apostle, and feel union and communion with him? Can we sum up our desires in his? If so, how can I better take my leave of you this visit than by using the prayer of the Apostle, that God would "count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you—"in your hearts, in your lips, in your lives, in your walk, in your conversation;" that you may be glorified in him, and be enabled from day to day to depend only upon "the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

## **THE WORKING OF ALL THINGS TOGETHER FOR GOOD**

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning, July 8, 1849

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."  
Romans 8:28

The child of God seems to me often to resemble a benighted traveller. He has left his home, and is struggling onward to a certain destination. He is surrounded on every side with mists and darkness; still he struggles onward. But looking up into the sky, he sees a star glimmer through the clouds: by-and-by another appears; and by-and-by another; till at last all the mist and fog are dispersed, and the stars shine forth in all their beauty and glory. Thus is it often with the child of God. He has left the world; he is struggling onward to his heavenly home; but he often walks in darkness and has no light; little else but mists and fogs surround the path he is treading. In this state, perhaps he opens the word of God; or, as he is musing over his many trials, a text, a promise breaks in upon his mind, and that shews him the mist and fog are breaking up; by-and-by another portion of God's word, another sweet promise comes into his soul; and this encourages him still more, till by-and-by the Bible seems full of promises, shining forth in the pages of the sacred volume more thickly and gloriously than the stars that spangle the midnight sky.

Among these bright stars that glimmer in the firmament of Scripture, there is scarcely one more resplendent than our text. Let us travel through the promises upon record, and we can scarcely find one more sweet or suitable to an exercised child of God than this, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

In looking at these words this morning, I shall, for the sake of greater clearness, somewhat invert the order, and show,

**First, who the characters are that are interested in this promise.**

**Secondly, the promise itself, and**

**Thirdly, the knowledge of the promise, and of our personal interest in it. The Lord grant his presence; and enable me to speak such things as he shall bless to our souls.**

1.—**First**, then, let us consider the **characters** to whom the promise belongs. Now it is necessary to make the ground good here; for if we err here, we err everywhere. Let me illustrate this by an example or two taken from the things of common life. A man makes a will; when he dies, and the will is opened and read, the very first thing to be settled is the person in whose favour the will is made. Until that is settled, there is no going a step further. Or, there is a society founded for a certain object. This society has certain objects in view, certain characters on whom it bestows its liberality. There are prescribed limits; as age, poverty, being members of the household of faith; and if these qualifications are not in the individual, he cannot be a candidate. So it is spiritually. Unless we make the ground good at first by coming to some clear decision who are the characters interested in this promise, we are all in confusion; we do not make straight paths for our feet; our eyes do not look onward, nor our eyelids straight before us. It is absolutely necessary, therefore, in order to make the ground good, to clear up who the characters are in favour of whom the promise is made.

If we look at these characters, we shall find them described as bearing two distinct marks,

**1** that they "love God;"

**2** that they are "the called according to God's purpose." If a man,



then, do not love God, and be not called according to God's purpose, he has no manifest interest in this promise. And if, on the other hand, he bear these two marks, that he loves God, and that he is called according to God's purpose, the promise is intended for him, and is ready to discharge its full contents into his heart.

I. First, then, let us look a little more closely at the character set forth as **a lover of God**. We are very certain this never can be true of any man in a state of nature, for "the carnal mind is enmity against God;" and if so, there cannot be any love to God in his heart. He is therefore excluded from the benefit of the promise; his name is not in the will.

But, in order to make this weighty matter more clear and plain, let us see what the Scriptures say of those who love God. I think we shall find in the first epistle of John three marks given us of those who love him; and by these three marks may we try our state. Let us, then, bring our hearts and consciences to the test of God's unerring word, and see whether we can find these three marks of the lovers of God in our soul. We read, "Love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." **1Jo 4:7** Here, then, are two marks which the Holy Ghost has given of him that loves God, that he is **born** of God, and that he **knoweth** God. And if we look a little lower down, we shall find a third mark, "This is the love of God that **we keep his commandments.**" **1Jo 5:3**

These, then, are the three marks of a man being a lover of God:

1. that he is **born** of God;
2. that he **knoweth** God; and
3. that he **keepeth God's commandments.**

1. But what is it to be **born** of God? We read of those who were followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, that they were "born not of

blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." **Joh 1:13** A heavenly birth is contrasted here with the birth of the flesh; the one is set aside, and the other set up. To be born of God is to be quickened into spiritual life by the Holy Ghost; to have passed from death unto life; to have faith, hope and love brought forth in our hearts by the operation of God the Spirit; to be made new creatures in Christ; to have the kingdom of heaven set up, and the power of God felt in our souls. If, then, a man can feel that he is born of God; that a mighty revolution has taken place in his soul; that he is a new creature in Christ; that old things are passed away and all things become new: if he has the witness of God in his conscience that this divine change has taken place in him, and that a measure of the love of God has been shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost—then he has an evidence that he is one who loves God. and therefore has an interest in the promise before us.

2. Our **second** mark of one that loves God is, that he knows God. This we cannot know by nature, for there is a veil of unbelief over our heart. We are born in darkness and the shadow of death: but when God is pleased to shine into our souls, and give us "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;" to take the veil of unbelief away, and give us that knowledge of himself as the only true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, which is eternal life—then we know God; we know who he is, and we fear his great Name.

3. The **third** mark is, that we **keep his commandments**, that we come out of the world, and are separate from it; that we desire to do his will, to serve him, and to walk before him in simplicity, humility, and godly sincerity; that his fear is alive in us; that we obey him, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

But why do I mention these marks? For this reason; because the children of God are often tried and exercised whether they do love him. There are so many things in their hearts to oppose the love of God. There is the world; a going out in their carnal mind

after the things of time and sense; sin working in them, bringing them continually into bondage; darkness of mind, so as to be unable to see their signs; deadness of soul, so that the love of God seems reduced to the last spark. All these things are so opposite to the love of God that they seem at times not to have one grain of it in their hearts. And when they would fain look back to certain spots, times, and seasons, when they did feel the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, when they could delight themselves in the Almighty, when his word was sweeter than honey and the honeycomb, and they could walk before him in holy obedience and love, I say, when they would fain look back upon these favourite spots, times, and seasons, they often cannot. Such is the darkness of their minds they can scarcely see the hill Mizar, or remember him from the land of Jordan and of the Hermonites. Therefore, it is necessary to look to certain marks of God's word. The landmarks in our experience are sometimes swept away, or clouds of darkness cover them. We therefore must look to the unerring landmarks of God's word, which, unlike the landmarks of experience, are never swept away, but stand there firmly fixed by the pen of the Holy Ghost. If therefore, with all our doubts and fears and misgivings, our hardness of heart, our unbelief, darkness of mind, and deadness of frame, we can find these three marks in our souls, that we have been born of God, that we know him, and that we are keeping his commandments and desiring to do his will, we have Scripture testimony that we are of those who love God, and therefore have an interest in this promise.

II.—Our **second** mark is, that such are the "called according to God's purpose." This seems to be added as a kind of supplement to clear up the first mark; and added for this twofold purpose. First, to exclude all men in a state of nature. A man, in a state of nature, might say, 'I love God; I love to walk abroad, and mark his glory in the beauties of creation. I look up by night, and as I see the stars in the sky I recognize in them a heavenly Architect. I am sure I love God.' A man in a state of nature may do this. Now this seems added to cut off such. It says, 'No; all those that love God are the called according to his purpose.' A man must be

called; there must be a work of grace upon his soul before he can be a true spiritual lover of God.

But there is another purpose also. The child of God may say, Do I love God? If so, what love do I **now** feel? Are my affections **now in** heaven? Do I feel my soul **now** desiring the Lord more than thousands of gold and silver? Is my heart **now** softened and melted by the sweet operations of his grace, mercy, and love? No;' the poor child of God says, I feel too much the contrary—hardness, darkness, carnality—perhaps enmity, rebellion—how can I, then hope I am the character for whom this promise is made? Yet if I be not a lover of God, I have no interest in it.

To clear up this dark path, it seems added by way of supplement, "called according to God's purpose." His purpose is not affected by what we are, or what we have. His purpose is still going on. We may be in darkness and deadness; but our darkness does not alter God's purpose; our deadness does not change his decree. We may not have the sweet enjoyment of his love in our hearts; but still his 'purpose' remains unchanged and unchangeable, like its divine Author.

But how can we prove we are called according to God's purpose? Love may flag; evidences may fade; hope may droop; enjoyment may cease; but the calling still remains. Can we, then, look back to any time or spot when the Lord signally called us? Can we cast an eye on the path we have trodden in the ways of grace, and say that none but the Lord could have separated us from the sins in which we were entangled, the company with which we were mixed, the course we were pursuing? Can we remember there were at the time certain feelings which none but God could inspire? certain operations in our hearts which none but God could perform? certain effects which nothing but a heavenly hand moving upon the soul could create? If we cannot **now** trace distinctly that we are the lovers of God; if we cannot now feel the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, yet we may compare ourselves with the three marks I have given, and take some comfort from them; or even if these three marks be buried in

obscurity, we may still cast an eye along the vista which we have trodden, and see the hand of God stretched out in a manifestive way to call us out of nature's darkness into his marvellous light.

I have been thus particular, and dwelt thus long upon this portion of the text, because I love to make sure ground. Let us make the ground good—then we can step safely on; but if the ground be sandy, the foundation uncertain, we are faulty at the very outset. There is no advancing a single step till the ground be made good. I will suppose, then, the ground is thus far made good, and that there are in this congregation those who have some internal testimony that they are lovers of God, and that they are "called according to God's purpose."

II.—But I proceed to the substance of the promise, "**that all things work together for good**" to such characters. Every word here is pregnant with blessed import: we could not part with a single syllable. And yet, what an exalted view does it give us of the wisdom, providence, and power of God! Look at this complicated scene. Here are God's people, surrounded by a thousand mysterious circumstances, travelling in the various paths of life—station, age, sex, circumstances, all widely different. Here is the world lying in wickedness around them—a crafty adversary ever on the watch to beguile or harass them,—a heart full of sin to overflowing, except as kept down by the mighty power of God! Look at all our varied circumstances; and then to believe that if we are the lovers of God, all things we experience are working together for our spiritual good, what a view does it give us of the wisdom, grace, and power of a wonder-working God! Let us bear with all our weight upon the text: it will bear all the strain that we can put upon it. "All things!" Look at that! All that concerns our body and soul; everything in providence, everything in grace; everything you have passed through, everything you are passing through, everything you shall pass through.

Let each of you who love God, and fear his name in this congregation, take everything belonging to you, and lay it upon

this text, as you might lay hymn-books and Bibles on the table before me. There is not a single thing in providence or grace that concerns any person in this congregation who loves God that the promise cannot bear. "All things! all things!" What! is there not a single thing, however minute, however comparatively unimportant, that is not for my good if I love God? No, not one. If there were a single thing, this text would not be true; God would speak an untruth. If there were a single thing which befalls me, be it in providence, or be it in grace, that is not working together for my good, if I am a child of God, I say it with reverence, that this would be a lie in God's book. And yet, when we consider the variety of things that affect us—to believe that all of them are working together for our good, how must we admire the wonderful wisdom, and power, and government of God.

But let us, by the way of casting a clearer light upon the words, "all things," look at them more minutely. All things that take place are either according to God's decretive appointment, or according to his permissive appointment. Many things that try your mind, and exercise your souls, are according to God's decretive appointment. Everything with which sin or Satan are not intermingled, we may say, comes from God's decretive appointment; and if we are lovers of God, they are working together for our good. **Are we tried in our circumstances?** This is according to God's decretive appointment. Is it the Lord's will and pleasure to bring us down in the world, by sorrows and adversities in providence? This is still according to God's decretive appointment. **Have we afflictions in the family?** It is still according to God's decretive appointment. It comes from him. Nothing can happen in body, in property, in family, that does not spring from God's decretive appointment. Are children taken away? They are taken by the hand of God. "The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away." Is wife or husband afflicted? The hand of God is in it. Is the body brought down with sickness? It cometh from God. Is the mind tried with a thousand perplexities, anxieties, and cares? It is still the hand of God. All these matters spring from his **decretive** appointment! But is Satan permitted to harass and distress our minds? This is only by God's **permissive**

appointment. He could do nothing against Job until God gave him permission. Have we enemies in the church or in the world? Have we to endure persecution for Christ's sake? slander, calumny, and opposition? Shimei was permitted to curse David; and Jeroboam was raised up in consequence of the idolatry of Solomon. All is still according to God's permissive' appointment. Are we tried by the evils of our fallen nature? It is still according to God's permissive appointment; for nothing can take place, either in providence or in grace, except as God in his infinite wisdom has decreed to perform, or decreed to allow.

But all these things, however trying to our minds, however hard to bear, however painful to our flesh, are decreed to work together. They do not work singly, but they work together with something else. It is like my watch. The wheel that turns the hand is not the same wheel that is moved by the spring; but one wheel works within another wheel, and one cog catches in another cog, until at length the time of day is shown upon the dial. So with respect to our afflictions, our exercises, the trials of our minds, the various disappointments and perplexities we have to endure; they do not work singly, but together with something else; and it is by this working together with something else that they produce a divine and blessed result.

But what is that with which they work. The grace of God in the soul. The wheel of providence works with the wheel of grace; and the wheel of grace works with the wheel of providence; and together a blessing is the result. For instance. Some affliction befalls your body; you are laid upon a sick bed. That affliction will do you no good in itself; but it works together with the grace of God in your soul; and by its working together with the grace of God in your soul, a blessing is the result. Or, you are brought down in circumstances: you have a very difficult path to tread in providence. This will do you no good in itself; there are thousands of persons in bad circumstances who get no good from them. But it works together with the life and power of God in your soul; and so it produces a blessing. Or, you may lose a wife, or a child, or have sickness in your family; in themselves no good is produced

by these things; but they work together with the life and power of God in your soul; and this brings about the blessing. In this word lies the mystery—they **work together**.

But what do they **work together for?** "For **good.**" But what do we call **good?** We must not take **our** idea of good, but God's idea of the matter. We must not take what we fancy to be good, but what is really and truly so in his eyes. For instance. A man may say, it is very good to have health; it may be so in his eyes, but not so in God's. Another may say, it is a very good thing to **get on in the world**, to have a flourishing business, and prosperous trade; that may be good in his eyes, but not in God's. Another may say, it is good for me to have a family **growing up** in health and strength, and well provided for: it may be so in his eyes; but it does not follow that it is good in the Lord's. Another may say, it is good to have no troubles, no temptations, no wicked heart, no devil to beguile or harass; it may seem very good in his eyes, but it does not follow that it is so in God's eyes. He is judge in these matters.

What, then, are we to say is "good?" Whatever produces spiritual profit and a blessing; **that** which is really good in the eyes of a heart-searching God.

Now just see whether all these things do not in this sense work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose. You have had an afflicted body. Well, that in itself did you no good; for it incapacitated you for business, troubled your mind, made you a burden to yourself and a burden to all around you. There was no good in that. But suppose it weaned you from the world; suppose it set death before your eyes, made you die daily, stirred up a spirit of prayer and supplication in your heart; suppose it opened up those promises of God which are suitable to his afflicted family; suppose it was the means of blessing your soul with some sweet manifestation of your interest in the love and blood of the Lamb—are you then to say, that your sickness, your affliction has not been for good, when it worked together with the grace of God in



your soul to bring forth a real blessing? Or, you have had reverses in the world, have lost money in trade, and are now in distressed circumstances. There is no good in these things considered abstractly; but do they stir up the life and power of God in your soul? do they give you an errand to the throne of grace? do they shew you what is in your heart? do they call forth confession before God? do they make Jesus near and dear to your souls? do they wean you from the world? then they have worked together for your good. You have lost a child, or have an afflicted wife, and unhealthy family; there is no good in that; for "the sorrow of the world worketh death." But suppose that this wife or child has become your idol; that you have worshipped it instead of worshipping God,—why, then, this affliction works together for good, if through it your heart's affections are now fixed on the Lord Jesus alone. Thus we are to measure this good, not by what the creature thinks, but by what God himself has declared to be good in his word, and what we have felt to be good in our soul's experience. Have your trials humbled you, made you meek and lowly? They have done you good. Have they stirred up a spirit of prayer in your bosom, made you sigh, cry, and groan for the Lord to appear, visit, or bless your soul? They have done you good. Have they opened up those parts of God's word which are full of mercy and comfort to his afflicted people? They have done you good. Have they stripped off the covering that is too narrow? They have done you good. Have they made you more sincere, more earnest, more spiritual, more heavenly-minded, more convinced that the Lord Jesus can alone bless and comfort your soul? They have done you good. Have they been the means in God's hand of giving you a lift in hearing the preached word, of opening your ears to hear none but the true servants of God, those who enter into a tried path, and describe a gracious experience? They have done you good. Have they made the Bible more precious to you, the promises more sweet, the dealings of God with your soul more prized? They have done you good.

Now this is the way, that "all things work together for good." Not by puffing you up with pride, but by filling your heart with humility; not by encouraging presumption, but by raising your

affections to where Jesus sits at the right hand of God; not by carrying us into the world, but by bringing us out of it; not by covering us with a veil of ignorance and arrogance, but by stripping this veil off, and bringing light, life, and power into the soul. In this way, "all things work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose."

III.—And this leads me to our **third** point, which is our **knowledge** of these things. "We **know** that all things work together for good." How do we **know** it?. We know it in two ways. We know it, **first**, from the testimony of God's **word**: and we know it **secondly**, from the testimony of God in our own **conscience**.

1. Let us look at the record of **God's word**. See the saints of old; how afflicted they were! But did not all things work together for good to them? Look at Jacob! What sorrows, trials and afflictions the aged patriarch went through! his whole life one continued scene of trouble and sorrow. But did not all work together for his good? Was there one too many, or one too heavy? Could he not in the end lay his head upon his dying pillow, and bless and thank God for them all? Look at Joseph! Did not all things work together for his good? His brethren's enmity; his being sold into Egypt; the wicked conduct of his master's wife: his being cast into prison: his interpreting the chief butler's and baker's dreams. How all these things worked together for his good, and brought him out to occupy the next place to Pharaoh himself, and be the means in the hand of God of keeping alive the people of Israel. Look at David! Hunted on the mountains like a partridge; continually exposed to the spear of Saul; on every hand nothing but persecution and distress: on all sides affliction and sorrow. Yet all things worked together for his good. What blessed Psalms we have in consequence! What a sweet treasury of comfort for God's people through David being thus hunted about on the mountains and in the wilderness! How suitable they are to God's poor tried and tempted family! If David had not had all these persecutions and afflictions, he never could have written the Psalms, nor would there have been in them such treasures of

consolation. Look at Job's troubles and afflictions! Children taken away; property swept off in a moment; his body plagued with boils; his friends turned to enemies; and God himself appearing to be against him. Yet, how all things worked together for good in his case!

2. And have we not in our measure proved the same? When trials came, we could not see that they were working together for good. No: perhaps you have sometimes been, as I have felt, in such a state as to believe we never should see the day when they would prove for our good. They were so dark in themselves, so mysterious, so painful, so trying, so perplexing, that in the unbelief of our mind, we could scarcely believe that God himself could ever convince us they were working together for our spiritual good. But has there been any trial, any temptation, any exercise, any affliction, any sorrow, which has not in some way or other worked together for our spiritual good—in humbling us, shewing us more of what we are, opening up the Scriptures to us, stirring up a spirit of prayer, making Jesus precious, throwing light upon God's truth, or applying that truth with a measure of sweetness and comfort to our souls? Thus, we know from our own experience as well as Scripture, that "all things work together for good to them that love **God**, and are the called according to his purpose."

But, you may say, 'I do not see it **now**.' No; there is the trying point. 'I do not feel it at this **present moment**.' No. Did you see your past trials at the very moment that they were working together for your good? When the Lord afflicted your body, brought you down in circumstances, sent disease into your family, suffered your mind to be tried with the fiery darts of the devil, and a thousand temptations and perplexities—I want to know whether **at the time** you could speak confidently, 'I know that what I am now passing through will work together for my spiritual good.' If you could say that, then I will add this—it was not half a trial. If you are passing through any trial, sorrow, or temptation; and can look up unto God, and say, 'I know and am persuaded that this very thing is working together for my spiritual

good—if you can say that, you have got through more than half the trial. It is this which aggravates the trials, temptations, and exercises of God's people for the most part, that when they are in them they have not this blessed confidence.

But say, that they have faith to see that all the trials and afflictions that grieve and burden them are working together for their spiritual good, then they do not want much comfort from God's word, and have no communion with God's tried saints. If I can fight my own battles, I do not want a precious Jesus to bring me off more than conqueror. And thus we should lose all the blessedness of having something to look back upon, and to say, 'I was in this trial, and it did me that good; I was upon that bed of affliction, and it brought me this blessing; I had that reverse of circumstances, and it did me good; I had that trouble in my family, and it did me good; I was harassed with this temptation, and it did me good; I was put into this furnace, and it did me good; sifted in that sieve, and it did me good; had these oppositions, and they did me good.' When we can look back and say, 'there has not been a single trial that has not worked in some measure for my good'—that experience encourages us to look forward, and to believe that present trials will have the same result—and that all things are working together for good to us as far as we love God, and are the called according to his purpose.

Thus we may resolve it all. There is no man that can say, 'I can make my trials work together for good.' He cannot manage that he must have them; and it is a mercy to have them. It is a mercy when we are enabled to bring our trials, our exercises, our temptations to the Lord's feet, and say, 'Lord, here I am, with all my trials, troubles, exercises; I cannot manage them; they are too much for me; do thou undertake for me; do thou bring me off more than conqueror; do thou appear for me; do thou bless me; do thou cause all my trials, exercises, and temptations to work together for my spiritual good; let the trial be sharp, let the affliction be heavy, let there be nothing in it but what is most painful and grievous, yet, Lord, if I can but believe that they are working together for my spiritual good, I can bear them all!' If we

have found that this has been the result of all that has passed, it may enable us at times to believe it for all that is to come, and to look up in confidence that nothing can happen to us, be it in providence or in grace,—but can and will "work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose."

## WRESTLING JACOB

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning, August 16, 1846

"I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." Genesis 32:26

The person by whom, and the circumstances under which these words were uttered, must be familiar to all here who have a tolerable acquaintance with the letter of God's written word. I need therefore scarcely remark that they are the words of Jacob when he was wrestling with the angel. He was returning to his native land under peculiar circumstances. Though he was a child of God, his treachery against his brother Esau had not passed unnoticed and unchastised by the Lord. Nay, for that very reason, because he was a child, he experienced chastisement. And not only so, but he had the very same treachery that he had shown to his brother Esau amply repaid into his own bosom by the Lord's permitting Laban to deceive him in a point where his tenderest affections were concerned, besides oppressing and defrauding him continually.

After a lapse, then, of twenty years, at the Lord's command he escapes from the hard oppression of Laban, and sets out to return to the land of his fathers and to his kindred. **Ge 31:3** But after being miraculously delivered from the vengeance of Laban, and drawing near the borders of Canaan, he learns to his dismay that his brother Esau was at hand with four hundred men. The recollection of his former treachery flashing upon his conscience immediately filled him with the deepest distress and alarm, lest his justly incensed brother should fall upon him, all defenceless as he was, and "smite the mother with the children." But what was Jacob's resource? He did what every child of God must do under similar circumstances. He goes and wrestles with the Lord. We read that he "was left alone." He allowed no person to be present while he poured out his soul before God. Thus Hezekiah "turned his face toward the wall," when the sentence of death

was felt in his conscience. **Isa 38:2** Thus Nehemiah stood in silence behind the king, when he put up a secret petition on Jerusalem's behalf. **Ne 2:4** Thus Moses lay at the feet of the Lord on the shore of the Red Sea, venting the secret groaning of his soul, unknown and unnoticed by the ear of man. Thus Hannah too left her husband and her rival, to pour out her soul before the Lord in solitude and sorrow. **1Samuel 1:9,10,15** And thus, in the days of his flesh, the Man of Sorrows "went into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God" **Lu 6:12**; and again, deserted and alone in the gloomy garden of Gethsemane, "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." **Heb 5:7** Sweet and encouraging examples for living souls to follow!

But O! how graciously did God interpose on Jacob's behalf! When reduced to extremity, the Lord showed Himself. And how did He appear? In human shape; not indeed by an actual assumption of real flesh and blood, as some have vainly imagined; **that** was reserved for the time when He took part of the "flesh and blood of the children." **Heb 2:14** The Son of God could only once become actually incarnate; and therefore these appearances in the Old Testament of the Lord in human shape were but shadowy representations, and preached to the church that then was, the future incarnation of the Son of God. With this "man," as He is called in the word, Jacob wrestled till the break of day; and whilst thus wrestling, these words, the words of the text, burst forth in the extremity of Jacob's case from his lips, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

Two things in the text strike my mind as its leading features.

1.—The earnest importunity of the wrestling patriarch "I will not let Thee go." And,

2.—The **desired object** which pressed so hard upon his **soul**—**"except Thou bless me."**

I.—Let us revert once more to the circumstances under which these words were uttered. Several things appear to me to have met together in Jacob's soul, in order to bring this petition out of his lips. And I believe, the very same things must, to a degree, meet also in our hearts, if the same petition is to escape from our lips honestly and sincerely before God.

1. **Guilt** lay hard upon Jacob's conscience. He knew that he justly deserved to be cut off by the angry sword of Esau. The recollection of his past treachery came fresh before his eyes, and his soul sank under the sense of his guilt, as knowing that he merited all that his incensed brother might do against him. Thus it is also with every quickened soul that comes earnestly and sincerely before the throne of mercy. If the guilt of sin lie not upon his conscience, it is but mocking God to ask Him to take it away. If the recollection of his sins do not press him down, it is but insulting God, it is but deceiving himself to beg of the Lord to remove the burden. Guilt, when laid upon the conscience by the blessed Spirit, will make a man honest; guilt, under the Spirit's intercession, will press a cry out of a man's heart, and force the language of confession and supplication out of his lips.

2. **Fear** was another circumstance that met in Jacob's soul—the fear of being cut off by the hand of Esau. The tidings brought back by the messengers that Esau was at hand with four hundred men, and he himself utterly defenceless, surrounded by weak women, feeble children and flocks and herds **a tempting booty to the wild hunter of Mount Seir** filled Jacob's soul with alarm. Thus he felt that Esau had but to draw his sword, and he and all that belonged to him must be sacrificed to his vengeance. Is not the same thing, in a spiritual sense, felt in the heart of a child of God, when he comes with similar language to the throne of grace? Does he not fear lest the Lord should draw His avenging sword against him, as Jacob feared lest the blade of Esau should be plunged into his heart; a fear arising, as in Jacob's case, from his defenceless state? fear lest he should not escape deserved punishment.



3. But, besides this, **want** also, **urgent necessity**, was another feature in Jacob's case; a pressing circumstance, which, combined with others, brought this petition out of his lips. He was in the extremity of need; he must have the Lord to appear for him, and that immediately. Delays would not suit his case; he must have help **now**. He could not wait; delay was death. Is it not so spiritually in the child of God, when he is brought to a throne of mercy? He must have immediate help; his soul is often in extremity; he cannot bear delay. God must appear for him, and that instantly; he must sink, he must faint, he must die, unless immediate help is given him.

4. But combined with these things, a measure also of **faith** was in Jacob's heart. If there had been no faith in Jacob's soul, he could not thus have wrestled with the Lord; for it is by faith alone that we come unto God. It is by faith alone that we have power with God and prevail; it is the prayer of faith alone, which enters the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth; it is the petition that is mixed with faith, which alone draws down an answer from God into the bosom. And this faith in Jacob's heart was strong faith. It was not faith, viewing dangers and difficulties at a distance, and then congratulating itself upon its amazing strength. It was not like some tall bully, who can be very courageous when no danger is at hand, but slinks immediately into the rear when anything appears alarming and terrifying. And this was the very mark of the strength of Jacob's faith—that it "lived under load;" that it manifested itself in spite and in the face of all opposing circumstances; that it was not damped, was not destroyed, was not overcome by dangers and perils; but shone the more brightly the more it was dipped in the floods, and struggled the more vehemently and manfully in proportion to the difficulties which it had to encounter.

Is not this the grand distinguishing feature of living faith in the soul—that it does not vaunt itself and swell high in times of quiet and ease, and immediately that difficulty appears shrinks and runs away? Living faith acts in a manner the direct contrary to this. It is indeed often timid and trembling in the face of danger;

but yet the nearer the danger comes, the more boldly does it maintain its ground. Thus the very necessity of the case, so far from weakening, so far from overcoming, so far from destroying Jacob's faith **the Lord making His strength perfect in the patriarch's weakness** rather put fresh vigour into it. Thus he prayed the more earnestly and the more believingly, in exact proportion to the urgent want of his soul. Is it not so also in the heart of a child of God? When is faith most in exercise? When there is neither doubt nor fear, distress nor alarm? when the sun shines, and all things wear a favourable aspect? When things in providence go well? when outward circumstances flourish? when the family is in health? when everything in grace and everything in nature seem on our side? False faith may be lively and strong in such summer weather; but not that faith which is the gift of God. **That** is the most active when the sky is most cloudy; **that** shines the most brightly, when it is most opposed by enemies, has to fight against and triumph over most difficulties and perplexing circumstances. Did not Jacob take hold of the Angel in order to wrestle with Him? And is not this typical and figurative of the way in which faith lays hold of Jesus? Does not God say, "Let him take hold of My strength that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me?" **Isa 27:5** This is the very character of faith—that it takes hold of God's word, brings into the heart God's promise, relies upon God's truth, hangs upon what God has declared, and maintains its hold in spite of death, Satan, and hell. If Jacob had merely viewed the Angel at a distance; if he had merely touched Him with his finger, and then immediately withdrawn his hand; or if he had begun to wrestle, and not gone on, would he have gained the blessing?

5. And this leads me to another feature that shines conspicuously in the wrestling of Jacob with the **Angel—his unwearied and persevering importunity**. Jacob was not satisfied with merely beginning to wrestle, or with just taking hold of the Angel, and then immediately letting Him go. His case was so urgent; the extremity was so great; he so felt in his soul that the blessing he must have or die, that he not only took hold, but maintained his hold; he not only began, but he continued; he not only continued,

but he persevered, till he came off more than conqueror through the Lord that loved him. And is not this the case with all living souls? Wherever there is true prayer, there is importunity. Wherever the Lord brings trials upon the soul, He pours out upon it the spirit of grace and supplications. He thus encourages and enables the soul to be importunate with him. The blessings and benefits of perseverance and importunity in prayer the Lord has brought prominently before us in two parables—one, of the man in bed with his children, who would not get up and relieve his friend, but yet was overcome by his importunity; and the other, of the woman, who had a cause at issue, and went before the judge who feared not God, neither regarded man; yet, by her continual going to him, overcame him at last by her importunity. **Lu 11:5-8 Lu 18:1-7** Thus importunity and perseverance form the very feature of true prayer. If the child of God has a burden—if he is labouring under a strong temptation—if his soul is passing through some pressing trial—he is not satisfied with merely going to a throne of grace and coming away. There is at such times and seasons, as the Lord enables, real importunity; there is a holy wrestling; there are fervent desires; there are unceasing groans; there is a labouring to enter into rest; there is a struggling after deliverance; there is a crying unto the Lord, until He appears and manifests Himself in the soul, "I will not let Thee go."

But what strength had Jacob against the God-Man so as to prevail? Might He not by one touch have ground him to powder? He might. But He graciously suffered Himself to be overcome; and yet to shew that it was not by might, nor by power, but by gracious permission, that "the worm Jacob" prevailed, He touched "the hollow of his thigh," and immediately it "was out of joint." By this He shewed effectually that He permitted Himself to be overcome, and that it was no strength of Jacob, which procured him the victory. Thus this man of war, this God-Man, this "Immanuel, God with us," who commanded all things into being, and before whose frown one day the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll, and all creation be dissolved into primitive nothingness, suffered Himself to be overcome by weak, timid Jacob, all fearing and trembling before the face of his brother Esau.

How encouraging it is for the Lord's poor and needy family, that this manifestation of the Son of God was in the shape of a man! Do we not see in it a pledge of His incarnation in the fulness of time? Do we not view it in His infinite condescension in taking upon Him the flesh and blood of the children? For did not the Lord, in thus assuming human shape, foreshadow Himself as the divinely appointed Mediator between God and man? as the "Consolation of Israel?" as Jacob's help? as the church's hope? It is encouraging then, to the Lord's people, as they are from time to time placed in similar circumstances of trial, exercise, perplexity, sorrow or distress with Jacob, to see the blessed result of his wrestling with the Angel. He crosses the ford of Jabbok all weakness; he recrosses it all strength. He leaves his family, and wrestles alone, a fainting Jacob; he returns to them a prevailing Israel. He goes to the Lord in an agony of doubt and alarm, fearing every moment lest he and all that was dear to him should be swept off from the face of the earth; he returns with the Lord's blessing in his soul, with the light of the Lord's countenance lifted up upon him. And is not this instance recorded for the instruction and consolation of the Lord's living family? Are they not from time to time in circumstances experimentally, which resemble Jacob's circumstances literally? Have they not often similar difficulties, similar wants and similar necessities? And does not the Lord from time to time raise up in their heart the same faith to lay hold? the same importunity to keep hold? And shall He, who gave Jacob such a merciful deliverance—shall He, who has recorded in His holy word this remarkable event in Jacob's life for the edification and instruction of His people in all times—hear Jacob, and not hear them? It is derogatory to the sympathizing "Man of Sorrows;" it is treason against the Majesty of heaven to believe, that a child of God, in similar circumstances, can go to the Lord in a similar way, and not get a similar blessing.

But what is the reason why there are so few blessings bestowed? What is the reason why the Lord's people experience so few signal interpositions in providence or in grace? The reason is, because they have so little of the utterance of Jacob's lips, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

II.—And this leads me to the second branch of our subject, "**Except Thou bless me.**" This is what Jacob wanted—a **blessing for his soul.** He wanted not merely deliverance, temporal deliverance from the threatening sword of Esau. He went indeed to the Lord with that burden; that was the petition he laid chiefly at the Lord's feet; for he said, "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children." **Ge 32:11** But, it seems to me, whilst he was thus pleading with the Lord for a temporal deliverance, he was so overcome, and so overpowered with a view of the Lord's glory, and there was such an unfolding and flowing out of His fulness into Jacob's heart, that his soul's desires mounted above the temporal deliverance that he went mainly to seek, and he poured out his soul after a spiritual blessing. He seems in the very act of wrestling to have received some token and pledge of temporal deliverance; and then soaring upwards beyond mere temporal necessity, he begged of the Lord to give him a spiritual blessing. For he does not say, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou answer me, except Thou deliver me from Esau, except Thou appear for me;" though he wanted all these. But his soul at this time was as if looking into the very bosom of the Lord; and seeing how that heart was full of mercy, kindness and love, and panting after those spiritual blessings which alone can satisfy and save, he cried out with vehement desire, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou **bless** me."

But what is **a blessing?** Blessings are very much talked about in our day; and there are those who speak of being blessed under well-nigh every sermon; but their blessing is all gone before they have walked a hundred yards from the chapel door. Blessings so transitory, that so soon evaporate, that slip away so easily, are not worth the name. A flash of transitory excitement, some movement of natural feeling, a trowelful of untempered mortar, or a fresh coat of white-wash, pass with many for blessings under the word; but none of them can be, or are considered, blessings by God's poor and needy family. An appetite so easily appeased,

a thirst so soon satisfied, is not like the hungering and thirsting of God's own people. They call nothing a blessing but that which comes stamped with the hand of God, and carries with it its own clear and decisive evidence. All that falls short of coming into their hearts from the lips of God—all that falls short of the manifestation of the Lord's mercy and love, they cannot consider to be "a blessing indeed," or such a one as their souls are panting to enjoy. And yet there are minor blessings. I dare not deny that there are blessings that fall short of those full, clear and ravishing manifestations which the Lord's people are longing after and often on the look out for; and these the living family are glad to receive when they are not indulged with a full one. A sip will relieve thirst, though it falls short of a full draught; a crumb even from the table of the Lord will be prized for the time, when a more abundant morsel is withholden.

I. It is a blessing then to have **the fear of God** in the soul; for the implantation and possession of godly fear is a certain proof of the Lord's having quickened the soul into eternal life. Are not these the Lord's own words? "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good, but I will put My fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from Me." **Jer 32:40** "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." **Pr 9:10** It is therefore the very first evidence that God has planted in the soul spiritual life. There are many times and seasons, however, when the fear of the Lord appears as it were stagnant in the soul. It does not manifest itself; its refreshing streams **for it is declared to be a "fountain of life to depart from the snares of death"** are not sensibly felt; the heart appears cold and dead, the conscience less tender than formerly. There are not those godly sensations; there are not those trembling emotions; there is not that holy sensitiveness; there is not that sense of God's great majesty; there is not that bowing down before His footstool, which the soul perhaps has experienced in times of old. But prizing highly godly fear almost as much from its felt absence as from its former presence, the soul may apply the words, and say, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me" with this grace.

**2. A testimony of our interest in the love and blood of the Lamb,** is a blessing that those of the Lord's people who have not yet attained to that favour are earnestly begging of Him to bestow. Many of the Lord's people are kept very low for years; but still the Lord from time to time revives their souls. When harassed and perplexed with the evils of their heart, and mourning and sighing over the body of sin and death which they bear about with them, He sometimes shows them that this is the way, and that they must walk in it. Sometimes He draws forth tender affections towards Himself, opens up the word with savour and sweetness to their souls, makes the truth precious, and gives them a heart to love His people. Sometimes He makes the promises drop like dew into their soul, shows them the suitability of the invitations, and gives them to taste their sweetness and savour. Sometimes He gives them glimpses and glances of the glory and beauty of Jesus, and melts and softens their hearts at the sight of His sufferings and dying love. But yet they have not that full deliverance, that clear testimony, which their hearts are longing to enjoy.

There are, therefore, often times and seasons when they are earnestly pleading with the Lord to bestow this rich mercy upon them. For instance: when they have been in company with any child of God more highly favoured than themselves, one more deeply taught, and who can speak more decidedly of the manifestations of God's mercy and love and the sweet enjoyment he has experienced in his soul, their hearts begin to sink, and they are sent groaning home. It casts them down in their souls, as not being able to find a similar blessing in their own heart. But what is the effect? It leads them to go to the Lord more earnestly. They go home, perhaps up into their chamber, fall down upon their knees, and ask the Lord that He would appear for them, that He would give them a clear testimony, that He would shine upon their heart, that He would bless their souls with some sweet manifestation of His love,—in a word, that He would give them that rich and full peace and joy in believing which alone can abundantly and amply satisfy them that they are the

Lord's own children. And thus, at these seasons, the language of their heart is, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

Sometimes too, when death seems near at hand; when some illness seizes their body, and they are laid upon a sick bed; when some neighbour, relative or friend is suddenly taken off; when some disease like cholera or fever is roving up the street, or approaching their door and they have no clear testimony that the Lord is their God—how it stirs up the sighs and cries of their souls that He would give them a manifestation, and shine into their hearts! So also, sometimes when guilt presses heavily upon their conscience, when the wrath of God is let down into their souls and they doubt and fear whether hell may not be their eternal portion, they are made to cry and sigh, and that earnestly, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." "Bless me instantly; bless me fully; bless me with that which shall amply satisfy me, that I am eternally thine."

3. Sometimes the Lord indulges His people with a view of the glorious Jesus, opens up with savour and power some Scripture that testifies of His Person, lets down some discovery of it into their conscience, enlightens the eyes of their understanding to see, and raises up faith in their heart to believe, though it falls short of the fulness of the blessing of pardon and peace. Jesus appears; but **He does not come into their heart.** They see His glory, and their souls are ravished by it. But they are not satisfied with beholding it at a distance; they want to have it brought fully and completely into their souls. But the Lord leads them out, from time to time, with earnest cries; He puts a wrestling petition into their heart; His own blessed Spirit intercedes for them and within them with some of His unutterable groanings, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou thus bless me."

4. Others of the Lord's people who have been indulged with some testimony, who have felt a measure of the Lord's presence, and been enabled to rejoice in His name, are tried upon this **point—they have not felt a full and powerful application of the atoning blood of Jesus to their conscience.** They want it



sprinkled upon their souls; to have it so clearly revealed to them that they may have no doubt whatever that that blood was indeed shed for them. They want it applied in a more clear, more manifest, more satisfying way than they have yet experienced. They cannot doubt that the Lord has done something for their souls; they do believe that He has given them some testimony of His goodness and mercy; but they are not yet assured that they have received upon their conscience the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. And this makes them from time to time, when they long to receive it into their souls and feel its cleansing efficacy, cry, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou thus bless me."

5. Others of the Lord's people who have had a measure of the manifestations of the Lord's mercy, seem to fall short in this—that they have **not had fellowship with Christ in His sufferings**. They do believe that Jesus is the only propitiation for sin; that there is no other redemption, no other sacrifice for transgression. They have felt too a measure of the love and blood of Jesus in their conscience; but they have not been led, as they desire to be led, into a fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. They have not been led into the garden of Gethsemane, nor have they accompanied Jesus to the cross; nor have they seen Him by the eye of faith crucified before their eyes **Ga 3:1**; nor have they entered by faith and feeling into the inward agonies and sufferings of the Man of Sorrows. They feel that this is one of the greatest blessings **shall I not say, the greatest blessing?** that the Lord can bestow. Thus, from time to time, as they see the glory of it, and feel their need of it, they cry, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou thus bless me."

6. Others of the Lord's family are **plagued with the world**. The things of time and sense lay such hold of them; the temporal cares that they are beset with, anxieties in the family, distressing circumstances in providence, and that busy bustling world in which their hearts are sometimes shut up from morning to night, seem to steal away all their thoughts from the Lord. They desire therefore to have such a work upon their heart, and such divine

teaching in their soul, as shall wean, separate, and bring them out of their carnal anxieties, that they may know nothing save Jesus and Him crucified. When their hearts are a little melted and softened, and they are brought a little off these perishing vanities, they want to retire into the innermost closet of their bosom, lie low before the Lord, and beseech Him to separate them from the spirit of the world; to accompany His word with power to their hearts, that they may live to His glory, enjoy His presence, and be delivered from being so much encumbered with worldly cares. This, then, is sometimes, if not the express language, yet the substance of their cry, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou thus bless me."

7. Others of the Lord's people are much subject to **the fear of death**. Though the Lord has from time to time appeared for them, yet when their evidences are beclouded, when their testimonies have sunk out of sight, when guilt lies upon their conscience, when doubts and fears press hard, when Satan harasses or tempts, when eternity appears before them an unknown and awful reality, the fear of death will very often lie hard and heavy upon their souls. They know that nothing but the Lord's own power, and the Lord's own manifestations of Himself in their soul, can take away this fear of death through which often all their lives they are subject to bondage. They want to have a happy dismissal when they come to lie upon their dying pillow; they want then to have the love smiles of the Lord sweetly experienced; not to die under a cloud; but to leave behind them some bright and clear testimony, that when the saints of God surround their bed, they may not be forced to hide their heads under the bedclothes in an agony of guilt and despair, or turn their faces away, and have nothing to tell of the Lord's goodness to their souls; but to be able to speak to His honour and praise, and tell aloud of the manifestation of His love and mercy to them; and, like aged Simeon, when he had seen the Lord's Anointed, may depart in peace. These too may say, when the fear of death lies upon them, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou thus bless me."

8. Others of the Lord's family are **labouring under temptations**. And these temptations are so suitable to their fallen nature, and they are so unable in their own strength to overcome them, that they are afraid lest one day they should be awfully carried away by them. The lusts of their flesh; the evils and corruptions of their wicked heart; the daily, hourly snares that Satan spreads for their feet; and their own thorough helplessness, their own proneness to fall into these very snares, all contribute to distress their souls. And thus, sometimes, in an agony of soul, the tears rolling down their cheeks, and heaving sobs gushing from their bosom, they are importunate with the Lord, and say, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me," in delivering me from this temptation, in breaking this snare, in setting my soul free from this besetment in which I am so cruelly and grievously entangled.

9. Others of the Lord's people desire **to live to His glory**; that they may not always be carnal and worldly minded, but that their thoughts and affections, body, soul and spirit, may be all devoted to His ways, all be such as He may approve of. When then they feel their darkness, carnality and death, at what a distance they live from God, and how little they do for His glory, the desire of their souls is, that God would make it otherwise; that He would work in them to will and to do of His good pleasure, and bring forth in their hearts, lips, and lives, the fruits and graces of the blessed Spirit. Thus these too say, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou thus bless me."

Whatever be the trial, the peculiar trial; the temptation, the peculiar temptation; the perplexity, the sorrow, the anxiety which each burdened soul feels, he is invited, he is encouraged and sometimes he is mercifully enabled to go with it to the throne of grace. What use is there venting our complaints into the ears of fellow mortals, of poor dying worms? Can **they** relieve? What help could Jacob get from his lamenting wives, his crying children, his timid servants, his bleating sheep, his lowing herds? He had to leave them all. They could not comfort him; they might increase his distress by harrowing up the affections of his heart; but they

could not relieve. And therefore he turns away from them all, to pour his complaint into the ears of that God who is ever mighty to save. He turns away from human help and creature strength, and goes as a petitioner to the Lord's footstool of mercy; and **there** he gets an answer; **there** he obtains deliverance; **there** he receives that which satisfies his soul, which blesses him, and makes him blessed. What profit shall you or I, then, ever get by pouring our complaints into the ears of some fellow sinner? or what relief shall we get by keeping our complaints locked up in our bosom? There is but one place whither we can go for these cares, these anxieties, these perplexities to be removed. And the Lord will bring all His people there. It is no matter of choice with them whether they will go or not. It was no matter of choice with Jacob. There was no wrestling whilst Jacob was keeping Laban's sheep; there was no wrestling whilst Jacob was travelling leisurely home. But when difficulty arose; when alarm presented itself; when the sword of revengeful Esau was being withdrawn from its scabbard, and its gleaming edge was about to be sheathed in his heart, **then** extremity, necessity, urgency all met together in Jacob's bosom; and meeting together, they pressed this cry out of his lips, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

And will not this be the case with all the Lord's living family? I may go to the footstool of mercy; I may bend my knees; I may lift up my hands; I may use words; and what are they? words, words, empty words; breath, breath; the mere talk of the lips that tendeth to penury; that like the eddying smoke curls round and round, and never rises higher than the ceiling of the roof. But when the Lord is pleased to lay some urgent necessity upon a man's heart **and this He ever does in the experience of all His people, though in different times and in different ways,** and at the same time pours out a spirit of grace and supplications, and raises up and draws forth into exercise living faith, **then** he will, yea, he must come to the throne of mercy; not because it is his duty, or his privilege; not out of custom nor tradition, nor from what he has learned from men, or imbibed in childhood. All these things are effectually slain. But he comes

under the immediate operation of the Spirit, under His immediate teaching, leading and guiding, under His supportings and blessed enablings. He it is who puts the cry into the heart and language into the lips, and intercedes in the soul with unutterable groanings, until in God's own time and way the answer comes full of mercy, grace and peace; an answer that amply satisfies, and more than amply satisfies every desire of the praying heart. "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

But some may say, "It seems almost like presumption in Jacob thus to speak. What could he have felt of the divine Majesty to use such irreverent language?" It was not so, my friends; it was not so. There was deep reverence mingled with faith in his soul; but his necessity compelled him. The Lord did not resent it. He did not rush upon the bosses of God's buckler; he did not intrude presumptuously into God's presence with a lying tale and a feigned lip. His was not the language of mock humility, that offends God more than the language of confidence when He Himself raises it up. But the Lord Himself raised up these cries in Jacob's soul, and put these petitions in Jacob's lips, and the Lord Himself acknowledged it and honoured it with his manifested blessing, for He said to him, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with man, and hast prevailed."

How many wrestling Jacobs have we within these walls this morning? Just so many as have urgent cases; just so many as the Lord is powerfully dealing with; just so many as the Lord is laying trying perplexities and difficulties before their eyes and upon their hearts. And how many mock prayers have gone up before God this morning? how many unanswered petitions have ascended before the throne? From every heart not circumcised to fear God's name; from every unburdened, unexercised, unhumiliated professor; from every one that knows nothing of living faith mingled with his petitions and cries. So many sorrowing souls, so many earnest cries; so many urgent cases, so many urgent petitions; so many cases of extremity; so many

cases of importunity; so many wrestling Jacobs, so many prevailing Israels.

Wherever, not the words, but the substance of them, has gone out of labouring, burdened, sorrowing, groaning hearts this morning, the answer is in the Lord's bosom already stored up, and in His own time and in His own way He will fully, He will amply, He will blessedly give you, who look to His throne in simplicity and godly sincerity, the desire of your souls. For wherever He has created the fruit of the lips, He will answer; wherever He has indited the language of supplication in the soul, His ear is open to hear, His heart is open to feel, and His bounteous hand is open richly and mercifully to bestow.

## ZION'S BLESSINGS

Preached on Lord's Day Evening, July 16th, 1843, at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London

"I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy." Psalm 132:15, 16

The most inattentive reader of Scripture must perceive that great things are spoken in the Word of God concerning Zion. As the Bible lies now open before me, my eye rests upon nine Psalms, and out of those nine Psalms in five I observe Zion spoken of, and blessings mentioned as belonging to her. This is but one instance out of many, and one that has only just struck me, wherein we see that "glorious things are spoken of Zion" (Psa. 87:3).

But what is the meaning of Zion that such blessings should belong to her? Zion, literally, was the hill in Jerusalem on which the temple was built; and it was this circumstance which laid the foundation for a spiritual meaning. What, then, did the temple signify? For in blessing Zion, God did not bless the literal hill of Zion, but He blessed that which stood upon Zion, the temple which was built upon that hill. But what did that temple represent? since we cannot think that God would lavish His blessings merely on a building erected by human hands; for the great God "dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with men's hands, seeing He giveth to all life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:24). But the reason why "the Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob," and why "the Highest Himself establishes her," (Psa. 87:2, 5), is because it was typical of that on which the eyes and heart of God are fixed perpetually (2 Chron. 7:16).

The temple, then, typified and represented two things. First, it typified the human nature of the Lord Jesus; as He Himself said, "Destroy *this temple*, and in three days I will raise it up." And the

evangelist adds, "But He spake of the temple of His body" (John 2:19, 21). The temple, then, on Mount Zion was typical of that holy human nature of the Lord Jesus which is indissolubly united to His eternal Godhead; and in which "it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell," that "out of His fulness we might receive, and grace for grace" (Col. 1:19 John 1:16).

But there is another thing which Zion typified, and that is, the Church of the living God, as the Apostle Paul declares: "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the Firstborn, which are written in heaven" (Heb. 12:22, 23).

The Church never had a being except in Christ. Could we view the Church for a moment distinct from Christ, we should behold nothing but a dead carcase, the head being severed from it. But as the Church is a living body, it can only be so as eternally connected with its Head; and therefore the Church of God is never for a moment to be looked at except in its standing in Christ, its eternal being in the glorious Mediator, "Immanuel, God with us." And this is the reason why the temple not merely set forth the human nature of the Lord Jesus, but typified also the Church, seeing that there is a vital, indissoluble union betwixt the Head and members.

If we look at the verses immediately preceding the text, we shall find Zion spoken of: "The Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it" (Psa. 132:13, 14). That the Lord should choose Zion, desire it for His habitation, eternally rest and dwell in it, cannot be true of any literal hill, or material temple. It can only, therefore, be spiritually understood as applicable to the human nature of Christ, which is the habitation of God (Col. 2:9), and to the Church, which is "His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:23) "Know ye not," says the Apostle, "that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). When the text then says, "I will abundantly bless her



provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation; and her saints shall shout aloud for joy," it speaks of Zion's provision, of Zion's bread, of Zion's priests, and of Zion's saints. Thus, in viewing the text, we must take it as it stands in connection with Zion, the Church of the living Jehovah.

Having seen, then, what Zion represents, we may enter into the meaning of the word, "*her*," so frequently repeated in the text; and if the Lord the Spirit is pleased to lead us into its spiritual import, we may gather up a little of the sweet promises contained in it. I shall, with God's blessing, take them in the order in which they lie before me.

I. The first promise runs thus: "I will abundantly bless her provision." Mark the emphasis laid upon the pronoun, "*her*." You see how it runs all through, "*her* provision," "*her* poor," "*her* priests," "*her* saints." And the repetition of the personal pronoun seems to intimate as though God, who is "a jealous God," would exclude from any appropriation of the promises in the text all but those who have an eternal interest in Christ; as though He would not suffer the children's bread to be given to the dogs; but would guard the promises He has made to His Church by that special and repeated limitation.

"I will abundantly bless her provision." We have a "*provision*" spoken of here, and this provision is limited to Zion. It is not scattered abroad for every person to claim, or for anybody to feed upon; but is spoken of as a distinct provision set apart and reserved especially for Zion.

But what is this "*provision*?" It is, I believe, the fulness of spiritual blessings which are stored up in the Son of God, as "Head over all things to the Church." As the Apostle speaks, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). And again the apostle John says, "And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." This "*provision*," then, is the fulness of Christ as the covenant Head of

His Church and people. And God has given to the Church this rich "provision," which He has stored up in Christ, that the poor and needy of Zion's children may "eat and be satisfied."

But the Lord promises to "bless" this "provision," and that "*abundantly.*" It is not then sufficient for the Church of the living God that there should be a fulness for her stored up in her covenant Head; it must be "*blessed;*" it must be brought down out of the storehouse into her heart. Joseph, instructed by divine wisdom, gathered up the seven plenteous years into storehouses, and when the Egyptians cried for bread, Pharaoh's answer to all their entreaties was, "Go unto Joseph" (Gen. 41:55). *He* kept the key. But what if Joseph had never unlocked the stores? Why, they must all have perished of famine. He that kept the stores opened the stores, and by opening them, saved their lives from destruction. So the spiritual Joseph has "the key of David:" and of Him it is said, "He openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth" (Rev. 3:7) He deals out of this "provision" at such times, in such a way, and in such a measure, as "seemeth good" in His own eyes.

But what are the channels or conduits through which this provision flows that God has promised thus to bless?

1. One of the channels or conduits through which this provision flows is *the gospel*. And what is the gospel? It is the revelation of a free grace salvation, the manifestation in God's Word of pardon, mercy, and love for a peculiar people through the finished work of the Son of God. The gospel, then, is the proclamation and publication of the treasures that are stored up in Christ; and through the gospel, which is the revelation of God's love and mercy, does this "provision" flow, as through a blessed channel, into the hearts of God's people. God has promised to bless the gospel, and wherever the gospel is preached by God's sent servants, it is more or less blessed to souls; not from any works performed by them; not because they are poor and needy; but because God has stored up provision for them in their covenant Head, and because the preached gospel is one of the blessed

channels of conveyance through which that provision flows into their heart.

You or I might have a sum of money lodged for our use in a banker's hands; but that would not profit us unless we had liberty to draw a cheque upon the banker. We might perish of starvation, and yet have a large sum lodged in his hands for our use. So it is with the gospel. A living soul cannot be satisfied with knowing that there is a treasure stored up for the Church in Christ. A few coins put into his hands by the gospel will more sensibly enrich him, and do his soul more present good than all the treasures of mercy and grace in Christ to which he has no feeling access. I can fancy a pauper, or a sweeper of the streets, or a beggar that lives upon alms walking by the Bank of England, and knowing perfectly that there are millions of bullion in its coffers and cellars. But will *that* clothe his nakedness? Will *that* relieve his famished appetite? Will *that* raise him from poverty to riches? The bare knowledge that there is money in the Bank will not relieve his poverty. And so you and I may know in our judgment, as a matter of doctrinal speculation, that there is in Christ all fulness treasured up. Will *that* profit us? We must have the communication of it: the handling of it; the sweet manifestation of it, that our souls may be savingly blessed by it. And the gospel in the hands of the Spirit does this. When God is pleased to bless the gospel, either preached or read (and sometimes without the one or the other), and communicates through it a taste of the riches of Christ, of the beauty of Christ, and of the salvation that is in Christ, He then abundantly blesses this provision to the hearts of His people.

2. But again, the *promises* of God are also channels of communication, through which the provision stored up in Christ flows into the hearts of God's people. They are therefore spoken of in Scripture as "breasts of consolation," at which the new-born babes of the household of faith suck. We are also said "*by them* to be made partakers of the divine nature" (1 Pet. 1:4), they being channels of heavenly communication through which grace flows to renew us in the spirit of our minds. But what are the promises unless they are applied, brought home with power,

sealed with a divine influence, so that we may enjoy them, feed upon them, and taste the sweetness that is in them? But when the promises come home with power, when a sweetness is tasted in them, and the heart is filled with the marrow and fatness of them, *then* the promises are so many channels and conduits of communication through which the provision stored up in Christ flows into the soul.

3. The *ordinances*, too, of God's house, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, when God is pleased to bless them, are channels through which grace and mercy flow into the soul. They are indeed nothing in themselves, absolutely valueless as mere forms; but when blessed of God, they are channels of communication, through which God is pleased sometimes to manifest His love and mercy to His people.

But the Lord has promised to bless Zion's provision *abundantly*. He does not, then, give grudgingly or niggardly, as though He ever repented of what He bestowed; but what He gives He bestows as a God, as a Prince, freely, bounteously, overflowing, worthy of an infinite, eternal, self-existent Jehovah. "He giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth (or grudgeth) not" (Jas. 1:5). "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29); that is, He never repents of what He gives to, and does for His people. And thus when He does bless, He blesses "abundantly," so as to make the soul like Naphtali, "satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the Lord" (Deut. 33:23).

But who are *the characters* that God thus abundantly blesses? If He blesses Zion's provision, He blesses it only to those who are poor and needy, hungry and naked, who have nothing and are nothing; and therefore can only have what God gives them, feel what God works in them, and be what God makes them. To such and such only is the provision of the gospel stored up in Christ blessed abundantly.

II. But we pass on to consider the second branch of blessings promised to Zion. "I will satisfy her poor with bread." As I before

remarked, see how the Holy Ghost limits the expression, "*Her* poor!" And what gather we from this limitation? That there are poor who are not Zion's poor. It is said of many professed beggars in our London streets that they are impostors, clothed indeed in rags and wearing every appearance of poverty, but could you follow them to their cellars, you would see them throwing off all their apparent miseries, and feasting upon delicacies which the honest poor cannot procure. Are there not many such sham beggars in the religious world? Are there not many who in prayer profess to be all poverty and emptiness, and the next moment begin to boast of the mighty acts that free will can perform? These are sham beggars, impostors, that have rags of poverty and nothing but the rags of poverty; who use indeed expressions that might almost make us think they are really poor and needy, while all the time they have no feeling sense of their poverty before a heart-searching God. And, again, there are persons in a Calvinistic profession of religion who have learnt, if I may use the expression, "the cant of poverty." You know the professed beggar always begs in a certain whining tone; he never speaks in his natural accent: he has a kind of professional whine. It is so with many, I fear, who profess to love experimental truth. They have the cant of poverty; they have got the true professional whine. But if you could look into their hearts, you would find them not really poor and needy by a work of grace upon their souls; but, like the Laodicean church, "rich and increased with goods, and in need of nothing." Now it is not of these sham poor that God speaks in the text—these religious impostors, these mock beggars, these tied up cripples, who on getting away from religious company, are as merry and cheerful as the London beggar is amongst his own crew. The text makes no promises to such, but limits the blessing to "*her* poor;" as though the heart-searching God saw that there were a great many professed poor who were not Zion's poor. Zion's poor are real paupers, true mendicants, unfeigned dependants upon alms; they have nothing and they are nothing in themselves but poverty, misery, and rags; they know it and they feel it; and when they tell God about it, it is not professional whine nor religious cant which they have learnt from others, but the

genuine feelings of their broken hearts.

Now you, my friends, (some of you at least, who approve of experimental preaching), know that God's people are spiritually a poor and needy people. But look into your hearts. You profess spiritual poverty. But has God really made you poor? Has the Lord Himself stripped you? Or have you learnt the words, and not learnt the feelings? Have you caught up the mere expressions, without knowing bankruptcy and insolvency before a heart-searching Jehovah? Now, my friends, if you have not learnt by divine teaching what soul poverty is, you have no present manifested interest in this promise. Poverty *naturally* is a thing that we shrink from naturally, and poverty *spiritually* is a thing we shrink from spiritually; and as people, naturally, in embarrassed circumstances, will try every shift and make use of every means to keep from sinking into beggary: so spiritually, when God begins to strip a man of his fancied wealth, he will make use of every shift and every evasion in order that he may escape that appalling sight of being poor and needy before a heart-searching God. There are many people who think that the standard in religion is usually set too high. I have read the remark, and I fully agree with it, that in general it is not placed sufficiently low. There are few people poor enough for Christ; they do not sink deep enough into soul trouble to be picked up by gospel consolation. They have not yet been in the Gazette; bankruptcy has not taken place; they have not come yet to thorough insolvency; they have not been brought into that spot which the Lord speaks of when He said, "When they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both." Most persons—aye, and among them many of God's own dear children—are not poor enough for the gospel. Perhaps there are some here who are from time to time saying, "I cannot rejoice in Christ as I could wish; I cannot see my name in the book of life as I desire; I have not those sweet consolations which others of God's people speak of." Shall I tell you the reason? Shall I be honest with you? You are not yet poor enough; you have yet a little store at home; the loaf has not altogether disappeared out of the cupboard; the last penny is not yet spent out of your pocket; you have something

still in hand; you are not yet poor enough for Christ. But when you become so poor that you have nothing whatever, and sink down into the depths of creature wretchedness, and "have nothing to pay," the Lord will frankly forgive you, and manifest His grace, mercy, and truth in your needy and naked soul.

Now the Lord has given a special promise to Zion's poor. "I will satisfy her poor with *bread*." Nothing else? Bread! Is that all? Yes; that is all God has promised; bread, the staff of life. But what does He mean by "bread?" The Lord Himself, in that blessed chapter, John 6, explains what bread is. He says, "Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven." "I am," He says, "the bread of life." And again, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever" (John 6:35, 51). The bread, then, that God gives to Zion's poor is the flesh and blood of His own dear Son; not received in the elements, as Popery and Puseyism teach, but fed upon by living faith, under the special operations of the Holy Ghost in the heart.

But must not we have an appetite before we can feed upon *bread*? The rich man who feasts continually upon juicy meat and savoury sauces could not subsist upon bread. To come down to live on such simple food as bread—why, he must be really hungry to be satisfied with that. So it is spiritually. A man fed upon notions and a number of speculative opinions cannot descend to the simplicity of the gospel. To feed upon a crucified Christ, a bleeding Jesus! He is not sufficiently brought down to the starving point to relish such spiritual food as this. Before, then, he can feed upon this bread of life he must be made spiritually poor; and when he is brought to be nothing but a mass of wretchedness, filth, guilt, and misery, when he feels his soul sinking under the wrath of God, and has scarcely a hope to buoy up his poor tottering heart; when he finds the world embittered to him, and he has no one object from which he can reap any abiding consolation, then when the Lord is pleased a little to open up in his conscience, and bring a savour of the love and blood of His dear Son into his heart, he begins to taste gospel bread. Being

weaned from feeding on husks and ashes, and sick "of the vine of Sodom and the fields of Gomorrah," and being brought to relish simple gospel food, he begins to taste a sweetness in Christ crucified which he never could know till he was made experimentally poor. The Lord has promised to satisfy such.

And what a sweetness there is in the word "satisfy!" The world cannot satisfy you and me. Have we not tried, and some of us perhaps for many years, to get some satisfaction from it? But can wife or husband "satisfy" us? Can children or relatives "satisfy" us? Can all the world calls good or great "satisfy" us? Can the pleasures of sin "satisfy" us? Is there not in all an aching void? Do we not reap dissatisfaction and disappointment from everything that is of the creature, and of the flesh? Do we not find that there is little else but sorrow to be reaped from everything in this world? I am sure I find, and have found for some years, that there is little else to be gathered from the world but disappointment, dissatisfaction, "vanity and vexation of spirit." The poor soul looks round upon the world and the creature, upon all the occupations, amusements, and relations of life, and finds all one melancholy harvest, so that all it reaps is sorrow, perplexity, and dissatisfaction.

Now when a man is brought here, to want satisfaction, something to make him happy, something to fill up the aching void, something to bind up broken bones, bleeding wounds, and leprous sores, and after he has looked at everything, at doctrines, opinions, notions, speculations, forms, rites, and ceremonies in religion, at the world with all its charms, and at self with all its varied workings, and found nothing but bitterness of spirit, vexation and trouble in them all, and thus sinks down a miserable wretch; why, then, when the Lord opens up to him something of the bread of life, he finds a satisfaction in that which he never could gain from any other quarter. And that is the reason, my friends, why the Lord afflicts His people so; why some carry about with them such weak, suffering tabernacles, why some have so many family troubles, why others are so deeply steeped in poverty, why others have such rebellious children, and why



others are so exercised with spiritual sorrows that they scarcely know what will be the end. It is all for one purpose, to make them miserable out of Christ, dissatisfied except with gospel food; to render them so wretched and uncomfortable that God alone can make them happy, and alone can speak consolation to their troubled minds.

My friends, if there be any young persons here whose heart God has touched with His Spirit, and you are yet seeking some satisfaction from the world; if your health and spirits are yet unbroken, and you are looking to reap a harvest of pleasure from the creature, depend upon it, if you are a child of God, you will be disappointed. The Lord will cut up by the roots all your anticipated pleasure. He will effectually mar your worldly happiness. He will never let you have an earthly Paradise, and it is your mercy that He will not. If you are looking for happiness from wife or husband, from business, from the world, from whatever your carnal heart is going out after, depend upon it, God will let you take no solid nor abiding pleasure in them, but He will cut up by the roots all your earthly enjoyments. He will mar all your worldly plans, and bring you to this spot, to be a miserable wretch without Christ, to be a ruined creature without the manifestations of the Son of God to your soul. And when you can find no pleasure in the world, no happiness in the things of time and sense, but feel misery in your soul, and are fearing lest eternal misery be your portion in the world to come, *you, you*, will then be the very characters that God will comfort through the gospel, and give you a manifested interest in the promise made to Zion, "I will satisfy her poor with bread." You will not then be one of those full souls that loathe the honeycomb, but one of those hungry souls to whom every bitter thing is sweet. And it is your mercy, and in my right mind, I believe it is my mercy—(though few, perhaps, more dislike afflictions, troubles, and trials than I do)—that we cannot take pleasure in the world. If we could, I know where and what I should be. I should be pursuing the vain imaginations of my carnal heart, and trying to reap pleasure where real happiness never can be found; turning away from the gospel and all the promised blessings of the gospel, as

the children of Israel turned away from the manna, "Our soul loatheth this light bread." Religion! what would you care for religion if you could love and enjoy the world? Why, a man's heart is so proud and worldly that he would not touch vital, spiritual religion unless he was absolutely forced by the hand of God in his soul. He absolutely would not so much as look at it, unless sorrow of heart, perplexity of mind, anguish of spirit, afflictions, and a conscience burdened with guilt made him seek happiness *there*, because every other path to happiness is effectually blocked up.

Now the Lord says, "I will *satisfy* her poor with bread." And they shall be satisfied. For He says, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved" (Song 5:1). He will make them drink "of the river of His pleasures" (Ps. 36:8); for "there is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God" (Ps. 46:4). And if any of you, my friends, are mourning, sighing and groaning, and sometimes heaving up with rebellion and fretful impatience because you cannot have what you wish naturally to enjoy, or because you cannot bring about your earthly schemes, and have little else but sorrow of heart and trouble of soul, you are far more favoured than if you could have all that heart could wish. God, who has made you wretched that you might find happiness in Him, will not leave you to live and die in your misery. He will bind up every bleeding wound, and pour the oil of joy into your troubled heart.

III. "I will also clothe her priests with salvation." Still the same limitation that we have before noticed, "*her* priests." And as "*her* poor" were divinely marked out and limited, so "her priests" are shut up in the same bound; and I think in our day, when Puseyism and Popery are so rampant, a very sweet and wise limitation. Who then are "priests," in the gospel sense of the word? Men on whom the Lord Bishop has laid holy hands? Men ordained by a conclave of dissenting ministers? Men who appear before the people in a gown, and bands, and gold rings? men who on their cards, and on the brass plates of their doors, call themselves, "The Rev. Mr. So and So?" Are these Zion's priests? I

will not say that *none* such are gospel priests; but these externals neither make them nor manifest them to be so. Let us then turn from these inventions of man to what the Holy Ghost has said upon this subject. What read we there? "Who hath made *us* kings and priests unto God" (Rev. 1:6). And again: "Ye are a chosen generation, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9). Then the true priests, "Zion's priests," are God's spiritually taught people; all who, as the Apostle says, as "living stones are built up a spiritual house, a *holy priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). God's praying people, then, His broken-hearted, mourning, sighing, crying, weeping, pleading people, all in whose hearts the Spirit of the living God intercedes with unutterable groanings, and works in them the sacrifices of a broken heart which in the sight of God are of great price—*these*, and *these only*, are Zion's priests. My friends, be not deceived by pretensions. Think not that there is something in the ministry under the gospel similar to the old Jewish priesthood. Be not imposed upon by priestcraft. *You* are priests, if God has given you a broken heart; you are a "holy, a royal priesthood," if God is kindling the sacrifices of prayer and praise in your soul. And these are the only priests of Zion, whether in or out of the ministry. All others are priests of Baal. And they may cry from morning until evening, they may cut their flesh with lancets, and inflict on themselves all the self-imposed austerities of Popery and Puseyism, there will be "neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any to regard them" (1 Kings 18:29). There will be no holy fire coming down from heaven, no still small voice whispering pardon and peace; as Zion's priests experience, who "worship God in Spirit and in truth." Do you then know what groaning prayer is? Do you know anything of secret sighs and cries unto God? Do you know what it is to pant after Jesus as the hart panteth after the water brooks? Is your soul alive unto God, seeking His face, groaning after the manifestations of His mercy? Then you are a priest, though holy hands were never laid upon you. And if you know not these inward teachings, not all the church priestcraft nor all the dissenting priestcraft that ever imposed on the minds of men can make you one of Zion's priests, or give you an interest in the

promises made to them.

But God has promised that "He will clothe these priests with *salvation*;" not clothe them with a gown and bands,—He makes no promise of that kind; but He will clothe them with salvation. And that is the only clothing that will suit Zion's priests. For a priest of Zion having a broken heart and a contrite spirit, having had the spirit of prayer communicated to him, and panting after God, the living God, wants a manifested salvation. He does not want the praise of men, or to be esteemed as some holy being, appointed of God to communicate blessings; he abhors such priestcraft. What he wants is the spiritual manifestation and divine application of salvation to his soul,—salvation in all its sweetness—salvation from sin, from self, from the curse of the law, from the wrath of God, from the snares of Satan, from the temptations which he is beset with, from the troubles which he is passing through—salvation in all its rich, glorious, and complete fulness. Now God has promised that He "will clothe these priests with salvation." He will cast around them this beautiful garment, this robe of Christ's righteousness; He will cover them therewith, "as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and a bride adorneth herself with her jewels" (Isa. 61:10).

If you have never yet known, then, what it is to sigh and cry and groan unto the Lord, and offer up these breathings of a broken heart, you have no present manifested interest in the promise, "I will clothe her priests with salvation." O, it is a mercy to be a broken-hearted sinner! In my right mind, I would sooner be a broken-hearted sinner than the most towering professor alive. I would sooner lie at Jesus' feet with a real contrite spirit and a broken heart, feel the blessed emotions of godly sorrow, clasp Him in my arms as my Lord and my God, and taste the beams of mercy shining into my soul out of the Sun of righteousness, than be the most eloquent, the most popular, or the most towering preacher that ever stood up in a pulpit. I covet not such baubles. The real thing which I covet, in my right mind, is to lie at the feet of the blessed Lord, and feel Him to be precious to my soul.

IV. "And her saints shall shout aloud for joy." What! limitation again! Must the Lord be ever hedging His promises in, lest the dogs take hold of them? Must the Lord keep His own hand firmly fixed upon them, lest those to whom they do not belong should break in, and seize them? Even so; the Lord must limit them; for, after all His positive limitations, men will still break through the hedge.

"Her saints." "Who is a *saint*?" A solemn visaged man? A fasting man? A man who macerates his body with austerities? These are not God's saints. They are such as carnal men may look up to with admiration; but they are not Zion's saints, whom the Lord has promised that they shall "shout aloud for joy." Who then are they? Those whom God has eternally sanctified by choosing them in Christ before the world began; those into whose hearts He has put the Spirit of holiness, that they may be a "peculiar people, vessels of mercy, sanctified and meet for the Master's use;" those in whom He is working "to will and to do of His good pleasure." These are Zion's saints. Now Zion's saints are all sinners to a man; that is, they are all feeling sinners; and the more they are saints, the more they are sinners; that is, the more God teaches them in their souls, sanctifies and separates them to His own use, the more vile, filthy, base, and polluted do they feel before Him. How are you to judge of your saintship? By becoming day by day more and more holy, more and more pure, more and more pious, and more and more religious? That is a false sanctity which only feeds the flesh; that is only nature masked and whitewashed. But Zion's saint grows downward—downward in self-abhorrence, self-loathing, godly sorrow, brokenness of heart, contrition of spirit, low views of himself. And just as he grows downward in self, will he grow upward in adoring, admiring, and loving the Lord of life and glory. And what then? Will this root sin out of him? Saints are partakers of a holy nature, and this "divine nature," as the Scripture calls it, in them makes known to them, but does not root out their sinfulness. A saint is rather one who is crying unto God on account of his sinfulness, who is abhorring himself on account of his baseness, who sees nothing in himself spiritually good, and loathes himself from time to time in dust and ashes.

Now the Lord has promised to *Zion's* saints (for there are mock saints, as well as mock beggars), that "they shall shout aloud for joy." They shall not be always mourning and crying; they shall not be always groaning from heaviness of heart and trouble of soul; but they shall "shout aloud for joy." When, where, and how? When the Lord blesses their souls, when He visits them with His gracious presence, and sheds His love abroad in their hearts, then they shall "shout aloud for joy." Not, however, because they are saints; not because of their mighty victories over sin, the world, and the devil; not because they are becoming more decidedly pious and more eminently religious; not because they have got a little pleasing holiness in the flesh which they can look at and admire. Of these who say, "Stand by, I am holier than thou," God says, "they are as a stench in His nostrils." But those who see and feel themselves to be filthy, base monsters of iniquity, crawling reptiles, guilty, defiled, and polluted before a heart-searching God; when these receive into their souls a precious Christ, in His love and blood, in His grace and glory, they "shout aloud for joy," not because of the mighty works they have done, are doing, or mean to do, but on account of what the Lord has done for them, and what the Lord has done and is doing in them.

See, my friends, how God has limited these promises! They are not thrown down for anybody to pick up, but they are limited; and I should not stand up as a faithful God-fearing man if I did not limit them. They stand in God's Word limited, and they come into my heart limited, and therefore they must come out of my mouth limited. But happy are those who are within the bound; happy are those who are "a peculiar people," who are walled about with God's promises and with God's mercy! They are within a fence, never to be broken, of God's eternal purposes, and God's eternal love. O happy are those whom God has gathered in with His own blessed hands, that they may be "a garden enclosed," in which the Lord walks, and "the spices flow out" as He visits and comes into this blessed garden; (Song 4:12, 16.)

You then whose hearts God has touched will not be offended because He has given limitations. That makes all the sweetness of them, that they are limited, and that you—(O wonder of wonders!) *you* have an interest in them. O, my friends, who am I, and who are you, that the Lord should take notice of us? Were any so far from salvation as you and I—any so proud, any so hypocritical, any so self-righteous, any so madly in love with sin, any so the servants of the devil, as you and I have been? And if God has taken notice of us, to what shall we ascribe it? I think sometimes that of all persons that were ever called by grace, I was the farthest from God's fold, the most unworthy, and the least likely for God ever to take out of the world, and to make and manifest me as "a vessel of honour meet for the Master's use." Not that I was living in open sin, or at least in those lengths to which others have gone, but so proud and worldly, and so buried in the things of time and sense was I, that it seems to me that it was not only a miracle, but a double miracle, that God should ever pluck my guilty soul out of the ruins of the fall, and bring me to this spot to be now preaching His truth in His name and His fear. And I believe it is the conviction, the heartfelt conviction, of all who fear God, that of all they were the farthest from the kingdom of heaven, and of all they were the least likely for the Lord to look upon. They are all brought to the spot to which the Lord brought Ruth, when she wondered that Boaz "should ever take knowledge of her, seeing she was a stranger" (Ruth 2:10).

Then you and I have no reason to quarrel with God's limitation of His promises. If the Lord has put us within the bounds, remember He *keeps us in* as well as keeps others out; and if He did not keep us in, we should soon fall out through some gap. But the Lord by His limitations keeps His people in, and keeps the world out; and thus, by keeping His people in, He preserves them unto the end, and leaves the wicked to perish in their own justly deserved doom.

We shall not, then, contend with the Lord, and say He is an arbitrary God. We acknowledge His sovereignty; we bow before it

with holy adoration and implicit submission. We quarrel not with Him because He is a Sovereign, but we adore Him and bless Him that His sovereignty should be displayed in a way of mercy, and not in a way of wrath. That He should limit His promises we quarrel not with Him; but that He should give us a name and a place amongst His children, that He should give you and me, the vilest, the basest, and the unworthiest, a standing in His Church and family, that, indeed, is a mercy, and that indeed is a wonder of matchless grace. And therefore so far from carping at God's limitation, and cavilling at the way in which God has fenced out some and fenced in others, in our right mind, under the sweet enjoyment of gospel blessings, we shall only bless Him and praise Him the more for it, and fall down before Him, ascribing honour and power and salvation and glory to God and the Lamb.



## ZION'S FOUNDATIONS, WINDOWS, GATES, AND BORDERS

Preached on Lord's Day Evening, August 1, 1852, at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road

"O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones." Isaiah 54:11, 12

The promises in the word of truth are exceedingly great and precious. This is God's own testimony concerning them; "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises." **2Pe 1:4** But to **whom** are these promises "exceeding great and precious?" To the church of God. But are they exceedingly great and precious to the church of God at all times and under all circumstance? No; only at peculiar times and under peculiar circumstances. In other words, only as the church of God is brought into those circumstances to which the promises apply, are they to her either great or precious. Now what is true of the church generally is true also of each believer individually. However great and precious the promises may be in themselves, they are nothing to us, absolutely nothing, except as we are brought into those circumstances to which they are applicable. But is not something further needed? Assuredly; for I may be in the very circumstances to which the promise is suitable, and yet be as utterly unable to derive any strength or draw any comfort out of it as if there were none. What then further do I need? The application of that promise to my soul. Looking therefore at the promises generally, we may say of them that though they are all exceedingly great and precious in themselves, yet they are really only made so as applied by the blessed Spirit with light, life, and power to the heart.

We have in the words before us a whole cluster of most precious promises; but connected with these promises we have the church of God in suffering circumstances. The Lord is here addressing his suffering Zion. "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires," and so on.

In looking at these words, we may with God's blessing attempt

I. To describe a little of **the state, character, and condition of the suffering church of God** as here drawn by the pen of the Spirit; and,

II. To consider **the promises** that are addressed to her under those suffering circumstances.

Describing her suffering condition, the Lord addresses her in these tender epithets—"O thou **afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted.**" Everyone of these expressions is pregnant with heavenly meaning, and demands a separate examination.

1. "O thou **afflicted.**" **Affliction** is one of the marks that God stamps upon his people. We may call it his peculiar **sheep-mark**. "I will leave in the midst of thee an **afflicted** and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord." **Zep 3:12** Unless then we have stamped upon us by the hand of God this sheep-mark, we have, at present, but little testimony that we belong to the flock of Jesus. "**Afflicted!**" How are the Lord's people afflicted? Certainly not all in the same way. Afflictions are of various kinds, and widely differ in nature, duration, and degree; but, viewed as proceeding from the hands of God, they are all sent by him to work a certain effect in the hearts of his people. Some afflictions, for instance, are **bodily**. Ill health is a very common gift of a Father's love, disguised under this painful rod. Many, many of the Lord's people are suffering under this affliction. An aching head, or a torpid liver, or shattered nerves, or weak chest, or rebellious stomach, or paralyzed limbs, or racked joints to many embitter life. I can speak experimentally

upon this point, for I have been afflicted, more or less, with colds and coughs, and a tender chest, for more than twenty years, besides being laid aside from preaching on two different occasions for many months. But if I know the painful part of this affliction, I trust, I know something also of the blessedness connected with it; for the greatest and clearest manifestation I ever had of the Lord Jesus Christ to my soul was when I lay stretched on a bed of affliction, from which I did not rise for three weeks. I know, therefore, the misery of it by painful experience, and the blessedness of it by pleasurable experience; for often, though by no means always, when the body is most afflicted the soul is most favoured.

Others of the Lord's people, who are exempted from bodily afflictions have afflictions of another kind, such for instance as **family** afflictions. From this quarter how many gusts blow and billows swell. Into some families how often does death enter, taking away idol after idol! The buds drop before expanded into blossoms, or ripened into fruit. Or if children grow up it is but to open new sources of anxiety and sorrow, and rend the heart with deeper grief.

Others of the Lord's people are afflicted in **circumstances**. This is a very prevailing affliction amongst the people of God, for "he hath chosen the poor of this world rich in faith." But I will not dwell upon those temporal afflictions which the church of God shares in common with the world. When the Lord says, "O thou afflicted," he seems rather to allude to those SPIRITUAL afflictions which are the peculiar lot of Zion. And, indeed, are any afflictions to be compared with spiritual afflictions? Guilt of conscience, distress of soul, fear of death, a troubled mind, anguish of spirit, the hidings of God's countenance, doubts, fears, and gloomy apprehensions, Satan's fiery darts, blasphemous suggestions, infidel insinuations—what bodily suffering, what family affliction, what poverty or temporal losses are to be compared with these draughts in Zion's bitter cup! Of this cup, each in his measure, all the Lord's people have to drink; for when the two disciples craved to sit, one at Christ's right hand and the

other at his left, in his glory, he asked them whether they could drink of his cup and be baptized with his baptism; and when they replied that they could, he told them that of his cup, the cup of bitter sorrow, they should drink, and with his baptism, the baptism of suffering, they should be baptized. What he said to them he says to all, for only as we suffer with him shall we be glorified together.

2. But not to dwell too long on this part, of the subject, we will pass on to the second mark that God has stamped on his church—"**tossed with tempest.**" The Lord here compares his suffering church to a ship at sea, under bare poles, labouring in the storm, driven out of her course by contrary winds, as was Paul's case in the Adriatic, and doubtful whether she will ever reach the harbour, as the hymn says

**"Half a wreck by tempests driv'n."**

What a picture of a tempest-tossed soul! Sun and stars beclouded, compass lost, chart useless, pilot overboard, and breakers ahead! Many, very many, of the Lord's dear family are thus tossed with tempest; some with a tempest of doubts and fears; others with a tempest of lusts and corruptions; others with a tempest of rebellion and fretfulness; others with a storm of guilt and despondency; others with gloomy forebodings and dismal apprehensions. Thus are they driven from their course, their sun and stars all obscured; no clear evidences, no bright manifestations: darkness above and a raging sea beneath; breakers ahead, and no harbour in sight.

3. But the Lord adds another word which seems to complete the whole, and to stamp the sheep-mark with a more vigorous hand and in broader characters upon the fleece, "**not comforted**"—that is, not comforted by, not capable of comfort from, man. This I look upon as a very decisive mark of a work of grace upon the soul. When a man is so cast down in his mind, so troubled in his conscience, and so burdened in his spirit that none but God can comfort him, we seem at once to be on the footsteps of the

Spirit. We do not find hypocrites on this ground. False professors can easily take comfort: they can steal what God does not give, and appropriate what he does not apply. Zion's special mark is that she is "not comforted"—that her wounds are too deep for human balsams, her sickness too sore for creature medicines. All the gospel sermons in the world, all the gospel ministers, nay, all the invitations, promises, and declarations of the gospel itself, short of divine manifestation, cannot minister to her any solid comfort. God has reserved her comfort in his own hands; from his lips alone can consolation be spoken into her soul.

Now I do not mean to say that all the Lord's people are equally "afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted." In some measure they must be, or they are not within the scope of this promise. Still less do I mean to say that when they are passing through this experience, they can reap any evidence from it, for if they could they would be comforted; they would see the sun and stars, the course they are steering, and the harbour fair in sight. But this is their peculiar mark, and one we always see upon them, that they cannot take comfort except as God himself is pleased to speak it into their hearts. Now, do not cut yourself off for a poor lost wretch because you cannot get comfort easily, because you are tossed with a sea of doubts and fears, temptations and corruptions, by the waves of lust and billows of sin. Do not say to yourself, 'I have come here tonight praying and groaning to get a word of comfort and cannot get any; I have now no hope!' That is the devil's conclusion, not God's. His mark is, "not comforted."—a mark he has stamped upon his sheep and lambs.

II. But we pass on to consider the blessed cluster of gospel promises that God makes to his suffering church; and indeed they are most precious. "**Behold**," he says, as though he would draw her special attention to the work that he was about to perform—"**I will lay thy stones with fair colours.**" The Lord here seems to take the figure of a building; or rather of a temple, for his people are compared to a temple, "What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?" And his blessed work

upon their soul he compares to the work of an architect, or a builder who lays stone upon stone until he puts on the top-stone with shoutings of grace, grace, unto it.

1. The first promise that he makes relative to this building of mercy is—"**I will lay her stones with fair colours.**" This seems to be a general description of the work of God in rearing up the spiritual building before he proceeds to nicer particulars, the other part of the text being, in my view, but a fuller explanation of what is laid down in the promise, "I will lay thy stones with fair colours." "I myself," he says, "will build thee up," as he promises elsewhere—"Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel." **Jer 31:4** And all the materials whether for foundation or superstructure shall be equally lasting and beautiful.

But what may we specially understand by these "stones," that the Lord promises to lay "with fair colours?" I think we may understand by them the blessed truths of the gospel. These are laid into the soul by the hand of God. Just as the mason takes a stone and lays it into the building, the structure itself being utterly passive in the matter, and only receiving stone by stone as the builder puts one upon another, so in the work of grace is the soul passive—God the Spirit taking precious truths out of the word, and inlaying them with his own hand into the heart. This indeed is the only way whereby Zion, afflicted, tempest-tossed, not comforted Zion, can receive the word of God. Her afflictions and tempests have beaten her off from every other mode. Nor indeed can any one in any other way rightly come at truth. It is not my coming to the word of God as to an orderly heap of building materials, selecting this or that stone, and laying this and that truth into my own conscience, and thus raising up my soul a temple for God. He alone begins, carries on, and completes. "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, his hands shall also finish it." **Zec 4:9**

Now as God the Spirit is pleased to lay any blessed truth into the soul, it is "a stone of fair colours." However fair or beautiful any

word of God be in itself, it only experimentally becomes so as inlaid by his own Divine hand into the soul. This brings out the fair colouring. How often we read the word of God without seeing any the least beauty in it. Let that same portion come home with sweetness and power to the soul, beauty, inexpressible beauty is seen in it immediately. It becomes at once "a stone of fair colours." Salvation full and free; the pardoning love of God; the precious blood of the Lamb; justification by Christ's imputed righteousness; wine and milk without money and without price; superabounding grace; eternal mercy, everlasting life—these, these are some of the precious stones that God the Spirit, with his own hand, lays into the conscience.

But in the words, "I will lay thy stones **with** fair colours," there seems to be a reference also to the cement in which the stones are laid, as well as to the stones themselves. What is this cement? Is it not blood and love? Are not the stones of fair colours, bright and beautiful, well laid in when thus cemented? Nor is the cement less beautiful than the stones; for it must last as long as they, and glitter and shine with equal lustre and brightness. Thus is the building compact as well as beautiful, firm in strength as it is resplendent in glory.

2. But the Lord goes on to particularize his work more distinctly and minutely. He speaks of her "foundations," her "windows," her "gates," and her "borders," and he tells us how they are all severally framed and made. Beginning at the beginning, he describes the material and laying of her **foundations**—"I will lay thy foundations with sapphires." Before we can stand firmly in the things of God, we must have a good foundation, something solid for our faith, our hope, our love, our all, to rest upon. We read of a foolish builder who built his house upon the sand, and of a wise builder who built upon a rock. Now, what we want is a solid foundation to rest upon as regards our eternal all. This God promises to do for his afflicted Zion—"I will lay thy foundations with sapphires." But what is a **sapphire**? Have you ever seen one? Perhaps you have. But if you have not, I may briefly describe it as a precious stone, the distinguishing feature

of which is its peculiar clear and beautiful colour—a heavenly blue. I would not press the figure too closely, but may it not fitly represent from its nature and colour **a special gift from heaven?** "A gift is a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it." **Pr 17:8** Every testimony then that God gives to the soul, every promise brought into the heart, every manifestation of mercy, visit of love. Or application of truth, we may call, in a spiritual sense, a sapphire, for it is indeed a precious stone, radiant with heaven's own hue. When God thus lays a sapphire into the soul it affords a solid foundation for faith. When he said to Abraham—"I am thy shield and exceeding great reward;" to Joshua—"I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;" to Jeremiah—"Fear not," **La 3:57** he laid a sapphire in each of their hearts. What a mercy for you if your faith has such a sapphire for its foundation; when you do not rest upon the bare letter of God's word, upon the naked truth of the Scriptures, but upon the testimony of God laid into your soul. When there is any manifestation of Christ, any application of a promise, any visit of his mercy, any token of his love, any proof of interest in the precious blood of the Lamb, that is a foundation, a safe and solid foundation on which to rest. As they are laid by the hands of God himself they must be firm; as they are sapphires they must be indestructible. These sapphires, it is true, may every one of them be buried in the dust of carnality and worldly mindedness; the filth and sewage, the mud and slush of our fallen nature may roll over them flood after flood; but are they injured thereby? Is their nature changed, their value impaired, their hue tarnished, their lustre faded and gone? A person whom I know, indeed a relation of mine, once lost a diamond ring for a whole year, in a strawberry bed in a garden. Autumn covered it with leaves, and winter with snow; the rain fell upon it, and the mould spread over it, it was wet with dew and bound in by hoarfrost; but did these impair its lustre? No; had it even dropped into a London sewer its value and beauty would not have been lessened. When my relation found her lost diamond ring it was as bright as ever. Thus, if God the Spirit has lodged a sapphire in your soul, all the dust and dirt of the carnal mind, nay, all the filth of sin, worse than that of a London sewer, may roll over it yet not destroy it.



True, they may hide it from view, obscure the getting, and for a while dim its face; but one touch of the polisher's hand restores all its beauty. **Grace in the soul has no more communion with sin than a diamond with a dunghill.** The manifestations of Christ to the soul, and the application of God's truth to the heart, are "sapphires," in their nature indestructible, in their beauty imperishable. See to it, my friend, that you have a sapphire in your soul. That is the foundation; get that, and you can build upon it without fear; But beware of counterfeits. There are plenty of Jews about who pass off paste for diamonds and blue glass for sapphires. Examine well your testimony from heaven, and see that it be a real sapphire, just in weight, clear in colour, bright in hue, and imperishable in nature, without fracture or flaw, and specially see whether laid by the hand of God. "I will lay thy foundations with sapphires."

3. But the Lord also adds—"And I will make thy windows of agates." What is a window for? Chiefly to admit light, and air, and also to give us a prospect of the scenery without. I am a great admirer naturally of fine prospects, and I have a very pretty one from the windows of my own house, which I often look at with pleasure and admiration. Our houses would be poor, dull abodes if there were no windows to them, or if they were always closed with shutters. They would rather be prisons than dwellings. Thus the windows spoken of in our text seem to signify spiritual prospects. For has the temple of mercy no windows for light and air? And are the shutters never thrown back to give Zion her prospects? Aye, surely, blessed prospects, glimpses of heaven, sights of Jesus, views of a triune God, glances into eternal bliss and blessedness beyond the grave.

But the windows are of "agate." Glass in those days was not used for windows; it was known for various other purposes; for it has been lately found in Nineveh, as well as in the tombs of Egypt; but its use for windows is of comparatively modern date. But why are they made of agate? Though not so clear as glass, it is what is called semi-transparent, that is, sufficiently transparent to admit a considerable amount of light. The sun shining through a

window of agate might lose a portion of its brightness, but not much of its light. Upon Zion in her time-state the Sun of Righteousness does not shine in all his brightness. The windows of agate whilst she is in the flesh temper his rays. Her prospects too are not fully bright and clear. As the Apostle speaks—"We see through, or in a glass darkly!" We have not those clear views which the saints have in glory where they see Jesus face to face. We have prospects sometimes, I hope, by faith, of God, and Christ, and heavenly glory; but still these views are but semi-transparent, streaked and clouded like a window of agate, not bright and clear as a pane of plate glass. But as Daniel opened his windows toward Jerusalem, that he might see by faith what he could not see by sight, so should we aim to look towards the heavenly Jerusalem, that by faith we may see him there who is invisible. It is poor, dull, miserable work to live in a house without windows; to have no views of God, nor sights of Jesus, nor glimpses of his heavenly glory! To be shut up in a prison, or a penitentiary, where every window is darkened with shutters, and but a few air-holes left to breathe at, is indeed most miserable. But many of the Lord's family live this prison life; and this makes them "afflicted, tossed, with tempest, and not comforted." But to such the Lord says—"I will make thy windows of agates." They shall have prospects. It may be at first only as glimmering through a lattice, but the windows of agate are ready for the framing; for "light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart."

4. But the Lord speaks also of Zion's "gates." These gates are to give admission to the temple which he is rearing for his own habitation. But of what material are the gates? These too, like the foundations and windows, are of precious stones. **"And thy gates of carbuncles."** Now I would not press Scripture figures too closely, and we must not be too fanciful in our interpretation of God's word; yet, doubtless, the Spirit of God chose these jewels with some peculiar meaning. The carbuncle is of a blood red colour. And why should the Lord have chosen that Zion's gates should be of this peculiar colour? May we not, without wresting the figure too closely, believe that there is some mystic

allusion here to the blood of the Lamb? But what are gates for? Two purposes, entrance and exit. How did we come into the chapel this evening but through the gate or door; and the same door that gave us entrance will give us exit. Zion too has her gates of exit and entrance. She has her gates of access to God, entrance into the presence of the Most High; the door of hope opened in the valley of Achor. And who has opened the door, or rather who has not only opened it, and made it, but himself is it, is the door. "I am the door," saith Jesus; and was not the door opened through his rent flesh, as the Apostle speaks—"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." **Heb 10:19,20.** Through his bleeding wounds, through his pierced side, through his mangled feet and hands, there is now access to God—

A door of hope is opened wide.  
In Jesus' pierced hands and side.

Is there any other access to God but through the slaughtered Lamb? "Through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father." There is no other, for he is "the way, the truth, and the life, and no man cometh to the Father but by him." Is not this an open way? Does not the soul through this door walk in and out and find pasture, and enter into the immediate presence of God? Do you, my friends, ever find access to God, a heart to pray, a sense of acceptance in prayer, an open door and power to enter therein? What opens it? **Merit?** Set up merit and we are all damned to a man! It is not merit, great or little; it is the blood of the Lamb which alone has opened a way for poor lost sinners to draw near to God. These are Zion's gates; her gates of carbuncles, ruddy in hue, types and figures of the atoning blood of the Lamb.

But gates not only give exit but admission. Not only do prayers, supplications, petitions, cries, groans, sighs and tears, rise up with acceptance through the gates of carbuncle, and thus enter

into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, but promises also, tokens, testimonies, and visits come down. And as every prayer, to be a prayer, is breathed through the gate of carbuncle, through the blood of the Lamb, so every answer, that is an answer, comes down through the same consecrated channel. Has it not surprised you sometimes that God ever heard your prayers? And what has been the reason of this surprise? Has it not been this? "My prayers are so polluted; my thoughts so wandering; my mind so carnal; my lusts so strong; my corruptions so powerful; my backslidings so innumerable; O, when I view these things I wonder that God can hear my prayers." And well you may wonder if you look at the matter in that way. God does not hear your prayers because there is anything good in you! How could it be? What does God see in you? A mass of filth and folly. There is in you nothing else. Then why does God hear prayer and answer it too? Only through the gate of carbuncle. Prayer ascends through Jesus, and answers descend through Jesus. Groans through Jesus enter the ears of the God of Sabaoth, and through the same open gate of bleeding mercy do answers drop into the soul. Our poor self-righteous hearts can hardly comprehend this; and we think we must have a good frame, or bring a good deed, or a good heart to make our prayers acceptable to God. Perish the thought. This is nothing but the spawn of self-righteousness. The gates of carbuncle,—through these every prayer ascends, through these every answer comes down; if we set up anything else, or make a gate of human merit, though no bigger than a mouse-hole, we pour contempt upon the grace and blood of the Lamb.

5. But the Lord also speaks of Zion's **borders**. He tells us he will make "all her borders of pleasant stones." There shall be nothing common about her. No architect pays the same attention to the courts and outbuildings that he pays to the mansion itself. If the mansion be of stone these may be of brick. Not so with God, Zion's divine Architect. Her very Courts are to be entered in with praise. No back buildings, no barn or stables, kitchens or wash-houses, to be thrust out of sight and hidden by plantations, lest as eyesores they should disfigure the noble mansion. Zion's very borders, courts, outbuildings, are all of the same material with

the mansion itself. "And all thy borders of pleasant stones," that is pleasant to the eye, as a precious stone is for its lustre and beauty. The walls that surround her, the courts within those walls, the avenues of approach, her walks and borders, every circuit and boundary whereby she is fenced off and separated from an ungodly world are made of stones pleasant to the eye and precious in value. Thus God's providential dealings, which often form the outer setting of his inward mercies, are of pleasant stones. North, south, east, west, all Zion's borders are of precious materials. The daily events of life, the circumstances of family, station, employment, success or the contrary, the ties of domestic affection, with all those varied circumstances which seem rather the borders and outer courts than the inner sanctuary of gracious experience—yet all these are of divine material and workmanship. Viewed by faith, every event and circumstance of life, however apparently grievous, is a pleasant stone; for **all** Zion's borders are of pleasant stones.

But for whom are all these mercies? The meritorious? the diligent? the industrious? We read not so: "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted." What! are all these mercies for such as they? They are the only persons who will prize them or glorify God for them. Give them to the Pharisee, and he will tell you that he gained them by his own exertions, deserved them by his own meritorious obedience; and, therefore, as God will not give his glory to another, and a Pharisee's religion is that which he can himself build up with his own hands—the Lord bestows them on the "afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted"—in other words, when he has made Zion a heap of ruins, he takes to himself the distinguished honour of building her up with his own hands, and laying every stone in its place with his own Almighty fingers.

But this is not suitable to the palate of a Pharisee. He wants to be handling the trowel himself. His very fingers itch to get hold of the plummet and line. If he might but dabble a little in the mortar of human merit, become a co-builder with God, and then write upon the building—"This was partly built by God and partly by

myself," he would be satisfied. How pleased he would be to see his own name bracketed with the name of God, as you see in the city churches just below the organ, the twin names of the distinguished churchwardens, in whose year of office the church was repaired and decorated. Oh, if the Pharisee could but see his name thus bracketed with God's as a co-builder, how it would please his vanity and pride. It might please him, but it would not please God, and it would not please my soul, nor if you are taught of God would it please yours. Let self be nothing. Dethrone self from the seat of empire, and banish it, as it deserves, into exile and obscurity; but let God be exalted and shine forth in his own divine glory. This is sweet to every soul taught of God. He would not take to himself a grain of merit. For what does he really merit? Hell! That is what he merits, nothing more, nothing less. And as long as he only merits hell, he dares not, will not, must not, shall not merit heaven.

Now this is the reason why the Lord has, so to speak, to take such pains in thrusting Zion down, and making her a heap of ruins, that he may have all the honour and all the glory of building her up into a temple for himself, to dwell in her by his grace here, and in his glory hereafter. And he well deserves it. It is sweet to the soul that it should be so; and if we are taught, as we must be if we are taught of God, to know our own helplessness and hopelessness toward everything spiritually good, we shall give him all the praise. It is the sweetest feeling upon earth. It is a blessed foretaste of heaven to praise God for his mercy, to thank him for his grace, and to bless him for a sense of his love. It is a drop of heaven; and he who never has it here will never have it hereafter. No Pharisee ever had it. No Pharisee whilst a Pharisee ever will have it. He must become a heap of ruins before God will put forth his hand to rear him up into a temple. He must be "afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted" before the Lord lays the "stones with fair colours, and lays the foundation with sapphires;" before he makes the "windows of agates, and the gates of carbuncles, and all the borders of pleasant stones." And if God does not do this for him,

where is his hope, where his confidence, and what will be his end?

## ZION'S GATES AND THE KING'S HIGHWAY

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, 18th January, 1863

"Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people." Isaiah 62:10

John, the beloved disciple, when he was in the Isle of Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ, was favoured with a glorious view in vision of "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband". One of the seven angels, which had the seven vials full of the last seven plagues, carried him away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and there showed him that glorious sight, the Bride, the Lamb's wife **Re 21:2,9**. The description which John has given of this glorious city is rather too long for our time and attention this morning, but I will just read one or two verses, which will give you a sufficient idea of its beauty and glory: "And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; and had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel" **Re 21:10-12**.

Now the question may probably arise in your mind, What was this city which John thus saw in vision? Did the Holy Ghost mean to declare thereby that at or after the consummation of all things, at or after the great judgment day, there would descend from God out of heaven a literal city, such as John saw in vision? Or was it intended as a mere mystical representation? I think if we consider for a few moments the description of the city, as given by the pen



of John, we shall see that a literal fulfilment of the prophetic vision was not intended.

Look, first, at the **size** of the city. "And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs; the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal." Twelve thousand furlongs are about 1,500 miles. Here, then, was a city 1,500 miles long, 1,500 miles broad, and, what is more strange still, 1,500 miles high; for its height was equal to its length and breadth. Could such a city exist upon the surface of the globe? Our highest mountains, such as the mighty Andes and lofty Himalayas, do not exceed five miles. But here is a city, a walled city, that reaches up to the heights of heaven, 1,500 miles! Look, again, at the **materials** of which the city was made. It was all of gold, and not common gold, gross and opaque, but clear and transparent, for it was "like unto clear glass". Now conceive the idea of a city, 1,500 miles long, 1,500 broad, and 1,500 in height, and all built of gold as clear as crystal. Could all the mines of the world furnish that precious material in sufficient abundance to construct a city of such magnitude?

So when we look at the **foundations** of the city, the same natural impossibilities meet us. They all were of precious stones, jasper, and sapphire, and emerald, and diamond, and so on. Whence could be found precious stones of a magnitude fit to be the foundations of a city whose walls were 1,500 miles high? for walls and foundations must be proportionate. And look at the **gates**. "The twelve gates were twelve pearls: every several gate was of one pearl." Where could a pearl be found to construct a gate at least a mile high? for the gates must bear some proportion to the walls.

I mention these things not to cast the slightest doubt on the mighty power of God to work even miracles like this, but to show you, by a comparison of circumstances, that the Holy Spirit never designed to show unto John a literal city. But like other symbols in the Revelation and other prophetic parts of the Scripture, it

was intended as an emblem to convey to his mind and depict to the Church a representation of heavenly and spiritual things. Thus, as the "beasts" seen by Daniel in vision were not actual, literal beasts, but mystical representations of the four empires: and as "the woman clothed in scarlet", whom John saw in Revelation, was not an actual woman, but an emblem of the false church, so "the holy city" which the beloved disciple beheld coming down from God was not meant to prefigure a literal city, but was intended as a spiritual symbol.

Having shown you, then, that the city which John saw was but a mystical representation, what do we gather from his description to be the spiritual meaning of the symbol thus presented to his view? We gather, I think, from it that it was a representation of the Church of God in her triumphant state. And this seems plain to me from an expression that I have before quoted, in which John first brings the subject before us: "I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared **as a bride adorned for her husband.**" What is the Church of God but "a bride", the bride of Jesus? And when is she "a bride adorned for her husband"? When she will be a full partaker of his heavenly glory. When the Lord shall appear in his glory and all his saints with him; when the dead shall be raised, and the living changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; when all the elect of God, clothed with their new and glorified bodies, in union with their happy and perfectly sanctified souls, shall enter into the glory of their Lord, then will be spiritually fulfilled what John saw in vision; for this holy city, new Jerusalem, which came down from God out of heaven, with its pure gold like unto clear glass, with its pearls and precious stones, can but faintly symbolise the immortal glories of the Church in her triumphant state as conformed to the glorified image of her all-glorious Head.

But besides this glorious city, as seen by John in vision, and representing, as I have pointed out, the Church of Christ in her triumphant state, the word of truth sets before our eyes another city—a city of a very different character. "We have", says the

prophet, "a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in" **Isa 26:1,2**. Of this city we also read, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King" **Ps 48:1,2**. Now, if we examine what is said of this city, we shall see it is of a different character from that which John saw descending from God out of heaven, for it varies from it in several striking particulars.

1. It is "**a strong city**", having walls and bulwarks, whereas John's city was a **glorious one**, and without bulwarks.

2. It differs from it, secondly, in that the gates of the celestial city are **never closed**, for we read, "And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day; for there shall be no night there." But the gates of Isaiah's strong city are kept **shut**; or to what purpose would serve the command, "**Open** ye the gates?"

3. It differs also in another point, that the gates of Isaiah's city do not lie, as in John's **foursquare**, three gates on each side, so as to admit, so to speak, all comers from all quarters, intimating thereby that the elect of God enter into their triumphant state fully and freely from north, south, east and west. Neither gates nor walls of the strong city resemble the gates and walls of the glorious city; for instead of there being one wall all round, there are "walls and bulwarks", that is, wall within wall and bulwark within bulwark, as in some of our mediaeval cities or fortified towns, all which walls and all which gates must be passed through successively before we can arrive at the dungeon keep, the inner fortress, the royal palace where the King sits and rules in all his grace and beauty, and where he manifests himself to his subjects whom he admits into his gracious presence.

4. There is also another distinction between the glorious city which John saw in vision and the strong city spoken of by Isaiah. The city which John saw had angels at the gates, those heavenly

ministrants who "gather the elect from the four winds of heaven" **Mt 24:31**, and who keep watch and ward over the heavenly city that "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie" **Re 21:27**. But the city which Isaiah speaks of had **ministers**, the sent servants of God, men of like passions with ourselves, standing at the gates, who were to lead the people into it; for it is they, and not the angelic host, who are bidden to "open the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in".

5. If, too, we take into consideration the **context**, we shall see a striking difference between the two cities. The city which John saw is described in connection with "a new heaven and a new earth"; with that blessed and glorious time when God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes; when "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away" **Re 21:4**. But the city which Isaiah saw is connected with "the song which is to be sung in the land of Judah"; nor have the new heaven and the new earth yet appeared; for the Lord speaks, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers and shut thy doors about thee; for behold the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity" **Isa 26:1 Isa 26:21**. Thus I think I have shown you that these two cities widely differ.

Now if we look closely at the words of the text, we shall see in it some allusion to that strong city of which I have just spoken, for we read in it, "Go through, go through the gates." And what are these gates but the gates of entrance into the city, the "strong city" spoken of by Isaiah in the chapter before quoted?

But the question may now arise, What does this "strong city" symbolically represent? I believe that as the city which John saw in vision was a symbol of the Church in her **triumphant** condition above; so the "strong city" spoken of by Isaiah as having walls and bulwarks represents the Church in her **militant**, suffering state here below.

Here, then, at once we have a clue to the spiritual meaning of these cities—that they both represent the Church of God, but in two different aspects; the one representing her in her state of ultimate glory, the other in her state of present grace; the one the Church triumphant, the other the Church militant. It is, then, of the Church in her militant, not her triumphant state, that the Lord speaks in the text, where he says, "Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people."

In opening the spiritual meaning of these words, I shall, as the Lord may enable,

I. **First**, show you the **persons** to whom this message is addressed.

II. **Secondly**, unfold in their order the **contents** of the message.

I. It is evident, from the very language of the text, that a commission is given to certain **persons**, and that they are commanded by the Lord to do a certain work. We shall, therefore, do well to inquire who the persons are who are thus commissioned, for until we can settle that point the message given to them must be covered with much obscurity. The word of God must be our only guide in this investigation; and under its clear, shining light, if we are enabled to see what those bright beams manifest, we shall not be at a loss to ascertain who they are; for I think we shall soon find them to be the servants of the Lord, the ministers of Jesus Christ. Yes, it is to these highly favoured men of God this commission is given, and it is they who have authority and power from him to do the work thus set before them. It was spoken in prophecy of our blessed Lord, "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them" **Ps 68:18**. This prophecy Paul quotes and opens: "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men"

**Eph 4:8.** The gracious Lord bade his disciples "tarry in the city of Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high" **Lu 24:49**; and also assured them that they should be baptised with the Holy Ghost not many days hence **Ac 1:5**. The gift, then, and promise of the Holy Spirit was that which he received, and which he poured out, as Peter declared **Ac 2:33**.

Now the apostle, explaining the nature of these spiritual gifts which the Lord gave unto men after his ascension, says, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" **Eph 4:11,12**. Apostles and prophets have ceased. They laid the foundation of the Church of Christ, and their ministrations then closed. But evangelists, pastors, and teachers still remain for the benefit of the Church of God; for the gospel is still to be preached; the saints are still to be perfected or established in the truth; the work of the ministry is still to be carried on; the body of Christ is still to be edified or built up, for it is not yet complete. Thus in the Church of Christ there still remain some as "evangelists", who simply preach the gospel, without having a settled ministry; some are "pastors", settled over churches, and able to feed and rule them; and others "teachers", to whom the Lord has especially given a gift of instruction to open the truth and establish the people of God in it.

This is their general description; but if we look a little more closely into their character and office, as described in the word of truth, we shall observe them called by several titles, which we shall find perhaps especially applicable to the commission given them in our text.

1. They are sometimes then called "**servants** of God", or "servants of Jesus Christ". The apostle thus describes himself: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle" **Ro 1:1**. So, writing to Titus, he says, "Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ" **Tit 1:1**. In the same way, in another epistle, he associates with himself his son Timothy: "Paul and

Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ" **Php 1:1**. Nor would he allow this commission of his to be lightly esteemed: "Let a man", he says, that is, every man, "so account of us, as of the ministers [or servants] of Christ" **1Co 4:1**. Thus a minister is a servant of Christ. He is not a servant of man, for this is expressly forbidden. "Ye are bought with a price; be not the servants of men" **1Co 7:23**. He is a servant of the living God. And though a servant **for** all, he is not servant **to** all or indeed to any one, for he is the Lord's servant, and therefore bound to obey not the commands of men but those of his heavenly Master; for what he does and what he suffers he does and suffers for **his** honour and glory, and not for his own or any other man's. It would be well if the churches would bear this in mind. Too many treat the minister as if he were their servant, and some almost as if he were **their** slave, ordering him about and directing him as if he were to be only the instrument of their will or of their caprice. He is, then, I repeat it, not a servant **to** the church, but **of** the church; for his services are spiritual services, and undertaken at the command of, and in subordination to a Master who has called him to the work, who maintains him in it, and supplies him with wisdom and ability for it; and thus though he labours willingly in the service of God, it is with an eye to his heavenly Master and for the good of his people, and not in slavish obedience to the dictates of man.

2. But the ministers of Christ are spoken of also as **stewards**, and especially "**stewards** of the mysteries of God" **1Co 4:1**. To them is committed the care and keeping of the mysteries of the Gospel. The steward is the highest officer in the household. To his care is committed the management of his master's property; he has a general oversight over the whole house; he keeps the key of cupboard, pantry, closet, and wardrobe; receives the rents and sees to the state of the farms. So, in a spiritual sense, the servant of Christ has an oversight of the Church of Christ, for the Holy Ghost has made him an overseer to feed the Church of God. This he does ministerially by bringing forth out of the treasury of his heavenly Master things new and old, and as "allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel" **1Th 2:4**, and as having "that good thing committed unto him" **2Ti 1:14**, his office is carefully

to guard, vigilantly protect, and, as occasion serves, to bring out for the food and clothing of the household the deep mysteries of heavenly truth.

3. They are also called "**labourers**". Thus our Lord called them: "The harvest is plenteous, but the labourers are few" **Mt 9:37**. So the apostle speaks of himself and his fellow-ministers: "We are labourers together with God;" and bids the Corinthians "submit themselves to every one that helped and laboured with him". And well indeed may the faithful servants of God be called "labourers", for no work is like theirs for hardship and anxiety, and, blessed be God, for reward and profit. They labour in word and doctrine for the good of God's people; they break up the fallow ground, and plough and sow, in hope that the Lord may crown their labours with wished for success, in giving them an abundant crop of souls saved and sanctified as the fruit of their ministry.

4. But in our text the servants of Christ are addressed as invested with a peculiar commission, which we may simply call that of **leaders**; for we cannot doubt that it is to his servants that the Lord here speaks, as he does in other parts of Scripture; as, for instance, where he bids them, "Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees" **Isa 35:3**; and again, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." And this appears especially plain in the case of our text, for we read in a preceding verse, "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night" **Isa 62:6**. Watchmen are evidently ministers, for they watch for the souls of God's people **Heb 13:17**. They are, then, represented in the text as going before God's people, leading the way, showing them the path in which they should walk, clearing away the difficulties which lie in the road, and opening the gates one after another, that the saints of the Most High following in their train, may successively go through each gate, and so entering into the heavenly city, there find rest and peace.



II. But this brings us to our second point, which is the **message** given them, the commission put into their hands, and the work which they have, with God's help and blessing, to perform. I shall, therefore, treat of these various parts of their heavenly commission severally, and open one by one what they have to do in the name and by the Spirit of the Lord.

Their first work is to "**go through the gates**"; and this is expressed in a very emphatic manner. The Lord doubles the command. He does not say merely, "Go through the gates," but, "Go through, go through;" as though he would charge this divine commission more warmly and impressively upon their conscience; as though he would give them more urgent and special directions, and lay more powerfully upon them the solemn duty and privilege of going through the gates that the people might follow as they lead, and enter with them into this blessed city. The servant of God, then, must himself first pass through each gate, and as he passes through, he throws it, so to speak, open, that the people of God may follow him as he goes before them and walk in the path in which he leads and points out.

1. Now what is the **first** gate that he and they must pass through? I have before shown you that the walls and gates of this strong city below are not like the walls and gates of the glorious city above, for the wall of that is foursquare and the gates are open night and day, free admission being given to the glorified saints to pass in. But this city is built upon a different plan. The walls are concentric, that is, circle within circle, wall within wall, and gate within gate: so that each gate in succession must be passed through before you can reach the other.

2. What, then, is the **first** gate which the servant of God has to lay open? The **strait gate**, that of which the Lord himself declares, "Strait is the gate"—that narrow gate which leads to life eternal, the gate of **regeneration**. Now there is no climbing over the wall, or creeping under it, or passing through it, except through the gate. He that climbs over is a thief and a robber; he that crawls under will be rejected as stealing into the city by a

forbidden way, "digging through in the dark", like Job's adulterer **Job 24:16**; and the wall is too strong, too thick, too massive for any to break through.

There is only one way, then, into the city which is the strait and narrow gate of regeneration—a gate so strait that no man can pass through it with his clothes upon his back and with sin held fast in his arms. Sin must be laid down in its practice and power outside the walls, with every idol, however loved or hugged to the bosom, yea, and his own righteousness, too, must be stripped off, and he must enter naked, so to speak, for there is no room in this narrow portal for sin and self. Bunyan, in his immortal work, "Grace Abounding," which I have sometimes said deserves to be written in letters of gold, gives us a striking account of a kind of vision which he had when his soul was passing through deep distress. He speaks of seeing the sunny side of a high mountain on which the saints of God were "refreshing themselves with the pleasant beams of the sun", whilst he was "shivering and shrinking in the cold, afflicted with frost, snow, and dark clouds". But on looking a little closer, he saw that there was a wall round this mountain through which he must pass before he could sun himself with those blessed denizens of the warm mountain side. So prayerfully and carefully he goes round this wall again and again to find an entrance, but sees none. At last he sees a very narrow gap, like a little doorway in the wall, through which he tries to pass; but he finds it so very narrow that all his attempts were vain to force his way in. But at length, with great striving, at first he got in his head, and after that "by a sideling striving", to use his own forcible expression, he got in his shoulders, and then his whole body, till at length he reached the warm mountain side, where he was comforted with the light and heat of their sun.

Now from this vision and the exceeding narrowness of the passage, he drew this conclusion, "That none could enter into life but those who were in downright earnest, and unless they left the wicked world behind them, for that here was only room for body and soul, but not for body and soul and sin." It is, indeed, a strait and narrow gate which none can see but those who have spiritual

eyes, none feel for but those who have spiritual hands, and none pass through but those who have spiritual feet. This outer wall separates the city from the world, from sin, from error, from evil. All these, therefore, must be left behind, or we cannot pass through the first gate, the gate of regeneration, without going through which there is neither seeing nor entering into the kingdom of heaven.

2. What is the **second** gate? for our text says, "Go through, go through the gates." Why, the **gate of faith**. Do we not read of "God opening the door of faith to the Gentiles?" **Ac 14:27**. And when was this? When the apostles preached to them the word of life, and God by his Spirit and grace opened their hearts, as he opened the heart of Lydia, to receive it. Thus the apostle speaks of his preaching at Ephesus: "For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" **1Co 16:9**; and again when he came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel he says, "A door was opened unto me of the Lord".

This door then, or gate, is the next to which we come when we have passed through the narrow gate of regeneration. And I may also add that we can only pass through the first gate by a light shining through the second: for as we are struggling in the very entry, a ray of heavenly light shines from the king, who sits enthroned in the midst of the city, in the very heart of it where his palace is, through each gate, as they are successively opened. Now just see the effect of this beam of heavenly light. Here is the soul, with much ado, much striving and exertion, sticking as it were in the very entrance of the city, half but not wholly through the first gate—the gate of regeneration, which is the gate of life. See the child of grace exercised with unbelief, feeling how strait and narrow the gate is through which he is striving to pass, doubting and fearing, yet longing to believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God, and to receive the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul. Before him stands another gate, the gate of faith, but he cannot pass through it; for it seems shut in his face. Thus he is half in the first gate, and the second is still closed.

But now hear the commission given to the servants of the Lord, "Go through, go through the gates." He himself then must first have passed through; to him must the door of faith have been opened. He must be a believer himself in the only begotten Son of God, and as a believer, he goes through the gate. Now, standing as if in this very gate which he opens with his hand, he holds up the Son of God as the object of faith, preaching the Gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and the Lord the Spirit blesses the testimony with unction and power to the heart of this struggling one in the strait and narrow gate. Faith is raised up in his soul; the door of it is opened in his heart; he receives the testimony; the gospel comes not in word only, but also in power; love comes to his aid, for "faith worketh by love"; and, drawn by its gentle cords, he passes through the gate by believing in the only begotten Son of God, and receiving him into his heart as "the way, the truth, and the life".

### **ZION'S GATES AND THE KING'S HIGHWAY**

3. Now comes another gate which has to be opened; and this is **the gate of hope**. Of this we read in the prophecy of Hosea, where the promise runs, "And I will give her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope" **Ho 2:15**. This door of hope is the same as the apostle calls "a good hope through grace" **2Th 2:16**, and which he declares to be "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil" **Heb 6:19**. But you may say, "Have you not made a mistake this morning? How is it you put hope after faith? Why don't you put hope first? Is not this the way that the Lord deals with his people—to give them first a little hope, and then, after hope is raised up in their hearts to reveal his dear Son, and thus communicate a living faith in him?" No, I think I have made no mistake. I don't like to make mistakes in solemn matters of this kind. I should not be able to go through the gates to open them to the people, if I did not know pretty well how the gates stand one after another. I should be at best but a blind guide or a sleepy watchman. But as you have asked me one

question, let me ask you another. How can we hope in what we do not believe? Faith is "the substance of things hoped for", that is, their foundation, as the word means; but which stands first, the foundation or the superstructure? Does not the apostle say, "Hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" **Ro 8:24**. But faith gives eyes, for it is "the evidence of things not seen". Thus faith is the evidence and hope the expectation. But how can we expect a thing of which we have no evidence that it exists? How can you hope in the goodness of God unless you believe in that goodness? How can you hope in salvation by the Son of God, if you have never believed in the Son of God, through whom salvation comes? Or how can you have an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast within the veil, unless first by faith you have laid hold of him who has passed within the veil, as the great High Priest over the house of God? The apostle tells us in the Epistle to the Romans that "experience worketh hope" **Ro 5:4**. But what experience? An experience of the goodness and mercy of God, which can only come by faith. He also tells us that "being justified by faith", "we rejoice in hope of the glory of God" **Ro 5:1,2**. But this justification must precede any rejoicing in hope; for what have we to rejoice in except what is laid hold of by a living faith? Thus we see we must pass through the gate of faith so as to believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God, before we can pass through the door of hope, there to anchor firmly within the veil.

This gate, too, the servant of God has to open by setting forth the promises of the gospel, and especially by describing and explaining the experience of God's people; for as "experience worketh hope", when they hear their experience described, it works hope in their heart. Thus as he holds in his hand the gate of hope, swaying it, so to speak, backwards and forwards on its hinges, a stream of heavenly light bursts through it upon their soul, and "a good hope through grace", springing up in their hearts, they pass through it, still pressing forward to the king's palace.

Now, though I say that faith goes before hope, I do not mean to assert that the **assurance** of faith precedes it. In this way, therefore, we may reconcile the difficulty which probably struck your mind when I put the gate of faith before the gate of hope; for we have often a good hope through grace before the Spirit seals on the soul the fulness of God's love.

4. But this brings us to another gate which has still to be opened, and a blessed one it is, for it gives admission to the very palace of the King. This gate is **the gate of love**. Now though we do not find in scripture express mention of a door of love, as of a door of faith and of hope, yet we do read of "a door being opened in heaven" **Re 4:1**; and if a door is opened in heaven, what must flow through that open door but love from him who sits in heaven's citadel, and from those glorious heights sends down his love into the heart? Has not Jesus passed within the veil as our glorious Forerunner? Is not that veil still open? For have not the children of God who enter through the gate of faith "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?" **Heb 10:19,20**. Are we not also bidden to "set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth?" **Col 3:2**. And is not all this a warrant for me to say that there is a **gate of love** as well as those which I have already mentioned? How can love come down unless there be an open door? How can love go up except through an open door? Martyred Stephen cried, "Behold, I see the heavens opened." Did no love flow up or down? When "the beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door", was not this the hand of love? It must have been so by its effects, for it made the bride cry out, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him that I am sick of love" **So 5:4,8**.

We have gone through the gates. There is none beyond the last; for "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" **1Jo 4:16**. Now look, then, at these gates and see how many you have passed through, or whether you have passed through any one of them. Look at the first gate, the **strait and**

**narrow gate,** which leads to eternal life. Have you passed through that? What struggles, difficulties, or conflicts did you experience; what sighs, cries, prayers, groans, tears went up out of your soul as you seemed to stick in that narrow pass; when, as the scripture speaks, you "came to the birth, and there was not strength to bring forth"; that perilous time when death seems to hover over mother and child. Did the Lord then fulfil his promise in your heart, "Shall I bring to the birth and not cause to bring forth?"

Have you passed through the next **gate**—the gate of **faith**? Has the Lord Jesus Christ ever been manifested to your soul or revealed to your heart, so that you can truly say you believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God, by some gracious discovery of his Person and work to your believing eye, whereby you beheld "his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"?

Have you ever passed through the gate of **hope**? Has the Lord the Spirit ever let down a sweet promise into your soul, applied any passage warm to your heart; or as the servant of God went before, and the Lord "spoke comfortably" by him, did he even open a door of hope in your soul, whereby you felt a sweet persuasion of your interest in the love and blood of the Lamb?

Have you ever passed through the gate of **love**, so as to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ in the arms of faith and affection, and to be able to say, with all sincerity of heart, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee?" Now these gates must be passed through before you can get into the presence of the great King, for in the very heart of the city he dwells, as we read, "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge" **Ps 48:2,3**. There he keeps palace; there he sits on his throne of grace, as David sat in his royal palace of Zion, swaying his peaceful sceptre over believing hearts. But these gates must first be passed through: "Go **through**, go **through** the gates." "Open ye the

gates, that the righteous nation," God's justified people, "which keepeth the truth"—the truth of God made precious to their heart—may enter in—not stand without **Isa 26:2**. For bear in mind that these gates not only admit, but also exclude; not only give access to his gracious Majesty, to adore and love his holy name, but shut out all intruders. So before you can get into the presence of the King, to see his beauty, behold his glory, and enjoy his love, you must pass through them all one after the other.

But this is not the only work that the servants of God are commissioned to perform. The message to them goes on, **"Prepare ye the way of the people."**

The "people" here spoken of are the people of God; the people for whom Jesus died; the people whose names are written in the Book of Life; the people whom the Lord has formed for himself that they may show forth his praise. But these people are represented in a state wherein they require spiritual guidance, as being unable of themselves to find their way to the city. They are thus like the sheep spoken of by the prophet, as "wandering through all the mountains and upon every high hill"; yea, as "scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none to search or seek after them".

Now, for this people as thus "scattered in the cloudy and dark day" **Eze 34:6 Eze 34:12**, the servants of God are bidden to prepare the way, the way that leads to the strong city; for until this way is pointed out to them and made plain before their eyes, through the darkness of their mind, the confusion of their thoughts, and the hard bondage with which they are exercised, they scarcely know where to set their feet, or in what direction the road lies. There is an allusion in the words, "Prepare ye the way," to a practice in Eastern countries, where there are not, as in our civilised land, beaten, well-known roads in all directions. When kings and princes travel there, especially when they move at the head of armies, roads have to be made for them. The deep rivers have to be bridged, the jungle cut through, the woods



levelled, the swamps and morasses filled up, and a clear, clean, broad way made, that they may not be stopped on their route by these natural obstructions. Taking, then, this figure, the Holy Spirit commands the servants of God to "prepare the way of the people"

But how do the servants of God ministerially execute this office? How did John the Baptist prepare the way of the people when he went before Christ as his forerunner? He preached repentance to them. So the servants of God prepare the way of the people by setting before them their lost condition by nature. They preach the law in its spirituality and curse; they set before them the wrath of God due to every sinner that comes into the world under the curse of the original transgression. They tell them they must repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ in order to salvation, as the apostle preached in his day "repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ" **Ac 20:21**. They tell the people there must be a work of grace upon their heart, that a mighty revolution must take place in their soul, wrought in them by the power of God; that Christ must be revealed and formed in them, the hope of glory, before they can be saved.

Thus by setting before the people their ruin and misery in a state of nature, and showing the curse and spirituality of God's law, they prepare their way, for as the word falls with power upon their conscience they listen to it, and flee from the wrath to come. This is as if a marking out of the way before the people's eyes; a setting it out, which is the first thing to be done in making a road. They prepare the way also by levelling the obstacles and difficulties that lie in the path. They tell them there is salvation for all those who repent of their sins, and believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God. They tell them that God is love in the Person and work of his dear Son. They tell them that the sin of all who believe is put away by the bloodshedding of the Son of God; that a righteousness is provided for all who come to him by a living faith; that the Holy Spirit is given to those who belong to Jesus, to lead and guide them in all truth. They set before them the love of God in sending

his dear Son, the infinite compassion of his merciful heart, and the way which he devised in the depth of his eternal wisdom of saving sinners, without sacrificing or infringing any one of his holy attributes. But they chiefly prepare the way by preaching Christ as "the way", the only way unto God.

And thus sometimes by thundering the law in their ears, sometimes by preaching the gospel, sometimes by unfolding the lost, ruined state of man, and sometimes by bringing before their eyes the blood and obedience of the Son of God, they prepare the way of the people, and instrumentally and ministerially go before, and lead them in it. Thus they bridge over the deep rivers, drain the swamps and morasses, cut down the thick forests in which the people might lose themselves, run a road across the jungle which otherwise the weak and feeble of the Lord's family could scarcely struggle through; and thus as good workmen who need not be ashamed, they make the way plain before the face of all who are made willing in the day of the Lord's power.

But they have other work to do, and this is expressly enjoined upon them by a reduplication of the command, "**Cast up, cast up the highway.**" When they have prepared the way by bridging the rivers, cutting down the forests, draining the morasses, and burning up the jungle, then they are to take the pickaxe and spade, and labour hard to "cast up the highway", that this glorious highway may stand prominently before the people's eyes, that they may plant their feet upon it, walk on it safe from floods, the incursions of wild beasts, and the attacks of enemies, as being on firm, high ground from which they cannot be easily dislodged.

In some of the Oxfordshire and Berkshire villages, and most probably in other localities less known by me, where they are liable to floods, we often see raised causeways of large stones, on which people travel in winter when the roads and meadows are covered with water. So, in a spiritual sense, there is "a highway" a causeway to be cast up to preserve the people of God from the various floods which often threaten them with destruction. Such

are the floods of Almighty vengeance which will one day rush down like waterspouts from heaven's open gates; the floods of sin which sweep over a guilty conscience; the floods of temptation out of the mouth of the dragon, which often threaten to bury them in destruction and perdition. Now the Lord's people want "a highway" on which they may safely travel, raised above all these devastating floods; and this the servants of God are called upon ministerially to cast up.

But how do they cast up this highway? You will observe that it must be an elevated way, that the people may stand and walk on it above the devastating floods. It must, therefore, not be built of mud, or earth, or clay, which the floods might sweep away. It must be of good solid work—sound stones well laid in their places. When, then, the servants of God bring forth the precious, glorious truth of a three-one God—Father, Son and Holy Ghost—in one undivided Essence, and lay this clearly and broadly before the people as the sum and substance of all divine revelation, as the sole object of all their spiritual worship, the life of all their real religion, the solid ground of all their faith, the fulfilment of all their hope, and the ultimate enjoyment of all their love, then they make a sound and good beginning in casting up the highway.

When they bring forth the Deity and eternal Sonship of our blessed Lord, in union with his spotless humanity, thus setting before the people his glorious Person as Immanuel, God with us, and lay this divine truth down before their eyes, it is casting up the highway and making the foundation broad and good, for it is "the foundation of the apostles and prophets", and of every master builder in Zion; for, "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" **1Co 3:11 Eph 2:20**. When they bring forth the "everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure", and hold it up before the people's eyes, as "the volume of the book", in which all the firm decrees of God are written, showing thereby the security of the saints, and the certainty of every event coming to pass which God has appointed for their good and his glory, then also they cast up the highway, as laying in their right place the solid stones each of which fits

into the other, and are thus immovable by all the floods which may beat against them.

When they set forth the atoning blood of the Lamb of God as cleansing from all sin; his spotless obedience as a perfect robe of righteousness; his dying love as a most blessed cordial for a fainting spirit; his meritorious sufferings and death as a ransom from the curse of the law, the power of darkness, the kingdom of Satan, the dominion of the grave, and the torments of hell, **then**, too, they cast up a causeway firm and good—the highway, the King's highway, on which the royal seed travel safely above all the floods of devouring wrath. When, too, they bring forth the promises, all of which are "Yea and amen in Christ Jesus to the glory of God by us" **2Co 1:20**; such as, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" **Joh 6:37**; "All things work together for good to those that love God; .... He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved;"—I need not, cannot go through them all: but as they bring forth promise after promise, and lay them down one after another close and thick, or pile them up high and strong, what a good and solid road they make—what a firm highway do they cast up.

So when they bring forth the exhortations, the invitations, and the comforting addresses of which God's word is so full, such as, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" or, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth;" and interlace them with the strongest assurances of the faithfulness of the Lord to every word he has ever spoken, **then**, too they cast up the King's highway and make it broad and good. When also they bring forth the precepts of God's word as well as the promises, and contend for and enforce the power of vital godliness in heart, lip, and life; when they set forth the ordinances of God's house in their due order, and lay them down broadly and plainly by pointing out to whom alone they belong; and when they grout the whole road well from beginning to end with the warm cement of living Christian experience, **then** also

they cast up the King's highway with a skilful, firm, and vigorous hand.

See what a highway it is; how raised above the wintry floods, the roaring lions, the howling wolves, and the prowling jackals; for "No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there" **Isa 35:9**. O what a safe and blessed highway! What glorious doctrines, precious promises, heavenly invitations, wise admonitions, holy precepts, gracious ordinances, and the whole built up and cemented together with a living experience! Well may the Lord say to his servants, and double the word, to impress it more deeply on their hearts, "Cast up, cast up the highway."

But let both minister and hearer bear this well in mind, that the King's highway is "a way of holiness", for this is God's own testimony concerning it: "And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein" **Isa 35:8**.

But the servants of the Lord have not yet done their work, nor fully executed all their commission. They have still other work upon their hands. When they have gone through the gates, prepared the way of the people, and cast up the highway, then they have to "**gather out the stones**". This indeed is back-breaking work, for the stones which they have to gather out are often very heavy, and deeply imbedded in the mud and mire. This work, therefore, especially requires that they should often go down upon their knees, and toil in the mud like any navvy, that they may gather up the stones which otherwise they would not be able to move.

But what are these stones? Not the stones which they have laid to cast up a highway; for to be ever doing and undoing, pulling their own work to pieces, and making the King's highway a confused heap, like a broken-up London pavement, would be but a poor employment; though too many who call themselves

labourers, are doing this all their lives. No; this is not the work which the Lord's servants are here called to do; for they are workmen who need not be ashamed, either of their work or their workmanship, their Master or his commission. But these stones which they have to "gather out" are the stumbling blocks of sin, Satan, and unbelief, thrown upon the King's highway after it is cast up, so that they block up the road, or cause the children of God to stumble in it.

That this is the meaning of the command is evident from similar instructions which the Lord has elsewhere given: "Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling block out of the way of my people" **Isa 57:14**. The servants of God, then, have to gather out these stones which impede the road, and over which God's people might stumble or come to a dead stand, finding the way so blocked up that there is no passage. This is often literally the case in mountain roads, on which however well constructed, rocks and avalanches fall from above, making them impassable until they are moved out of the way. Bearing this in mind, let us cast an eye at some of these stones which block the road of God's people, and which the servants of God have ministerially to gather out.

1. Some of the Lord's people fear that **their sins are too great to be pardoned**. Here, then, they find a stone upon the King's highway which they cannot remove, nor get round, for it is too deeply imbedded and too heavy for them to lift, and too high for them to climb over, so that they often come to a dead stand, afraid to go back and yet unable to go forward. Then the servant of God has to come and gather out the stone. This he does by showing them that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin"; that there is no iniquity a child of God has ever committed, except the unpardonable sin, which he cannot commit, that is not freely forgiven him for Christ's sake. As, then, he holds up the blood of the cross, it is as though he said to their sins, "What art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain" **Zec 4:7**. He thus gathers out the stone, takes it out of the path, and casts it, so to speak, into the depths of the sea, so that

when these sins are sought for they shall no more be found **Mic 7:19**.

2. Another stone is one which many tried souls have stumbled over—a fear lest they have **sinned against the Holy Ghost**. The servant of God, then, has to gather out this stone also, by showing from the Scriptures who the characters are who have committed the unpardonable sin and what are its marks, thereby plainly proving that a child of God never can be guilty of it; for if he were, instead of being tried and distressed with the fear of it, he would have been given over to a reprobate mind, hardness of heart, or utter despair.

3. Another stone which the labourer, who labours in word and doctrine, has to gather out, is the **guilty fear** of one who has **backslidden** from the Lord, either inwardly or outwardly, and who is trembling under the apprehension that this backsliding is a proof there is no grace in his heart. This is a source of many dismal fears, for such a one thinks that had he been a child of God, he could not have backslidden so repeatedly, wandered so far from the Lord, and got into so barren and unfruitful a state. This is a deep and heavy stone against which he stumbles, for he finds that he cannot move it out of the way, or pass over it. Here, then, the servant of God has to come to his aid and point out the cases of Peter, David, and others and show how **they** had backslidden, and yet were forgiven. He sounds too in his ears the invitations and the promises, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings" **Jer 3:22** . "I will heal their backsliding: I will love them freely, for mine anger is turned away from him" **Ho 14:4**. As the Lord blesses the word spoken by his servant to their hearts, poor backsliders feel that the stone which has so long stood in the way is gathered up, and they move comfortably on.

4. Another stone, which the servants of God have to "gather out", or I may rather call them heaps of stones which strew almost every part of the road, are the **doubts and fears** with which the family of God are, for the most part, so deeply and continually

exercised. The servant of God comes and gathers out these stones, by showing from the word of truth, such as the Psalms, Lamentations, the experience of Job, &c., that all God's people are liable to these doubts and fears; that an evil heart of unbelief is ever suggesting them or fostering them; that Satan often produces them by his suggestions or fiery darts; but that none of these chilling apprehensions will eventually prevail; that in the end the Lord, who is "the author", will also be "the finisher of their faith", and that ultimately it will gain the victory over all their unbelief.

Time and opportunity will not allow me to enter further upon this branch of the work of the ministry; I shall, therefore, merely add that the servant of the Lord has, in dealing with the experience of the people of God, to open their temptations, describe their trials, enter into their various and complicated cases, and thus instrumentally gather out the stones which lie in their path, and over which they so cruelly stumble.

And then he has, as the last commission given him, to "**lift up a standard for the people**". As I have lately preached upon this subject in showing you "the banner" which the Lord gives to those who fear him, I shall not dwell long upon it, as it would be but a repetition of what I have there brought forward from the word of truth. I shall merely, therefore, remark that this standard which the servant of God is to lift up is the standard of the Gospel, the glorious Gospel flag, which he has to hold in his hand and wave on high, that it may be a guide for the people to show them the path in which they are to walk. This standard is lifted up in the very beginning of the way to show where the path begins, and it floats all along the road to the very end of the way to show where the path ends: for Jesus is the way, the whole of the way, and every part of the way; and this as Prophet, Priest, and King. As Prophet, he begins the work and completes it by his own almighty power; as Priest, he lines the whole path with blood; as King, he sways his sceptre over the whole road, for it is the King's highway throughout, of which he alone is Lord and Sovereign.



As, then, the servant of the Lord lifts up the standard of Gospel truth, holds on high the banner of truth and love, it shows the people of God, for whose benefit it is displayed, that this is the way in which they are to walk; for when they see him going forward with this glorious banner in his hand, they, too, can follow on with some confidence; and as they thus keep step by step in their serried ranks, they are "terrible as an army with banners" **So 6:4**; for they fear no foe, and can put all their enemies to the rout when they see and feel the glorious flag of salvation waving over their heads. When, too, they wander and stray from the path, as the servant of the Lord lifts up the standard before their eyes, it gives them a rallying point once more to bring their feet upon the King's highway; for there and there alone the royal standard floats, and there and there alone do they feel safe under its ample folds.

Thus you see what the work of a minister is, and what is the commission given him by his heavenly Master. I shall not say, my friends, how I perform it, for I am sure I do it very feebly and imperfectly, although I may describe it from the word of God as I see it written as with a sunbeam in the pages of heavenly truth, and as it is commended to my conscience. But I must confess that I see much more clearly what a minister should do than that I do it. All I can say is, that it is my desire to be found faithful in every part of the ministerial work, though I am forced to confess that in this, as in everything else that is spiritual and heavenly, "to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do" **Ro 7:18,19**.

But I think I may ask us all, what do we know of these heavenly mysteries—of these gates through which we pass successively into the strong city; of this way which is prepared for the people; of this highway which is thus ministerially cast up; of these stones which are thus instrumentally gathered out; and of this standard lifted up on high? Do you not see that the people of God are described here? that the strong city into which they enter is our militant state upon earth; and that we must all become

citizens of this city below before we shall be citizens of the city above? Do you not see that we must pass through the gates in order to see the King by the eye of faith in his palace here, before we have right and privilege to enter the pearly gates of the heavenly Jerusalem, which the glory of God ever lightens, and the Lamb is ever the light thereof?

I desire to lay these solemn things before you in the fear of the Lord, who alone can bless his word and apply it with power to the heart; and in this hope and confidence I leave it in his hands for him to seal it with his own unction and savour upon your consciences.

## ZION'S WAYFARERS AND THEIR EARNEST RESOLVE

Preached on Thursday Evening, March 21st, 1854, at Oakham

"They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." Jeremiah 50:5

God has in this vale of tears a family whom He has loved with an everlasting love, and of whom He is the everlasting Father and Friend; as the hymn says,

"There is a family on earth  
Whose Father fills a throne."

As, then, of this family God is the Father, so the Lord Jesus Christ is the Elder Brother, and the Holy Spirit the Teacher, Comforter, and Sanctifier. But in this heavenly family there always have been, and ever will be, members differing from each other in age, knowledge, and stature, as, in a corresponding sense, there are these different members in an earthly family. Thus, first, there are "*babes*," as the Apostle Peter tells us: "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). Next, there are "little children," of whom we read in the Epistle of John: "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake" (1 John 2:12). There are also in this spiritual family "young men," who are grown up to some degree of Christian maturity, and according to John's declaration, "have overcome the wicked one." And, lastly, there are "fathers"; aged fathers, who have maintained a long course of conflict and temptation, and have become firm and established and rooted in the gospel of the grace of God. The mark that John gives of them is that "they have known Him that is from the beginning" (1 John 2:13). It is beautiful when we can see these members of the family of God united to each other in the bonds of sympathy, affection, and love. Literally and naturally there are few sights more revolting to the mind than the spectacle of a

divided, quarrelling family. And there are few sights upon earth more lovely than a family united in the bonds of mutual affection, and where each member seeks the interest and happiness of the whole. But if this be true naturally, how much more so spiritually! There is not, there cannot be, a more discordant sight—there is not, there cannot be, a thing more inconsistent with the precepts and practice of the Lord Jesus than a church of God rent and torn with divisions. It is an object for the saints of God to weep over, and to endeavour by all means in their power either to prevent or to remedy. And on the other hand, to see a family of God walking together in tender affection, striving not only to maintain the power and purity of the gospel, but to seek each other's spiritual welfare and interest, weeping with those that weep and rejoicing with those that rejoice, is a sight for angels to look at and admire.

In our text we read of certain members of this family, for it does not seem to comprehend all the children of God, who are described as journeying Zionward. Of them it is also said that they ask their way with their faces thitherward, the meaning evidently being that they have turned their backs upon the world, and have set their faces towards Zion with the hope and expectation of entering into it, and becoming citizens of it. They seem also represented as cheering one another along in their dangerous and difficult course by speaking to each other in words of tender affection: "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." This appears to be a consistent and Scriptural interpretation of our text. In looking, then, at these words, I shall with God's blessing endeavour to show—

I. What is meant by Zion.

II. The way to Zion.

III. What it is *to ask the way with our faces thitherward*.

IV. The sweet language of a believing heart when Zion's

battlements appear in sight: *"Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten."*

I. The word "Zion" occurs very frequently in the Old Testament, and therefore it will be desirable to obtain, if we can, a Scriptural view of what the blessed Spirit means by the word so frequently employed. To get at this, we must see what and where Zion was literally. For the literal meaning is always the foundation of the spiritual. Zion literally was a strong hill forming a part of the ancient Jerusalem. In fact it was the strongest and highest part of the whole of the city, being an almost inaccessible rock, and therefore it remained in the hands of the Jebusites many years after the children of Israel got possession of the lower city. In fact Zion never belonged to the children of Israel till the time of David. We read an account of its capture in 2 Sam. 5:6: "And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither." This was a taunting speech, its meaning being that the precipice of which the hill Zion formed a part was at once so high and so strongly fortified by nature and art that the blind and the lame whom they had set upon the battlements were strong enough to keep possession. This taunting speech incensed David, and made him issue the proclamation, "Whosoever getteth up to the gutter (or parapet) and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain" (5:8). Not to dwell longer upon this point, David succeeded in the attempt, and took the stronghold of Zion. Having thus got possession of that strong fortress, what did David do with it? He made it his own abode; as we read, "So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David." Zion, then, was not, as many have asserted, the spot on which the temple stood. That was situated in another part of the city, and was built on Mount Moriah.

In our views, then, of Zion, we must always bear in mind that it was the spot where David built his palace; where he reigned in power and splendour; whence he issued his laws; and where he

was enthroned as king of Judah and Israel. From those circumstances, Zion became in the Old Testament prophecies a standing emblem and representation of the Church of God in which Christ reigns and rules as Head and King. We therefore find the Apostle Paul thus speaking to the Hebrews: "But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," where he clearly considers Mount Zion to represent spiritually the Church of Christ as being the city of the living God. And is not this in strict accordance with the general tenor of divine truth? Spiritually viewed, where does Jesus reign? Where does He manifest Himself? Where does He keep His court? Where does He sway His sceptre? Where does He shine forth in His grace and glory? Is it not in His Church and people? For He dwells in their hearts as David in the literal Zion, and sways His sceptre in their consciences as David did literally in his palace. But as it is by the gospel that the Lord Jesus sways the hearts of His living people, Zion became also often employed as the prophetic and foreshadowed name for the gospel of Jesus Christ. As the literal David sat enthroned in Zion, and thence issued his laws, so the spiritual David sits as it were enthroned in the gospel; for it is in and by the gospel that His glory is made manifest. Now you will see why the Apostle Paul in the chapter quoted from the Epistle to the Hebrews draws a distinction between the law and the gospel: "For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words;" by all which expressions he points out the giving of the law upon Mount Sinai; but contrasting with it the gospel, he says, "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God." If you look at the passage, you will see how he enumerates certain blessings which only flow out of the gospel, such as the blood of sprinkling, and mentions specifically the general assembly and church of the firstborn. Jesus, then, as the Mediator of the new covenant, dwells enthroned in Zion. We may view, then, Zion in our text under two lights. 1. As representing the Church of the living God; and, 2. the everlasting gospel of the grace of God.

II. But we pass on to consider our second point, which was to examine the way to Zion. For the heavenly travellers in our text are represented as desirous to know this way. "They shall ask their way to Zion with their faces thitherward." The way to Zion is hidden from the eyes of all till God is pleased to make it known to them by spiritual revelation. It is as Job speaks, "There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen" (28:7). Thus the way to Zion is hidden from the fowls of the air, those unclean birds of the sky which may typify the ungodly, and is not seen by the piercing eye of the vulture, which may represent those who have clear views of doctrine, but are devoid of grace. Yet this way to Zion is laid down plainly and clearly enough in the Word of God. There is no difficulty or obscurity there. The darkness is not in the revelation of the way, but in our mind, the veil of unbelief over our hearts preventing us from seeing it. The Lord, however, in His own good time and way is pleased to open the eyes of His people to see this way, for it is His goodwill and pleasure that they should walk in it. Now one thing is very plain, that we must be out of the way before we can get into it; and it is equally evident that whilst we are in the world we are not in the way. Zion and the world are as much opposed to each other as heaven to hell. There is, there can be no communion between light and darkness, no partnership between Christ and Belial. And as Satan is the god of this world, whilst we are in it and not brought out of it, we are so far his servants and subjects. A man then *in the world* is not in the way to Zion.

2. But again; whilst we are wrapped up in a mere profession of religion, without having experienced any power in our souls of the truth of God, we are not in the way to Zion.

3. Nor whilst we are under the power of self-righteousness, immersed up to the neck in Pharisaism and legality, are we in the way to Zion. For Zion, as we have explained, represents the gospel, and that is as distinct from it as the two literal mounts, Sinai and Zion, were separate.

4. Nor again, until there is some conviction of sin produced by the operation of the Spirit of God in a man's conscience, can he be said to be on the way to Zion, for we care nothing about the gospel till the blessed Spirit convinces us of sin, and shows us our need of it. Thus when Peter's hearers were pricked in their heart, he immediately preached the gospel to them, and they gladly received his word. A man may think himself in the way to Zion, and yet upon this point much deceive himself. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12).

But having shown thus far what is not the way to Zion, let me endeavour to point out what is the way. We may lay it down, then, as a certain truth, that the way to Zion lies *through tribulation*, for it is "through much tribulation that we are to enter the kingdom." Tribulation therefore is pretty sure to begin with us when we begin to walk in the way to Zion. We cannot take many steps before we meet with a strait gate; and we may be well assured that this gate will be too strait for any person to get through as long as he is wrapped up in the cumbrous robe of his own righteousness. But besides the strait gate, there is also a narrow way which runs from the strait gate, and keeps narrow all its length; and this way is so hemmed in on every side by its close and confined boundaries that no person can pass through it who is not stripped to the skin of all his own strength, wisdom and goodness.

Again, hard abutting on the way to Zion lies that fiery mount, Mount Sinai, from which the law was proclaimed in thunder and lightning. The terrors of this mount urge the wayfaring pilgrim onward, for unless he knows something of the breadth, spirituality, curse, wrath, bondage and condemnation of the holy law of God, he will never turn his face from Mount Sinai unto Mount Zion. Hundreds and thousands are tarrying at the foot of Mount Sinai because that flaming mount is in their apprehension but an extinct volcano. But if that volcano were to cast forth its flaming fires, and again to burst out in thunder and lightning, they would be glad to escape from it, and flee to a city of refuge.



Had they seen the flames, heard the thunders, and viewed the molten lava streaming down its sides, how glad they would be to get away from under its frowning top.

But again, the way to Mount Zion is through *atonement blood*; for as Hart speaks, "Blood lines all the way." It is only through the blood of Jesus that we have access to God. As the High Priest, on the great day of atonement, could not enter into the most holy place except he carried atoning blood in his hand, so without the precious blood of Christ we cannot approach God acceptably in His courts below, nor shall have access into the glorious courts above.

Again, the way to Zion lies through Christ's obedience to the law in acting and suffering, in doing and dying, which constitutes our justifying righteousness. Nor can we be said to walk in Zion's way except as sprinkled with atoning blood and clothed in Christ's righteousness.

But the way to Mount Zion lies also *through temptation*. Nor are these temptations of a slight or passing nature. They are called in Scripture " manifold temptations," implying number and variety. They are therefore, for the most part, very powerful, and often very distressing. They cannot indeed be said to form a part of the way, but still they lie in the way, much in the same manner as mud and mire do not necessarily form the road, but so lie in the road that if we walk in it we must walk through them. So if we are walking Zionward we shall have our feet clogged by those temptations which lie in the road.

It is also a way of affliction and trial, for many are the afflictions of the righteous. These afflictions will be sometimes in providence and sometimes in grace. Many painful trials may be expected from various quarters, sometimes persecutions from without, and opposition of various kinds from within. I cannot now dwell upon the numerous afflictions of the Lord's people, as there is, for the most part, in them a great variety of circumstances, and they proceed from such various quarters; but from whatever source

they arise, or of whatever nature they be, they all produce suffering and distress, and constitute the afflictions of Zion. One thing, however, we must never lose sight of in pointing out the way to Zion, that the Lord is Himself emphatically the way, as He declares, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." He therefore must ever be looked to as the only way to God.

III. But we now come to our third point, which was to describe in what way the heaven-bound pilgrims "*ask their way to Zion with their faces thitherward.*" They are represented by this expression as having turned their back upon the world and the City of Destruction, which Bunyan speaks of in his "Pilgrim's Progress." This is indispensable, for, until the back is fairly turned upon the world, the face is not directed Zionward. When God takes a man in hand, He turns him, so to speak, right round, puts his back to the world, and his face to Mount Zion.

But, though their face is turned Zionward, they at present neither know it nor the road which leads into it. They are therefore said "to ask their way to Zion," the expression clearly implying not only their ignorance of the road, but their desire to find it and walk in it. But whence could this desire have arisen? It must have arisen from some discovery to their souls of what Mount Zion is. In other words, they must have seen and felt something of the beauty and blessedness of the gospel; it must have been in some way commended to their consciences; they must have had some such views of the Church of God and its high and glorious privileges as to make them long earnestly to partake of them. We read of the Lord making His people "willing in the day of His power," and the promise runs, "As soon as they hear of Me they shall obey Me." It is, therefore, the gracious movement of the blessed Spirit on their souls which has produced in them this willing mind to travel toward it, at every risk, and through every obstruction.

Here we seem to see the spirit of a true-born citizen, and to trace some of the genuine family features, some infallible tokens of

divine relationship, manifesting and proclaiming their participation of a heavenly birth. A sincere, heartfelt love to the gospel is certainly a mark of grace, for it shows that those who possess it have received the love of the truth. Professors of religion who have not felt the power of truth have none of this love toward it. Nay, they hate the gospel even more than the world does. Those, too, who are filled with a legal spirit, who have never known either law or gospel by a divine application, but are still wrapped up in their own righteousness, are so far from loving the gospel of the pure grace of God that they rather hate it with perfect hatred.

How differently does God deal with His children! To draw His family Zionward, He graciously at times lets down into their soul a taste of its sweetness, and gives them to see a beauty and blessedness in it, which touches their heart, and draws it forth in earnest desires to enjoy its blessings.

I wish to dwell markedly upon this point, because I consider it a very distinctive mark of a child of God. See how the gospel, when faithfully preached, works upon different individuals. Two persons may come to the same place of worship to hear the gospel. They may both be in a profession of religion, but the one shall be a nominal professor and the other under his profession may have divine life at work in his soul. Now he who has nothing but a profession will have his carnal mind stirred up to storm and rage against the freeness and fulness of gospel grace. The very blessedness of the gospel, and its suitability to the wants of a lost sinner, only serve to stir up the nest of vipers which previously lay hidden and coiled up in his carnal mind. But the other, who may not appear to know much for himself, at once feels a going out after and a clinging to what he hears, it being so commended to his conscience, and dropping with such a sweetness into his heart. Whence arises this difference in these two individuals? God has raised up in the latter a new heart and a new nature, which He has not given to the former; and it is this new man of grace, which though very weak and tender, and perhaps much buried and covered up from view, yet feeds upon what it hears of the

word of life, and cleaves to it with purpose of heart. Thus there is a separation between these two individuals. The one tarries still at Mount Sinai; and the other, having had a taste of the sweetness and blessedness of Zion's provisions, goes out after them with earnestness. The power and preciousness of the gospel being thus felt, it sets the face Zionward. Nor do these pilgrims ever turn their back on Zion afterwards. All they want is to get into it, that they may see the beauty of the King, sit under His shadow with great delight, and find His fruit sweet to their taste. Having once tasted the power and preciousness of the gospel, their desire is to have more and more of it, for everything else, compared with the gospel in its power and preciousness, is to them vapid and tasteless. I often think that our early days—what the Scripture calls, "the day of our espousals"—are our best days. It is much with spiritual love as with natural. People who have been married a number of years, though they may love each other as much as ever they did, and perhaps with a stronger degree of affection, yet their love has not in it the same ardour, warmth, and tenderness, as when they first came together. So in divine things, when a soul is first espoused to Jesus, in the days of its espousals there is a warmth of affection which it seems much to lose afterwards. It may have a more deep and solid love to Jesus; but it does not seem to possess that holy fervour and heavenly tenderness of affection which it enjoyed when the Lord was pleased first to manifest Himself. Now I do not mean to say that the soul enjoys this manifestation of Christ until it comes to Zion, but it often has sips and tastes beforehand; and it is these sips and tastes, with the blessed discoveries of the Lord Jesus Christ in the gospel, which set the face Zionward. At this period of the soul's experience, there is usually a great fixedness of determination whereby the face is set as a flint against all obstacles without or within. It now says, "What care I whether I am liked or hated, honoured or despised, rich or poor? O let me be anything, rather than miss the prize! What need I care if I am right at last, and win Christ as my eternal all?" Under such feelings we can make sacrifices, care neither for friend or foe, be deterred by no opposition, and count nothing worth living or dying for but the precious gospel, and to enjoy a sweet

manifestation of the power and preciousness of that gospel to our souls.

Now this earnest bent of the soul is setting the face Zionward. It is sweet to see how persons under these impressions ask the way thitherward. They feel their ignorance, and this makes them ask the way, for they are afraid of taking a wrong path. But this they do in a variety of ways. One way is to inquire of those who have travelled the road. Suppose, for instance, you were going to a strange country, say Australia, and there was in the town where you live a person who had been there many years, and had lately returned home. Would you not want to see that person that you might get from him some correct information about the land whither you were going? So in divine things. If you are one of those who are asking their way to Zion with their faces thitherward, you will want to get into the company of those who have been to Zion, that they may tell you something of the beauties and glories of Zion, and the difficulties and troubles they experienced in getting there. You are thus brought to value the experience and exercise of the children of God. You can no longer despise and ridicule them as professors do, but feel a cleaving of soul to them, because you see in them the grace of God. If you have been taught highly to prize the grace of God, instead of despising the children of God, let their station in life be ever so mean, you will be glad to talk with them, and will often feel to get more instruction and real soul profit from their conversation than from books or learned divines. This, then, is one way of asking your way to Zion with your face thitherward.

2. But suppose if you were taking a journey to a strange place you had heard there was a map or a chart of the road published, would you not be very glad to get hold of one that you might look over it, and by it trace your path? When our fleets sail into the Black or Baltic seas, they always take their charts with them. These are what the pilot has continually to pore over, that he may not run upon the rocks, but may steer the ship in the right channel. God has given us a chart of the way to heaven. This chart is the Bible, the Scriptures of truth. When God's inquiring

family, then, are asking their way to Zion with their faces thitherward, what students of the Bible they generally are! what earnest, what indefatigable Scripture readers they are! How they search God's Word as for hidden treasure, and what good it does them when it comes home with any sweet, encouraging power to their souls to assure them that they are in the way! We never read the Scriptures so much as when the Lord is first pleased to bless our souls. I have gone sometimes and lain on the warm sea-beach, within sound of the waves, and almost learnt whole chapters by heart, and read them with a savour that I wish I could feel now. O how hard I find it to read the Bible now as I used to read it then! I tasted such a blessedness and sweetness in the Word of God at that time that I wanted no other company. And this, I believe, is generally true in those who ask their way to Zion with their faces thitherward. How diligently and earnestly they read the Scriptures! What light, life, power, and blessedness they see in the Word of God, and as they thus sip a little of the honey out of the rock, how it makes them come to the Word of God again and again. When the Lord is thus pleased to cast a light on the Scriptures, and open up its precious truths to the heart, it seems to bring them into a new world, to give them a new bible to read, a new Jesus to look unto, and a new Spirit to teach and lead them into all truth.

3. But suppose there was a guide appointed to show the travellers the way, would they not wish to put themselves under his guidance, and listen to his directions? The Lord has provided such guides for His people. These are His servants, whom He instructs into His mysteries, and sends out as leaders and guides for inquiring pilgrims. These are the teachers promised, who are not to be hidden in a corner, but whom their eyes are to see. When, then, the Lord brings them into the way, He opens their eyes to see who are servants of His, whom He has instructed in the gospel, and whose word He blesses to the souls of His people. They therefore ask the way to Zion by sitting under the ministry of those who are commended to their consciences as taught and sent of God. I cannot speak upon this point of personal experience, for I never was privileged to sit under the gospel, nor

did I know there was such a thing as experience, or that there were such persons as experimental ministers, until I had some experience in my own heart, and preached experience myself. But the Lord in mercy usually takes care to place His people under a gospel ministry, and gives them His servants to be their guides and instructors. This is a great privilege, but these guides are to be followed only so far as they follow Christ and His Word, and not a single step farther.

4. But, best of all, there is an *infallible Guide*. Your earthly guide might through ignorance mislead you, for earthly guides are at best but fallible men. But there is a heavenly Guide who never can mislead, a Pilot who never makes a mistake, or steers the ship into a wrong channel. Those therefore who ask their way to Zion will be looking up toward that infallible Pilot, that holy and heavenly Guide, who is to lead them into all truth. But how do they ask their way to Zion? Must it not ever be by prayer, supplication, and entreaty, with cries, sighs, groans, and tears? This is the Lord's description of them: "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them."

IV. But we must pass on to consider the language which they make use of as they journey Zionward. We at first sight might ignorantly think that this was the language of free-will, but, if we thought so, it would be from a misapprehension of their meaning. There often occurs in Scripture a language which to ignorant people sounds like free-will, and which Arminian ministers bring forward as such. But to a discerning heart and a God-taught soul, it is on the contrary the sweetest language of free grace. Look, then, at these words, "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord." To my mind, these words, instead of breathing the language of free-will, are full of sweetness and blessedness—the very cream and marrow of free grace. I will show you how.

We read, then, that the Lord works in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure. When, then, He works in us to will, we have a will, what I may call a free-grace will; and when the Lord works in us to do, we have not only a will, but also a power to do—what I

may call a free-grace power. Thus it is free grace in its blessed influences and unctuous power in the heart which makes these Zion-bound pilgrims say, "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant." Their desire is after union with the Lord. This implies the coming together of two parties. If, then, the Lord stretch forth His hand, and I take hold of that outstretched hand, is it my free-will in the usual sense of the word which does it? Look at this idea naturally. Here is a young couple going to be married. When they take each other's hand for life, is not that on both sides a spontaneous act of love? Is there compulsion or constraint on either side? So in grace. If the Lord put forth His hand in a way of love, drawing thereby the heart unto Himself, and the soul in tender affection takes hold of that hand, is there in that act any particle of creature strength, or any act of the natural mind? So when these Zion-bound pilgrims say, "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord," it implies that the Lord is drawing them to Himself. They are not only longing after, but enjoying a measure of spiritual union with Him, and it is as if they said, "O how blessed the Lord is! How we do love the Lord Jesus! How we cleave to Him, to His precious blood and justifying righteousness! O come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord, that we may enjoy blessed union and communion with Him!" Now, can you find free-will in these desires and expressions of a believing heart? So far from that, I only find in it the sweetest breathings of free-grace. But observe how the text is worded. "Come, let us join ourselves." How shall we explain this language of the pilgrims to one another? May we not explain it thus. Suppose you were journeying onward with a gospel traveller, and the Lord was blessing your soul with some sweet manifestation of His love and mercy, and your friend was rather hanging behind through doubts and fears, might you not safely encourage that limping traveller by saying, "Come, let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant"? You believe that he loves the truth, and desires to experience a sense of the Lord's goodness and mercy. May you not, then, encourage him to believe from what you are feeling in your own soul? Here is a soul longing to be one with Jesus, to be married to and enjoy sweet union and communion with Him, and that in a perpetual covenant, so as to be His for ever and ever.



Why should not that soul be encouraged to give itself unto the Lord? And if there be those here who are desiring, but have not yet attained to this, may I not say to them, Has your soul never earnestly longed with intense desires after union with Christ, as though nothing else could satisfy you? Now when, perhaps, upon your bed, your heart was going forth after union with the Lord Jesus, you were saying inwardly, using the language of these pilgrims, "O let me join myself to the Lord in a perpetual covenant! Let Him be mine and me be His for ever, and let there never be any separation between Him and me. May I enjoy His blessed presence whilst here on earth, and afterwards see Him as He is in heaven." Where do we find free-will speaking of a perpetual covenant? Where does free-will even name a covenant at all? Why, a perpetual, an indissoluble, an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, is its very death-stroke.

Now the grand point is whether you can find in your heart any of these marks and testimonies of being a Zion-bound pilgrim. Has your heart ever longed after Zion, and its beauty and blessedness ever been commended to your conscience, and let down with any measure of sweetness into your soul? Has this brought you out of the world, and turned your face Zionwards, though it has cost you many sacrifices of a worldly nature, and you have been even obliged to turn your back on your dearest friends? Here, then, is a mark that the Lord has been dealing with your conscience. And can you see how you have been perhaps for years asking the way Zionwards by prayer and supplication, by reading the Scriptures, hearing the truth preached, and pressing forward as one desirous to know, believe in, and love the Lord Jesus Christ, being united unto Him in the bonds of this everlasting covenant not to be forgotten? Where we find these marks, we have a Scriptural evidence of a divine work on the soul. And those that thus set their faces Zionward will surely reach Zion. Not only shall they enjoy the power and preciousness of a free gospel here, but most certainly they shall hereafter appear before God in Zion.

## Zion's Waymarks

Preached at North Street chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, Aug. 18, 1861

"Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities. How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man." Jer. 31:21, 22.

The Scripture in some respects much resembles the eyes of a well-painted portrait. Have you not observed how, in a picture of this kind, the eyes always seem to be looking upon you, and still to follow you in whatever direction you may go? Whether you stand before it or at either side of it, even if you retreat into some distant corner, whatever position you take in the room where it is, the eyes of the picture follow you still at every change. So the Scripture looks with its searching eyes upon and into your very heart, nor can you get into any spot or place where these eyes will not follow you; for as it is the word of the living God, it looks out as with his eyes upon the thoughts, words, and actions of men. But the eyes of the best painted portrait are not living eyes. They are representations of the living eye, but in themselves, however beautifully painted, they are at best but lifeless imitations of nature's piercing glance. But assume such a case as this—impossible, I admit, but allowable as an illustration—that by some supernatural power and influence these eyes should all at once be animated into life; that living instead of dead eyes looked from the picture upon you as you stood before it. How different then would be the feelings of your mind! What a revulsion would at once take place in your thoughts! The dead eyes of the best painted portrait exercise no power or influence over your actions. You know it is but painted canvass as inanimate as the wall on which it hangs; but the living eyes of the living portrait following your every movement would at once control every action as witnessing them as much as if the person himself were actually

inspecting them. Now this is just the difference between the way in which Scripture looks upon those who are still in their unregeneracy, and those who are made alive unto God by regenerating grace. The Scripture looks out as with the eyes of God upon all men, for it condemns their actions; but all men do not tremble before its eyes. But let there be the communication of divine life to the soul, then those eyes of God in the word are seen not only to look upon the actions, but a power is felt in them whereby they penetrate into the deepest and darkest recesses of the heart itself.

Take another idea as an illustration, which may give you perhaps a little inlet into the authority of God's word as spoken with power to the heart. Assume that in this congregation there were now several foreigners present—French, Dutch, or German strangers, none of whom understood a word of the English language. Whatever I might speak would then have no power or influence upon their hearts. If I preached law or gospel, if I held out the curse or the blessing, it would equally fail to produce any effect upon their consciences, for this simple reason, that they would not understand a single word of what I spoke. But assume that a miracle could be suddenly wrought as on the day of Pentecost, when every man heard the apostles speak in his own language wherein each was born. Could such a miracle be at this moment wrought, then what before was a mere crowd of unmeaning sounds would fall upon their ears as intelligible words.

Such is the difference between life and death; such is the distinction between the word of God looking out with living eyes as the Lord looked through the pillar of fire and of the cloud unto the host of the Egyptians, and its looking upon men with dead eyes; such is the difference between the word of God speaking with power and authority, life and spirit, to men's consciences as quickened into life by his grace, and its falling upon their ears, as it falls upon most men's hearts, as an unintelligible sound.

Now apply these figures to the passage before us. God speaks in it to the Church, and says to her with a voice of authority and

power, "Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities." This direction from his lips being found in the word of truth, looks out as it were with the eyes of God upon his living family as in a certain state; this word of admonition, as being uttered by the mouth of the Lord to his bride, speaks with authority to those who, as united to him in wedding ties, have ears to listen to the voice of their Husband and Head. But if you have no divine life, no spiritual or experimental knowledge of Christ in your heart, these eyes have no life for you, and look upon you like the eyes of a dead portrait, which you see to look at you, yet which do not search the very depths of your soul. The words, though uttered by the lips of God, fall likewise as so many unmeaning sounds upon your ears, and do not enter into your heart as though they were being uttered by the glorious Majesty of heaven personally to you.

But hoping there are children of the living God here present to whom these words may speak as with the Lord's own mouth, I shall, with his blessing, endeavour from them,

I.—*First*, to show *the character of the person* who is here addressed, and, in explaining thus, I shall be guided by the special title which the Lord gives her, "*O, virgin of Israel.*"

II.—*Secondly*, to open up the *expostulation* which God addresses to her, and *the name* by which he calls her: "*How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter?*"

II.—*Thirdly*, to enforce the *directions* which God gives to this backsliding daughter: "*Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities.*"

IV.—*Fourthly*, to point out *the foundation* on which the whole of these gracious admonitions are based: "*The Lord hath created*

*new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man."*

I.—Observe, then, with me, first, *the character of the person addressed*, and let us see if we can gather up, from the word of truth and from the experience of God's saints, who and what this character is. It is a female personage, and one evidently of great mark and likelihood. As, however, she is called "the virgin of *Israel*," and Israel is a typical name in the Scripture for the family of God, there can be no doubt that the Church is here addressed under that title. But why should the Church be called "*the virgin of Israel*," not only here but in many other places of Scripture? as, for instance, in this very chapter, "Again I will build thee and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel" (v. 4); and again, where the Lord reproving her for her idolatries, says, "The virgin of Israel hath done a very horrible thing." (Jer. 18:13.) In a similar way the Church is called sometimes "the virgin, the daughter of Zion," as where the Lord says of her concerning Sennacherib, "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee and laughed thee to scorn" (Isai. 37:22); and sometimes "the virgin, the daughter of Judah." "The Lord hath trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah, as in a wine press." (Lam. 1:15.) As it is clear from these passages that by the expression, "the virgin of Israel" is meant the Church of Christ, the virgin spouse of the Lord the Lamb, it will be desirable to explain why the term is used; and, in doing so, I think we may give it a twofold interpretation.

1. First, we may view it as *descriptive of the character of the Church of Christ antecedently to the fall*, and thus as expressing, in determinate language, what she was in the mind of God, as viewed in the Son of his love, before she fell in the Adam transgression. Nothing can be more plain from the word of truth than that the Church had a being in the mind of God before the foundation of the world, and that before time itself had birth she was given to the Son of God to be eternally his. Thus the apostle speaks of the saints at Ephesus as being "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4); and our blessed Lord, in his intercessory prayer to his heavenly Father, says, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of

the world; thine they were and thou gavest them me;" and again, "I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine; and all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them." (John 17:6, 9, 10.) Thus we see that the Church had a being in the mind of God before earth was, and as such was chosen in Christ and given to Christ. Now the question arises whether the Church was thus chosen in Christ and given to him fallen or unfallen. Many good men have believed that she was chosen as fallen; but such is not my faith. I believe that she was chosen unfallen, in all her primitive beauty and purity, as viewed by the Father in all the glorious perfections of his dear Son. We can hardly think that our blessed Lord espoused the Church to himself in all her degradation, in all her guilt, filth, and ruin. As such she would hardly seem a fitting spouse for the Son of God; and I think that we have a striking representation of this in the direction given to the high priest under the law to take a fitting wife for him in his high office. "He shall take a wife in her virginity; a widow, or a divorced woman, or profane, or a harlot, these shall he not take; but he shall take a virgin of his own people to wife." (Lev. 21:13, 14.) Now as the high priest under the law was a type of the great High Priest over the house of God, we may well see in that direction and in that prohibition an intimation that the Church was espoused to the Son of God in all her virgin purity, as she stood up in the mind of Jehovah in all her native innocency. Not that she ever stood separate from the Son of God, for God loved his people from eternity only in Him, and that with the same love, as the Lord himself declared, "And hast loved them as thou hast loved me." (John 17:23.) She was therefore "blessed in him with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places," and "accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:3, 6); and thus, as his chosen and accepted bride, the Church was presented to our blessed Lord in all that perfection, beauty, and glory wherewith she will shine for ever in union with Him. It is true that she fell, miserably fell, in the Adam fall. It is true that she sank, awfully sank, out of that state of purity in which she was viewed by the eye of Jehovah and wherein she was received into the arms of Jesus as his espoused bride. But because she fell from her state of native innocency, she did not fall out of his heart or arms. We

therefore read, "Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it." Does not this expression show that he loved the Church *before* he gave himself for it? But when did he love the Church? Before or after the fall? Surely before the fall, for did not the Lord tell his heavenly Father that he loved his people as he loved him, and did he not say, "Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world?" (John 17:24.) But further. Was not the union of Eve with Adam in Paradise a type of the union of the Church with Christ? for as Adam was a type of Christ when he was made a living soul (1 Cor. 15:45), so Eve was a type of the Church; and as Eve was brought and given to Adam in Paradise before the fall in all her native innocence, in all her virgin purity, so was the Church presented and given to Christ before she was contaminated by the Adam transgression. It was *because* he loved her, loved her before the fall, that he gave himself for her after she had become ruined by the fall. Thus though she awfully fell in the Adam transgression, and became defiled from head to foot through the sin in which she was then and there entangled, it did not break the eternal bond of union, did not snap the wedding tie with which she had been already espoused to the Son of God. But now came in that wondrous scheme of eternal mercy and superabounding grace whereby she was to be washed from all her sins in the atoning blood of the Lord the Lamb. Thus redemption came in as part of God's eternal purpose to glorify his dear Son; for the Church being sunk into that awful state of sin and transgression through the Adam fall from which she could not redeem herself, there lay a necessity upon the Son of God that he must die for her, so that he might wash out all her sins in the fountain of his blood and present her without spot or wrinkle or any such thing before the eyes of infinite Purity. Being so deeply sunk in sin, how could she stand up in the courts of heavenly bliss except as washed in his blood and clothed in his righteousness? Thus she has a perfection in the Son of God not only antecedently to the fall but subsequently to it, as washed in his blood, clothed in his righteousness, sanctified by his Spirit, and conformed to his image.

2. But there is another sense in which the Lord may be

considered as addressing the Church here by the name of "the virgin of Israel," which I may term an experimental sense. In this sense I understand it as referring to *the experience of the first love of a virgin soul*. We must ever bear in mind that the word of truth not only lays down doctrine in its clearest form, but blends it continually with the experience of the saints, and thus truth wears a twofold aspect—truth in the mind of God, truth in the heart of a believer. We find the Lord speaking to the church of Ephesus, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." (Rev. 2:4.) This "first love" we may call virgin love, as being the first pure love of the soul before it is contaminated by the sins of a backsliding heart, and thus the Lord says, "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says the Lord; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." (Jer. 2:2.) What was the state of Israel then? "Israel was *holiness* unto the Lord." Such is the Lord's own testimony to those gracious feelings, holy affections, and pure desires which are ever found in the soul under the first manifestations of his dying love. The heart then is wholly his. Then the spouse can say, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine. Because of the savour of thy good ointments, thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee." (Song 1:2, 3.) That in this sense the Church may be called the "Virgin of Israel" is plain from Paul's words, "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2): that is, free from all the contaminating pollutions of evil and error. It is in grace as in nature. No natural love is so pure, so strong its virgin love, when the youthful heart expands itself like an opening rose, or like a climbing plant embraces with its tender yet firm tendrils the first object of its fond affection. So in grace. When the Lord is pleased for the first time to manifest himself after a season of soul trouble, of great guilt of conscience, of many doubts, fears, painful exercises, and distressing sensations under an apprehension of the wrath of God, he wins every affection of the heart, and in discovering himself as the King in his beauty, makes



captive and takes possession of our first, our virgin love. No sooner does he manifest himself we give him our heart, for he is worthy of it, and we love his Person and work, love, blood, and grace, than we **[love?]** him with a pure heart fervently. This is the day of our espousals, when we go after the Lord in the wilderness, leaving the world, and abandoning everything in it for his sake. How little we care at that time for all its pleasures or all its profits, and how little we court its smiles or fear its frowns! Now at that time there is no room for the entrance of any other love. The love of Christ which passeth knowledge takes and keeps full possession of the soul, and all other lovers are shut out. As in strong natural love, so in spiritual love, there can be but one object, and that one object kills the heart to everything and every person else.

But, alas, this pure virgin love does not abide very long in its power and purity. We carry in our bosom a vile nature; a backsliding, wandering, transgressing heart. We are surrounded also by innumerable snares, gins, and traps laid for our feet by a most unwearied adversary. There is in our carnal mind a dreadful propensity to become entangled in them; and as these get possession of the thoughts and affections, we insensibly wander from the Lord and leave our first love. I may perhaps illustrate this insensible wandering of affection by a case in nature, unhappily too common. Two young people are fondly attached to each other; they never have loved any other, and their love, therefore, is of the strongest, warmest, and most unbroken character. But through some unexpected circumstances, the man is compelled to go to a foreign land. Employment is so scarce, or trade and business so bad, that he can scarcely earn a living for himself in his own country, much less keep a wife, and therefore he feels compelled to emigrate, to see if he can better his condition in Australia, in the expectation that the woman whom he loves may eventually join him there or he return to her. They part with many lamentations, tears, and protestations of mutual fidelity, and for a time keep their vows with all strictness. But time rolls on; by slow degrees the affections grow cool on one or both sides, and the consequence is that their vows are forgotten,

their protestations vanish into thin air, and eventually other lovers come in and occupy the almost vacant heart. He marries another woman, she marries another man, and they see each other no more. I mention this not unusual occurrence merely as an illustration, for we well know that there is no such final separation between the Lord and the soul that believes in him, but to show what takes place sometimes in the heart of a child of God in the gradual declension of his spiritual affections. When he is espoused to the Lord in the first manifestations of his love and grace, Jesus takes full possession of his heart; there is no room then for any other lover, and the soul binds itself with many protestations of continued faithfulness to this blessed bridegroom, to this gracious Head and Husband, who by a discovery of his beauty and blessedness, grace and glory, has won to himself every affection of the virgin heart. If ever we hate sin it is then; if ever we love holiness it is then; if ever we are spiritually minded, which is life and peace, it is then. I hope I can truly say, that when the Lord discovered himself to my soul in his person and work, such were the feelings and affections of my heart. But sooner or later, for good and wise reasons, the Lord withdraws himself. He is like the householder spoken of in the parable, who is said to go "into a far country." (Matt. 22:33.) This withdrawing of the Lord the bride speaks of where she says, "I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake; I sought him but I could not find him; I called him but he gave me no answer." (Song Sol. 5:6.) This withdrawing of the Lord's power and presence made David so often cry, "O Lord, be not far from me; forsake me not, O Lord." (Psalm 35:22; 38:21.) When he thus withdraws himself the soul may mourn over his absence and beg him to return; but he does not, at least for a time, grant this request. But as his absence is less sensibly felt, room is soon made in the affections for other lovers. The various objects of time and sense, the allurements of the world, the lusting after evil things, with many carking cares, all gather up a power which was sensibly weakened and apparently destroyed when the Lord first made himself precious. The heart must have an object; the affections must be engaged, and therefore if faith, hope, and love are not in

strong and sensible operation upon the Lord, there is as it were naturally and necessarily a leaving, a losing of the first love; a wandering in affection from Jesus; a straying after other lovers and other objects to amuse and entertain the mind. But this brings us to our second point, which is to open up

II.—The keen yet tender *expostulation* which the Lord addresses to the church, and the *name* by which he calls her, "*How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter?*" She is still a daughter of God and addressed by him as such, though a backsliding one. She has not lost her title to be one of the family of God, though from the power of temptation, the strength of sin, and the subtlety of Satan, she has wandered from her first love, and become a backsliding daughter. The Lord, therefore, whose eyes have ever been resting upon her to take notice of all her ways, meets her as a wanderer from his love, reproves her as having departed from him, and yet tenderly and affectionately asks her, how long she means to go about, roving and straying from her rightful head and husband. It is as if he asked her why she would not return, for his arms and heart were ready to receive her, and he was grieved that she should treat him so unkindly as to forget all his love and all her own vows and protestations, and leave him for other lovers. Now if you know anything experimentally of having loved the Lord with a pure heart fervently, of being espoused to him in days past so as to give him all your affections; and yet, through the power of temptation, the strength of sin, the weakness of the flesh, and the subtlety of Satan, have left your first love and have backslidden, I do not mean openly, but secretly, from the power of that love once enjoyed; you will see and feel how aptly the Lord addresses to you these words of *expostulation*, mingled with encouragement. The earlier chapters of Jeremiah abound in such reproofs for departing from the Lord, and yet all are mingled with the most gracious invitations to return. Thus he says "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." (Jer. 2:13.) And again: "What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and

have walked after vanity, and are become vain?" (Jer. 2:5.) So also: "And now what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?" (Jer. 2:18.) Thus, we see how earnestly and yet how tenderly the Lord remonstrates with his people for departing from him, "the fountain of living waters, and hewing out to themselves cisterns broken cisterns that can hold no water." After all he had done for them in his providence and in his grace, might he not justly ask them what they had to do in the way of Egypt to drink the waters of Sihor, that is, the Nile, or what had they to do in the way of Assyria, to drink of the waters of the river Euphrates? Could these turbid, could these foreign streams quench their thirst, and to get at them, must they not leave the waters of Shiloah that go softly? (Isai. 8:6.) What contempt is poured upon the past goodness and mercy of the Lord, when happiness is sought out of him, who is the only true Fountain of delight, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore!

But all this search after happiness in created objects proves useless and vain. Therefore the Lord says "Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way" (Jer. 2:36); or as in the words of the text, "How long wilt thou *go about*, O thou backsliding daughter?" There is a going about; or as the word here means, a roving and wandering with restless desires, and yet never obtaining rest or peace. But how aptly this expression represents the way in which the backsliding daughter, when she has left her first love, goes about from object to object, to obtain something to satisfy her restless mind.

1. There is a going about, for instance, *to set up a fleshly holiness*. Those who have been rightly led of God, who have been chastened by him, and taught out of his law, so as to know its curse and bondage, do not usually afterwards go about to set up their own righteousness as before. They do not in this point resemble those of whom the Apostle speaks, "that they being ignorant of God's righteousness, go about to establish their own righteousness." (Rom. 10:3.) They have been driven out of this

false refuge; but they still, as I have said, often go about to set up a fleshly holiness, by which I mean a holiness distinct from that which flows out of the communications of the Lord's Spirit and grace, power, and presence. They are divorced, in a sense, from the law of Moses, by knowing something of its curse and bondage, or they could never have been married to Christ; but from the legality of their self-righteous heart, they have some idea that there is a holiness in the creature which can be obtained by their own diligent exertions. Thus, when they have lost the presence and power of the Lord, they often seek to regain it by an unceasing round of duties, as if these would win him back, or as if they could walk in Christ in any other way but as they first received him as in themselves without help or hope. Now all these attempts to set up a fleshly holiness distinct from that produced by the power and presence of the Lord are a going about, and a real departure in heart from him; for there is no holiness in the absence of Jesus; there is no spirituality of mind, no gracious affections, no delight in knowing his will and doing it where he is not felt in his power and in his love. We may set up for ourselves a fleshly holiness, prescribe for our daily walk a round of self-imposed duties, and please ourselves with a vain imagination of our religious superiority to others; but all these thoughts and views are in reality the mere dregs of self-righteousness, for there is, there can be no real holiness of heart, no real sanctification of spirit except in the enjoyment of the Lord's manifested presence and the shedding abroad of his love. Is not Jesus "of God made unto us sanctification?" In his favour is there not life? In his presence is there not power? In union with him is there not fruit? In communion with him is there not a fellowship with his Spirit, for "he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit?" (1. Cor. 6:17.) Thus all this going about in the pursuit of fleshly holiness will end where it began—in vanity and vexation of spirit. He would therefore remonstrate with his backsliding daughter, "How long wilt thou go about to set up this fancied holiness of thine? Art thou not comely in my comeliness which I have put upon thee (Ezek. 16:14); perfect in my perfections and glorious as shining forth in the beauty of holiness which thou hast from union and communion with thy Head and Husband? All

holiness, except that produced by my Spirit and grace, is deception at the best. There is a worm at the root. It may seem, like Jonah's gourd, to shelter thee awhile, but it will fade, wither, and die under the first hot beams of the sun of temptation." So we have found it. The assaults of Satan, the workings of deep and desperate corruption, the boilings up of rebellion, fretfulness, unbelief, infidelity, and a thousand other evils soon dried up this gourd that we were once so highly pleased with, and we found its root to be in the dust.

2. But take the words in another sense. There is a going about of the carnal mind, in the case of the backsliding daughter, a "gadding about," as Scripture emphatically calls it, *to gather up pleasure and delight from earthly objects*. How many paradises have you constructed in your ever-teeming fancy! How many lofty castles have you built in the air! How many objects has a fond and wandering imagination painted and is perhaps still painting before your eyes, from which you hoped to gather up something to amuse or entertain your carnal mind! What schemes of pleasure or profit, what speculations in thought or purse, what visions of happiness and comfort, what a swimming in a sea of fancied delight in wife or child, husband or home, house and independence, have been floating before your eyes like evening clouds all tinted with rays of purple and gold! But night came on, and where were they? Yet whilst so fondly and madly doing this, there was not merely a departing from the living God, but a hewing out of cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water; a gadding about to drink of the waters of Sihor or of the river of Assyria; for instead of being content with happiness in the Lord, there was a longing in your vain mind for some created object to make you happy, a stretching forth of your hands to embrace an earthly lover, a seeking of pleasure in some image created by your carnal heart as a source of delight, distinct from the manifested presence of the Lord.

3. But look at the words as descriptive of another wandering from the Lord. What a going about is often too painfully visible in some who we hope fear God, *to enable themselves to rise in the world*.

What ambition to get on in life fires the minds of most; and some of the people of God are not free from this unholy fire. If the Lord, too, seem in some way to smile in providence, how it feeds this unholy flame. Have you never been caught in the snare; and did you not sensibly feel to rise in pride as the things of time and sense rose in your estimation, and as they came more closely within your grasp? If your business increase, if you are making money, if you are getting on prosperously in worldly circumstances, how this accession of means to gratify it secretly feeds the pride of your heart, and what a train it lays in your mind for a succession of earthly objects, whereby to please and entertain your carnal senses! How this to you new prosperity seems to push you out of the circumstances in which God originally placed you! You might have moved once in a humble sphere, were born perhaps in the lap of poverty and struggled in youth with many difficulties. But now you seem to be climbing up the ladder of life—from being a servant that you have become a master; from being at everybody's beck and call, you have now those whom you can send where you please. As these things then work in your mind, pleasing and gratifying it, how pride works with them, and how instead of seeking your happiness in the love of God, and deriving all your pleasure from that pure stream of holy and heavenly delight, there is an indulging in those objects which merely feed the carnal mind in its enmity against God and godliness. Drawn aside more and more by these things, you are "going about" bewildered as regards any delight in heavenly blessings; and having lost sight of the sweet views you once had of the Lord, and being deprived of the enjoyment of his presence, you are almost now content to feed on the dust. Or take the other side of the question; suppose that the Lord should not suffer you to rise in the world as you could wish, for indeed there are very few of the Lord's people who do so rise; say that you are sinking instead of rising; that your farm, or shop, or business, instead of becoming more flourishing, gets more and more drooping. What then? Will those reverses carry your affections upwards? May you not be still a backsliding daughter? Yes; you may equally be "going about" full of carking cares, bowed down by a load of worldly troubles that seem to gnaw your very vitals,

and sunk into such despondency as to the future as almost to forget there is a God of providence, or how he has appeared for your help and relief in times past. Thus there is danger in riches, and danger in poverty; a snare in rising, a snare in sinking. There are temptations when business increases, and there are temptations when business diminishes; a neglect of God when providence smiles, and a forgetfulness of God when providence frowns. "They that will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." (1 Tim. 6:9.) But poverty has its snares too, for it opens a door for despondency, fretfulness, unbelief, and the sorrow of the world which worketh death.

4. But apart from these peculiar temptations, what *a variety of objects* the carnal mind can entertain itself with when once the soul has left its first love! How each person has his favourite pursuit, his peculiar besetment; and how as this becomes an idol, which it often will do in the absence of the Lord, it will gradually occupy the mind and insensibly steal away the affections. From this heart-idolatry arises a "going about" of the backsliding daughter to entertain herself with her earthly lovers. Now the Lord sees all this, and sees too into what a state of confusion and bewilderment his backsliding daughter gradually gets, when losing sight of him, she goes after her idols. When her affections were heavenly and her mind engaged on divine realities, she was walking in the strait and narrow path; her eyes were looking right on and her eyelids straight before her. (Prov. 4:25.) But leaving her first love, and her eyes looking off the Lord, she has got entangled in some snares of Satan; and the consequence is that she has lost sight of the path, is wandering in a wilderness where she cannot make straight paths for her feet, and is become so bewildered that she scarcely knows where she is, who she is, or what she is. She is like a person lost upon a wild moor, or out of the beaten track in a dreary desert, who the further he goes the more bewildered he becomes, and the more he tries the more difficult he finds it to recover the path. Now does not this exactly describe the case and state of some of you here? You cannot altogether give up the belief that God has done something in



times past for your soul; you cannot abandon the hope that it was he who began the work, and gave you some testimony of your interest in the love and blood of the Lamb. It may have been long ago; but it was a time never to be forgotten, when the Lord first broke in upon your soul with healing in his wings, and gave you a testimony that indeed he had bought you with his redeeming blood. Oh, how you loved him then and walked with him in sweet communion! But where have you been since, and where are you now? How do you spend the greater part of your time, and what for the most part are the daily exercises of your mind? Perhaps, feeling little else but a wandering heart, ever departing from the Lord, ever hewing out broken cisterns; ever gadding about, first down to Egypt, then up to Assyria; trying if this pursuit can give you any pleasure, or if you can gather up any profit or amusement or interest from this object. Is not this sad work for a living soul? Is not this a miserable declension from the right ways of the Lord? and does not conscience in your bosom often proclaim it is so, filling you with grief and compunction, and making you cry, "Oh that I were as in months past, as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle?" (Job 29:2, 4.) But like a person who has wandered out of the road, you have gone every way but the right, and now scarcely know where you are or what you are, but often fear lest, like the man that wandereth out of the way of understanding, you should be found at last in the congregation of the dead. (Prov. 21:16.)

Now what I would fain impress upon your mind is that you should see how God looks out upon you in your present state from the eyes of the text, and how his voice speaks to you when he says in it, "How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter?" Are you not tired yet? What will be the end of all your wanderings? Will you still persevere in this wretched course? Will this make a happy death-bed for you? Will this roving, wandering desire after earthly good, put down into your pillow when the cold sweats of death stand upon your forehead? Will these schemes and speculations give you peace and ease at the last? You who have been speculating morning, noon, and night, who have been

striving after gain or seeking after pleasure, and thus neglected the throne of grace and the footstool of mercy, to whom the Bible has been a sealed book; who have long been strangers to union and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ, and who are sunk into coldness and apathy, so as to know little either of spiritual joy and sorrow; what have you procured to yourselves by all the wandering desires, restless ambition, and eager speculations of your vain mind? What but present death and future sorrow? For if you are a child of God, you must be brought out of your present state, and it may be by terrible things in righteousness, or as the Lord speaks by the mouth of the prophet, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts." (Jer. 2:19.)

Now when you begin to hear the reproofs of God in your conscience, and feel that it is an evil thing and bitter to have forsaken the Lord, when you mourn and sigh over your departings from him, and would gladly return, but scarcely know how, would willingly find your way back, but it seems too obscured to discover: then the eyes of the text look out upon you with favourable aspect, and the words that it speaks are words of encouragement to your soul; which brings me to my third point, viz.—

III.—*The directions* which the Lord gives to his backsliding daughter, "*Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities.*"

The Lord here assumes that his backsliding daughter, but still the virgin of Israel, has lost her way, but would fain find it; would return to him, but knows not how to get back into the road. If, therefore, you do not feel that you have lost your way, or have no desire to return to the Lord, these words are not spoken to you. But if you feel that you have indeed lost your way and would gladly find it again, that you might come back to your first love,

as saying with the wife spoken of by Hosea, "It was better with me then than now," then these words may be considered as speaking to your conscience, and it is as if the Lord personally said, "*Set thee up waymarks.*"

i. Let us then look at this direction, and see if we can penetrate into its spiritual meaning. Just see for a moment where the person is to whom the words speak. He is represented as one who has lost his way and trying to find it, but unable; pressed, it may be, with hunger and thirst, and in danger of perishing. Now, how it would rejoice the heart of such a wanderer literally if just as he was sinking upon the sand to rise no more, his eyes caught sight of a distant waymark that just rose above the rest of the plain; if when he strained his eyes into the weary distance to take almost his last look for some indication of the road, he could just see upon the edge of the horizon a pillar or projecting stone, which he knew had been placed there by the side of the road to point out the right path. Would it not put strength into his weary limbs as giving him a sure mark of the right road? and would he not at once turn his steps to reach it that so he might escape from the desert in which he was pent in and all but lost? In this sense he might be said to *set up a waymark*; not that he himself set it up with his own hands, but with his own eyes; that he set it up in hope and expectation, in joyful anticipation of escape. Apply this idea spiritually to the experience of the backsliding daughter. There are for her spiritual waymarks; that is, gracious indications of the right track. Of course you are well aware that in eastern countries they have no roads as we have, marked out by hedges and travelled over by a long succession of vehicles. Their ways, for the most part, lie over large plains, wide steppes, and dreary deserts, where the track is soon lost and with difficulty recovered, and this is generally pointed out by marks at various distances within sight of each other to guide the traveller. So in grace there are certain waymarks whereby we may know whether we are in the way or not, and by which, if we get out of the road, we may be enabled to find the way back. But as the direction is given to Zion's backsliding daughter, to set up waymarks, let us see if we can show her what she may set up.

1. The first waymark is to *have a clear testimony that God had called her by his grace*. The first work of God upon the soul, the entrance of conviction into the heart, the application of the law to the conscience, and the first breaking in of that light which shows us that we are sinners and of that life which makes us feel our lost, ruined, undone state: this is the first waymark of the path of life, and therefore the first to be set up by the virgin of Israel. And bear this in mind that the more striking the beginning the clearer the waymark. A little pillar, a slab two or three feet high, would be but a poor waymark in the wilderness. The higher, broader, and wider it is the better. Can you set up this waymark or anything like it? Can you look back to any time when the Lord began the work of grace upon your soul—when his word entered into your conscience to give light and life, when you were awakened out of your sleep of death, brought to cry for mercy, and had a Spirit of grace and supplications poured out upon you? Set up that waymark, if you can see it distinctly and clearly. It may be a blessed help to you to bring you back once more into the path from which you have wandered, as showing that you are still a virgin of Israel, though you must confess with shame and sorrow a backsliding daughter.

2. Now look at another waymark: *the deliverance* that God gave you from a burden of sin upon your conscience; the first manifestation in any measure of his pardoning love to your heart; the first gracious intimation of his mercy to your soul. Can you set up this waymark? Can you look back to any sweet time or blessed season when the Lord was first pleased to break in upon your soul with any intimation of his mercy, with any discovery of his pardoning love, with any application of atoning blood to your conscience? If you can, set it up, set it up; take it with both hands, plant it deeply and firmly in the path. These are the two most blessed waymarks, the two most conspicuous of all the rest. The first work of God upon the soul in the conviction of sin by the law, and the deliverance through a manifestation of pardoning love and mercy through the gospel; these are the two greatest waymarks that any soul can set up. And if a backsliding daughter

can set up these two waymarks, they will bring her back into the path from which she has wandered. But why? Because they give her a sure testimony that she belongs to the Lord. They are closely connected together, and mutually strengthen and support each other. For if the conscience was never convinced of sin, what room is there for a manifestation of mercy? and what is mercy as separated from a conviction of sin? A presumptuous notion.

3. Now look at another waymark. *Has the Lord ever given you any marked answer to prayer?* Were you ever in trouble of mind or distress of soul, or under any peculiar temptation, and made it a matter of special prayer, that the Lord would deliver you from it; and did you soon receive from him a blessed answer? I was once lying under a powerful temptation which made me sigh and groan before the Lord. I made it a matter of earnest prayer that he would deliver me from it; and in a day or two a letter came by the post which immediately opened up in a most unexpected manner a deliverance, and that so plainly that I could not but see in it the outstretched hand of God. Answer to prayer is a blessed waymark. Set it up: it will show you at times that you are in the way; for God never hears prayer unless indited by the blessed Spirit in the hearts of his people. It is true that he hears the young ravens that cry unto him and gives the stranger food and raiment: but it is spiritual prayers and spiritual answers of which I am speaking as divine waymarks to shew the virgin of Israel that the Lord is her God.

4. But let us look along the edge of the desert to see whether we cannot find another waymark. *Have you ever had any manifestations of Jesus to your soul,* any views of the King in his beauty, any discovery of him to your heart as the Son of God? If you have, set it up; it is a most blessed waymark. Do we not learn from the pen of holy John that "whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God" (1 John 4:15); and does he not say, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself?" (1 John 5:10.) But how can any one either believe it or confess it unless it has been

revealed to his soul by the power of God?

5. But can we not find another waymark? *Was any promise ever applied to your soul* with divine power when in trouble or distress? Did the Lord the Spirit ever bring any word home to your heart to relieve and comfort and encourage you under temptation or exercise? If ever he did, set it up; it is a most blessed waymark.

Now these which I have brought forward are distinguished waymarks which seem to tower above the rest; but you know that on a high road all the waymarks need not be of the same conspicuous character. There may be several broad and high in order to distinguish the road with greater clearness, and be more evident guides for the lost traveller; but between them there may be smaller waymarks. So it is in grace. We have set up some of the most conspicuous; now let us look at some of the smaller.

6. Has the Lord ever *given you any love to his people*? We must not overlook this waymark, for it is one of the Spirit's own giving. "We know," says John, "that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

7. Again, has the Lord ever *melted your heart under the word of truth*, given you a good hope through grace, a sweet intimation of his favour, a prospect of better days, and though you are following the Lord in chains, yet it is with weeping and supplications, and there is an expectation in your soul that he will in due time appear and bless you with pardon and peace? This is a waymark, for it is an opening in the valley of Achor of a door of hope.

8. Do you ever *feel any softening of heart* into godly sorrow on account of your backslidings, any contrition of spirit or any confession of your sins, so as to long to return to the Lord with a broken heart and weeping eyes? This is a waymark; set it up; it is an indication that you are in the way, for this is "that repentance unto life" which Jesus is "exalted to give" as well as "remission of

sins."

ii. But let us pass on to another of the Lord's directions to the virgin of Israel: "*Make thee high heaps.*" In Eastern countries, there being few other means to indicate the road, it was usual at various points to set up not only lofty waymarks, but heaps of stones by the wayside; and it still is the custom to do so, travellers often casting a stone upon the heap to add to its size. Now as the country was often very level, these heaps were sometimes made very high, to distinguish them from other objects. So in grace. The literal "waymarks" seemed to have been hewed pillars, with perhaps characters deeply sculptured upon them; but the "high heaps" were stones simply and rudely piled together without being hewn out with skill and care like the waymarks. As, then, these heaps consisted of stones, put together, we may view them spiritually as indicative of certain favourable marks of grace, not indeed so clear and conspicuous as the "waymarks," but no less signs of the road, from being brought together for that purpose. Thus, there are those amongst the family of God who have no very conspicuous waymarks, and yet have a number of gracious evidences, which all put together show that they are in the right path.

1. Take, for instance, any *conspicuous appearance of Providence in answer to prayer*. It has not the clearness of a blessed answer in grace, or a conspicuous deliverance, or a gracious manifestation, or a sweet promise applied to the soul; it does not bear upon its face the clear writing of the blessed Spirit as these "waymarks" do, but is still a heap of stones, and though the stones are not in themselves very large, and are put together a little confusedly, yet, when together, a good many little evidences may make up a good heap. Thus, if the Lord has appeared to you again and again in providence, you may put all together until you get a heap of them.

2. Or again, *have you ever had any particular blessing* in hearing the preached word, or in secret prayer, when you have been upon your knees? Has the Scripture ever been opened up to you

with any life and power? Or has there ever been any discovery of the suitability of Jesus, or any sweetness enjoyed in his name, "as the ointment poured forth," which you have tasted, felt, and handled for yourself? You may take all these stones and put them together, the more you have got the better, and pile them up, and it may be you will find them to be a nice little heap. Look at this heap in the light of the Spirit. View this good time of hearing, and that sweet season in prayer; that remarkable occasion when a word came with power, unction, and savour to your heart. Call to mind again this glimpse of Christ, or this gleam of mercy, or this ray of hope, or this sweet encouragement, or this token for good, or this comforting testimony. There has been this brokenness of heart; this humility of mind; this weeping over your sins; this self-loathing and self-abhorrence; this hatred of sin, this love of holiness; this separation from the world; this spirituality of mind; this spirit of prayer. Put together all these as so many stones upon stones until you get a high heap of them.

But why is the virgin of Israel directed to set up these waymarks and make these high heaps, except that by these means she may be led clearly to see not only the way that leads to Zion, but how to guide her feet back into it? But what if you have no such waymarks, no such high heaps? Where, then, is there any indication that you are in the way, or even desirous to be in the way? Consider these things, and the Lord impress them with his own power upon your conscience.

iii. But the Lord still goes on with his directions to his backsliding daughter: "*Set thine heart towards the highway, even the way which thou wentest.*" There is a way that leads to Zion, of which we read, "A highway shall be there and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it." (Isai. 35:8.) In this way of happiness and holiness the virgin daughter of Israel once walked, when she came up from the wilderness leaning upon her beloved; but, alas! in leaving her first love she declined from it; she has got out of the road, lost sight of it, and strayed away into the wilderness. Now the Lord says to her, as she is longing to return, "Set thine heart towards



the highway, even the way which thou wentest." Let thy affections flow out towards that strait and narrow path in which thou once didst walk, when thine eyes as well as thy feet were set upon Jesus; for is not he "the way" as well as the truth and the life? When thou wert walking in him as the way unto God, thou wert not gadding about after every vain imagination of thy carnal heart. Now "set thine heart towards the highway, even the way which thou wentest." Is not Jesus the highway to God, for no man cometh to the Father but by him? (John 14:6.) Thine heart was then set toward the highway, for it was fixed upon him. Was it not well with thee in those days? Look back, then, to that happy season, when thou wert prayerful, spiritually-minded, tender in conscience, watchful in spirit, circumspect in life, full of love and affection to the people of God, with sin subdued, the flesh crucified, and the world under thy feet, and all because thine heart was fully and firmly fixed upon the Lord of life and glory. Though it was a very strait and narrow way, for there was no room for sin, the flesh, and the world to walk with thee in it, O what a good way it was to be found in! How it brought thee out of the world; and what a blessed path it was, though bodily sickness, providential trials, sore afflictions, or hot persecution might have attended it! Now, if thou wouldst get back to that spot, the first thing to do is to set thine heart toward it, that, sick of sin, the world, and thyself, thou mayest desire once more to walk in that strait and narrow path. There it is, though thou had forgotten it. "But how shall I find it?" says the soul. "Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps," the Lord answers. Look at his dealings with thy soul in times past; and as thou gettest encouragement from them it will revive thy hope, strengthen thy faith, and draw out thy love. Jesus, as the way, is worthy of all thine affections. Set thy heart, therefore, toward him, for in finding him thou wilt find the highway, even the way which thou wentest in days gone by. If thine heart is really and truly toward it, thine eyes will soon discover it and thy feet will quickly find it. For why is thy way now so dark and obscure? Because the old veil of darkness is come back over thine heart. But if thou turnest to the Lord with all thine heart, the veil shall once more be taken away. (2 Cor. 3:16.) Art thou not weary of thy sins? Art thou not

willing to suffer almost anything and everything sooner than be deceived in what regards thine eternal peace? Dost thou not desire to be found at last in the path of life, and die under the sweet smiles of God? Then set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest in days of old, when, in all the tenderness, purity, and warmth of virgin love, thou didst cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart, and all thy delight was to serve, please, and obey him.

iv. But the Lord gives his backsliding daughter another direction. "Turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities." By "cities" we may here understand places of fixed abode as opposed to wandering in the wilderness. Zion's cities, here called "thy cities," may, then, be viewed as places where the virgin of Israel had found salvation and rest. Thus we read, "We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks" (Isai. 26:1); and thus the ancient worthies are spoken of as "looking for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God." (Heb. 11:10.) In these cities the virgin of Israel had found a sure habitation, and therefore the Lord says to her, "Turn again to these thy cities;" that is, viewed spiritually and experimentally, seek once more that rest and peace, that sure shelter which thou hadst when thou couldst rest within those walls and bulwarks which God has appointed for salvation, and where thou wert secure from the perils of the wilderness. Turn again to those thy cities, for the gates are still open that "the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in;" and if thou keep the truth firmly and warmly in thy heart, those gates will again be opened unto thee.

IV.—Now for our last point, the *strong foundation* upon which those directions rest. The soul might say, "Lord, how can I do all this? how can I find my way back, for have I not wandered so far as to preclude all hope of return?" "No," he answers; "*The Lord hath created a new thing in the earth; a woman shall compass a man.*" Here we have a clear intimation of that miraculous incarnation of the Son of God which was to take place at the appointed time, and which is the strong, the only foundation on

which salvation, with all salvation's blessings, rests. Salvation from death and hell, the full pardon of sin, the righteousness which perfectly justifies, the superaboundings of the free, distinguishing grace of God, all stand on this one foundation, that the Son of God has become man and that not by natural generation, but by a supernatural and miraculous way, here intimated by the expression, "The Lord hath created a new thing in the earth." This is a delicate foreshadowing of the miraculous conception of the pure humanity of the Son of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary. In that sense it was true that "a woman should compass a man," for when a pure virgin compassed in her womb the sacred manhood of the Lord Jesus Christ and embraced him in her arms when brought forth, she "compassed a man" as conceiving and bringing forth a perfect man by the sole influence and operation of the perfect Ghost.

Now is not this the stone, the tried stone, the precious corner stone which God has laid in Zion for a sure foundation? An incarnate God, the Son of God in our nature, his eternal Deity in union with his humanity, in which he suffered, bled, died, rose again, ascended up on high, and is glorified at the right hand of the Father—is not this the foundation of the whole salvation of the Church? And as it is the foundation of all salvation, so it is the foundation of all restoration. This, therefore, is the foundation of all the directions and admonitions of God to his backsliding daughter when he bids her set up her waymarks, make her high heaps, and speaks as in her ears, "Turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities. How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter?" Thou art a virgin of Israel, though a backsliding daughter; and because the Lord hath created this new thing, this mighty miracle in the earth, therefore mercy can once more reach thy soul; therefore grace can still superabound over the aboundings of sin.

See what a door of hope this opens in the valley of Achor, and what assurance it gives that souls are pardoned and blessed by the sole virtue of the atoning blood of the Son of God. Do you see the connection between the incarnation of the Son of God and

pardoned sin; between atoning blood and the healing of all backslidings? Is it not a beautiful connection? How blessed it is to see and feel that because the Lord hath created this new thing upon the earth in the incarnation of his dear Son; that because "to us a child is born, unto us a Son is given," that "the government shall be upon his shoulder, and that of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end." (Isai. 9:6, 7.) Therefore, O virgin of Israel, "Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest." There is hope for thee, help for thee, mercy for thee, grace for thee: and why all this? Because the Son of God has become flesh for thee; because mercy, grace, and peace flow through the channel of a Saviour's blood, and God can be just, infinitely, inflexibly just, and yet the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Thus there is a blessed reason why the virgin of Israel, though a backsliding daughter, may yet set up her waymarks and make her high heaps, and set her heart towards the highway; for there is mercy for her in a bleeding Lamb; there is salvation for her through the blood-shedding, obedience, and death of the Son of God. There is no reason then why any sensible sinner should sit down in despair; there is no cause why any poor backsliding child of God should say, "There is no hope, therefore after my idols will I go." There is room to return for every poor wanderer; there is mercy in the bosom of God; there is salvation in the blood of Christ; and there is grace superabounding over the aboundings of sin in the pierced side and bleeding wounds of a once suffering but now glorified Immanuel.

Englishman ever would, even were death before him, renounce his country's flag.

2. Secondly, never *desert* it; never turn your back upon it, or go from truth to error, or from the love of truth to love a lie. Some cases occurred in the Crimea of our soldiers deserting their flag and going over to the Russians; and one of these wretched deserters, I believe, if not more, met with his just deserts, being shot down by his former comrades before he reached the enemy's lines. So may we never desert our glorious flag—love of the truth. If we do, we deserve to be shot before we reach the camp of the enemy.

3. And, thirdly, may we never *disgrace* it. It is a glorious flag, the flag of truth. It is purity itself, for "every word of God is pure." May we, then, never trail it in the dirt. May none of us who profess to love the truth, by word or deed, ever disgrace that cause which I trust we hold dear, nor dip the glorious flag into the common sewer.

Bear these things in mind. The flag is to be *displayed*, therefore don't let it be a dirty flag. It may be honorably shot through; it may even be stained with blood. This is no disgrace; but don't let it be defiled with the dirt of the street. If you were an ensign in the army, you would not like to carry before your regiment a flag which you had let fall into the mud. Then don't you, with God's help and blessing, ever disgrace the glorious banner of God's truth by letting it fall through your misconduct into the mire. The Lord alone can give us grace to adorn it. May it be our desire not only [not] to deny it, not to desert it, and not to disgrace it; but as gallant soldiers love to glorify the flag of their country, and every regiment in the service will gladly shed their blood to cover it with honour and glory, so may we, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ desire to adorn that glorious flag under which we have enlisted, and which the Lord himself has put into our hands, that it may be displayed, because of the truth.