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**SERMONS BY**

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**Volume 9**

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## **A SPIRITUAL DEATH AND A HIDDEN LIFE**

Preached on Lord's Day Morning, July 20th, 1856, at Gower Street Chapel, London

"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." Col. 3:2-4

What a signal mercy! what a blessing, as beyond all price, so beyond all conception, and all expression, is it to be a believer in the Son of God! Hundreds, thousands, millions, live and die without any knowledge of Him, any faith in Him, any love towards Him. And what must be their eternal destiny? What but the lake that burns with fire and brimstone? Our reasoning mind, when not subdued by divine teaching, our naturally compassionate feelings, when not softened into acquiescence with the divine will, pause and ponder; and when in imagination we seem to look down into the flames of eternal woe, and think of the thousands and millions that will for ever welter there, we instinctively shrink back. If such feelings be indulged, we may soon be drawn aside to pity lost souls; when once we begin to pity lost souls, Satan may draw us on to pity lost devils; and when we begin to pity lost devils we rebel against God, until the mind becomes filled with every base imagination too vile for me even to allude to. We must, therefore, at any cost, hold fast by the Word of God's testimony; for when once we depart from that, we wander into mazes of error and confusion. Now, if we adhere to God's testimony, we seem, to my mind, to come to these three points: 1. That the soul which lives and dies without knowing the Lord Jesus Christ cannot be a partaker of eternal life; for He Himself says, "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." If, then, eternal life consists in the knowledge of Christ, eternal death must be the consequence of not knowing Him. 2. Again: the Lord says, "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins."

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." We come, therefore, to this solemn conclusion, that if a man live and die without a spiritual faith in the Son of God, he is and must be eternally lost. And, 3. We come to a third conclusion, from the same inspired Word of testimony, that if a man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, and live and die without His love being shed abroad in his heart, he falls under the curse of God; for the Apostle Paul, speaking in His name, says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema," i.e., let the solemn curse of God rest upon him. So that if we adhere to the Word of God's testimony we come to this solemn conclusion, though in coming to it we seem to cut off and indeed do cut off millions, that without a saving knowledge of, without a spiritual faith in, and without a divine love to, the Son of God, there is no salvation; and therefore that those who die without that knowledge, without that faith, and without that love, must perish in their sins.

But the point that concerns you and me is, whether we have this saving knowledge of, this living faith in, and this heavenly love toward the Son of God; for we have to stand before His bar, we have souls to be saved or lost, and the grand question with every one whom God has quickened into spiritual life is, "Lord, is it I? How stands my soul before God? On what ground does it rest for eternity?"

The Epistles, and amongst them the Epistle to the Colossians, are addressed to the Church of God. When, therefore, the Apostle says, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God," he addresses these words to believers—to those who, by virtue of a vital union with the Son of God, and by being made partakers of regenerating grace, have risen with Christ, and having risen with Christ, and sitting with Him in heavenly places, are seeking "those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." It is, therefore, to believers, and to believers only, in the Son of God, that he addresses the exhortation of our text, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."

Why? "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." But will it be always so? No; for "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory."

In looking at these words, I hope I shall not confuse your minds, nor complicate my subject, if I arrange my thoughts under five heads.

I. I shall endeavour to show how Christ is "our life."

II. How the believer is "dead."

III. How his life is hid with Christ in God.

IV. How it springs from this—that he is to "set his affection on things above, not on things on the earth."

V. Lastly, the sweet and blessed promise that puts the crowning blessing upon the whole: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory."

I. *Union with Christ* is the grand truth revealed in the Scripture, and the fountain head out of which every blessing springs. But to understand this we must carry our thoughts upward and backward, to look at the foundation of the eternal union that subsists between Christ and the Church. The Fall did not break in upon the purposes of God as a river swollen with heavy rains bursts in upon and desolates the smiling plains. It was an event fore-viewed and fore-provided for; and therefore, in the counsels of eternity, a people, "a multitude which no man can number," was given to the Son of God, and united to Him by a union so close, so ineffable, and so indissoluble, that though the Scripture does give us figures to help our conception, yet all earthly figures fall far short of the divine reality. There is no union in nature that approaches in closeness the union betwixt Christ and His people. "I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one." What natural oneness can ever approach a union thus set forth by the words of Him who cannot lie?

But to help our conceptions, the Scripture has given us various figures to set forth the eternal union that subsists between Christ and His Church. The vine and the branches, the corner-stone and the stones that surround it, the husband and wife, the head and members—all these are Scriptural figures, whereby the eternal union between Christ and His people is set forth. Now, it is by virtue of this eternal union between Christ and His people that when He suffered they, so to speak, suffered with Him; when He died, they died with Him; when He lay in the tomb, they lay with Him; when He rose from the grave, they rose with Him; when He ascended up on high, they ascended with Him; and when He sat Himself down in heavenly places, at the right hand of the Majesty on high, they virtually sat down together with Him. All this was independent of the work of grace upon their soul, whereby they are brought in due time to a living apprehension of it. There are members of Christ who are not at present in living union, and yet have an eternal union with Him. We may conceive this even in the instance of the human body. Take the case of a frost-bitten hand. That is to all vital movement and feeling perfectly dead; and would, unless vivified and restored, rot and perish. But by timely aid, and proper appliances, it is restored, and becomes a living, active member of the body. So there are members of the mystical body of Christ still dead in trespasses and sins. Nay, many are not even in existence, but are still unborn. As the Lord Himself speaks, "In Thy book were all My members written, when as yet there was none of them." These, then, have not yet received regenerating grace to give them a vital union; but they have eternal grace stored up in Christ, as their covenant Head, whereby they possess an eternal union. In due time the Spirit of grace will come into them, and quicken them into spiritual life; and then they will be not only one with Him in that eternal union, which is the source of all other, but they will have a living union by faith, whereby being joined to the Lord, they become one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), and so receive out of His fulness grace for grace.

In this sense Christ is "*our life*." When the blessed Spirit has

breathed upon us, quickened us into spiritual existence, communicating the life of God, brought Him near to us and brought us near to Him, and given us a living faith to apprehend Him, then He becomes "our life," our Head, and from Him we derive all supplies of faith, hope, love, and every grace.

II. I pass on to consider how a believer is "*dead*;" for the text says, "Ye are dead." Religion, true religion, is full of paradoxes. There is no real contradiction in the work of grace upon the heart. But there are many paradoxes. The apostle, for instance, says, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things." These are not contradictions, but they are paradoxes; that is, they are apparent, not real inconsistencies. So in the text, the believer is not dead in one sense, yet he is dead in another; yea, by a singular paradox, when he is alive he is dead, and when he is dead he is alive. As the apostle says, "I was alive without the law once." He was not really alive, for he was dead in sin; but when the law came and slew him, though there was life in his soul, yet by that law he was killed and slain; as he says, "When the commandment came, sin revived and I died." Now, a believer, a child of God, is dead in two senses: he is dead as regards the law, and he is dead as regards the gospel; and I shall show you how. First, he is dead by the law; as the apostle says, "I through the law am dead to the law." The law comes home with spirituality to his conscience, and by its condemning sentence it slays him utterly; it kills him as to all legal hope.

But we may say, perhaps, if we examine the subject a little more closely, that the law kills in three senses, and in three ways.

1. First, it kills by its spirituality and curse, when it is opened up in a sinner's conscience, in some such words as, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." When that killing sentence comes into a man's conscience, it slays him as to salvation by the works of the law; it condemns him, and kills him outright, as to any hope that may spring from

his own righteousness.

2. The law kills, secondly, by stirring up the movements of sin in the carnal mind. As the apostle says, "The motions of sin, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." Sin lies in our mind at times almost torpid; at least we are unconscious of any vigorous movement. The law comes. What is the consequence? Sin is revived by the condemnation that the law brings. There is something in our nature that resists prohibition, and rises up against it. If there were so many rooms in a house, and there was a strict charge given you that you should not go into one certain room, that would be the first room you would want to enter. If there were so many different kinds of fruit put on the table, and you might touch every fruit but one, that one would be the one you would want to eat. There is something, then, in our perverse nature, which prohibition seems to stir up into movement. Thus the law, prohibiting sin, rouses up sin by the very prohibition it gives. "Thou shalt not do this." "Aye, but I will." "Thou shalt do this." "Aye, but I won't." There is thus the vigorous movement of the carnal mind setting itself in opposition against the will of God. And thus the spirituality of God's law kills, not only by cursing us in every thought, word, and deed that does not come up to the required perfection, but by rousing up the very sins that it does condemn; and thus brings us in doubly guilty.

3. And there is a third sense in which the law condemns; which is, by not only slaying once, outright and for ever for transgressions past and gone, but by continually passing a fresh sentence of condemnation against every sinful thought, word, or deed, as it springs up into manifestation. Thus it is not only the scythe in the hayfield that mows down the long and strong crop of grass, but the scythe on the lawn which cuts down the fresh grass as it springs up. And thus, first, by its spirituality, secondly, by its stirring up of sin, and thirdly, by its constant sentence of condemnation, the law kills and slays the soul which is under its curse and bondage. In that sense, then, a believer is "dead." When, however, the law has executed its office it is virtually dead

also. It has done its worst, and dies in doing it. Like a bee it dies in stinging. Let us look a little more closely at this point. A man is arrested for a certain crime, for the commission of which the law of the land adjudges six to twelve months imprisonment. The man is found guilty, and the law takes its effect. But with the last stroke of twelve on the last day of his imprisonment, he is as free as his jailer; the prison doors are thrown open, and the law is as dead to him as much as if he had never broken it. So in the case of the condemned murderer. When the law has hanged him, and his body is taken down from the fatal beam, the law is as dead to him as if it had never executed him. This is the apostle's meaning when he says, "I, through the law, am become dead to the law." When the criminal dies by the law, he becomes dead to that law which has killed him. The law is then dead to him, and he dead to it.

But there is another sense in which a child of God becomes "dead;" and that is by virtue of a living union with Christ. When, after being killed and slain by the law, mercy reaches the soul with any revelation of Christ, any manifestation of the love of God, or any application of His truth, a divine power is put forth that raises up a living faith in the Lord Jesus, as sitting at God's right hand; and this living faith puts us into a vital possession of all those benefits and blessings which are in Christ Jesus. We know not who or what Christ is till He reveals Himself; we know not what He has suffered, or what we are in Him till He is pleased to manifest Himself. But when he discovers His blessedness and beauty, He raises up a spiritual faith in Himself; and by this spiritual faith we apprehend what He is and has, and receive out of His fulness grace for grace; and thus we enter by living faith into the benefits and blessings of His death and resurrection. It is in this sense that we become "dead" by the gospel, as we became "dead" by the law. Now, it is only as we drink at the fountain-head, and receive by living faith out of Christ's fulness, that we can be dead in the full sense of the apostle's meaning; for when he says, "Ye are dead," he implies the death of a child of God to everything around him—to all those things that lead the soul into captivity and bondage. We are to become "dead" to everything by

which we are surrounded. How? By a vital union with the Son of God; by seeing who and what Jesus is, and entering by faith into His sufferings and sorrows, death and burial; and then rising with Him into heavenly places, and receiving supplies out of His fulness. It is by this experience that a death is put upon the things of time and sense, and we become, as the apostle speaks, "dead" in the true gospel sense of the word.

How many poor souls are struggling against the power of sin, and yet never get any victory over it! How many are daily led captive by the lusts of the flesh, the love of the world, and the pride of life, and never get any victory over them! How many fight and grapple with tears, vows, and strong resolutions against the besetting sins of temper, levity, or covetousness, who are still entangled and overcome by them again and again! Now, why is this? Because they know not the secret of spiritual strength against, and spiritual victory over them. It is only by virtue of a living union with the Lord Jesus Christ, drinking into His sufferings and death, and receiving out of His fulness, that we can gain any victory over the world, sin, death, or hell. Let me bring this down a little to your own experience. Say your soul has been, on one particular occasion, very sweetly favoured; a melting sense of the Saviour's precious love and blood has come into your heart, and you could then believe, with a faith of God's own giving, that He is eternally yours; and through this faith, as an open channel of divine communication, His merits and mediation, blood, righteousness, and dying love, came sweetly streaming into your soul. What was the effect? To lead you to sin, to presumption, to licentiousness? Nay, just the contrary. To a holy obedience in heart, lip, and life. Sin is never really or effectually subdued in any other way. I have often thought of the conversion of Colonel Gardiner as an instance in point. It is an extreme case, I admit, and one, perhaps, unparalleled in the annals of grace, but it will, perhaps, throw light on the subject before us. He, being dead in sin, had made an assignation with a married female, and was waiting to keep his criminal appointment. To while away his time, he took up a book; and whilst reading, a light suddenly streamed on the page. Looking up to see the cause, he beheld in vision

Christ hanging on the cross, surrounded with heavenly glory, and these words seemed spoken as with an audible voice, "Did I suffer all this for thee; and are these thy returns?" I offer no opinion on the vision itself, though I believe it was from the Lord. What I want to show is, the effect produced on his soul. It overwhelmed him in a flood of sorrow, and swept away in a moment every thought of his criminal engagement. Saul struck down at the gates of Damascus, and turned from persecution to praying, is a scriptural instance of the death of sin by the power of Christ. It is not, then, by legal strivings and earnest resolutions, vows, and tears, which are but monkery at best (a milder form of the hair shirt, the bleeding scourge, and the damp cloister), the vain struggle of religious flesh to subdue sinful flesh, that can overcome sin; but it is by a believing acquaintance with, and a spiritual entrance into the sufferings and sorrows of the Son of God, having a living faith in Him, and receiving out of His fulness supplies of grace and strength—strength made perfect in our weakness. In this sense the apostle says to these Colossians, "For ye are dead;" not merely by the law having condemned and slain you, as to all legal hopes, but by virtue of a participation in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, by virtue of a living union with the suffering Son of God. "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law," where sin reigns with increased dominion, "but under grace," which subdues sin by pardoning it. If you read Rom. 6 with an enlightened eye, you will see how the apostle traces out the death of the believer unto the power and prevalence of sin, by virtue of a spiritual baptism into the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

III. But I pass on to our third point, which is very closely connected with the two preceding. I have been endeavouring, hitherto, to trace out from the Word of God, and from the experience of His saints, these two vital positions; first, the union that a believer has with the Son of God, giving him communion with Him in sufferings and death, as well as in resurrection and life. I then went on to show how the believer, by having this living union with the Son of God, received into his soul Christ's death and sufferings; and by virtue of these, felt in living

experience, obtained a victory, according to the measure of his faith, over sin and the world. Now I pass on to a point closely connected with these two, which is, the life of a believer being hid with Christ in God.

I said religion was made up of paradoxes. Paradoxes are not contradictions; at least so only in appearance, for though they contradict each other in one sense, yet not in another. Here, then, is a paradox: dead, and yet alive. "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." But, my friends, what a blessed thing it is to have a life in the soul that never can die! What will all our profession avail us if we are not made partakers of this spiritual, this eternal life, by regenerating grace? But if we are, this life can no more die out of our heart than Christ can die out of heaven. His own words are—and let His own words stand, say unbelief and Satan what they will—"Because I live, ye shall live also." Here, then, is our life, if God has quickened our souls into spiritual being. It is Christ Himself; and the life that He gives out of His fulness He will Himself maintain, according to His own declaration: "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand."

But this life is a hidden life; and hidden in two senses. 1. First, from all human view. As Hart speaks of faith,

"Deep in the heart it lies;

so with the life of God. It lies deep in the heart, and lying there is necessarily hidden from all human eye, except so far as is manifested by fruits following.

There is nothing so deep, nothing so hidden, as the life of God in the soul. It seems to be enshrined in the lowest depths of a man's heart. It does not float upon the surface, like a cork upon the water, but sinks deep, very deep, into the very bottom of the soul. Therefore hidden from the eyes of a profane world; hidden from the professing world; and what is more, sometimes hidden from the subject of it himself. A child of God often cannot see his

own faith, nor can he discern the life that is bubbling and streaming up in his own bosom. It is not a lake, spread abroad in the meridian sunshine, to attract every eye; nor is it a brook that flows babbling on over the clear pebbles; but it is a well. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." Therefore hidden from view. The best part of our religion is that which is least seen. The secret cries, groans, tears, confessions, supplications, and breathings after God do not for the most part come abroad; the despondency, heart sickness, trials, perplexities, and powerful temptations, with which many a dear saint of God is exercised, do not come to view. No; nor his fears, sinkings, guilt, misery, and self-condemnation. Yes, the best part of his religion is hidden from view, for the weightiest ever sinks the deepest. And as it is with the dealings of his soul with God, so it is with the dealings of God with his soul—making and keeping his conscience tender, reviving the fear of God, drawing the heart upward into prayer and meditation, watering his spirit, and bedewing it with the secret dew and rain of His grace. Thus, the best part, because the spiritual part, of a man's religion is hidden from the eyes of all, except as the fruits thereof are manifest. Take your stand upon yon hill, and see that thread of verdure spreading itself through the barren plain. Whence comes that green strip which you see? Coming down to examine it, you find a little brooklet threading its way through the barren plain. It is this brooklet that, watering the roots of the grass, gives it that verdure; yet the brooklet itself is hidden till the eye is brought close to it. So it is with the life of God in the soul. We see the effects, the verdure produced by the brooklet: but the brooklet itself, the life and grace of God in the innermost soul, is hidden, "hid with Christ in God."

And if not merely hidden, but hidden with Christ in God, what a sacred, what a holy, what a truly divine life it must be! If this be spiritual religion, that it dwells with Christ Himself in the bosom of God, what a divine thing, what a heavenly possession! how full of eternal blessedness must the religion of a child of God be! It is locked up in two distinct places, yet united with each other by virtue of the humanity of Christ, and the faith that embraces it. If

I may use the expression, one end is in the bosom of God, and the other in the believer's breast! Compare man's paltry, beggarly religion with this supernatural life of God in the soul—Christ Himself formed in the heart the hope of glory. Words would fail to express the eternal distinction between them.

2. But the word "hidden" will carry another idea—out of reach, treasured up, therefore safe. What would have become long ago of the life of God in the soul, if it could have been robbed, trodden out, or lost? But this it never can be, for it is locked up in the person of the Son of God. It is, therefore, out of the reach of Satan, sin, death, and hell; safe in Christ's keeping, locked up in His eternal bosom. Were it otherwise, where should you and I long ago have been? Where would our religion have gone to, unless we had reason to believe that it had been kindled by the power of God, and was maintained by the same power which first gave it birth? This is the grand consolation of a child of God—to believe that he has the life of God in his soul; and to feel, day by day, that He who gave that life maintains it in firm and living exercise.

IV. This brings us to our fourth point: "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."

Has God by His Spirit and grace planted divine life in your soul? Has He made you a partaker of the benefits and blessings of Christ's sufferings and death, blood and righteousness? and is your life "hidden with Christ in God?" Where are your affections, then, to be? Are they to be set on things on the earth—those perishing toys, those polluting vanities, those carking cares, which must ever damp, though they cannot destroy, the life of God in the soul? Oh! we may well say to those who have any vital evidence of being dead, yet alive, "Dear brethren, set your affection on things above; let your thoughts, your desires, your wants and wishes, be fixed on heavenly realities; let them not grovel on things below, which, fondly loved and eagerly pursued, can only bring bondage and death into your soul."

The expression, "Things on the earth," takes a wide scope. It embraces not only the vain toys, the ambitious hopes, the perishing pleasures in which a gay, unthinking world is sunk and lost; but even the legitimate calls of business, the claims of wife and home, family and friends, with every social tie that binds to earth. Thus every object on which the eye can rest, every thought or desire apart from God that may spring up in the mind, every secret idol that lurks in the bosom, every care and anxiety that is not of grace, every fond anticipation of pleasure or profit that the world may hold out, or the worldly heart embrace—all, with a million pursuits in which man's fallen nature seeks employment or happiness, are "things on the earth" on which the affections are not to be set. Love we may our wives and children; pursue our lawful callings we should with diligence and industry; provide for our families we must according to the good providence of God; but set our affections on these things we may not when they pull us down from heaven to earth. He who is worthy of all our affections claims them all for Himself. He who is the Bridegroom of the soul demands, as He has fairly won, the undivided love of His bride.

But how are we to do this? Can we do this great work of ourselves? No; it is only the Lord Himself manifesting His beauty and blessedness to our soul, and letting down the golden cord of His love into our breast, that draws up our affections, and fixes them where He sits at God's right hand. In order to do this, He captivates the heart by some look of love, some word of His grace, some sweet promise, or some divine truth spiritually applied. When He thus captivates the soul, and draws it up, then the affections flow unto Him as the source and fountain of all blessings. We are not flogged into loving Him, but drawn by love into love. Love cannot be bought or sold; it is an inward affection that flows naturally and necessarily towards its object and all connected with it; and thus, as love flows out to Jesus, the affections instinctively and necessarily set themselves "on things above, and not on things on the earth."

But what are these "things above?" They are all things stored up

in Christ, that breathe of Christ, and come out of Christ. Pardon, peace, righteousness, love, "joy unspeakable and full of glory," with strength against sin, victory over death and hell, power against besetting lusts and temptations—in a word, every blessing wherewith God hath blessed His people "in heavenly places in Christ;" these are the "things above" that the soul has to set its affections upon. But we must have some view by faith of the Person of Christ, the eternal Son of the eternal Father; He must be revealed to our soul by the power of God before we can see His beauty and blessedness, and so fall in love with Him as "the chiefest among ten thousand and altogether lovely." Then everything that speaks of Christ, savours of Christ, and breathes of Christ, becomes inexpressibly sweet and precious.

This is "the golden oil" that flows into the heart; this is the "sweet-smelling myrrh which drops upon the handles of the lock;" this is "the aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces;" this is "the love which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown;" and by an experience of this the affections become set on things above. And in no other way can they be lifted up from earth to heaven. We cannot control our affections; they will run out of their own accord. If then our affections be earthly, they will run towards the earth; if they be carnal and sensual, they will flow towards carnal and sensual objects. But when the Lord Jesus Christ, by some manifestation of His glory and blessedness, or the Holy Ghost, by taking of the things of Christ and revealing them to the soul, sets Him before our eyes as the only object worthy of and claiming every affection of our heart, then the affections flow out, I was going to say naturally, but most certainly spiritually, towards Him; and when this is the case, the affections are set on things above.

Again, there is no way except by being spiritually baptized into Christ's death and life, that we can ever get a victory over our besetting sins. If, on the one hand, we have a view of a suffering Christ, and thus become baptized into His sufferings and death, the feeling, while it lasts, will subdue the power of sin. Or, on the other hand, if we get a believing view of a risen Christ, and

receive supplies of grace out of His fulness, that will lift us above its dominion. If sin be powerfully working in us, we want one of these two things to subdue it: either we must have something come down to us to give us a victory over sin in our strugglings against it, or we must have something to lift us up out of sin into a purer and better element. When there is a view of the sufferings and sorrows, agonies and death of the Son of God, power comes down to the soul in its struggles against sin, and gives it a measure of holy resistance and subduing strength against it. So, when there is a coming in of the grace and love of Christ, it lifts up the soul from the love and power of sin into a purer and holier atmosphere. Sin cannot be subdued in any other way. You must either be baptized into Christ's sufferings and death, or you must be baptized (and these follow each other) into Christ's resurrection and life.

A sight of Him as a suffering God, or a view of Him as a risen Jesus, must be connected with every successful attempt to get the victory over sin, death, hell, and the grave. You may strive, vow, and repent; and what does it all amount to? You sink deeper and deeper into sin than before. Pride, lust, and covetousness come in like a flood, and you are swamped and carried away almost before you are aware. But if you get a view of a suffering Christ, or of a risen Christ; if you get a taste of His dying love, a drop of His atoning blood, or any manifestation of His beauty and blessedness, there comes from this spiritual baptism into His death or His life a subduing power; and this gives a victory over temptation and sin which nothing else can or will give. Yet I believe we are often many years learning this divine secret, striving to repent and reform, and cannot; trying to get better by dipping the Ethiopian into the washing tub, till at last by divine teaching we come to learn a little of what the apostle meant when he said, "The life I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God." And when we can get into this life of faith, this hidden life, then our affections are set on things above. There is no use setting people to work by legal strivings; they only plunge themselves deeper in the ditch. You must get Christ into your soul by the power of God, and then He will subdue, by His smiles,

blood, love, and presence, every internal foe.

V. The apostle (to come to our fifth and last point, upon which I must be brief) sets before the believing church a blessed prospect, to cheer and encourage them in their onward struggle towards this heavenly kingdom. "When Christ," he says, "who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." If Christ be your life upon earth; if you have a living faith in His divine majesty; if any drops of His love have ever bedewed your soul; if any sweet smile has ever comforted your heart, the apostle would say to all such, "When Christ, who is your life, shall appear with all His saints, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." No longer pestered by sin and Satan, no longer carrying about a weak, infirm tabernacle, the seat of innumerable evils and maladies, but endued with a soul pure as He is pure, and a spiritual body capable of enjoying the bliss and blessedness of eternity, "then shall ye appear," ye suffering saints, who have set your affections on Him whom ye have not seen, and yet in whom ye believe, "then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." And is not this worth struggling for? Is not this a blessed goal at the end of the race? Is not this a worthy prize to run for? Is not this an ample reward of all your temptations, troubles, griefs, and sorrows, to believe, and not in vain, that "when He shall appear," you "shall appear with Him in glory?" The Lord, if it be His will, lead our souls into these divine and blessed realities! They are the substance of vital godliness; and so far as we feel them, and live under the sweet influences and bedewing operations of the Spirit of grace, these things will prove all our salvation, as they must be, if we be rightly taught, all our desire.

## Spiritual Delight, and Confiding Trust

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Thursday Evening, August 7, 1845

"Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day."  
Psalm 37:4, 5, 6

To search and to know the heart of man is God's special prerogative. He claims it as such; for, when speaking of man's heart, he says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" he adds, "I, the Lord, search the heart; I try the reins." (Jer. 17:9, 10.) We find the Psalmist using similar language, "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me: thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; thou understandest my thought afar off; thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways: for there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether." (Psa. 139:1-4.)

The deepest traces of this knowledge which God has of the heart of man are to be found scattered up and down the Scriptures of truth. The **37th Psalm**, [**I believe the author meant the 73<sup>rd</sup> Psalm**] for instance, contains the deepest knowledge of the heart of man; and not merely the most intimate acquaintance with all its secret movements, but also with the remedy which God himself has provided to meet the malady. It is a grand spiritual armoury out of which heavenly weapons to fight against the peculiar besetments of God's people are to be brought to the end of time. It is a repository of healing medicines to be applied from time to time to the rankling wounds that these peculiar besetments continually make in the conscience. One of these peculiar besetments is the fretting and envying that there is in a gracious man's heart against the prosperity of the ungodly. Asaph

deeply felt this; nay, so deeply that his feet had well-nigh slipped altogether through the force of the temptation. Job felt this, as we read in the 21st chapter, when he was so stumbled at the prosperity of the wicked. And all God's people, one in a greater and another in a less degree, feel from time to time the workings of this spirit of envying and fretful murmuring, when things go against them, and in favour of those whom they know to be ungodly.

The Lord in this Psalm meets this case, and provides remedies for it; and these remedies he not merely provides for his people in the letter of truth, but he also, in his own time and way, graciously applies them to their soul.

You will observe, that in the text there is a very close and intimate connection betwixt the precept and the promise. The Lord lays down two precepts, and he connects with them two promises. And it will be my endeavour and aim this evening, if God give me power and ability, to show not only what the precept and the promise are, but also the spiritual and experimental connection between them. So that, if we are enabled (and God alone can enable us) to perform the precept, we are sure of having the promise fulfilled in our heart's experience.

The text consists, therefore, as I have just observed, of two distinct branches. There is a precept in each, and a promise in each, and these two are intimately connected.

I.—The first precept runs thus, "Delight thyself in the Lord;" and the promise connected with that precept is, "And he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

There is a close and intimate connection betwixt the humbling teachings of God in the heart, and our delighting ourselves in him. What was the frame and mind, and what was the peculiar besetment that God the Spirit met in this Psalm? It was the envy and fretfulness which often work in a good man's bosom against the prosperity of the wicked. In other words, the character

pointed out in this Psalm was one walking in a path of peculiar trial, temptation, and perplexity; and one of his peculiar trials, perplexities, and temptations was, that all things went contrary to him, whilst all things went on favourably with the ungodly. Now I do not say that this was absolutely necessary to make him delight in the Lord. But I say this, that we cannot delight ourselves in the Lord till we have ceased to delight in other things; and therefore we need to be led in a path of trial, temptation, perplexity, conflict, and sometimes to experience great distress of soul on account of sin laid upon our conscience, in order to be brought to fulfil this precept spiritually.

The precept is not laid down here as though man were able in his own strength and wisdom to take it up and obey it. There is a preparatory teaching of the blessed Spirit before a man can enjoy in his own soul a living experience of the precept. And the very way whereby God brings him to perform it is, by first leading him into those paths of trial, perplexity, and sorrow which stir up the enmity, peevishness, and fretfulness of his rebellious heart. For instance

1. By nature *we delight in the world*. It is our element, our home, and what our carnal hearts are intimately blended with. We need to be divorced from this carnal union; we need to have the world embittered to us. Now the very means that God employs to embitter the world to us are cutting and grievous dispensations as unexpected reverses in fortune, afflictions of body, of family, or of soul. But these very means that the Lord employs to divorce our carnal union from the world, act upon the peevishness and fretfulness of our depraved nature. So that we think we are being very hard dealt with in being compelled to walk in this trying path, whilst the ungodly are prospering. And yet by these cutting dispensations we are eventually brought to delight ourselves in him, who will give us the desires of our heart.

2. Again. *We cleave close to a covenant of works*. Our naturally religious heart is continually aiming to do something whereby we think we can gain the favour of God. Now when every exertion to

set up our righteousness is completely baffled, when our resolutions are proved to be weak as water, when all our endeavour to do something that we think God can accept prove entirely baseless, and the corruption of our heart becomes more and more manifest in every attempt to carry out what we think will please God—this stirs up the self-pity, the murmuring, the peevishness, and the rebelliousness of our nature.

3. Again. *We delight in sin.* It is the very element of our nature; and even after the Lord has called us by his grace and quickened us by his Spirit, there is the same love to sin in the carnal heart as there was before. We delight in it; we would wallow in it, take our full enjoyment of it, and swim in it as a whale swims in the waters of the sea. But the Lord will never suffer us to do the evils that we would; he prevents us from walking in these things, by laying the guilt of them upon the conscience, by producing cutting convictions in our soul, by making us at times loathe ourselves in dust and ashes on account of our own sinfulness and folly, by making us feel ashamed of ourselves, and covering us with confusion of face because our carnal heart so delights in wickedness.

4. *We by nature are prone to idolatry.* Self is the grand object of all our sensual and carnal worship. Our own exaltation, our own amusement, our own pleasure, and our own gratification, or something whereby self may be flattered, admired, adored, and delighted, is the grand end and aim of man's natural worship.

From all these things, then, which are intrinsically evil, which a pure and holy God must hate with perfect abhorrence, we must be weaned and effectually divorced. This we cannot learn from reading the Scriptures, or by hearing the experience of others. We may have the theory correct; but the experience of it must be wrought by God's own hand in our conscience. But all the time we are doing homage and worship to self; all the time we are loving the world; all the time we delight in sin; all the time we are setting up idols in the secret chambers of imagery, there is no delighting ourselves in the Lord. There cannot be. We cannot delight ourselves in the Lord till we are purged of creature love,

till the idolatry of our hearts is not merely manifested, but hated and abhorred, till by cutting temptations, sharp exercises, painful perplexities, and various sorrows we are brought to this state—to be sick of sin, sick of self, and sick of the world. Until we are brought to loathe ourselves, we are not brought to that spot where none but God himself can comfort, please, or make the soul really happy.

How long you shall be walking in this painful path, how heavy your trials, or what their duration shall be, how deep you may have to sink, or how cutting your afflictions may be in body or soul, God has not defined, and we cannot. But they must work till they have produced this result—weaned, divorced, and completely separated us from all that we naturally love, all that we idolatrously cleave unto, and all that we adulterously roam after. If they have not done this, they must go on till they produce that effect. The burden must be laid upon the back, affliction must try the mind, perplexities must encumber the feet, until we are brought to this point,—that none but the Lord himself, with a taste of his dying love, can comfort our hearts, or give us that inward peace and joy which our soul is taught to crave after.

See, then, the connection betwixt the workings of fretfulness, rebelliousness, and peevishness in the heart of the saint, and the precept, "Delight thyself in the Lord." 'What?' it may be said, 'here is a man full of peevishness, rebellion, enmity, and fretfulness, and God tells him to "delight himself in the Lord."' He fain would do it, but cannot. This is the state and case of many of the Lord's people; they have enough religion to make them miserable, but not enough to make them happy; enough grace to make the world distasteful, but not enough to make the Lord of life and glory precious; enough religion to keep them from falling into sin, but not enough to break down the hankering idolatry of the carnal heart.

The Lord, then, who sees all their trials, raises up in their hearts the power to perform the precept—to delight themselves in the

Lord. But how does the Lord do this? We are completely powerless, thoroughly unable to delight ourselves in the Lord. It is as impossible for a fallen sinner to delight himself in the perfections of Jehovah, as it is for him to create a new sun, and plant it in the sky. It ever is, and ever must be, a special act of grace, and of the operation of God the Spirit in the heart and conscience of the elect sinner. But there is a time and season when the Lord does enable his dear family to fulfil this precept, "Delight thyself in the Lord."

How then does he bring about the fulfilment of this precept? By manifesting himself, with more or less clearness and power to their souls. There are in the Lord of life and glory infinite treasures of loveliness and beauty; and when these are manifested to the soul, then delight in these glorious perfections instantaneously springs up in the heart. Sometimes the Lord is pleased to enlighten the eyes of our understanding, and then we have a view of his matchless perfection, beauty, and loveliness by the eye of living faith. We see an indescribable glory in his eternal Godhead; we see an indescribable loveliness in his pure and spotless humanity; and we see an indescribable beauty in the union of the Godhead and the manhood in one glorious Immanuel. I have seen, I believe, with the eye of faith, that "perfection of beauty," which the tongue of man can never express, the beauty, loveliness, grace, and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. When there is any discovery of his beauty and glory to the eyes of the understanding, and any reception of it by living faith in the heart, it is utterly beyond the tongue of men or angels to describe. But when we have a view by faith of the matchless perfection, glory, beauty, and loveliness of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is then, and then only we are enabled to delight ourselves in him. There is in the soul a solemn delight in the beauty of the Lord of life and glory; there is a going forth of the tender affections of the heart unto him as the "altogether lovely;" and there is a flowing forth of the secret desires of the soul towards him as he sits enthroned in glory, power, and majesty at the right hand of the Father. Now if ever we have seen this, we have fulfilled the precept, "Delight thyself in the Lord." But this delight

is not in thy religion, not in thy own acts, no, nor in thy own experience either, but "*in the Lord*"—thy thoughts, thy desires, thy meditations, thine affections, all fixed in, all fixed upon, the Lord of life and glory.

Now, when we are enabled to delight ourselves thus in the Lord, it is sometimes *in the way of meditation*. There is a sweet meditation of the soul upon his glorious attributes. Every divine character that shines forth in the Person of Immanuel is received by faith; and no sooner does faith receive it, than hope in the soul anchors in it, and love in the heart flows out towards it. Sometimes *in reading the Scriptures*, they are opened up to us with sweetness and savour. We see and feel an indescribable beauty in those passages which speak of the Lord of life and glory. Faith is kindled; the soul believes, simply and with a child-like spirit, what it reads; and the affections flow forth to that which is so sweetly and solemnly made known. Sometimes, in secret prayer, there is a drawing near to the Lord—a delighting ourselves in him as altogether beautiful, and altogether glorious and lovely. And sometimes, without any special means, before the heart is aware it is made like the chariots of Amminadib, caught up in believing admiration and adoration of the Lord of life and glory. Now, when this is felt in the soul, it is a fulfilment of the promises—"Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off" (Isa. 33:1)—"In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel." (Isa. 4:2.) Then the soul can enter, in some measure, into the language of the Bride, when she said, "My Beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest amongst ten thousand: yea, he is altogether lovely."

II.—But I pass on to consider the connection of the promise with the precept. You will observe, the Lord has given a precept—"Delight thyself in the Lord;" and he has closely connected a promise with it—"And he shall give thee the desires of thy heart." Now, if we are enabled (and only God can enable us) to delight ourselves in the Lord with child-like simplicity and affection, the

Lord, for his own name's sake, for his own mercy's sake, will fulfil the promise so closely connected with the precept. And not only so. They are not merely connected by the solemn declaration of Jehovah, but also *by a link in time*. I will explain my meaning. If we are enabled to delight ourselves in the Lord, he gives us then and there the desires of our heart. The precept and the promise are so closely allied, there is such an intimate connection between the two, that they are linked together in time in enjoyment at seasons, as closely as they are linked together in the word of truth. When we are enabled to delight ourselves in the Lord, the desire of the heart flows out instantaneously unto him in whom we are enabled to delight. There are times, many times (O how numerous are they?), when we have no delight in the Lord—when we can scarcely recall any delight we have ever experienced—when our heart is a desolate wilderness, where nothing grows but thorns and briars; and when we have no desires after him. But when we are enabled to delight ourselves in the Lord, immediately desires spring up. The very same Spirit that raises up the power and gives the feeling to delight ourselves in the Lord, enables us, at the same moment, and by the same operation, to feel desires—nay more, to give those desires utterance, to pour them forth, to spread them out, to lay them, with all humility and simplicity, at the divine footstool. And what are these desires? Let us endeavour to mention a few of them.

1. One is, to *embrace in our arms that blessed Lord in whom we are, at the time, delighting*. We see him sitting in heaven above, in glory and beauty; and our desire is, to stretch forth our arms, and bring him down into our heart, and that he would come with divine savour and power into our soul. We want something more than to delight ourselves in him—we want to enjoy him. It is not sufficient to see his beauty at a distance. It is not sufficient to have the affections of the heart drawn out towards that beauty. *That* does not satisfy us—nothing satisfies us but a personal enjoyment of that beauty, made manifest and shed abroad in the heart. But when we are enabled to delight ourselves in the Lord, there is the desire going forth that the Lord would reveal himself with power, come down with glorious majesty, and sweetly form

himself in our heart the "hope of glory." This, you see, is the desire of the heart; and the Lord gives the desire when he enables us to perform the precept. To be brought near to that blessed bosom out of which all grace flows, and in which all affection and love centre, is the desire of the heart when we are enabled to delight ourselves in the Lord; not to be at a distance, but to be brought near; and the nearer we are brought, the nearer we desire to be brought. If I may use an illustration, it is something like the movement of the earth towards the sun. Philosophers tell us, that were the earth to advance towards the sun, it would move every moment, more and more rapidly towards it, till at last it would be altogether swallowed up, and lose its own existence in it. So spiritually. When the Sun of Righteousness attracts a soul near to himself, the more near it is drawn, the nearer it desires to be drawn; so that nothing can really satisfy and satiate it, except to be absorbed and swallowed up in his boundless grace and glory.

2. Another desire of our heart is, *to be conformed to his image*. When we delight ourselves in the Lord, and are then enabled to tell him the desires of our heart, one is—that he would stamp upon us his own image, and conform us to his own likeness. We see his meekness, gentleness, tenderness, and compassion. We see him "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." We see in him all perfection—everything holy, pure, and blessed. Now, we cannot delight ourselves in the Lord, unless there be some sympathy and union between us and him. Can impurity delight in purity? Can sin delight in holiness? Can the carnal love that which is spiritual? Impossible. But when we are under the sensations I have traced out (and I hope I know something of them, or I could not speak of them as I do), then there is that softness of heart, that spirituality, that heavenly-mindedness, that tenderness of conscience, that holy affection, graciously wrought out and produced in the soul, whereby we desire to have the mind, likeness, and image of Christ stamped upon us. And if the Lord would but indulge us with it, we would wish never to sin again, never think anything again dishonouring to God, never speak

anything that grieves the Spirit, never do anything that the Lord eternally hates.

3. Another desire of our heart is, to be *separated and weaned from the things of time and sense*, to have the world put under our feet, and the body of sin and death subdued; that we may not live under the power of any sin, but trample it under our feet.

4. Another desire is, to *receive the blood of sprinkling with full power upon our conscience*; to feel its sweet efficacy, purging away all sin and guilt; to have it so applied by the Holy Ghost, so spiritually received, known and felt, that fear, dread, and darkness may all take flight from the soul, and hide themselves in their dens as the unclean birds were driven away from Abraham's sacrifice.

5. Another desire of the heart is, to *shelter under his glorious righteousness*. When we delight ourselves in the Lord we behold his righteousness; but to behold his righteousness with solemn delight, is not the same thing as feeling the sweet enjoyment of that glorious righteousness received into the soul. There is a delighting in it as a garment; but this is a different thing from having the garment put upon and imputed to us, suited and perfect in all its parts. But when the soul delights itself in the Lord's spotless righteousness, its desire goes after this righteousness, to be altogether wrapped and clothed in it, to feel the sweetness and know the efficacy of it, that it may stand up before God whiter and brighter than the angels of light.

But many, nay, innumerable are the desires which the soul feels, when it is enabled to delight itself in the Lord. Each has his peculiar trials which then he can lay before the throne; each has his peculiar griefs which then he can unbosom himself of; each has one request which then lies with greater power upon his heart than another. And when he delights himself in the Lord, he is enabled to tell the Lord that desire. There are times when we have desires in our hearts, but we cannot utter them; sometimes unbelief works in us; sometimes self-pity, sullenness and

murmuring; sometimes despondency and rebellion; sometimes a cold, torpid spirit that freezes up every faculty of the soul. We may too have desires fluttering in our heart, and working at the bottom of our bosom; but there they are fluttering to and fro, without any power to raise themselves up from the heart in which they lie. But when we are enabled to delight ourselves in the Lord, they come trooping forth. This however may not be once a year, or very rarely in a man's life. These are not every day banquets, every week or month's enjoyments; no, they are for the most part very rare things,—so rare that when they are past we look back at them as sweet reminiscences. But it is at these times if we have desires, that we are enabled to lay them before the throne of mercy.

Now if we have ever been enabled, in the depths of the soul, in the movements of the heart towards God, when stretched upon our bed, sitting by our fireside, occupied in the affairs of life, or in any of those solemn moments, when no eye or ear saw or heard us but the eye or ear of the Almighty—if ever we have been enabled to delight ourselves in him, and to have the goings forth of sweet affection towards him who is infinitely, ineffably, and inconceivably glorious—if ever our delights have centred in him who is altogether lovely and only desirable, then God will give us every desire of our heart. At these moments he says, inwardly, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it;" "Make thy request large; make it in heaven above, or in the depth beneath." And the Lord is pleased, so to speak, that his dear people should open their mouth wide at such times, telling every thought, and uttering at his footstool every secret desire.

III.—But we pass on to consider the other precept contained in the text, and the promise connected with it. I see a great beauty, glory, and sweetness in the linking together of these two precepts and these two promises. I will explain how.—There may be here some of God's people (perhaps many) who cannot altogether realize what it is to delight themselves in the Lord. They want to do so more than they have been yet enabled. They have had glances, glimpses, testimonies, hopes, tokens; but as to a season

of solemn delight in the Lord, they cannot say clearly and positively, that such has been their experience. Well, does the Lord cut off such? Does the Lord do with them as many a haughty professor does now-a-day, trample them under foot as nothing? take his weak sheep and trembling lambs, and throw them over the hurdles? God deals not so with his little ones. The sympathizing bosom of Jesus is as distinct from the conduct of such professors, as heaven is from hell. He knows his people's state and case. He sees the secret movements of their hearts. He knows all their times of despondency, fear and apprehension. And therefore he gives them a precept, and connects with that precept a promise as suitable as the other. "*Commit thy way unto the Lord.*" Some here may say, 'O that I could delight myself in the Lord! but my heart is hard, my path intricate, my mind perplexed and burdened, and my soul dark; I feel my helplessness; I know I cannot delight myself in the Lord; but it is my grief and burden that I cannot do so.' Now are you to be cut off for that? No: does it not say, "*Commit thy way unto the Lord.*" What is 'thy way?' Why, it is thy perplexed way, thy entangled way, thy desponding way, thy doubting and exercised way, every feeling thou hast in thy soul because thou canst not delight thyself in the Lord—this is 'thy way.' 'But,' say some of you, 'if I could see my interest clear; if I could feel the blood of sprinkling applied, enjoy the sweet assurance that I am saved, and taste the love of Christ that passeth knowledge, how happy I should be!' The anxiety and sorrow you feel because you cannot realize these sweet sensations in your heart, are your 'way;' that is the path in which you are walking. And it is this which tries you so. It is your perplexed way, your intricate way, your entangled way, that is the grief and trouble of your heart.

Now, the text says, "*Commit thy way unto the Lord.*" But God must as much work in us the power to commit our way unto him, as he must work in us the ability to delight ourselves in him. They are both acts of faith. The minor act of faith, to "*commit our way unto the Lord,*" is as much an act of living faith, as the greater act of faith, to "*delight ourselves in the Lord.*" It requires the same power that made heaven and earth to enable a living soul

to commit his way unto the Lord. But there are times and seasons when the Lord enables the soul to fulfil the precept, to commit its way unto him.

But what is the idea contained in the word "commit?" It is to take one's burden, and lay it humbly at the Lord's feet; to bring our case, and put it in the Lord's hand; in whatsoever state, whatsoever trial, whatsoever experience, to take it, and lay it at the Lord's feet—this is to commit our way unto the Lord. But before we can do this, we must be divorced and weaned from looking to the creature. How prone we are to do this, to measure our experience by that of others, to trust to the good opinion of men or of a minister, to try to gain the approbation of a church—something or other distinct from God's approbation in the soul, something or other distinct from the witness of the Spirit in the heart! Now, the reason, the main reason, why the Lord exercises his people so with perplexities and trials, shuts them up, makes the way dark before them, is to take them off the creature, and bring them to this spot—"none but the Lord himself can save my soul, pardon my sins, relieve my distress, and give me that which alone can satisfy me I am his." Whenever this is wrought in the soul (and it is for the most part wrought there by a series of cutting disappointments), it is enabled to commit its way to the Lord, to lay its case at his footstool. This is an act and exercise of living faith. How many of the Lord's people there are who have a way in which they are walking, and this way they think altogether peculiar: that no saint has ever walked in the path before them! Theirs, they complain, is such a strange, such a strait, such a difficult, such an entangled road, that they cannot think any child of God ever travelled in it.

Now, whatever be the way, the precept runs—"Commit thy way unto the Lord." Art thou dark? Commit thy darkness. Art thou unbelieving? Commit thy unbelief. Art thou tempted? Commit thy temptation. Art thou exercised? Commit thy exercises. Art thou perplexed and embarrassed as to what course to take? Commit thy perplexity and embarrassment to the Lord, in the actings of simple faith, in the pouring out of spiritual desire, in the goings

forth of hope and love from the heart Godward.

But some may say, 'Why, you are setting before us an impossibility.' It is so: but God works these impossibilities. What is impossible to man, is possible to God, for "with God all things are possible." Nay, I will tell you another thing—if you have never committed your way unto the Lord, you are no Christian; you are nothing but a dressed-out professor; you have never had the teachings of the Spirit in your conscience, nor the actings and exercises of living faith in your soul. You may have the doctrines correctly—you may have a sound system, creed, and theory—but you have never felt the operation of God the Spirit upon your conscience, if you have never committed your way to the Lord. I know the difficulty, as well as you do, of committing one's way to the Lord—the workings of unbelief, the temptations of Satan, the harassings of the enemy of our soul; the infidelity and scepticism, the doubting and fearing of a perplexed mind. But I know also what it is to commit that way. We must know both sides. We must not take the infirmities, the sins, the unbelief of God's children, and because we have that which all men have, conclude we have the other. We must know both sides of the question. We must know the impossibility, and we must know the possibility. We must know the difficulty, and we must know the ease. We must know the want of power, and we must know the communication of power. We must know what it is to cry under our burden, and we must know what it is to lay that burden at the Lord's feet. And this committing of our way unto the Lord is as solemn an exercise of living faith in the soul (though not so clear, not so sweet, not so satisfying), as much an act and operation of God the Spirit, as delighting ourselves in the Lord.

IV.—But the text adds—"*Trust also in him,*" which is a further expansion, a more complete development of what it is to commit our way unto the Lord. There is this difference betwixt the two—*trusting* is a further act of faith. I will illustrate my meaning by a comparison. Say you have a sum of money in hand; and this, for various reasons, you do not wish to keep in your house. You have a friend, a trustworthy friend: you go to him, and say, 'Will you

take charge of this little sum of money I have?' Now, putting into his hands this sum, is committing your money unto him. It is committing to his charge and keeping what is dear and precious to you. After you have left the money, perhaps, a certain fear comes over you—'suppose he should spend the money; suppose he should not give it back when I want it; suppose he should employ it for his own purposes; what becomes of me? what becomes of my engagements?' But if after you have committed the money to your friend, you feel implicit confidence that when you ask for the money it will be returned, then you *trust* in him. You first *believe*, then you *commit*, then you *trust*. If you did not believe your friend was trustworthy, you would not commit it to him. After you have committed it to him, a doubt may rise in your mind as to whether he is really trustworthy; but when your confidence in him is so well-grounded, that you are sure he will return the money when wanted, then you can trust in him that when you go for it he will return it fully and fairly into your hands. Look at it spiritually. Our 'way' is that most dear to us. Nothing can be so dear to a man as the way by which the Lord leads him. His experience is all in all. If that be right, all is right—if that be wrong, all is wrong. If he part with that, he parts with all he holds dear. When then he believes, by the actings of living faith in the soul, that the Lord Jesus is revealed that he should commit his way to him; that as God, he has almighty power—as man, a tender, sympathizing bosom—as God-Man, he is "over all, God blessed for ever;" when in the actings of this faith, he commits his way to the Lord, he puts his soul into his hands, puts all his difficulties, perplexities, exercises into his hands, into his very heart. But there may rise doubts, fears, suspicions—'Will the Lord hear me? will he appear for use? Is he all that I believe him to be?' Infidelity will work—doubt, suspicion, and fears may arise, 'Is the Lord what I believe him to be? am I what I believed myself to be?' But when we are enabled to feel that he will keep what we have committed unto him, and that he is able and willing to keep us who have committed it, then we are enabled to trust as well as to commit.

V.—Now follows the promise—"And he shall bring it to pass; and

he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day." "He shall bring it to pass." What? The thing that lies deepest in thy heart—"thy way." Does not thy way lie deepest in thy soul—the path that God has led you by, the path that God is now leading you; your path of temptation, trial, and perplexity; your past or present experience; the case and condition in which you now are? You may be troubled in your soul, doubting in your mind, fearing in your heart, distressed in your feelings; you may sink down to the lowest point that a child of God can sink to; yet that way, in which you are so deeply sunk, if the Lord enable you from time to time to commit it to the Lord, and trust in him, he will bring to pass above what your heart desires. Look at the movements of your heart Godward; look at your embarrassments, temptations, and exercises; look at that which rolls backwards and forwards in your mind, and which is tossed to and fro on the waves of your anxious bosom—what lies nearest, dearest, and deepest,—let honest conscience speak. *That*, whatever it be, the Lord tells you, and sometimes enables you to commit to him, to put it into his hands, to trust it to him. Now whatever it be, so committed and so trusted, the Lord has declared in his unerring word of truth, he "will bring it to pass; "he will fulfil it when his time has arrived. Does darkness envelop it? do mountains of difficulty stand up in the way of its fulfilment? Never mind; God will bring it to pass in the face of all, over mountains and through difficulties, in spite of, and in the midst of, all surrounding obstacles. He "will bring it to pass,"—that which lies deepest in your heart, nearest your affections, and that which you are enabled in the actings of living faith sometimes to commit into the hands of the Lord God Almighty.

But, in order to clear up the point, God the Spirit has added, by the pen of the Psalmist, this explanation, "*And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day.*" The word "righteousness" in the Scripture has more than one signification. I will not take up the time, as it is wearing away, by explaining the different senses; but merely observe two. One is, 'the righteousness of God,' which is imputed unto and put upon all them that believe; the other is, uprightness,

sincerity, and honesty of heart in the child of God, as a part of his new nature. Now both these different kinds of righteousness will God bring forth as the light. I have been endeavouring to show that the precept, "Commit thy way unto the Lord," is a precept adapted to the exercised, tried, tempted, and distressed. Now do you want your righteousness to be brought forth as the light, that you may see Christ's righteousness, and that you may see your interest in it, as clear, plain, and palpable as the light of day? And if you have committed your way unto the Lord, your doubting and fearing way, he will one day give a clear discovery of this righteousness to your heart. What the everlasting God has said, that he will fulfil, "He will bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day." It shall spangle before your eyes, glisten in your heart, and shall be manifest in your soul's happy experience as the light of day when it arises to gladden the earth.

But there is another sense—the uprightness, sincerity, and integrity of a man's heart Godward. There is much of this spoken of in the Old Testament Scriptures; the sincerity and uprightness of a man's heart. It is a cutting feeling to us, (and yet we must have the experience of it), to have our motives misunderstood, and the things that we do and the things that we say from pure motives (and so far as they spring from the new man of grace they are pure) put down to base ones. Few things are more mortifying or more trying to me, than to have my words and actions attributed to the worst of purposes, such as, that they are said and done merely to exalt and glorify myself, when it is the very furthest from my thoughts. Now we shall all have to lie under this imputation, that pride may be mortified. We would glory in our pure motives, in our integrity, did our professing brethren, did the real brethren admire them. We should glory in man, and rob God of the glory. Therefore he permits that your motives, thoughts, and actions should all be misrepresented, and put down to base motives. But the time will come when the Lord will bring forth your righteousness (so far as you have acted in any point from pure and simple motives) as the light. It shall shine in the eyes of men. It shall be as bright to those that have

spiritual discernment as the light of the sun, which shines forth clearly in its own intrinsic glory. Now, this may be your lot. You have acted from motives really, in the sight of a heart-searching God, simple and pure. You are now lying under misrepresentation. It is no use your trying to remove it—your attempts to remove it will only make it worse. But the Lord will one day bring forth your righteousness, the integrity of your motives, the sincerity of your actions, as the light, so that men shall be forced to acknowledge that you were honest and upright in intention.

*"And thy judgment as the noon-day."* The word 'judgment' here means *case*—the case to be decided by the judge, the point in hand that perplexes a man's soul, the grand trial at issue. Every man has a case, a cause—something to be decided; a cause that he looks to God to give him an issue upon. Now, if you are enabled to commit your way to the Lord, and trust in him, he will surely fulfil these promises. He will bring forth your imputed righteousness as the light to gladden your soul with its beaming rays. He will bring forth your integrity and uprightness to shine and glisten before the eyes of your believing brethren. He will also bring your judgment—the case in hand, the trial at issue, the point that lies most upon your heart, the thing that presses most deeply upon your conscience—he will bring this judgment forth as the noon-day. You shall see Satan defeated, sin pardoned, your enemies baffled, your case brought out to the light as clear as ever you have seen the noon-day sun walking in his brightness, and casting forth his beams of glory and splendour to enlighten the world.

## Spiritual Fruit

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Thursday Evening, September 2, 1858

"From me is thy fruit found." Hosea 14:8

Man unites in himself what at first sight seem to be directly opposite things; he is the greatest of sinners and yet the greatest of Pharisees. Now, what two things can be so opposed to each other as sin and self-righteousness? Yet the very same man who is a sinner from top to toe, with the whole heart sick and the whole heart faint, who is spiritually nothing else but a leper throughout, how contradictory it appears that the same man has in his own heart a most stubborn self-righteousness. Now, against these two evils God, so to speak, directs his whole artillery—he spares neither one nor the other; but it is hard to say which is the greatest rebellion against God—the existence of sin in man and what he is as a fallen sinner, or his Pharisaism—the lifting up his head in the pride of self-righteousness. It is not easy to decide which is the more obnoxious—the drunkard who sins without shame or the Pharisee puffed up to see how pleasing he is to God. The one is abhorrent to our feelings, and, as far as decency and morality are concerned, we would sooner see the Pharisee; but when we come to matters of religion the Pharisee seems the worst—at least our Lord intimated as much when he said the publicans and harlots would enter the kingdom of God before them.

Now, in this Book the Lord seems sometimes to knock Ephraim to pieces and then to put him together again. Sometimes we find denunciations against his backslidings, and then when Ephraim is broken to pieces the Lord seeks to raise him up, as he says in the 13th chapter, "When Ephraim spake trembling he exalted himself in Israel." When he was humble and broken down—broken so as to tremble at the majesty of God—he exalted himself—that is, God exalted him, for God exalts the humble; "but when he

offended in Baal he died"—the life of God seemed to be extinct in his soul. Now, in this last chapter the Lord speaks very comfortably, and he says, "O Ephraim," that is Israel, "return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." Never think to stand upright by thine own self-righteousness—thou hast fallen by thy iniquity, and now thou must humble thyself before the Lord thy God. Turn to the Lord thy God and say unto him, "Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously, so will we render the calves of our lips"—that is, we will sing and praise thy holy name. "Asshur shall not save us," that is the king of Assyria, "we will not ride upon horses," that is the devices of men, "neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods"—our idols are self and self-righteousness—"for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy." Well, I need not go on with the chapter. Ephraim shall say, "What have I to do any more with idols?" Here is Ephraim brought away from his idols: "I have heard him and observed him; I am like a green fig tree;" and then the words of our text, "From me is thy fruit found," as though he would show Ephraim this—"Ephraim, though thou art a sinner, let not that cast thee down, so that thou shalt think there never can be any fruit in thee: look upward and not to thyself for this fruit."

In opening up these words I shall with God's blessing show—

I.—What is the fruit called here "*thy fruit.*"

III.—How this fruit is from the Lord, "*from me is thy fruit found.*"

III.—How this fruit not only is from the Lord but is *found* also to be such, and made manifest, for we not only have it from the Lord, but it is found to be from the Lord—"From me is thy fruit *found.*"

Now, I sincerely believe that wherever God the Spirit has anything to do with a man's soul—and oh! if God the Spirit has nothing to do with a man's soul what an awful thing it is—in his quickening and regenerating operations upon it, his

communications of life and grace to it, there will always be a desire to bring forth fruit unto God. No child of God can be an Antinomian, and never so little as when God first begins to work upon the heart. If he has been years in the work there may be a leaning in his wretched heart to this weakness, to this carelessness, but no beginner has any leaning toward or is ever upset by this Antinomian devil. On the contrary his longing is to work out his own righteousness. He is trying to keep the law, working hard to please God by a life of obedience; he is seeking to be holy, and endeavouring to overcome the wicked passions of his heart. So that you never find a child of God under the first teaching who has any leaning towards Antinomianism; it is his will to please God by his own acts and words. But I believe there is a desire in every soul under divine teaching to bring forth fruit, to come out of the world and the things that are of the world, to walk in God's fear, and to have some testimonies that he is accepted, that he is a saved soul, and that he has an interest in the atoning blood of the Son of God. And all through a Christian's life wherever the Spirit moves, wherever the Spirit operates upon that man's heart and conscience, there will be a desire to bring forth fruit; and this is a mark and test of being one of God's family. A profession does not put us into Christ, knowledge does not put us into Christ, talking and chattering do not put us into Christ, none of the works of man give us a birth and being in Christ, and a title to receive out of the fulness of Christ; therefore, from first to last, beginning, middle, and end it is all of sovereign grace, of the work and workmanship of the Holy Ghost in the heart and conscience. If a soul is living under the operation of the Holy Ghost, under this communication and influence, there is a breaking out and a breathing after bringing forth fruit. How that godly man Habakkuk stood upon the watch tower and his soul was grieved within him because there were those that stirred up strife and grievances. How he grieved and groaned not only because the Lord did not hear his prayer, but because he did not bring forth fruit. When we see that leanness, that being content to drag on a life without any union and communion, real faith, hope, or love, we may be sure that the love of God is not there. The people of God may sink very low, but there are those

breathings after God that make them live to his praise and honour. Now, when they begin to long to bring forth fruit they begin to see what fruit is, for none can see what fruit is but the saints of God. All men do not know what fruit is, and until a man knows what it is he cannot bring it forth. For instance, here is a man who does not go to the races, to balls or parties, but goes to church and pays his debts. O what a good man he thinks he is; he says his prayers at night, and makes sure of going to heaven. The man is blind as a gnat, dead as a door nail, and his heart is hard as adamant; he does not know what real Christianity is. He gives beef to the poor at Christmas, subscribes to charities and missions, and thinks what wonderful things he is doing. The man has not his eyes open to see what true Christianity is and what real Christian fruit is. When a child of God begins to see what fruit is and that it must be spiritual, the first thing he sees is that natural fruit is not accepted of God. If I gave an order for a basket of fruit because I was expecting a friend to dine with me, and the fruiterer sent me a basket of sloes, crabs, or rotten oranges I should think he was insulting me; and so if a man has not sufficient knowledge to distinguish between the crabs and all the rottenness of human production and good fruit, he will find that the Lord is not a God to be mocked, but that the only fruit which is acceptable in his sight must be spiritually produced by union and communion with Jesus Christ. And I wish that you who profess religion, and who may have it to some extent, would pray for a clearer view of what fruit is, for then, instead of being puffed up with pride you would see that there was little else in you but thorns and briars. Now, this is what the soul must know—that all fruit is produced by union and communion with Christ. You will find that subject opened up in the seventh chapter of Romans, where we read of being married to him who is raised from the dead. So if a man is not married to Christ and does not thus bring forth fruit it is only bastard fruit. All fruit that is not produced by marriage to Christ is not legitimate fruit. As in nature where children are born out of wedlock, they are the offspring of adultery, and as such will bear the stamp of their parents, and cannot take part in the inheritance of the father; so a person may bring forth fruit, but if that fruit is not legitimate

God will stamp it with bastardy, and will not allow it to take part in the inheritance of his family. And, therefore, fruit is not of works. The gift of a few shillings or a few times going to chapel or church will not produce it; it is deeper than this. What is this fruit then? It is faith, hope, love, godly fear, submission to God's will, tenderness of conscience, love and esteem for the brethren, self-denial, putting off the old man, putting on the new, and I might stand here till midnight and then not exhaust the catalogue. These are set forth by the Apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians, where he says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." Here are all the fruits of the Spirit penned down by the Holy Ghost himself; but you may examine it for yourselves, and indeed compare what is in your soul with it; then you will confess how short you come of bearing that fruit, the bearing of which stamps the Christian indeed, but we shall never bear fruit to God until we are brought to see that our fruit comes from God.

II.—This leads me to my second part—"*From me* is thy fruit found." How positively and clearly is this set forth in the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of John's Gospel, where the Lord says, "Without me ye can do nothing." "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me." So you see that union with Christ is indispensable to the bringing forth of fruit; for as the sap flows out of the stem so it is with the believing soul and Jesus; only so far as Christ flows into his soul is he able to bring forth fruit unto God. "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." Then there is a being in Christ by vital union, and an abiding in him by faith, prayer, hope, and love, and a receiving grace for grace out of his fulness; so that from him is our fruit. Now, as we begin to feel day by day our barrenness, and as our wrinkles arise in our face, we begin to see that from Jesus only is our fruit. Let us then raise our souls up out of our miserable selves and fix our eyes upon him at the right hand of God and beg of him to communicate of his grace to our souls, and send down the

influence of his Spirit that will bring forth fruit in us, which is peace, praise, and honour to God. No one can bring forth fruit without a conflict with self; self checks the crop like the ivy clinging to and strangling the vine. I have a vine in the front of my house, and almost the first thing I noticed when I returned home yesterday was that every leaf was struck with mildew—in fact the whole tree has been struck, as it were, with the same withering disease. What an emblem of a poor, withered professor! There will never be a cluster either fit to be made into wine or eaten as dessert. Now, when we see what we are in ourselves we see nothing but mildew. As the vine seems to have more enemies than any other fruit, because, as it is said, it cheereth the heart of God and man, and we are represented in Scripture as branches of the vine, therefore we need the grace of God in order that we may overcome these enemies. Though I have not sufficient skill to cure the mildew on my vine, yet the Lord has skill to cure the mildew in our souls, for his grace can and does and will sanctify the sinner's heart; therefore whatever despair I might feel about having any fruit from the vine on my trellis, there shall be no mildew upon the trellis of your soul, for he can send a shower to wash off the mildew, and put forth his hand to knock off the insects that feed upon the leaves, or, worse than all, upon the fruit of the vine. The Lord says, "From me is thy fruit found." The fruit flows forth, the spirit of thankfulness, of brokenness, and godly sorrow for sin. And yet there will be times and seasons when we sink very low, and when we feel or fear that there never was a spark of grace in our heart. But your very feeling there is no fruit is in itself a fruit. Your mourning over your unfruitfulness and your being cast down into dejection, these very things are fruit if they are spiritual, for they are produced by the same Holy Ghost that brings forth the blossoms of faith, hope, and love.

III.—There is the finding of this fruit. In a vine some of the richest clusters are found under the leaves. Leaf and fruit go very much together, for where there is a leaf full of sand and mildew you find nothing but a cluster of rotten fruit. Well, so in grace; if there be little fruit there will be a withered profession, because

the leaf represents the profession. The world can see what you profess, and they will see the mildew spots upon it. "O," they say, "that man talks about religion, but he is just like us. You who have to deal with him know how he deals, how he can laugh and giggle like other men, and how passionate he is if anything crosses him. It is only a profession; he goes to chapel, but we all know what he is." Here is a profession with the mildew upon it. "See," they may say, "that man was drunk last night: here is a man who goes to North Street Chapel." If the leaf is so bad, what must the berry be? If the man's profession is such, what must be the man himself? So if the mildew has struck the leaf you may be sure the mildew has reached the clusters. We find that the best clusters sometimes grow on the last bough; so it is in grace—the humbler a man is the more fruit he will bring forth. The same sap that feeds the branch nearest the stem feeds the branch farthest off. "From me is thy fruit found." Your soul may be often cast down, and you may say, "Was there ever any sinner like me?" but your complaints do not take you into the world again; you are not telling lies or joking and gossiping with your neighbours, but you are mourning and groaning that you are not bringing forth fruit unto God. Now, the Lord may speak these words to encourage his saints: "Come out of the world. From me is thy fruit found. Not from the world. Be not carried away with the things of time and sense—not from worldly-mindedness, not from family distress is fruit produced—but from me, out of my fulness by the communications of my grace." If you don't get it from that source you will get it nowhere, and every branch that beareth not fruit he heweth down. So that we come to one of two things: you must either be a branch that bears fruit from Christ—from the communications of Christ's love to your soul—or else one that beareth not fruit, which the Father taketh away. There is no intermediate state whereby we have part from ourselves and part from Christ, for "from me," saith the Lord, "is thy fruit found."

## Spiritual Mysteries

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning, July 14, 1844

"In the Spirit he speaketh mysteries." 1 Cor. 14:2

In the days of the Apostles, God saw fit, for wise purposes, to bestow special and miraculous gifts upon the church. These, indeed, have been long withdrawn; and while they lasted, peculiar evils appear, through man's perverse nature, to have been connected with them; among them this not the least, that they tended much to fill with pride the person who possessed them. We therefore find the Apostle Paul reproving the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 14, for the confusion and disorder manifested in their assemblies, and giving directions how these gifts were to be exercised for the profit and edification of the church. The gifts I allude to were such as prophecy, speaking in strange tongues, healing the sick, and other miraculous powers of the Holy Ghost. It appears, then, that some of those who were favoured with these supernatural gifts, were apt to make a display of them; and amongst these, particularly the persons gifted with speaking in unknown tongues. Sooner than not display their gift they would speak in a language not understood by the congregation. This the Apostle reproveth. "For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue, speaketh not unto man, but unto God; for no man understandeth him; howbeit, *in the Spirit he speaketh mysteries.*" Now, the Apostle was not blaming him for speaking mysteries; but he blames him for speaking them in an unknown tongue: for in so doing he edified himself, but not the church. May we not apply this reproof to ministers now, who preach in such fine language, that God's poor, plain, and uneducated people hardly understand what they say?

Every true minister of the gospel is "a steward of the mysteries of God;" as the Apostle declares (1 Cor. 4:1), "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." And his office is, as God the Spirit teaches and enables

him, to bring forth these mysteries for the edification and consolation of the people of God. "We speak," says the Apostle, "the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory."

But what is a mystery? Let us endeavour to discover its scriptural meaning.

A mystery, then, has these three marks attending it. 1. It is a truth beyond the comprehension of nature, sense, and reason. 2. It is hid from the wise and prudent. And 3. It is revealed by the Spirit of God unto babes. These three distinct marks are found in every gospel mystery; and therefore nothing but divine teaching can lead us into a spiritual and experimental acquaintance with heavenly mysteries.

With God's blessing, I shall this morning endeavour to set forth some of those mysteries which are revealed in the Scriptures; and which, therefore, we may justly conclude, the person mentioned in the text would speak in the Spirit. And may God the Holy Ghost reveal them with power to our hearts.

1. The first grand mystery in point of importance which God has revealed in the word of truth, is *the mystery of the Trinity*; as we find the Apostle speaking (Col. 2:2), "That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the *mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.*" Here the Three Persons of the Trinity are named, and their undivided Essence declared to be "a mystery." Can we find the three marks of a mystery in it? It is, 1. Beyond the comprehension of nature, sense, and reason. 2. It is hid from the wise and prudent. They may, indeed, have a notional acquaintance with it, and contend for it as a part of revealed truth; but as to any feeling acquaintance with it, any experimental knowledge of it, any spiritual enjoyment of it, they are completely destitute. But 3. It is revealed to the babes, a secret into which God's people only are introduced by the teaching of the Holy Ghost.

A spiritual knowledge of the Trinity lies at the foundation of all vital godliness. To know Father, Son, and Holy Ghost by special teaching and divine revelation, is the sum and substance of spiritual religion, and is eternal life; according to the Lord's own testimony, John 17:3, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." Thus, sooner or later, the Lord leads all his people into a feeling acquaintance with, and divine reception of this glorious mystery: and thus they come to know the Father's electing love, the Son's redeeming work, and the Spirit's inward testimony; and that these Three are One. But how opposed to nature, sense, and reason is this glorious mystery; and how they all rise up in rebellion against it. How can Three be One, or one be Three? nature asks, and reason argues. And yet the babes receive and believe it. For take away the doctrine of the Trinity, and all their hope is gone in a moment. How can we rest upon Christ's atoning blood, if it is not the blood of the Son of God? or upon his justifying righteousness, if not the righteousness of God? or how could we be kept, led, taught, and guided by the Holy Ghost, if he too was not a divine Person in the Godhead? Thus we come to know the mystery of Three Persons in the Godhead, by feelingly receiving into our hearts the work of each with power; and yet we know that these Three are but one God. It is this inward reception of the truth in the love of it which holds up the soul in a storm. We are often tossed about, and ready to say, "How can these things be?" But we are brought up by this deep-rooted feeling, as the anchor brings up the ship in the gale, that we are undone without it. If this mystery be removed, our hope must be removed with it; for there is no pardon, peace, nor salvation, but what stands in, and flows out of, an experimental knowledge of the Three-One God.

2. Another deeply important mystery which the Holy Ghost has revealed in the Scriptures, is what the Apostle calls "the great mystery of godliness, *God manifest in the flesh,*"—the Person of Immanuel, "God with us." Deity and humanity in one glorious Person is this great "mystery;" in an experimental acquaintance

with which lies so much of the secret of vital godliness, and so much of the faith, hope, and love of a Christian. But do we not still find the three marks of a divine mystery attending it? Nature staggers, reason fails, sense is confounded, that the Eternal God should lie in the womb of the Virgin a span long—that he "who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, should make himself of no reputation, and take upon him the form of a servant, and be made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, should humble himself, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:6, 7, 8.) That he who was crucified on Calvary should be God and man in one glorious Person, may well be a mystery hidden from the wise and prudent. But in the feeling reception of it into the heart, and in an experimental acquaintance with it in the conscience, does every child of God, more or less, feel vital godliness to consist. When we begin to view, by the eye of faith, the Person of Jesus as God-Man, see his blood as the blood of God, his righteousness as the righteousness of God, his love as the love of God, his sympathy as the sympathy of God, his power as the power of God, and that all he is and has as God is engaged on behalf of his people, how such a sight encourages the poor fainting sinner still to hope in his mercy; and how it emboldens him who is groaning and crying under the evils of his heart, to take refuge under the shadow of this glorious mystery, "God manifest in the flesh." How the love, grace, and condescension displayed in this wondrous mystery meet every want that God's people feel, suit every desire of their hearts, and are adapted to every experience of their troubled minds. Let this truth go, and they are driven on the quicksands of despair; let this hope fail, and their souls are eternally lost; let this sure refuge be abandoned, and they are tossed on the billows of guilt and shame, without any haven to flee unto. Thus, however nature, sense, and reason may be baffled by this mystery, yet as God the Spirit, in fulfilling his covenant office, unfolds and holds it up to the soul's view, and applies it with unction and power to the conscience, the whole heart of the child of God receives it, his affections flow to it, and all his hope hangs and centres in it. Sooner, therefore, than give up this glorious mystery, he would,

when favoured with the enjoyment of it, consent to have his head struck off with an axe on the scaffold.

Now, if there were no cavillings working against it in our carnal mind, no mustering up of misgivings sturdy and strong, no formidable array of infidel objections, no subtle reasonings and pleadings of our natural understanding, it would cease to be a mystery to us. Could sense understand it, reason comprehend it, or nature explain it, we should not need the Holy Ghost to reveal it, nor faith to receive it; but because it is a mystery beyond nature, sense, and reason, it must be received by faith through the revelation of God the Spirit. There may be some poor desponding creature here this morning who has been tossed up and down, and his soul sorely oppressed with the harassing darts of infidelity. Do not despair because your faith is staggering under the force of these infidel suspicions that continually shoot across your heart. Do not think that you are altogether a castaway, or will soon turn out an open infidel. It is because Satan sees that your heart longs to embrace this glorious mystery, that he exerts all his power, and musters all his infernal arts and arms against you. It is when the soul longs most to lay hold of this mystery, that Satan plies most thick his fiery darts; so that the very infernal objections that cross your mind, the very staggerings of faith, and sinkings of hope, so far from proving that you believe not that God was made manifest in the flesh, evidently show that you do believe it; for those who believe it doctrinally with the head, have few or none of these darts of infidelity; they only assail those who believe with the heart. I believe, from soul experience, that many of God's people are exercised with these temptations of infidelity; my own soul has had to labour under them at times for years. But these gusts of infidelity that rush down on the mind, only tend eventually to ground the soul more firmly in the truth; as the winds and storms that blow upon the oak only make it take firmer root in the soil. A winter storm soon blows down a dead tree; but it makes the living tree, when the first shock is passed away, to take a stronger root: and thus the gusts of infidelity, which would root up a dead professor, eventually establish a living soul more firmly in the truth. For

myself I can say, that the more I have been tried about this mystery, the more firmly I have cleaved to it, for I have felt to part with it is to part with all.

3. Another mystery revealed in the sacred Scriptures, and received by faith, is, the mystery of *the union of the church with her covenant Head*, as the apostle speaks, Ephes. 5:30-32, where having declared, "we are members of Christ's body, of his flesh, and of his bones;" he adds, "for this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. *This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*" But why should the union of the church with her covenant Head be a mystery? Let us see if the three marks of mystery, which I before pointed out, are to be found here. *First*, nature, sense, and reason, cannot understand how the church could be in eternal union with her covenant Head. That the future wife can be a bride before she is born—how can reason comprehend this? And, *secondly*, is it not hidden from the wise and prudent, who therefore shoot out their arrows, even bitter words against it, and treat it with universal contempt and ridicule? How many ministers in London, for instance, believe in eternal union with Christ? And O what an armoury of academical objections may be found against it! But does it not bear the *third* mark of a gospel mystery; that it is revealed to babes by the Spirit, and sealed on their hearts with a heavenly unction? And a mystery indeed it must ever be to them, that such a beggarly wretch, such a filthy pauper, such a vile adulteress, should ever have an eternal union with the Son of God. I know indeed that the Church was viewed and taken before her Adam-fall; but base is the condition in which she is found, when the union is manifested by the Spirit's work. If a king were to take a beggar girl to his bed and throne, it would not be half or a thousandth part of such a marvel, as that the darling Son of God should take into union with himself his Church and Bride; pluck her, when debased to the lowest hell, from the ruins of the fall, wash her in his own blood, clothe her in his own righteousness, bring her into a feeling sense of union with himself, and shew her that this union existed before all worlds. O what a mystery is this to

receive into the heart by faith.

But the very essence of a mystery is, that it is beyond nature, sense, and reason. And will not then nature, sense, and reason fight against it? And will not faith stagger at the thought, that a vile wretch, sunk into the depths of sin and shame, should be in eternal union with the glorious Son of God? Do not a thousand darts of suspicion shoot through the mind whether these things can be true? Does not Satan perpetually ply all his infernal armoury of doubts and fears to sink the soul, if he could, in the waves of doubt, despondency, and despair? But in spite of all suspicions and objections, the soul is brought to receive it by a living faith; and in embracing this glorious mystery, feels a measure of its sweetness and power. And no one truth of revelation received into the heart will more debase the sinner, exalt the Saviour, and bring glory to the Triune God.

4. Another mystery revealed in the sacred Scriptures, and made known by the Spirit to the hearts of God's people, is, *the mystery of the gospel*; as the Apostle speaks, (Eph. 6:19), "That utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, *to make known the mystery of the gospel*, for which I am an ambassador in bonds." *The mystery of the gospel!* Let us see if the three marks are applicable to this mystery also. Is not the pure gospel of Jesus (I say, *pure*, in opposition to a mangled or mongrel gospel) opposed to nature, sense, and reason? Is it not hidden from the wise and prudent? And is it not revealed unto babes? But what is the gospel? It is "good news," a proclamation of mercy and grace, a message of glad tidings. But to whom? Why this is what makes it a mystery, that, in the gospel, salvation is proclaimed for guilty wretches, condemned rebels, and vile criminals. It would be no mystery if it were for the good and holy, the pious and religious. Nature, sense, and reason could easily understand how a reward is given to the deserving; nor would the wise and prudent cavil at that. But this makes it a mystery, that the gospel of the grace of God should be for the worthless and undeserving, for the guilty and filthy, the lost and undone. Yet in this consists the glory, the preciousness, and the

comfort of the gospel, that it is for sinners; according to those words, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world *to save sinners*; of whom I am chief." (1 Tim. 1:15.) And what a word the Holy Ghost makes use of (Rom. 4:5), "He justifieth the *ungodly!*" He does not justify those who are naturally righteous, holy, and religious; but the mystery is, that he takes the sinner as he is, in all his filth and guilt, washes him in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, and clothes in his own robe of righteousness the naked shivering wretch, who has nothing to cover him but filthy rags. How this is set forth, Zech. 3:3, 4: "Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." This is the gospel, the mystery hid from the wise and prudent, but revealed to babes. "But," say men, "such a gospel as this leads to licentiousness; we know that the Scriptures say, 'Christ died for sinners;' but we must guard it with conditions, and hedge it in with limitations, or it will only make men sin the more." But what other than a gospel of free grace, without conditions, could suit us in our desperate circumstances? We want something that comes down to us, not something for us to clamber up to; something to pluck us out of the pit of ruin into which we are sunk; not a something suspended over the top of the pit for us, all maimed and crippled, to reach by mounting its sandy and slippery sides. We are like the man journeying from Jerusalem to Jericho, who fell among thieves, and was left half dead. Instead of getting to the inn by our own exertions, we want the good Samaritan to come to us, pour the wine and oil of the gospel into our bleeding wounds, and carry us himself where we can find food, rest, and shelter. And no other gospel is worthy the name but the gospel of the grace of God, which brings glad tidings of pardon to the criminal, of mercy to the guilty, and of salvation to the lost. A gospel which nature can understand, which sense can explain, which reason can fathom, is not the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no mystery in a conditional gospel: but that the holy God should look down in love on

wretches that deserve the damnation of hell; that the pure and spotless Jehovah should pity, save, and bless enemies and rebels, and make them endless partakers of his own glory; this indeed is a mystery, the depth of which eternity itself will not fathom. As I before hinted, wherever there is a mystery, there will be doubts and suspicions floating through the mind; and as regards the mystery of the gospel, it will chiefly be how it can possibly be for such vile, guilty wretches. "If I could do something to recommend myself to God's favour, if I could purify my heart, renew my mind, and abstain from all sin, live entirely to God's glory, and be holy in thought, word, and deed, then," says the soul, "I think I might be accepted. But when I continually find all manner of evil working in my mind, every base corruption crawling in my heart, every thing vile, sensual, and filthy rising up from its abominable deeps, can I think God can look down in love and mercy on such a wretch?" And yet our very necessities, our very poverty, the very extremity of the case, and the desperate nature of all the circumstances, all combine, under the teachings and leadings of the Spirit, to prepare us for the gifts of faith, hope, and love; and thus really confirm us in a knowledge of the mystery of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For we feel brought to this solemn conclusion in our minds, that without a free grace gospel, we are entirely lost. The law, we are sure, cannot save us, for it only curses and condemns; the creature cannot help us, nor can we help ourselves. But the free grace of God, flowing through the Saviour's love and blood, and manifested in the gospel, brings mercy, peace, and pardon, unclogged by works or conditions. And therefore nothing but such a gospel can suit our case, or do us any real good. Thus, sometimes through painful necessity, and sometimes through pleasing enjoyment; sometimes feeling lost without it, and sometimes feeling its beauty and glory; sometimes driven by the north wind of Sinai, and sometimes drawn by the south wind of Zion, we are led to embrace this glorious mystery of the gospel. And sweet indeed is it to see how in it all the perfections of God harmonize; how the sinner is pardoned, and yet sin condemned; how the justice of God is preserved in all its purity, and yet the mercy of God is manifested in all its fulness; how all the attributes of Jehovah meet in the

Person of Christ, and the sinner is saved without one being sacrificed; nay, rather all heightened, magnified, and glorified in the face, love, blood, and work of the Lord Jesus. Now no other gospel than this is worth the name; no other gospel than the gospel of the grace of God is revealed to the heart by the Spirit. Every other is a mongrel gospel, and will leave the soul under the wrath of God. No other gospel brings deliverance from the curse of the law, manifests the pardon of sin, gives a sense of acceptance and reconciliation unto God, and takes away the sting of death: nor is any other gospel but the gospel that reveals salvation for the vilest of the vile, a mystery; nor will any other give the church all the comfort, and God all the glory.

5. Another mystery which the Scripture speaks of, is *the mystery of the kingdom of heaven*; as the Lord said unto his disciples, "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God." (Mark 4:11.) By "the kingdom of God" is meant the same thing as "the kingdom of heaven;" that is, the internal kingdom set up in the heart by the power of the Spirit:—that kingdom which shall stand for ever and ever, and last when time shall be no more. This the Lord calls a mystery. And if it is a mystery, it will have the three marks I have mentioned; it will be beyond nature, sense, and reason, will be hidden from the wise and prudent, and will be revealed unto babes. Let us see if we can find these marks belonging to the kingdom of heaven set up in the heart. It certainly is above nature, sense and reason, that God should dwell in a man's heart, as the apostle says, "Christ in you, the hope of glory;" and again, "Ye are the temple of the living God: as God hath said I will dwell in them, and walk in them." (2 Cor. 6:16.) That God should take up his abode in a man's heart; that Christ should be in a man; and the Holy Ghost should make the body of his saints his temple; how can nature, sense, and reason understand such a mystery as this? When one of the ancient martyrs, I think it was Polycarp, was brought before Trajan, when the Emperor asked him his name, he answered, "I am Polycarp, the God-bearer, for I carry God in me." At this answer the Emperor laughed, and said, "Let him be thrown to the wild beasts." That was the only answer a

persecuting tyrant could give. That a man, frail and feeble, whom a lion could tear to pieces in a few moments, carried God in his bosom,—how could the wise and prudent Trajan believe a thing so unheard of? Yet it is a mystery revealed to babes for they receive it in the love of it under divine teaching, as one of the mysteries that God the Spirit makes known in the heart.

Daniel, in prophecy, had a view of this kingdom of God. In interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image, he said to the King, "Thou sawest till a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." (Dan. 2:34, 35.) This "stone cut out without hands," represented the Lord Jesus, and shadowed forth his kingdom which was to stand upon the ruins of all the preceding. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall brake in pieces and consume all the kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." (Dan. 2:44.) Thus the internal kingdom of God breaks to pieces all the other kingdoms, and stands upon their ruins; it breaks to pieces the kingdom of pride, the kingdom of covetousness, the kingdom of self-righteousness, the kingdom of lust and passion, in a word, all that kingdom in which nature, sense, and reason reign. Now, if this is the case, that the kingdom of God stands on the ruins of all the rest, it must, indeed, be a mystery, that I have no true religion till I have lost all my old; that I can enjoy no sense of God's goodness till I have seen the wreck of all my own; that the mercy and grace of God are built upon the ruins of self; that I have neither righteousness, or holiness of my own to boast in, or to be saved by. That the kingdom of heaven should be thus built on the wreck of the creature is indeed a mystery which nature, sense, and reason cannot comprehend; is a mystery indeed hidden from the wise and prudent; but one which is revealed by

the Spirit of God unto babes. And to their experience I may appeal. Do we ever know anything of the grace of God in Christ till nature is laid low? Do we ever feel the blessedness of God's salvation till our own righteousness becomes an unshapely wreck? Do we feel anything of supernatural religion and vital godliness till our own religion and our own exertions fail us in the hour of need? Thus the internal kingdom of God stands upon the ruins of nature; and only so far as it does so stand, has it any abiding place in our souls.

But this kingdom of heaven within is exposed to perpetual assaults; the child of God, therefore, taught by the Spirit, finds there is an inward mystery in himself—*the mystery, I mean, of the two natures*, of "the flesh lusting against the spirit," and the "spirit lusting against the flesh." Are you not often a mystery to yourself? Warm one moment, cold the next; abasing yourself one half-hour, exalting yourself the following; loving the world, full of it, steeped up to your lips in it to-day; crying, groaning, and sighing for a sweet manifestation of the love of God to-morrow; brought down to nothingness, covered with shame and confusion, on your knees before you leave your room; filled with pride and self-importance before you have got downstairs; despising the world, and willing to give it all up for one taste of the love of Jesus when in solitude; trying to grasp it with both hands when in business. What a mystery are you! Touched by love, and stung with enmity; possessing a little wisdom, and a great deal of folly; earthly-minded, and yet having the affections in heaven; pressing forward, and lagging behind; full of sloth, and yet taking the kingdom with violence. And thus the Spirit, by a process which we may feel but cannot adequately describe, leads us into the mystery of the two natures, that "company of two armies," perpetually struggling and striving against each other in the same bosom. So that one man cannot more differ from another than the same man differs from himself. But do not nature, sense, and reason contradict this? Do not the wise and prudent deny this? "There must be a progressive advance," they say, "in holiness; there must be a gradual amendment of our nature until at length all sin is rooted out, and we become as perfect as Christ." But the mystery of the kingdom of heaven is this, that our carnal mind

undergoes no alteration, but maintains a perpetual war with grace: and thus, the deeper we sink in self-abasement under a sense of our vileness, the higher we rise in a knowledge of Christ; and the blacker we are in our own view, the more comely does Jesus appear.

6. Another mystery spoken of in Scripture, is "*the mystery of iniquity*;" as we read (2 Thess. 2:7), "The mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way." There is a twofold mystery of iniquity—one outward, and the other inward. The outward mystery of iniquity is in the professing church; and to this the Apostle refers in the passage quoted, where he shews that it will one day be fully ripened and developed in the man of sin, that "Wicked" one, "whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." (ver. 8.) The mystery of iniquity in the outward church is the mystery of a dead profession, the hands being full of blood, and the heart full of hypocrisy. This, in its varied forms, seems now fast ripening to a head, and gradually advancing till it will come to its grand completion in the "man of sin."

But there is, also, the inward mystery of iniquity in a man's own bosom. And O what a mystery is that! What shapes and forms it wears! What marks and disguises it puts on! How it intermingles itself with every thought, appears in every word, and discovers itself in every action! This inward mystery of iniquity we cannot for a single moment bar out; like a flood, it will force its way in; do what we will, still it works in the heart; with all our desires or resolutions to the contrary, we cannot keep this mystery from working and manifesting itself perpetually. This mystery in a man's heart takes such subtle forms, wears such various dresses, insinuates itself into such crevices and corners, entwines and entangles itself so around every thought of the heart, that we never seem free from it. Would we pray against it? The mystery of iniquity still works in the very prayer. Would we read the Scriptures to find some promise against it? It mingles with all our reading. Would we separate ourselves from the world, and

seclude ourselves from all society? Still the mystery of iniquity will work in the deepest solitude. So that do what we will, we find the mystery of iniquity will still work. But is it not hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes?

7. Another mystery revealed in the Scriptures, is *the mystery of the resurrection*. As Paul says, "Behold, *I shew you a mystery*; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (1 Cor. 15:51, 52.) The mystery of the resurrection is this, that the vile body shall one day become a glorious body, changed into a perfect likeness to the glorified humanity of Jesus, and entirely conformed to his image, so as to be for ever with him, and like to him, as the Holy Ghost testifies, Phil. 3:21: "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2.) Now this is a mystery which nature, sense, and reason cannot grasp; a mystery hidden from the wise and prudent, and yet revealed unto babes. Has it not struck you sometimes as an inexplicable mystery, how you could be ever holy enough for heaven, so as to find all your delight to centre in looking at Jesus and being like him through the countless ages of eternity; and to have no other happiness but what consists in communion with the Three-One God? Is not this a mystery? Now you can scarcely for a quarter of an hour be spiritually-minded, scarcely now for the space of five minutes be engaged in meditating on the Person of Christ. When on your knees, vile thoughts will intrude; when at the ordinance, some wicked iniquity will suggest itself; in hearing the word, your minds cannot sometimes for a quarter of the sermon keep up their attention. Being now so earthly and sensual, is it not a mystery how you, who are God's people, shall one day be perfectly holy, perfectly pure, and perfectly conformed to the image of Christ; and that all your happiness and joy will be in being holy, and in

holding communion with the Three-One God? O what a mystery is this to nature, sense, and reason. Do they not stagger and give way beneath it? When we compare the happiness and glory of the saints in heaven with what we are here on earth, how amazing the contrast. When we see our vileness, baseness, carnality, and sensuality; how our souls cleave to dust, and grovel in things evil and hateful; how dark our minds, how earthly our affections, how depraved our hearts, how strong our lusts, how raging our passions; we feel ourselves, at times, no more fit for God, in our present state, than Satan himself. What a mystery then is this, that such a wonderful change should take place as to make the saints perfectly holy in body, soul, and spirit, and fit guests to sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb! Sure I am, the more that a man becomes acquainted with the depravity of his fallen nature, and the more that he feels the workings of devilism in his heart, the more will he wonder how he can be brought into such a state as to be perfectly holy, enjoy uninterrupted communion with the Three-One God, and bask for ever in the smiles of Jehovah.

But though this is a mystery which nature, sense, and reason cannot comprehend, yet faith receives it as revealed by the Holy Ghost. Would it be heaven, if we could carry our present depraved nature there; our pride, our presumption, our hypocrisy, with all the abominable workings of our fallen, filthy, and grovelling hearts? To carry these with us to that glorious abode of perfection, holiness, and purity would make heaven to us a hell. Therefore, though it is indeed a mystery how it can be, yet, as received by faith, the child of God is happy that it should be so; for he is certain, were it otherwise, heaven would be no heaven for him. He would not be fit for it; he could not enjoy it; nay, the very thought of being there for ever would be irksome and intolerable to him. Nay more, when the soul is tossed to and fro by exercises and perplexities, and the workings of sin in a depraved heart, and can look forward with something of gospel hope to that day when it shall feel the plague of sin no more, but be perfectly holy and perfectly pure in body and soul, it becomes commended to the conscience, and is embraced by faith as a

blessed mystery suitable to us, and glorifying to God.

8. And then comes what John saw in Revelation (10:7): "In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, *the mystery of God shall be finished*, which he has declared to his servants the prophets." This is the winding up of all things, when the mystery of iniquity in the professing world; the mystery of God's dealings with his people in grace; the mystery of his dealings with them in providence; the mystery of the way in which God has led his church; the mystery of all our trials, temptations, afflictions, and sufferings; the mystery of the crooked road we have walked, of the tangled labyrinth which we have threaded; the mystery why the wicked have prospered, and the righteous been oppressed—all these mysteries, which now puzzle and perplex nature, sense, and reason, will then be unfolded to the church of God. Then "the mystery will be finished;" and God will lay bare the mystery hid for ages in Christ Jesus, and make it known to the salvation of his people, the confusion of his enemies, and the glory of himself.

Now, "in the Spirit," the man of whom the Apostle spoke, preached "mysteries;" for "in the Spirit" they must be preached, and "in the Spirit" they must be received; or he that preaches, and those that hear, will preach and hear in vain. But what a mercy if the Spirit has preached any of these mysteries into our hearts; and what a blessing if we have received them in a measure of faith, hope, and love; and being deeply sensible of our ignorance, have received the truth in the love of it, been enabled to embrace it, in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, for our soul's edification and consolation. They must be received as mysteries. Immediately that natural reason intrudes, and the question is asked, "How can these things be?" we cease to submit to God's will and word. But when we fall down before the throne of God, and feeling that though we cannot understand them, cannot comprehend them, cannot reason ourselves into them, we yet are enabled to receive them into our heart by a living faith, we see their beauty, taste their sweetness, and enjoy a measure of their glory.

Thus we have some evidence that we have received and have felt a power in the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, when a reasonable religion, a natural religion, an intellectual religion satisfies us no longer. Has there not been a time with us when we scorned all mysteries, and would have no religion but one which we could comprehend, and, by dint of our natural understanding, could lay hold of? And through mercy, has not this proud Babel been laid low? And have not some of us, through the teachings of God in the conscience, found nature, sense, and reason buried in the dust; and felt ourselves brought down to be little children, to know our own ignorance, and to cry to the Lord to teach us the truth by divine revelation? And since the Lord in mercy has brought our reason to nought, since in mercy he has caused the tall steeples of natural religion to topple down and be stretched in the dust, have we not felt a measure of sweetness, of power, of reality in the things of God not known before? Has not truth come with life and light into our souls, made us new creatures, revolutionized our lives, changed all our views, and given us eyes to see realities we never thought of before? And has not the Gospel of the grace of God been received into a believing heart, and a measure of its sweetness been experienced? It is thus we have some evidence that we have received the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. And are they not doubly sweet, because reason cannot comprehend them, because we are not able to understand them; and because they can only be received from the lips of Jesus, or as they are dropped into the heart, and distilled on the conscience by the power of the Holy Ghost? And is it not far more blessed to learn them thus, than if we could understand all mysteries by natural intellect, or fathom the depths of God by the line of creature understanding?

Some of you perhaps are poor and despised, and are ridden down by great professors; your family and friends perhaps cast you out, and say, "Really we cannot understand you; you were a good Christian once, a pattern to others, a truly pious character; and everybody loved and spoke well of you. But," say they, "what a strange person you are now! we cannot at all get on with you."

Ever since you have gone to that chapel, and become connected with that strange set, you are quite altered, and we know not what to make of you." Does not this shew that the mystery, revealed unto babes, is hidden from the wise and prudent? If all could see as we see, hear as we hear, feel as we feel, the gospel would then be no mystery at all; but by knowing something of this mystery, we are made to differ from them, and this stirs up their enmity and wrath. "What," say they, "are there only two or three in a village, only half a dozen in a town, only one in a family going to heaven? and are none right but they?—Away with such narrow-minded, bigoted wretches." What is this but declaring that there is a mystery in this people's religion? If they could understand it, if it were agreeable to nature, sense, and reason, it would cease to be a mystery, and you would cease to have a testimony from God that you have received it into your heart with power. Therefore, to know gospel mysteries by divine teaching, will separate a man from the world, lead him out of false churches, cut him off from dead ministers, and bring him into union with the people of God. And as he finds these are spiritually led into the mysteries of the kingdom of God, it will produce a communion with them, and a sweetness which he never knew in dead churches; and, his heart being dissolved in love and affection, he will cry, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." (Ruth 1:16.) And thus he will have an increasing testimony from God that he is not one of the "wise and prudent" from whom these things are hidden, but one of "the babes" to whom they are revealed.

O may we know more of these divine mysteries! And may the Lord the Spirit lead us more deeply into them, favour us with more sweet and abiding views of them, and specially make the mystery of the gospel, in the Person, love, and blood of Jesus, "all our salvation and all our desire." And then, we shall bless God not only that there is a mystery in the gospel, but that he has mercifully unfolded it with power to our consciences.

## Spiritual Paradoxes

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, Nov. 25, 1860

"As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." 2 Cor. 6:9, 10

What a portrait does the apostle draw in this chapter of a servant of Jesus Christ! What a description does he give of a true ambassador of God to the souls of men! We see sometimes portraits of distinguished characters, or read descriptions of their features, manners, dress, and appearance; and these are often so correct that were we thrown into their company, we should at once recognise them from their resemblance to what we have thus seen and read of them, though they themselves were previously personally unknown to us. Now if we were to take through the length and breadth of the land this portrait of a Christian minister, this description of a servant of God, as delineated by Paul in the chapter before us, and examine by this portrait and by this description all or any who call themselves ministers of Christ and servants of God, how many, think you, should we find to correspond with, I will not say the whole, but even a good part of the character and description here given? Not to press it too closely, take but two verses as merely a part of the whole description, distinct from our text which furnishes another portion: "By pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." (2 Cor. 6:6, 7.) Now who can say that we have any lack of professed servants of Jesus Christ and ministers of the gospel in this country? We may safely assume that in this or that town there are six men in or out of the National Establishment who call themselves servants of God and ministers of Jesus Christ; or, to bring it to a narrower point, let us

suppose that in this or that village there is but one resident clergyman who shall consider himself, as many we know do, alone commissioned to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. Assume also a circumstance by no means uncommon, that, strong in his episcopal ordination and legal title, he should denominate and denounce all other unordained preachers who may come within the bounds of his parish schismatics. Surely, with such firm and strongly asserted claims to be an ambassador of God, he could not reasonably object to a comparison with the portrait and description given of one by an inspired apostle, especially as he says, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ;" and, "But in all things *approving* ourselves as the ministers of God." How far he could stand such a test the great day must decide.

But you will perhaps say, "Look at home. Never mind other men. How do your own credentials stand? Where and what are you when compared with Paul's portrait and description of a minister of God and a servant of Jesus Christ?" In reply to your question, I hope that the Lord has given me both inward and outward testimonies that I am one though the least and last of his servants; but I frankly confess, when I compare myself with this description, and examine my features by this picture, I shrink into insignificance, and feel to come so deplorably short of the character and description of a minister of Christ as drawn by the pen of Paul, that I seem utterly unworthy of the name. But you will say, "If this be the case, why do you choose such a text as this? Why don't you take less lofty ground and find some lower standard?" I might ask, by way of answer, when a schoolmaster is teaching a boy to write, why does he set before him a perfect copy slip? Or when a pupil is learning to engrave, or to draw, or to chisel, why is he furnished by his teacher with the best models? Because he knows there is no other way whereby he can learn to write, or engrave, or draw, or make a statue properly. If you set before him bad copy slips he will never write a good hand, for he will naturally follow the pattern placed before him; and so if you give him faulty models, he will never attain to any degree of excellency as an artist or a sculptor. These perfect

models show him also his own deficiencies, and thus not only teach him what true excellence is, but make and keep him humble by giving him to see and feel how far he is from it.

But the words of the apostle are not only descriptive of a Christian minister, but also of a Christian people; for the experience of a servant of God in almost every point except that of the ministry does not differ from theirs, nor does he walk in a different path from them. His is the same faith, his the same hope, his the same love, his the same trials, his the same consolations; so that though the words of our text do in the first instance specially apply to the servants of Christ, yet they are so comprehensive as to take in, not them only, but every one in whose heart God is working by his Holy Spirit. Were it not so, why should I preach from the words this morning? You are not a congregation of preachers, but simple hearers of the gospel. If therefore the text has no bearing upon you, why should I attempt to speak from it this day? But it is as much a description of the experience of a private Christian as of a minister of Christ: and so I think you will find it, if I am enabled to lay bare its spiritual and experimental meaning.

But when in this spirit we come to look at it a little more closely, we may well call our text a chain of paradoxes. And observe how each spiritual paradox is fastened together by a double link. In seeking therefore this morning to unwind this chain, I shall take up these double links in the order in which they present themselves to my hand.

"As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

I.—Let us look, first, at the double link that presents itself in the very opening of our text: "*As unknown and yet well known.*"

i. This is true in a *literal sense*. God's people, as well as God's

servants, are little known and less esteemed in this world. It is God's purpose and a part of his infinite wisdom that it should be so. The Lord is training up heirs of an exceeding and eternal weight of glory, and preparing them for those mansions of holiness and bliss which he has prepared for them before the foundation of the world. But whilst they are here below they are in a state of obscurity. We may compare them to a large and valuable diamond, which is now undergoing the operations of cutting and polishing in some obscure court in the city, no one scarcely knowing of its existence or value but its owner and the jeweller who is patiently cutting it into shape. But one day it may adorn a monarch's crown. So whilst God is cutting and polishing his diamonds by trials and temptations, sufferings and afflictions, they are hidden from the eyes of men, many of them literally and actually in obscure alleys and courts, in garrets and alms-houses; but when the Lord maketh up his jewels, they will shine forth for ever in the mediatorial crown. God has chosen the poor of this world for the most part to be rich in faith. Not many notable in the annals of learning, power, or rank; not many noble, not many rich, not many mighty, has he called by his grace to a knowledge of himself. The Lord's people rarely possess any wealth, station, property, or worldly distinction. They are for the most part poor and despised, as their Lord and Master was before them, and such the world cares neither to know nor notice.

But not only in a *literal* sense are the saints and servants of God unknown to the men of this world, but they are *spiritually* unknown. What does the world know of their sorrows, their distress of conscience, the bitterness they feel under the application of a broken law, under the hidings of God's face, under the cruel temptations of Satan, under the misgivings and fears, the doubts and exercises, by which they are so cast down? And what does it know of their joys and consolations, deliverances and manifestations; the sweet discoveries of the blood and grace of Christ to their heart; the love of God shed abroad in their soul, and the inward witness of the Spirit to their spirit that they are God's children? As they are unknown in their sorrows, they are unknown in their joys; for their joy is that

which a stranger intermeddleth not with. What does the world know of their doubts and fears; of their misgivings and apprehensions whether the work upon their hearts be genuine, whether they have an interest in the finished work of the Son of God, whether what they have experienced has been wrought in their soul by a divine power? What does the world know of their earnest and prayerful desires after God and their seeking after his presence and favour; of what they feel and enjoy in hearing their experience described by a servant of God, and the testimony thereby afforded to the reality of the work upon their heart? What does the world know of the breaking in of the light of the Lord's countenance, and the sweet springing up of a good hope through grace? What does the world know of their temptations to disbelieve and question every sacred truth, or what they experience under the fiery darts of Satan, stirring up every base and bad feeling in their wretched hearts? Or what does the world know of their deliverance from these temptations, the support they receive under them, and the way in which the Lord makes them work for their spiritual good? Look at the dying believer: what does the world know of the sweet consolation which that dying believer is experiencing in the very agony of death? What does it see of the glorious vision of an eternal crown which the Holy Ghost anoints his dying eyes to behold as eternally his? What does it see of the choir of angels surrounding his bed, and how they are waiting to waft his soul to heaven?

ii. But if "unknown," yet—and here is the paradox—they are *well known*.

1. They are well known *to God the Father*, for he knew them with the foreknowledge of approbation when he chose them in Christ before the foundation of the world. We therefore read "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Pet. 1:2); and "whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate." (Rom. 8:29.)

But God the Father knoweth them also in time as well as eternity; for he "knoweth the way of the righteous." He knows therefore

every thought of their heart, every word of their lip, every action of their hands. He knows too all their wants, with every desire that springs up in their mind, every secret cry and inward groan, every feeling of contrition, brokenness, repentance, and humility; all their self-abasement and self-loathing on account of sin, with all their confessions and supplications before the throne of grace. He knows too the faith that he himself gives them to lay hold of the Son of his love; the hope he inspires in his mercy, the love he sheds abroad to his name. These things are not concealed from the eye of God, who searches all hearts, and before whom every secret lies naked and bare. How beautifully is all this expressed in Psalm 139: "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and my uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me." (Psal. 139:1-5.)

2. Nor are they unknown to the *Lord Jesus Christ*; for "the Lord knoweth them that are his." And does he not say "I am the good shepherd, and know my *sheep*, and am known of mine?" And again, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." They often do not know themselves, for the work of grace is obscured by the darkness of their minds and the unbelief of their hearts. But he can distinguish his own work, not only from any base imitation of it, but in the depths of its obscurity. He can see sincerity, uprightness, godly fear at work in the hearts of his people, though they may be tempted to think there is nothing in them but insincerity and hypocrisy. The Lord can discern his own work and his own grace, however weak, feeble, or disputed; and therefore however low his people may sink, he knows all their sinkings and all their risings, all their temptations and all their afflictions; and not only so, but he is able to stretch forth his hand to give support under them and deliver out of them.

3. And they are well known to the *Holy Ghost*, who began the

work of grace upon their heart, who is poured out upon them and abides in them as a Spirit of grace and of supplications, who helps their infirmities, teaches them how to pray and what to pray for, and intercedes in them and for them with groanings which cannot be uttered. He knows when and what promises to apply to their hearts, and how to comfort them in their afflictions, to reveal Christ to them, and form him in them the hope of glory.

4. And they are well known by each other, even when they are not known to each other; for they are taught by the same Spirit, led into the same faith, have the same sorrows and the same joys, can speak the same language, are walking in the same path of tribulation, and are looking forward to the same heavenly crown.

5. Ministers of Christ also are in another sense, "though unknown, yet *well known*." There is spread through this country a people little known and observed by the world, but who are in close union with each other; and by this people the real servants of Christ are well known and highly esteemed. Being taught by the same Spirit, there is a fellow feeling in the saints of God, uniting them to each other and to the servants of God, and kindling in the bosom love and affection to those whom they only know by their writings, or their general acceptability to the living members of the mystical body of Christ.

II.—But now we come to another double link, equally mysterious, equally paradoxical, yet equally susceptible of a gracious interpretation: "*As dying, and, behold, we live.*"

i. This is true *literally*. Many of the Lord's people are dying the greater part of their lives, and yet live till their work is done. It is just thirty years ago since I was first laid aside from the work of the ministry by a severe and protracted illness, mainly brought on I believe by hard labour; for I was then in the Church of England, and like most zealous young men worked hard in my parish, preaching, lecturing, and visiting the poor, beyond my bodily strength. But by that illness I was so prostrated, that I scarcely

got over it for several years, and indeed have never fully recovered from it to this day. Thus in a sense I have been dying these last thirty years, and yet I live, and shall live until my work is done. And yet a great deal of work since then I have done both with tongue and pen, for I have an active mind in a weak body, and hate idleness whether in myself or others.

But look at the words in a *spiritual sense*. How true it is that the Lord's people are always dying. How they die for instance under the law. When Moses comes with the application of the fiery law, it burns up all the dross and tin of their self-righteousness. How they sink under the feeling sense of the wrath of God, so as sometimes to have scarcely any more hope of being saved than those at this moment in hell! How they die under this killing sentence of a fiery law to their own righteousness: how they die to their own strength and wisdom and every creature hope: and how they die to any expectations of being saved by the works of the flesh or by any obedience the creature can pay! And not only once or twice do they thus die, but they are always dying. Continual discoveries of the majesty of God, of his holiness and purity, with a daily sense of their own sinfulness, weakness, helplessness, and inability to deliver their own souls—all these things working in them, make them in a spiritual sense to be dying every day. As the apostle speaks of himself, "I die daily." Thus they die to all hope of salvation by the works of the law, die to all idea of strength as wrought by an arm of flesh, die to any expectation of happiness in this world, any prospect of creature enjoyment, or any fancied paradise of earthly pleasure. They carry, too, about with them more or less a daily sense of their mortality, often meditate upon their latter end, and feel that the time must shortly come when the scythe of death will cut them down, and lay their body in the grave.

ii. But though they thus die, yet *they live*. When the law first arrested you with its tremendous curse, and brought the sentence of death into your conscience, it was not to kill you outright, but to make you alive unto God. It was a sentence of death in itself, but it was a living Spirit who applied it. So dying

under the law, yet that you were quickened into divine life, was made manifest. To cry and sigh for mercy, to groan for pardon, to be favoured with a spirit of prayer and supplication, and with wrestlings and beseechings to God for mercy,—are not these evidences that there was life even in death? When God strikes with fiery displeasure a reprobate, it is like Joab striking Amasa: he strikes not again: he needs not to "double his stroke," as the margin reads. (2 Sam. 20:10.) When God struck Saul and Judas, he did not strike them twice. I was reading the other day an instance in the life of godly Mr. Welch, one of the old Scotch Covenanters. He was entertaining some company with godly conversation and amongst those present was a profane youth, who openly mocked, sneered, and ridiculed what he said upon the solemn matters of eternity. The godly man paused a moment, looked at him, and said aloud, "Behold the judgment of God." In a moment the profane youth fell dead under the table. He died at once under the manifested wrath of God. No second stroke was needed; down came the sword of justice and cleft him asunder before the frightened guests. Have you not sometimes feared lest you might so die too, an awful monument of the just displeasure of the Almighty? But the Lord did not so deal with you. He smote you with his rod, not with his sword. He smote you not that you should die under his frown, but that you might repent and live. "By these things men live," said the afflicted king Hezekiah, "and in all these things is the life of my spirit." (Isai. 38:16.)

But not only in the first dealings of God with the soul, but all through the godly man's experience he is ever dying, yet behold a mystery—he is ever living. At this time of the year the trees for the most part drop their leaves; but do the trees die? They are rather preparing themselves for a spring suit; and when the warm days of April and May return, those dead branches will re clothe themselves with foliage. So it is with the soul. Your faith may seem almost gone, your hope to be removed, and your love to drop out of your soul as the leaves drop from a tree in autumn; but behold, you live. There is life in the root, life in the stem. Look at the vine at this time of the year, especially if it has undergone a sharp pruning: the grapes all gone, the leaves dropped off, the branches apparently dead; but when the spring

returns there will be a revival. So it is with you. Like the vine, you may have dropped the leaf, or the sharp pruning knife of affliction may have cut into the branch; but in due time you will again put forth leaves and flowers and fruit. Is not this Scripture language and a Scripture figure? My figures are sometimes objected to as natural, not Scriptural comparisons; but this time I will not so offend the critical ear. What says the prophet? "But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof." (Isai. 6:13.) Thus, though the teil tree and the oak cast their leaves, yet the holy seed is in them—in "stock and stem" (margin), and this gives them an enduring substance and a future revival.

Thus, though we die and die daily, yet behold, we live; and in a sense, the *more* we die, the *more* we live. The more we die to self, the more we die to sin; the more we die to pride and self-righteousness, the more we die to creature strength; and the more we thus die to nature, the more we live to grace. And this runs all the way through the life and experience of a Christian. Nature must die that grace may live. The weeds must be plucked up that the crop may grow; the flesh be starved that the spirit may be fed; the old man put off that the new man may be put on; the deeds of the body be mortified that the soul may live unto God. As then we die, we live. The more we die to our own strength, the more we live to Christ's strength; the more we die to creature hope, the more we live to a good hope through grace; the more we die to our own righteousness, the more we live to Christ's righteousness; and the more we die to the world, the more we live to and for heaven. This is the grand mystery, that the Christian is always dying, yet always living: and the more he dies, the more he lives. The death of the flesh is the life of the spirit; the death of sin is the life of righteousness; and the death of the creature is the very life of God in the soul.

III.—But let us pass on to our next double link; for these paradoxes are most blessedly linked together, and each one strengthens and confirms the other: "*As chastened, and not*

*killed."*

Chastisement is part of the covenant: that is God's own declaration of it in Psalm 89: "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David." (Psalm 89:30-35.) And is not this New Testament language too? How striking, how decisive are the words of the apostle: "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children: My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If we endure chastening, God dealeth with us as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." (Heb. 12:5-8.) There are men in our day who deny chastisement; who would take the rod out of God's hands, and boldly teach that the Lord never chastens his people. All I can say of them is, that they proclaim their own bastardy. They say with a loud voice to the world, "whatever others are, we are illegitimate." Now a man must be dead to shame to make such a proclamation. A person told me some years ago that she heard a well-known London preacher thus open his sermon, "I am a bastard!" Methinks he need not have thus openly revealed his mother's sin and shame, or made a sport for the profane. But what he was bold enough to proclaim of himself literally these men proclaim of themselves spiritually, when they say, "The rod of God never has been, and never will be upon me." Can they not see, that in denying the chastening hand of God, they deny that they are the children of God? But all the Lord's people know by their own experience that he is a chastening God, for they have often felt the rod upon their own back.

i. But *what* are these chastenings?

1. Some of them are *bodily*. We find this spoken of by Elihu in the book of Job, where, describing the way in which God sometimes deals with his people, he says, "He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out." (Job 33:19-21.) This is a description of God's chastening the body. A large share have I had of that rod from God's hand, and in a measure am experiencing it now. But the Lord does not see fit to lay the same chastisements upon all his people. He has rods of different sizes and different descriptions; though all are felt to be rods when God brings them upon the back.

2. There are *family afflictions* which the Lord sometimes makes use of as chastening rods. Such are bereavements of those near and dear in the prime of life, just when they seem most needed, as the husband to sustain the scantily provided wife, the father to bring up the children, the mother to nurse the new-born babe. Few are there who have families who have not tasted the bitter as well as the sweet. And children can be made rods as well as comforts, as Isaac, Jacob, Eli, and David found to their grief and sorrow.

3. *Providential trials* are sometimes twigs of this chastising rod. Heavy losses in business, unexpected and unavoidable calls on a small income, entanglements through the default or dishonesty of others, perhaps children or relations, a worn out farm, a sinking shop, long doctor's bills—these are some of the deep trials of the middle classes, as hard to bear as loss of work and wages to the day-labourer. Attending these, as helping on the calamity, there fly about painful misgivings as to the future, dark clouds lowering over the mind, with many dismal apprehensions what the result may be to one's self and those dearer than self—the wife and family. Who shall say that the Lord does not make use of these providential trials and afflictions sometimes as a chastening rod?

But for the most part these chastenings are of an *inward* and *spiritual* nature. Hidings of his face, frowns of his brow, reproofs administered in the conscience, denials of answer to prayer, secret rebukes, letting the soul hang in doubt which way the scale will turn, so that it trembles before his terrible Majesty,—in these and other ways the Lord chastises many of his dear family, that they may be partakers of his holiness.

ii. But though "chastened" by these afflictions, they are "not *killed*." The Lord chastises with one hand and upholds with the other. You may have passed in your spiritual experience under many chastising strokes; and when they fell upon you, they seemed to come as a killing sentence from God's lips. Your illness, you feared, might end in death; under your bereavement, you felt as if you never could hold up your head again; your providential losses you apprehended might prove your earthly ruin; your family afflictions seemed to be so heavy as to be radically incurable; the hidings of God's face so great that he never would look upon you with love again; the rebukes and reproofs of his voice so cutting that you felt as if he would never apply a promise to your soul any more. These were in your feelings *killing* strokes; but though chastened you were *not* killed. You lost no divine life thereby; but you lost much that pleased the flesh, much that gratified the creature, much that looked well for days of prosperity, but would not abide a storm. But you lost nothing that was for your real good. If you lost bodily health, you gained spiritual health; if you lost a dear husband or child, God filled up the void in your heart by making Christ more precious; if you had troubles in your family, the Lord made it up by giving more manifestations of his love and grace. Your very losses in providence were for your good, for he either made them up, or what you lost in providence he doubled in grace. So that though chastened, you are not killed. Is not your hope still alive? Does not the holy flame that God kindled in your bosom still burn, though it may burn dimly? Has anything that has happened to you in providence or in grace quenched, extinguished for ever the life of God in your soul? Has it not rather brought it out more

clearly? As the dross and tin were more separated, has not the gold shone more brightly? Have you not held spiritual things with a tighter grasp? When God chastens his people, it is not to kill them: it is to make them partakers of his holiness; it is to revive their drooping graces, to make them more sincere and upright and tender in conscience, to become more separate from the world, to seek more his glory, to have a more single eye to his praise, and to live more a life of faith upon the Son of God. Here is the blessedness, that when God chastises his people, it is not for their injury, but for their profit; not for their destruction, but for their salvation; not to treat them with the unkindness of an enemy, but with the love of a friend. Look at the afflictions, chastenings, grievous sorrows, and exercises that you have passed through. Have they been friends to you or enemies; instruments of helping you, or hindrances; ladders whereby you have climbed up to heaven, or steps whereby you have descended into hell; means of taking you near to Christ, or means of carrying you more into the spirit of the world? If you know anything of God's chastening, you will say, "Every stroke has brought me nearer to God; he has flogged me home." As a mother will seize her truant boy out of a mob of other children and flog him home, so the Lord sometimes flogs his children home; every stroke laid upon their back bringing them a step nearer to their home in the mansions above. In your own experience, therefore, without my teaching or explanation, you can set to your seal that God's chastenings have not killed you, but rather they have been the means of reviving and keeping alive the work of grace upon your heart.

IV.—But we now take hold of the next double link: "*As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.*"

Many of the Lord's people are stamped with a sorrowful spirit; and had we a deeper sense of what this world is, and what we are as dying sinners in it, we should have more of a sorrowful spirit amongst us than we have. The world may dance, as it were, upon the very brink of hell; but the saint of God has much to make him sorrowful, for he feels himself to be a sinner in a sinful

world, far from happiness and home. For the most part his path in *providence* is one of sorrow; and his very social cup is often embittered by many painful ingredients, for the Lord knows what our carnal mind is—that we should drink the cup of this life with gall and wormwood in it. But as regards *spiritual* things, how many causes there are that the Christian should be of a sorrowful spirit. When he looks at his blessed Lord, who was a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," he sees an example to which he has to be conformed. We read that Jesus wept (John 11); we never read that Jesus laughed or even smiled. We read of his sighing and groaning in spirit (Mark 7:34; John 11:33), and that he "rejoiced in spirit." (Luke 10:21.) But he who "bore our sins in his own body on the tree" hath also "borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." (Isai. 53:4.) Now we have to be conformed to this suffering image of the Lord Jesus; for we must "suffer with him if we are to be glorified together." (Rom. 8:17.) And the promise is sure: "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." (2 Tim. 2:12.) This made the apostle say, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:18.) And abundant cause there is for sorrow of heart. O if we could view by the eyes of faith how God looks down upon the world—what a scene of wickedness and abomination it is in his holy and pure eyes, we should carry about with us more of that sorrowful spirit which our blessed Lord so signally displayed. Can we wonder that the Lord Jesus was grieved for the hardness of men's hearts (Mark 3:5); or that his holy soul was pained within him at the continual spectacle of sin and woe? A similar feeling will be in our breasts, if we are in any way imbued with the same spirit. If righteous Lot, dwelling among the wicked, in seeing and hearing vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds (2 Pet. 2:8), should not we feel a measure of the same inward vexation with the filthy conversation of the wicked?

2. When, too, we turn from looking at others to look at ourselves, what fresh and additional reason we have to be sorrowful before God. Our shortcomings, our numerous slips and falls, our grievous backslidings, our little living to God's praise, our doing

so little the things which are pleasing in his sight, our crooked tempers, vile imaginations, foolish words, vain thoughts, and many inconsistencies,—were these laid with any weight and power upon our conscience, they would make us sorrowful indeed, and force us often to smite upon our breast and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

3. To enjoy so few visits from Jesus, to know so little of his dying love, to walk so little in his holy, humble, self-denying footsteps, to have our affections so little fixed upon things above,—if these things were laid upon our conscience with greater weight and power, they would make us also of a sorrowful spirit.

4. To see how few there are who are walking in the straight and narrow way; to behold how many even of those who name the name of Christ do not depart from iniquity; to view how thousands round about us are filling up the measure of their iniquities, and upon whom the wrath of God will speedily fall; to feel how the name of God is openly blasphemed and abused, his mercies in providence disregarded, his truth hated and reviled, his people contemned and despised; to think how little professors of the truths of the gospel generally adorn the doctrine by a godly life; how little fruit is borne by the church and congregation where the word of life has been preached for years; what strifes and divisions there are in all our churches; what abounding errors in many who have sat half their life-time under the sound of the gospel truth; and how little the Lord Jesus Christ is admired, loved, and honoured in this world by those who call themselves Christians, as if they were true followers of him,—if we carried about with us a deep and daily sense of these things we might well be sorrowful; for there is everything in self and in others, in the world and in the church, to make us of a sorrowful spirit before God. The apostle said of himself, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart." (Rom. 9:1, 2.) Now what was the cause of this sorrow? It was for "his brethren, his kinsmen, according to the flesh," as seeing the hardness and unbelief of their hearts; and how again

he says, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you." (2 Cor. 2:4.) Thus where there is love to the Lord, a zeal for his glory, and affection to his people, there will be continual occasion for sorrow of heart.

ii. And yet here again we have a spiritual paradox, that is, an apparent, but not real contradiction. The word "paradox" means literally "something contrary to expectation;" and does not this definition agree with all the spiritual paradoxes which we have been explaining? Thus the apostle says of himself, "As sorrowful, yet *always rejoicing*." Is not this a paradox—a thing contrary to expectation; what we never could have supposed probable or possible? For is it not a manifest contradiction that the same man should be ever sorrowful, yet be always rejoicing? It is as if the rejoicing bride and the mourning widow were one and the same person. But what is a contradiction in nature is not a contradiction in grace. Let us seek then to solve the mystery, to open and unfold the paradox. And this we shall best do by setting before our eyes the Lord Jesus Christ. For in what or in whom are we to rejoice but in him? This made the apostle say, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." And do observe how he gives rejoicing in Christ Jesus as a mark of true circumcision. "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." (Phil. 3:3.) If we rejoice, then, it is not in ourselves, for the more we see of ourselves, the more cause we shall have for sorrow; not in our own strength, or wisdom, or righteousness, for I have already shown you that to all these things we have to die; and how can we rejoice in a thing of death? But if we rejoice it must be in the Lord Jesus, and what he is made of God unto us—"Wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." When, too, we are favoured with the visitations of his presence, we may rejoice in hope of eternal life; in a conscience made honest and tender in God's fear, and purged by the blood of sprinkling from filth, guilt, and dead works; in the promises as they are applied with power to the soul; in fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus

Christ; in the views of rest and peace beyond the grave in that happy land where tears are wiped from off all faces, and the very names of sin and sorrow are unknown. Thus though the Christian in himself is sorrowful, and has reason to be so all the day long, yet so far as he has any views by faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, any good hope through grace, or any manifestation of his Person, work, blood, and love, he may be always rejoicing. Nay his very sorrow opens up a way for joy. There is no room in a worldly heart for spiritual joy, for the Lord gives joy in sorrow. When the heart is sunk in gloom and fear, and doubt and distress take possession of the mind, when family afflictions, or painful bereavements, or trying circumstances, fill the heart with grief and dismay, that is the very time for the Lord to pour joy into the soul. As afflictions abound, so do consolations. Sorrow and joy are linked together as night and day, as sun and moon, as heaven and earth. Without sorrow, there can be no joy, for joy is its counterpoise. If you had everything your heart could desire, what room would there be for spiritual joy? But when all sources of earthly joy dry up, and there is nothing but sorrow and trouble before you in this world, as long as life remains; when you are afflicted in body, poor in circumstances, tried in your family, distressed in your mind, and there is nothing but grief and misery, then you have room as it were made in your heart to receive the sweet consolations of God's grace. Thus, so far from sorrow and joy being inconsistent with, or destructive of each other, whatever may be the case naturally, we may say that spiritually, one is needful, nay, indispensable to the other; for if there is no sorrow, there can be no joy. Nay, the more sorrow, the more joy: spiritual sorrow killing all earthly joy, and yet opening up a way for spiritual joy to come in. And is not this the very meaning and language of the apostle, where he says, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ?" (2 Cor. 1:3, 4, 5.) So again he says, "Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great

is my glorying of you; I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation." (2 Cor. 7:4.) Well then may we call these divine realities spiritual paradoxes: I say spiritual, because they are heavenly mysteries, and as such among the things which God has hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes. (Matt. 11:25.) If then you have not the key, you cannot open this cabinet; if you have not the solution, you cannot decipher this riddle. But if you have the teaching of the Spirit, and understand anything of these divine mysteries by divine teaching, you will understand what it is to be "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing."

V.—I now pass to another spiritual paradox: "*As poor, yet making many rich.*"

I. This paradox is especially applicable to the servants of God, many of whom, by far the great majority, are very poor in *worldly circumstances*. And the Lord sees fit it should be so, to make them more dependent upon himself in providence. Few men, very few, are fit to be trusted with money; for there is a tendency in the possession of property to lift up the mind, and make it, so to speak, independent of God. But all rules have their exceptions, and so it may be in this instance. But if all the servants of God are not poor in worldly circumstances, they are all poor, or at least should be so *in spirit*. He that is rich in his own eyes is not fit to speak to those who are poor in their own eyes. The rich man naturally has no sympathy with the poor man. A merchant upon 'Change with a hundred thousand pounds in his pocket has no sympathy with a bankrupt. A man sitting down to every delicacy and the choicest wines, has no sympathy with a beggar shivering with cold and hunger in the street. So if a minister has not been made poor in his own soul, he will not be much of a preacher to those who have been made poor in spirit. He that would bring forth the riches of the gospel must be made poor in soul, if not made poor in pocket—made poor in spirit, if not poor in substance.

But you may extend, as I have done before, the paradox to

include others besides the servants of Christ. The saints of God then are made poor, as well as the servants of God, nor is there a feature more general, more descriptive, or more characteristic of the family of God than poverty—I mean spiritual poverty. Were I to speak of great manifestations and deliverances, I might be shooting over some of your heads; but coming down to poverty and necessity, there I meet your case. If the Lord has but touched your heart with his finger, brought you down and laid you low at his feet, I shall meet you upon that ground, because he has stripped you or is stripping you of all creature sufficiency. Thus poverty of spirit is a feature common to every saint of God. How did the Lord open his ministry in the sermon upon the Mount? "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." If, therefore, you have no poverty of spirit, you have no kingdom as your inheritance; and recollect that we must enter into the kingdom of heaven upon earth, for it is "within us;" so that if you are not partakers of the kingdom of grace below you will not inherit the kingdom of glory above. But as I have spoken so much before on the same point and to the same effect under my preceding heads, I shall pass on to the second link of the paradox.

ii. And surely this is a paradox of paradoxes, a mystery of mysteries, that a poor man can *make many rich*.

If I were to walk out some day and find out upon examination that the stone quarries near this town concealed a gold mine, how many thousands would be glad to listen to such intelligence, and what a rush there would be if I could assure them that under a certain stone in a certain quarry there was a vein of gold. Tomorrow would not pass without thousands flocking to pick it up. But tell them of the glorious riches of Christ, of the treasures of grace and glory which are hidden in the Person and work, blood and righteousness of an incarnate God, where is the heart to listen to that tale? Where is the hand stretched out to dig into that vein "which no fowl knoweth and which the vulture's eye hath not seen?" And why is this but because there is no desire for the wealth which makes the soul rich for eternity. But what a

view had the apostle of these riches when he said, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." (Eph. 3:8.) How remarkable the words, "The unsearchable riches of Christ." So he speaks also in another epistle: "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27); and again, "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Col. 2:3.) How low, how poor are all earthly riches compared with these heavenly treasures of which the Lord himself said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." (Matt. 6:19, 20.)

But let us now see how the servants of God though poor yet *make many rich*. It is because God uses them as the means of conveying his kingdom into many a sinner's heart: and to make any rich for eternity is the greatest wealth God can bestow through the instrumentality of man. If the Lord has blessed my testimony to any of your consciences, I have done more for you than if I had given you a thousand pounds. You have more reason to bless God than if I could at this moment put a bag of gold into your hand; for that money might soon be spent. It would make you comfortable for a short space; but where would it be and of what value would you find it when death knocked at your door? But to be put into possession of a kingdom which cannot be moved, to be favoured and blessed with a knowledge of the eternal salvation of your soul, and to find in a dying hour the peace of God in your heart, what language can express the value of a treasure like this? And yet God's servants, though poor, most of them literally and all of them spiritually, have this wonderful privilege committed to them that they make many rich. O how many a dying saint has blessed God for the ministry of the gospel; and how he can look back upon times and seasons when the preached word communicated to his soul that heavenly

treasure of life, light, and power which is his support in the very arms of death. What an honour then is this which God confers upon his servants, that he enables them to enrich the souls of his people by instrumentally conveying into their heart the riches which are stored up in Christ Jesus. This, however, they can only do by preaching free grace, by holding up before the eyes of the people the Lord of life and glory as the only object of faith, hope, and love, by proclaiming the blood of the cross as the only way of pardon and peace, by tracing out the work of grace upon the heart as a means of encouraging the cast down and distressed, and setting before them salvation as the free gift of God. When, then, the poor and needy receive these glorious tidings into their heart under the power and unction of the blessed Spirit, and feel a sweet conviction of their interest in these heavenly realities, then are they made rich indeed. You who have been so blessed need not envy the wealthiest peer who ever walked before the Queen in a robe of ermine and with a coronet in his hand: you need not envy the King of Italy with his newly acquired kingdom, nor the Emperor of the French at the head of his armies, if God has put his fear into your heart and blessed you with a living faith in his dear Son; for all these earthly pageants will sooner or later come to a close. I am not speaking, I would have you observe, against kings and queens, rank and station, for all these things are necessary in a time state, and it is only the "presumptuous and self-willed" who "despise government and are not afraid to speak evil of dignities." (2 Pet. 2:10.) I bless God that we have in this country a gradation of ranks and stations, and that society is linked together from the Queen on the throne to the ploughman in the field. But what is good for time is of no avail for eternity. Thus all earthly dignity, wealth, rank, and power pass away, like a pageant moving over a stage: but those who are blessed with a living faith, with a good hope in God's mercy and any discovery of the Lord Jesus Christ to their souls to make them love his dear name will live for ever and ever; yea, live when time itself shall be no more. As our Lord said, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43); or, as it is so beautifully expressed by the prophet Daniel: "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and

they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." (Dan. 12:3.) What riches, I may well ask, are to be compared with this? If the gold of all California and all Australia with all the bullion in the Bank cellars could be made yours, what would they be in comparison with shining as a star for ever and ever in the kingdom of glory?

VI.—But now we come to our last double link of these spiritual paradoxes: "*as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*"

i. This is true sometimes in a *literal* sense, but as I have before sufficiently dwelt upon this point I shall not again call your attention to it, but direct your thoughts to its *spiritual* meaning. How true then it is, in a spiritual sense, both of ministers and people, both of the servants and the saints of God, that they have nothing. Have you not looked at your heart again and again, pondered over your past words and works, examined the whole course of your life, viewed and reviewed it both before and after you made a profession of religion? Now when you have taken a solemn view of yourself, probing and examining heart and life by the light of God's word, have you not come to the conclusion that you have been and are exceedingly vile; and that as regards your best attainments you are nothing and less than nothing; for whatever you have done, even with the best motives and to the highest ends, has been effectually marred, as stained and polluted by sin? Suppose a manufacturer gave to a weaver a quantity of beautiful silk for him to weave out of it a costly robe for the Queen, and suppose that when he had executed his task with great labour and skill, he purposely or accidentally spilt a bottle of ink over it. Would his employer take it? Could it be made up into a royal robe? He would say, "You have spent a vast deal of labour upon this piece of silk, but look at it. It is covered with ink; I cannot take it. It is worthless and valueless by your folly or mismanagement." So man may work and work and work again to weave for himself a robe of righteousness, but if sin is spilt all over his work, how can God accept it at his hands? The manufacturer will not accept spoiled work; and can we therefore expect that God will take work which sin has polluted? That holy

Being, before whose eyes the heavens themselves are not clean, will he take the polluted work of a polluted soul, and crown it with eternal glory? Thus when you view and review the works of your hands, and the words of your lips, what claim have you upon God? Within the last thirty years I must have preached thousands of sermons and travelled thousands of miles in the service of the sanctuary. But can I bring any of these words and works before God's heart searching eye, as possessing any merit, when the sin of my heart, poured all over them like the bottle of ink, has spoiled them all? And what is all my knowledge and learning, if I have any; all my natural and acquired abilities, if I possess them; and all my gifts, if endowed with them; what is all I have done in these thirty years for the Lord and his people, if the inward sin of my heart has run over, stained, and defiled it all? So in taking a solemn review of all I have and am as a Christian man or minister, and all I have said, thought, and done, I feel that sin has defiled the whole. Then I have nothing. I cannot boast of my gifts, my abilities, my knowledge, my learning, or labours, because the inward sin of my heart has polluted and defiled all my words, works, and ways. Then I have nothing; I am a beggar, living upon alms; and are not you the same, if the Lord has stripped you of all your strength, wisdom, and goodness?

ii. Yet, mystery of mysteries, paradox of paradoxes, though we have nothing, yet *we possess all things*. But how do we possess all things? In possessing Christ who is heir of all things. If we possess Christ, what have we not in him? We have wisdom to teach us, righteousness to justify us, sanctification to make us holy, and redemption to deliver us from sin, death, and hell. If we have him, we have the favour and love of God; we have the pardon of our sins, the reconciliation of our persons, the casting behind God's back of all our backslidings, and a title to a heavenly crown. If we have him, we have everything in him, for Christ is ours, and Christ is God's. Therefore in him we possess all things. We shall have in providence things sufficient to carry us to the grave. He will give us everything that is for our good, and keep back nothing that is for our benefit. If we possess him, what have we not in him? Now the world, when death comes, what has

it? Nothing to look to but the anger of God and a fearful judgment. But the saint of God, when death comes to him, what has he to look to? A crown of life, a mansion in the skies, a smiling God, and a blessed assurance that he shall sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Thus though the saints of God have nothing, yet they possess all things; and possessing a heavenly crown, what can God give them more? He has given his dear Son that he might shed his atoning blood to wash away their sins, and work out a perfect righteousness to justify their persons. He has now given them a complete salvation, and in giving them that he has withheld nothing; for in not keeping back his Son, he has kept nothing back that his loving heart could bestow. This made Paul say, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32.)

Now see how far you can lay your experience side by side with these heavenly paradoxes; and you must take them together. You must not take the bright side and leave out the dark; take the riches and trample upon the poverty; take "possessing all things," and not take "having nothing." You must take them as God has put them, for they are linked together, and what God hath joined together let no man put asunder. If you can find these heavenly paradoxes, these divine mysteries wrought by a divine power in your soul, you are sure of heaven. God is as much your God, as he was Paul's; Christ as much your Christ, and heaven as much your own. But if you know nothing of these paradoxes in your own experience, I would plainly ask you how you expect to meet him who is a consuming fire? The Lord enable you to lay these things to heart.

## Spiritual Poverty and Heavenly Riches

Preached at Trinity Street Chapel, Borough, London, on Tuesday Evening, July 30, 1844

"Having nothing, and yet possessing all things." 2 Cor. 6:10

In the Gospel of Jesus Christ there are many apparent contradictions. I use the word *apparent*, for there are no *real* contradictions. What at first sight appears paradoxical and inconsistent is found, when we see it in the Spirit's light, to be perfectly consistent and harmonious with the whole scheme of revealed truth. The very glory of the gospel is, that *it is a mystery*; and if it is a mystery, there will be things in it apparently contradictory, and utterly irreconcilable by human reason.

The Apostle in this chapter has brought together some of these apparent contradictions, as worked out in his own experience. He says, "By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, yet true; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." To a natural man, to a reasoning mind, to one not initiated by divine teaching into the mystery of the gospel, what clashing and contradiction are to be found in these expressions! And yet, when seen in the light of the Spirit and known and felt in a gracious experience, all the apparent contradictions disappear, all the seeming inconsistencies are blessedly harmonised, and we taste a beauty and glory in the very paradoxes and very apparent contradictions. Mr. Hart, who of all men seems to have been led most deeply into experimental truth, speaks in similar language of Christian experience:

"'Tis to credit contradictions,  
Talk with Him one never sees;  
Cry and groan beneath afflictions,  
Yet to dread the thoughts of ease.

"'Tis to feel the fight against us,  
Yet the vict'ry hope to gain;  
To believe that Christ has cleans'd us,  
Though the leprosy remain."

With God's blessing, I shall attempt this evening to show how the apparent contradiction in the text is reconciled to, and is harmoniously consistent with, not only revealed truth, but also with the experience of every one taught of the Spirit. May the Lord in mercy crown the word with his blessing.

*"Having nothing!"* The Apostle might have, and doubtless had, some reference here to his needy state naturally. The Lord saw fit to keep him in a state of absolute dependence upon himself for temporals. He did not use, as he tells us, the liberty which he had as an Apostle to "live by the gospel" that he preached; but he consented to voluntary poverty that he might not "hinder the gospel of Christ." So that, in a literal sense, the Apostle speaks here of *"having nothing,"* as being completely dependent upon the Lord for the bread that he daily ate, and the clothing he daily wore. And yet, though such a beggar in temporals, rich in spirituals; though "having nothing," except what the Lord gave him as alms for his daily need, yet in the enjoyment of spiritual mercies, and in the possession of Christ in his heart, the hope of glory, *"possessing all things."*

But, I think, we should limit the Apostle's meaning; we should not get, so to speak, into the mind of the Holy Ghost in this passage, if we confined our interpretation merely to this point, that the Apostle by "having nothing" only meant that he had nothing in a temporal sense. We will take the expression in a higher sense, and place it upon another and more spiritual footing: we will view the Apostle speaking here, not so much of his temporal state as **literary [literally?]** dependent upon God for daily food; but consider him as speaking of his state spiritually. And thus we shall find, that the two clauses of the text, so far from clashing with or contradicting each other, meet, in the soul's experience,

in a most sweet and blessed harmony. And we are borne out in this interpretation by the Apostle's own words in this very Epistle, (2 Cor. 12:11) where he says, "*Though I be nothing.*" To "be nothing," and to "have nothing," are expressions that differ but little; so that we may bring the Apostle's own authority and his own interpretation to bear upon the text; and consider, that when he said "having nothing," his views were carried beyond this present temporal scene and the struggles for daily bread; that he had a higher reference, and looked at things in a spiritual point of view, when he spake of himself "as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

Thus, then, if God enable us, we will unfold the two branches of the subject, and shew, what it is to "have nothing," and what it is to "possess all things" And then we shall see how these two opposites, or rather apparent opposites, so far from contradicting each other, are brought, in the experience of the child of God, sweetly to harmonize.

I.—"*Having nothing.*" Is that the experience of a man in a state of nature? It cannot be; we know it is not. Could any man, in a state of nature, honestly take such an expression into his mouth? Some might say, "Man has nothing by nature." It is true; but though that is his *state*, it is not his *experience*. Man by nature is in that spot in which we read (Rev. 3:7) the church of Laodicea was. I do not mean to say, that the Laodicean church was in a state of nature. She was a true church, though fallen; the grace of God was in her, though she had backslidden from that spiritual standing which she once occupied. But her language in her fallen state was that of every man in his unregenerate condition, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;" though to the heart-searching eye of Omniscience she was "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

The Apostle, then, in using the expression, "having nothing," is not speaking of man in a state of nature, but of his own experience, and of the things he had spiritually felt and known. He was describing the state into which he had himself been

reduced. I say, "reduced;" for we do not set out with this experience, nor do we come here in a day. There is a stripping, emptying process carried on by God the Spirit in the conscience; and it is only after we have passed through this stripping and emptying process, that we come into the experience of the Apostle, "having nothing." Until the Lord brings the soul down from its once lofty eminence, breaks to pieces its self-righteousness, and cuts from under its feet that ground on which it once proudly took its stand, it cannot come into the spiritual meaning of these words. The wealthy stock-broker that walks daily upon 'Change cannot honestly say he "has nothing," when he knows that he has his thousands; nor can any one say, spiritually, he "has nothing," while he has any stock of strength, wisdom, or righteousness left. But if this wealthy stock-broker, through some unsuccessful speculation, (mark, I am merely using this as a figure; I am not saying that speculation of any kind is justifiable) were reduced to complete beggary, then he could say, he "had nothing;" and his conscience (if he had one, which few speculators have) could bear witness that he spoke the truth. Now I use this figure just to show the way in which the Lord deals with his people. When we first set out Zionward, we start full of self: we have no idea what God means to do with us. Our idea of getting to heaven is, by accumulating a treasure of good deeds, heaping up an amount of piety, and living a life whereby we may propitiate God, and secure to our souls a seat in glory. Nature never can pursue any other path; nature knows no other way to heaven, but to climb up by the ladder of good works, and to crane itself up to glory by working at the winch of human merit. But we read, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord: for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isa. 55:8, 9.) Our thoughts are, to make ourselves rich; his thoughts are, to make us poor. Our thoughts are, to increase in piety; his thoughts are, to make us sink down into the ruins of self. Our thoughts are, to advance day by day in sanctification and holiness, and continually increase the amount of good works we mean to produce; his thoughts are, to teach us feelingly our helpless and hopeless state, and to strip us

of all boasting in the flesh. But we struggle against this humiliating process. Our proud heart rebels against God's dealings with us in this manner; and being ignorant, for the most part, of what the Lord is doing in us by thus stripping us of the fancied treasure we are getting together, our proud, presumptuous, hypocritical heart rises up in perverseness and anger against it. We do not often see what the Lord is doing with us until some months, perhaps years, after we have been put into the furnace. I am sure I can say so for myself. We certainly do not know, at the time, what the Lord is doing with us, when he is stripping us of our fancied religion. But when we come out of the furnace, and the Lord makes it clear to us how much tin and dross we have lost, we see the reason why we were put there. When we come out of the waters, we are glad we were sunk there, though we may have been half drowned in the process, when we see our filthy rags left at the bottom.

There is a word in the song of Hannah (a song I am very partial to, for it is a sweet epitome of the Lord's dealings with his people) that throws a light upon the text. In reviewing God's dealings with her, that gracious woman says, "The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up." (1 Sam. 2:6, 7.) What a wise and well-taught woman Hannah was! She knew both sides of the question. She was not for liberty without bondage, pardon without guilt, mercy without misery, salvation without condemnation, the riches of Christ without the poverty of the creature. She (as we find 1 Sam. 1) had passed through an experience that had taught her better things. She had poured out her soul before the Lord in groans and cries, and he had manifested his mercy to her conscience. And thus she had learnt both sides of the question. She had known black, as well as white; darkness, as well as light; sorrow, as well as joy; stripping, as well as clothing; humbling, as well as raising; a furnace to pass through, as well as coming out like tried gold; floods of water to wade in, as well as to stand upon the bank blessing and praising the Lord. That gracious and wise woman, speaking by divine inspiration, has left this sentence

upon record; and there it stands as a bulwark against all those who say, "That a man can know Christ and salvation without any stripping and emptying process;" *"the Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich."* Now Hannah must have had an experimental meaning in these words. She had no temporal necessities; her husband Elkanah was not a poor man; his coming up to Shiloh yearly, with his wives and children, shows that he could afford to travel. And we read, that "he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions but to Hannah he gave a worthy (or "double") portion." We hear only of her soul trouble; therefore, when she said, "The Lord maketh poor," she must have had reference to the spiritual dealings of God with her soul. Taking, then, these words of Hannah as throwing light upon what Paul says here, "having nothing," we see that the Apostle means spiritual poverty and nothingness.

The Lord makes poor by taking away fancied riches. To use a figure, (and sometimes figures throw light upon truth,) a man may have invested all his property in a bank. He may get up in the morning, and please himself with thinking what a wealthy man he is; but before the hour of noon tidings come that the bank is broken; that, like many banks, it has been nothing but a swindling concern; and that he is completely ruined. Before the tidings came, he thought himself rich; and yet all the time his wealth was but fancied, only a bubble. While he was counting and calculating on the wealth which he thought so securely invested, it had all been swindled away months and years ago; and he finds himself in the deepest poverty, when he fancied himself abounding in riches. So spiritually, how many persons think they are sure to go to heaven; their hope is firm and steadfast; they never doubt their faith; they have no exercises of mind, no trials, no desponding seasons, no harassing temptations, no fiery darts from Satan; and they are quite confident that they are safe for eternity. But unless God the Spirit has revealed salvation with power in their conscience, their hope stands upon a slippery foundation. It will not do to take the Scriptures, and get your religion out of them, unless God seal mercy and pardon with power upon your conscience. Like the man whose money was all

in the bubble bank, you may fancy yourself rich when you are really a bankrupt, and dream of wealth in the midst of poverty. You may resemble the man of whom we read (Isa. 29:8), "It shall be even as when a 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." He dreams in the night, that he is sitting down to a banquet; but the pangs of hunger convince him to the contrary in the morning. So a man may dream and delude himself by thinking how much religion he possesses; but when the Lord begins to show him what vital godliness really is, and convinces him that all saving faith stands, not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God; and that he has not a grain, nor an atom, but what the Spirit works in the heart, he sinks down into the depths of soul poverty. Grace makes a man's heart honest in the fear of the Lord; and therefore when he weighs up his religion in the "balances of the sanctuary," unless he feels that faith, hope, and love have been powerfully wrought in his conscience, he begins to find how much of his confidence stands in the flesh, and how much that he fancied to be a safe foundation for eternity was built upon nothing else but delusion or fleshly excitement.

Now it is from feeling this, and experiencing a measure of the stripping hand of God in the conscience (and I have known what it is to roll upon my bed in trouble whilst being stripped of my false religion, though I believe that the root of the matter was in my soul at the time), that the Lord drives his people out of the refuges of lies in which many a professor hides his deluded head. For instance, there is

1. *Our own righteousness*, that Babel by which we would fain climb up into heaven, and escape the rising waters of the flood; that proud tower must be levelled, and fall into complete ruin. The Lord, by bringing the law in its purity and spirituality into the conscience, discovers to us what sin is, and thus opens up the depravity of the heart and the vileness of our nature. There are many people who are strongly opposed to hearing anything about

sin; they cannot bear to have "corruption," as they call it, even touched upon. But depend upon this, if you never know the malady, you can never prize the remedy. It is not very pleasant to go into a hospital, and look at the sores of the patients there; but what takes the patient there but the very sores which are so disgusting to the eyes of the healthy?

So stout, unwounded professors may say, "This gloating over corruption and the sores of human nature, how disgusting it is!" It is disgusting to a healthy man to look at these sores. But if the man had a wound made in his conscience, and was covered with bruises and putrefying sores, how glad he would be to be admitted into the spiritual hospital; to have Jehovah-rophi, "the Lord my healer," come to his bed-side, and heal him by a touch of his gracious hand, and the application of the balm of his blood to his conscience.

2. So with our own *wisdom*. I do not know how it is with you; perhaps the Lord has led you otherwise. But when I set out, what a wonderful stock of wisdom I thought I should get from reading the Scriptures, and good men's books; and I thought, by such helps I could easily understand the truth. But the Lord has to teach us different lessons from this. I have been to the University, have learnt languages, studied commentators, and thought to make myself wise by cultivating my natural understanding. I have passed through all those things which are by many considered such wondrous helps; I bought book upon book, and commentator upon commentator. And what did all these helps do for me? They never gave me one grain of true wisdom. I value all these things in their proper place. But there is no greater delusion than to think we can learn the truths of God by the exercise of creature intellect. When the Lord begins to open up his truth in our conscience, he shows us (and that is the main point I am aiming at) our own folly, and that though we may "know his mysteries" and "have all knowledge," yet, short of his teaching, we know nothing as we ought to know. This is what the Apostle says, (1 Cor. 3:18) "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be

wise." We thus become fools for Christ's sake; and learning what ignorant besotted wretches we are strips us of our fancied wisdom, and brings us down to our true level. You would not think it, but I assure you it is true; I have, as I told you before, learnt languages, studied commentaries, and exercised my mind upon the Scriptures; but I have often felt, that a poor ploughman who only just knew how to hold the stilts of the plough through the field, if the Lord teach him more deeply by his grace than myself, is a wiser man than I. And the veriest dolt that cannot read a word in a book, and does not know great A from great B, if the Lord but teach him, knows better and deeper the meaning of the word of God and the nature of the kingdom of heaven, than I, or any man, ever could by all our study of God's word distinct from that teaching. When, then, we come to know and feel in our conscience that divine teaching is the only source of all true knowledge, the pride of human wisdom is brought down. And what a mercy it is to be brought there!

3. So again, with respect to our own *strength*. How strong we think we are when we set out in the divine life! We do not want God to strengthen us against temptation; we may not dare actually to say so; but we never think of the Lord's keeping us, or of his strength being made perfect in our weakness. We have little idea of being guided and kept continually by him that "our footsteps slip not," and of his power being thus made known. But we go on leaning, as we think, upon the Lord and depending upon him, but in a great measure, in reality, depending upon ourselves. After a time, however, we begin to find our strength fail us; we have no power to stand against the temptations that attack us; our inward slips and falls, and the idolatrous workings of our depraved nature, startle and alarm us. From these things we painfully learn our weakness, and come to that spot where the Apostle was, when Christ said to him, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9.)

4. So with respect to *holiness and inward sanctification*. There is much talk about holiness. That "without holiness no man shall see the Lord," is most certain; and that there is a holy principle which

the Lord communicates to every man to whom he gives a new nature, is most certain also. But how often is mere fleshly holiness mistaken for the inward sanctification of the Spirit! And until we learn painfully that we have no real holiness of nature's growth, and until we are made to know our own vileness and defilement, we never can learn what gospel holiness is. As long as the Lord lets us, we whiten the sepulchre, and make the outside of the cup and platter clean. But when we painfully feel what defiled wretches we are by nature and practice, what vile thoughts fill our mind, what perverseness is working and bubbling up from the bottom of our heart, we cry out with the leper, "Unclean, unclean;" and with Paul, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

And thus, as the Lord leads us into the secret, we come into the experience of the Apostle—"Having nothing." Now I would just direct your thoughts for a few moments in the way in which the Lord brought his Apostle here. What an unheard-of way it was! It is enough to strike our minds with wonder and astonishment. He took him up into the "third heaven," (as we read 2 Cor. 12:2) to that blissful abode of eternal happiness and purity, where he saw and heard things "not lawful," nor "possible," for a man to utter; and his soul was bathed in such unutterable bliss and overwhelming joy, that he knew not whether he was in the body, or out of the body. But did this teach him his weakness? Not so; he learnt no weakness there: for we read, "Lest I should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of the revelations." The pride and presumption of his carnal mind would puff him up; as Hart says,

"The heart uplifts with God's own gifts."

There was "given to him, therefore, a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure." Now here we have the experience of the Apostle in learning the secret of his own weakness. A "messenger of Satan" was sent "to *buffet* him." There is something very expressive in that word; it means literally, "beating a man with a

fist." Here, then, we have the Apostle coming down from the "third heaven," and the Lord sending "a messenger of Satan to buffet him." Whatever this thorn in the flesh was, this vile temptation, as an emissary of the Devil, beat his face to a mummy, smote him with the fist of wickedness, and by these infernal assaults brought him into the greatest distress and horror of mind. Under the pressure of this "thorn in the flesh," "this messenger of Satan," (some vile temptation, no doubt, perpetually haunting and harassing his soul) "he asked the Lord thrice that it might depart from him." Now what was the Lord's answer? "My grace is sufficient for thee; for *my* strength," (not *thy* strength) "is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore," says the Apostle, "will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." He could bear the very buffetings of "the messenger of Satan," he could endure the rankling "thorn in the flesh," he could submit to the vile temptation that perpetually haunted him, in order that he might find the strength of Christ made perfect in his weakness.

But what a mysterious dealing was this! That this highly favoured man of God should come down from the "third heaven" to the very gates of hell, (that is not too strong an expression, for "the messenger of Satan" came from hell)—that he should sink, I say, in soul feeling to the very gates of hell, there to be buffeted by "the messenger of Satan;" and all to teach him a lesson that heaven did not teach him, *the strength of God made perfect in weakness!* Do you not think, my friends, that if we are to learn our weakness, we must learn it in the same way? How did Paul get his religion? And must we not get ours, in our feebler measure, through the same channels, by the same means, and by the same inward teachings? If we are to learn the secret of Christ's strength, it is not by making daily advances in fleshly holiness, and getting stronger in self day by day. It is not by old nature being so mended and improved, as by and by to be shaded off into grace, just as the colours in the rainbow are so harmoniously blended that you can scarcely tell where the one ends and the other begins. For this is what is really meant by "progressive sanctification," that the old nature is so gradually

softened and blended into grace, that we can scarcely tell where the old man ceases and the new nature commences. I say, did the Apostle learn Christ's strength in that way? No: but by being buffeted by Satan's messenger, and thus being beaten out of his own strength, he found Christ's strength made perfect (what a word that is, *perfect!*) in his weakness.

If, then, you know not experimentally the meaning of the expression in the text, "having nothing" in self, you may depend upon it, your religion, however highly you may think of it, is but a delusion; or if you have not learnt it in some measure as Paul did his, in the experience of a feeling heart. I am not setting up a rigorous standard for conformity; but we must all learn our weakness and Christ's strength in the same way that the Apostle learnt his. If you know anything of Christ it must be by learning what you are by nature, and by finding in him a remedy for every malady, and a mercy for every misery.

II.—Now this leads me to the second part of the text, "*Possessing all things.*" I hinted that these two clauses of the text, so far from being really contradictory, had a most blessed and harmonious consistency. They dovetail into each other; and so far from being inconsistent, heighten and illustrate each other. When we look at a beautiful picture, we do not say, that the shade disturbs or destroys the light, or that the light disturbs and destroys the shade: but we see that the light and the shade mutually relieve each other. So in a beautiful prospect, sunlight and shadow do not destroy each other; but the light sets off the shade, and the shade sets off the light. The light and the shade are really contradictory; but the contrast enhances the beauty of the landscape. It is true, a reasoning man may say, "'Having nothing and yet possessing all things!' It is a flat contradiction." We may fancy an infidel, or a person that had never seen the Bible, picking up a leaf in the street, and reading, without knowing it to be the word of God, this list of contradictions. Would not the pride of his heart rise up, and would he not throw it away with scorn and say, "The man that wrote it is a fool." But seen in the Spirit's light, we find that so far from contradicting each other, they

beautifully harmonize.

For instance. "Having nothing," that is the needful preparation, the indispensable preliminary to "possessing all things;" and only so far as we "have nothing," do we "possess all things." But *how* do we possess all things? *Not in self*; that is very clear. We possess all things *in Christ*. We find the Lord himself, if I may use the expression, *puzzling* his opponents by the apparent contradiction between those Scriptures that speak of him as God, and those that speak of him as man. For example; he asked the Pharisees, "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?" (Matt. 22:42-45.) The difficulty was, to reconcile how David could call him Lord, if he were David's son? How could the son be Lord, and the child reign over the father? Now that difficulty could not be explained except by acknowledging Christ's divine nature, in which he was David's Lord; and his human nature, in which he was David's son. By seeing the union of the two natures in one glorious Immanuel this apparent contradiction disappears, and we see a blessed harmony in the very seeming inconsistency. So in this passage, "having nothing, and yet possessing all things"—how can that contradiction be reconciled? It is thus—"having nothing" in self, "possessing all things" in Christ. And just in proportion as I have nothing in self experimentally, so I possess all things in Christ. For my own beggary leads me out of self to his riches; my own unrighteousness leads me, under the Spirit's teachings, into Christ's righteousness; my own defilement, into Christ's sanctification; my own weakness, into Christ's strength; my own misery, into Christ's mercy.

But how do we "possess all things" in Christ? Let us take for our guide what the Lord the Spirit says in that striking passage, "Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." (1 Cor. 1:30.) Let us see, then, how of God Jesus is made these things unto us.

1. Look we first, then, how he is made *righteousness*. Assuming that the Lord has, by his inward teaching, brought us down to poverty and beggary, our own righteousness has disappeared; we have "seen an end of all perfection, and found God's law exceeding broad." Now this has prepared our soul for the reception of Christ's righteousness. I do not wonder that men who hold freewill views should call Christ's imputed righteousness "imputed nonsense;" such blasphemies (for they are blasphemies) do not strike me as wonderful. As long as we hold the principle of freewill in the creature, all that Christ is and has for his people is nonsense, because it is giving us what we do not want, bestowing on us a treasure we do not stand in need of; so that the expression, however blasphemous (and it is most blasphemous), is perfectly consistent with the whole scheme of human freewill and creature righteousness. But when the Lord makes known by his teaching in the conscience, that we have no righteousness; that, as the Prophet speaks, "all our righteousness are as filthy rags," (and what a figure is that!) and convinces us that we must have a perfect righteousness in which to stand, or sink into hell under the overwhelming wrath of God; as the Spirit opens our eyes to see the glorious righteousness of the Son of God, and that all the obedience, both acting and suffering, of Jesus is imputed to those that believe on his name—having none of our own, we are led, taught, and guided to embrace this imputed righteousness as all our justification before the throne of God. And thus the deeper we sink into a conviction that we have no righteousness of our own, and the more we trample under foot our own filthy rags, the higher do we rise in an experimental reception of Christ's glorious righteousness as suited to all our necessities. Thus, not having any righteousness of our own, not an atom whereby God can be pleased, we indeed "have nothing;" yet, in having Christ's righteousness, we "possess all things." We possess a full satisfaction made to God's righteous law; all the demands of God are honoured, justice is completely fulfilled; not a single atom is missing, not a single iota deficient, not a thread in the garment wanting. What a beautiful picture has the holy Ghost made use of in Psalm 45:14, to show us Christ's imputed

righteousness, where, speaking of the Queen, he says, "She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework." What a sweet expression that is, if I can explain it without vulgarising it! Every stitch in the raiment of needlework must have had the needle to pass through it. And O, what a succession of laborious stitches must the raiment of needlework have gone through in which the church is attired! Now, when we look at every holy thought that passed through Christ's mind, every holy word that dropped from Christ's lips, every holy action performed by Christ's hands; at every holy emotion, every holy prayer, every act of obedience, from the moment that he came into the world till the moment he died on the cross, we see how stitch by stitch the justification of the church was wrought out. We thus see how all the demands of the law were completely satisfied, and how the Queen stands before her Bridegroom in the raiment of needlework. And when Jesus looks upon the raiment of needlework, he sees that every part of that raiment has been accomplished by his own hands. Thus, however needy and naked we are as to our own righteousness, when standing in his righteousness we possess "all things," and we want no more.

2. So with respect to *wisdom*; for he "of God is made unto us wisdom." We have none; not an atom, not a grain of true wisdom. But Christ is "made unto us wisdom," in all the circumstances of life, in all the difficulties of the way. So that we cannot come into any condition or circumstance of difficulty, for which there is not a provision in his wisdom. Having none of our own, in him we possess all wisdom.

3. So with respect to *strength*. Strength of our own we have none. We are all weakness, and cannot stand a day. People talk of their firm standing; but if God were to deal with them, as with Job, take away the hedge, and let Satan come upon them with one of his temptations; if he did not support them, they would be at once swept away. Christ being strength to the soul, he supports it in every state into which it may come. Not having any of our own strength, we have the strength of God; not the strength of a man, like ourselves, but the strength of God in every state. So that, as the Lord said to Paul, "My grace is

*sufficient* for thee." Our sufficiency is in his strength, not in our own. Our strength fails when we need it most. His strength is suited for every place, for every case, every condition, every circumstance; so that a man may say, "Christ is my strength; I have therefore strength; for I have just as much as is suited to my day;" as the promise is, "As thy day is, so thy strength shall be."

4. And so with respect to *sanctification*. We have none in ourselves; but Christ of God being made unto us "sanctification," we have in him all holiness. Holiness is to have Christ dwelling in our hearts; to have him making our bodies his temple, and working in us that which is well pleasing in his sight. He is the fountain of holiness. There is an *outward* sanctification, whereby the church was sanctified in him before the foundation of the world; and an *inward* sanctification by his indwelling presence. Shall I go then to the filthy streams, or to the fountain of living waters? I might as well dip a cup into the common sewer, or fill a goblet from the puddle that rolls down the dirtiest street in London, while a fountain of pure water was at hand, as look to my own holiness, when "the holy child Jesus," the Son of God, is sanctification to all that believe in his name; inward sanctification by his indwelling Spirit, and outward sanctification by his covenant headship.

So I might similarly carry out every other circumstance. Happiness, in this world, we have none; life is a blank; afflictions, troubles, and trials are our lot here below, for "through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom." Can we find comfort here? It is blighted. When the Lord drove Adam out of paradise, he planted the cherubims there with the flaming sword pointing every way; and man will never enter this paradise again below. But in Christ we possess all things.

Thus the Lord leads us into these two branches of divine truth, by showing us first that we have nothing, and then, that in him we possess all things. There are two rooms in the chambers where God brings his people, as he says, "Come my people, enter thou into thy chambers." These are the two rooms in the spiritual

chambers—the room of self-aborrence, and the room of admiration of Jesus; the room of humility, and the room of exaltation; the room of poverty, and the room of riches; the room of beggary on our part, and the room of wealth in him; the room where all that the creature has is felt to be a blank, and the room where all that Jesus gives him, and all that Jesus has, is seen to be the source of eternal bliss and happiness. So that these two branches of divine truth, so far from clashing with each other, sweetly, gloriously, and blessedly harmonize. And just in proportion as we are let down into the one, we are led up into the other; and just as much as we know spiritually, experimentally, and vitally of the one as "having nothing," just so much shall we know spiritually, experimentally, and vitally of the other to "possess all things."

## **SPIRITUAL SICKNESS AND HEALTH**

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham on Lord's Day Morning, June 22nd, 1845

"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" 3 John 2

This epistle differs from most of the other epistles of the New Testament, in being written to an individual, to "the well-beloved Gaius," of whom we read elsewhere, "Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth thee" (Rom.16:23). This Gaius appears to have been a man of a very enlarged heart towards the children of God; for he was not satisfied with being the host of Paul, and entertaining him kindly, but his house and heart were both large enough to entertain the whole church of God at Corinth.

To this open-hearted and affectionate Gaius, John the apostle addresses his third epistle: "The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth." There was a difference in the form of the letters among the ancients compared with that observed by ourselves. Their custom was, not as ours, to put the name of the writer at the end of the epistle, but they placed their name at the beginning; and, next in order, the name of the person to whom it was addressed. We have an instance of this in the Acts of the Apostles, where we have an original letter preserved, which Claudius Lysias sent to Felix. He commences thus: "Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting" (Acts 23:26). This was the form of letter customary among the ancients. Claudius Lysias was the writer; he therefore puts his own name first. "The most excellent governor Felix" was the person to whom the letter was sent; his name comes next. But, besides this, it was the usual custom to add at the beginning a friendly greeting, the writer wishing his correspondent "health," what we should call something complimentary. We find the apostle Paul following this prevailing custom in all his epistles. He first puts his own name, and next

that of the church or persons to whom he wrote; and then offers prayers to God that he would bless them with mercy, grace, and truth. It was the custom then, at the beginning of the letter, to offer some short desire for the health of the correspondent, that being the greatest temporal blessing the writer could wish for his friend. We find the apostle John following this custom; and being a spiritual man, and writing a spiritual letter to a spiritual friend, he gives the usual salutation a spiritual turn. He does not write as a carnal writer would do, for example as, "The elder unto beloved Gaius, health," which was the usual form; but he gives this desire for his health a spiritual turn: "Beloved I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." It is as though he should say, "I wish thee temporal health, if it be the Lord's will; but, far more, I wish thee spiritual health. I wish thy circumstances to prosper, and thy body to be in health, as far as God sees fit to bestow; but only so far as is consistent with the health of thy soul. I wish it even as thy soul prospereth." As though again he should say, "I cannot wish thee temporal prosperity, if it be not good for thy spiritual welfare. But, if thy soul prospers and be in health, with this, then, I can wish thee temporal prosperity and bodily health."

In looking then at the text, I shall endeavour to show what soulprosperity is. But, as we often see things more plainly by viewing their opposites, I shall, with God's blessing,

I. Show *what soul-sickness is*; and, in showing soul-sickness, endeavour to show the symptoms, the causes, and the cure of that sickness.

II. If the Lord enable, show *what spiritual health is*, and what are its symptoms and causes. Then, if the Lord apply the word with power, and bring it into our consciences, we may be enabled to see who are in a state of sickness and who are in a state of health.

But, before I enter into the subject, it will be right to premise a remark that my meaning may not be misunderstood. There are always persons glad to fix upon everything that may feed mere

criticism. I shall, therefore, endeavour to lay down a few points by way of explanation, and to obviate all misconception of my meaning in speaking of soul-sickness and soul-health.

1. Then we must bear in mind that man is a fallen sinner, in a state of sickness and disease. The Holy Ghost has given us a picture of this, where he says that "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" (Isa.1:5-6).

2. When the Lord would make a man whole, he does not do so by restoring the soul to its original state of health. Adam had a healthy soul in paradise; but it was a health of nature, not of grace. Soul and body were alike perfectly healthy, because free from all defect; healthy, as having come pure and innocent out of the Creator's hands. But when Adam fell, disease entered into his soul, at the same moment that sickness entered into his body. Death spiritual seized his soul; and the seeds of death temporal were planted in his body. Thus soul and body became alike subject to, and under the power of, disease. 3. When the Lord would communicate health to the soul, he does it by breathing into it a new nature, thereby implanting a divine principle, which is pure and spiritual, heavenly and holy; and which, therefore, is perfectly healthy and entirely free from the least taint of disease. And yet the old nature continues as corrupt as before. 4. I would observe that the soul, in our experience, is sickly or healthy, just in proportion as the corruptions of our fallen nature prevail over grace; or as the grace that is in the new nature prevails over corruption. When corruption prevails in the soul, it is sickly; when grace prevails, it is healthy.

I have given you these explanations that you may not misunderstand my meaning.

I. But I will go on to show some of the *causes* and *symptoms* of soul-sickness, and its cure. When the Lord begins a work of grace in the heart, and thus implants a principle of divine health, he

teaches us painfully to feel that we are, by nature, corrupt before him. The very health which the Lord communicates to the soul, by implanting in it a new and divine principle, makes us feel that we are sick; yet perhaps the soul is never so lively, so active, so vigorous, as when life is first communicated. What zeal! What earnestness! What prayerfulness! What deadness to the world! What strong cries! What longing desires! What vehement hungerings! What ardent thirstings there are in a new-born soul, the principle of life within being so vigorous and active! But usually, after a time, in the experience of God's people, they find that this vigour, this activity, and this zeal, sensibly decline. They lose their zeal, their earnestness, their comforts, and their enjoyments; and the old corrupt nature seems once more to exert its power. Then the soul becomes feelingly sick. It is not that it becomes more diseased than before; but the revival of sin seems to cast its sickly shadow over all a man's spirit.

But what are the *symptoms* of soul-sickness?

1. One is *coldness, deadness, hardness, a want of life and feeling* in the soul, so different from the zeal and activity that it once experienced. What a prevailing complaint, among the people of God, is their deadness, coldness, hardness, want of feeling in the things of God! And this attended with a sense of complete inability to raise themselves out of this dead unfeeling state! They seem as if they had been struck with palsy, a withering, paralyzing stroke, which prevents them from lifting up their hands in prayer, from looking unto Jesus, from walking and talking with him as in times past.

2. *Carnality and worldly mindedness* is another symptom of the soul's being sick. It is a strange thing, but so it is, that when the soul is sick in the things of God, then is the time for the carnal mind, so to speak, to be in health. The more weak and enfeebled that the new nature is, the more active and vigorous is the old; and the more weak and enfeebled the old man is, the more active and vigorous is the new. It is a symptom, then, of soul-sickness, when the carnal heart is grasping after the things of time and sense. When covetousness and pride, worldly-mindedness, levity,

frivolity, and thoughtlessness take such strong possession of a man's heart that he seems to have scarcely any desire whatever after the things of God, he may indeed be said to be sick.

3. Another symptom is *prayerlessness*. When the Lord begins a work of grace on the soul, he usually communicates a spirit of grace and of supplications. How prayerful a new-born soul is! What desires are then felt! What longings after manifested mercy! What hungerings and thirstings after righteousness! What power is felt in the heart to pour out its wants before the mercy-seat! Then the soul is healthy. But when prayer becomes a burden, and the heart is utterly unable to raise itself up from earth to heaven; when all spiritual desires seem to languish and fade away; when no hungerings and thirstings, no ardent desires, no pantings after the sweet manifestations of mercy are felt within, then indeed it is a symptom that sickness is spreading over the soul.

4. To find the Word of God *without savour, sweetness, or power* is another symptom of the soul being sickly. When, instead of taking down the Bible, and reading it with sweetness and pleasure, we let the dust gather on it, and allow the spider to spin its web over the cover, O, that is a sad symptom of the soul being in a sickly state! So when, in coming to chapel, the body is rather dragged there as a custom than from any real longing that the Lord would bless the Word with power to the soul, that is a symptom of the soul's being in a sickly state. When, instead of crying to the Lord that he would bless the Word, there is nothing within but sleepiness and indifference, so that we can sit asleep under the Word, and have no more care whether it come into our heart with power or whether it passes us by altogether, that is indeed a symptom of a sickly state of soul.

5. When *we feel no affection to the people of God*; when we do not desire their company; when we would rather go out of their way than meet them; when our hearts are not knit to them in the bonds of tenderness and love; when we spy out their faults, instead of covering their infirmities with a mantle of love; that is

another symptom of a sickly state of soul. When backbiting and slander prevail, and we feel a devilish pleasure in feasting on the infirmities and failings of God's dear children, O, that is a sad sign of the soul having backslidden from God, and being in a sickly state.

6. When *we can substitute the letter for the power*, and the form for the spirit, being satisfied with a name to live, that is another symptom of the soul being in a sickly state.

7. When *we can be satisfied whether we have the Lord's presence or not*; when we can go for days, and weeks, and months, without craving one smile, one intimation, one word, one whisper, one token of love; when we can be as easy in the Lord's absence as if he had never made his presence known; this is another symptom of the soul being in a sickly state.

8. When *the ordinances of God's house are despised*, and we see no beauty or sweetness in them; when we are glad to shun them; and get away from them, and even dislike the company of God's people because we see them spiritual and heavenly-minded; that is another symptom of the soul being in a sickly state.

9. When, instead of loving the more spiritual part of God's family, and those most who have most of God's fear in their heart, we *rather cleave to professors*, and to those who have not a clear and gracious experience, that is another symptom of the soul being in a sickly state.

10. When *earthly things are pursued and heavenly things neglected*; when the world rises in the estimation and Jesus and his blood and righteousness sink; when we can be comfortable with carnal people and take an interest in all the carnality of children and relations, and really feel more happy with them than with the broken, contrite people of God; when we can talk more about the business, the shop, the farm, and the railway than the real teachings of God in the soul; that is another symptom of the soul being in a sickly state. Are there no such sickly ones here, no

such diseased souls who feel certain in their minds they are not what they used to be? Now, if you are in the state I have been describing, you are in a sickly, diseased state; and you know it, too, if you are a child of God. Your conscience bears witness to it, and you sometimes cry out, "O that it were with me as in months past, when his candle shone upon my head, and when, by his light, I walked through darkness" (cf. Job 29:2,3). "I would rather," say you, "be in trouble than in this dead, lukewarm state. I read of the Laodicean church, of which the Lord said, 'So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth' (Rev.3:16). Am I a Laodicean, a deceived character, an empty professor? I, who have been slaying and backbiting at professors? What! Am I come to the same spot, as careless, as dead, and as stupid as they? O! What is the matter with my soul? Put forth thy hand, and work in me, Lord. Let me rather go through a thousand hells than be deceived at last. Let me have stripe upon stripe, rod upon rod, affliction upon affliction, though my coward heart shrinks from them, rather than be at ease in Zion."

These are a few of the symptoms of the soul's being in a sickly state. But what are the *causes*?

1. One cause is *things in providence going well*. Temporal prosperity and ease in worldly circumstances are one grand source of the soul being in a sickly state. When things are against us in providence, when the body is afflicted, when worldly circumstances are straitened, and the mind is troubled and exercised about it, the soul then is often in its most flourishing state. It resembles the two buckets of a well. When the bucket of temporal prosperity is sinking, then the bucket of spiritual prosperity is rising; and when the bucket of temporal prosperity is rising then, too often, the bucket of spiritual prosperity is sinking. Therefore, we need not wish to have health and strength or great success in temporal things, or the world to smile upon us, and to have everything that our carnal heart could wish. What does the Scripture say of such characters? "Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish" (Psa.73:7).

2. Another cause is the Lord's *withholding his rod*. It is strange to say, but most true, that we cannot do without stripes. The Lord is obliged, so to speak, to drive us on by blow upon blow, stripe upon stripe, and stroke upon stroke; for, without these continual goads, we should not move a single step, but, like the sluggish ass, would rather turn aside to the hedges and ditches to crop the thistles, than trudge along the rough and narrow way. Therefore the Lord is obliged to give us blows and stripes to make us move forward in the path that leads to glory. Now, when the Lord withholds his stripes and does not rebuke as sharply with internal or external troubles, then the world, and the things of time and sense catch our eye and attract our wandering heart, and we crave something to feed our lusts with.

3. The *withholding of the dew and rain from heaven* makes the soul become barren before God. The soul can no more do without the dew and rain, the sacred operations and divine teachings of God the Spirit, upon the heart and conscience, than the natural soil can do without the dew and rain of heaven. We get parched, dried up, barren, withered, and unfruitful, when the dew and rain of the blessed Spirit do not descend into the heart.

4. Nay, more, *sickness generates sickness*. It is the same with health; health begets health. When part of our body is diseased, it affects the whole. So, as a person gets sickly in his soul, he gradually becomes worse and worse, unless that sickness be relieved. Thus, if the Lord spares his rod, and withholds his dew and rain, soul-sickness spreads and increases like the leprosy of old. And if the Lord did not, at last, put forth his hand, this sickness would terminate altogether in the death of the soul. In all sickness, whether natural or spiritual, there is a tendency to mortality and death. And if the Lord did not, in mercy, put forth his hand, and, by renewing the work, bring health into the soul, it would go on languishing and pining away.

But now let us take a short glimpse at the *cure*. We have looked at the symptoms, and we have seen some of the causes; now let

us glance at the cure. The Lord cures us in two ways, though, after all, we may say, it is but one way. Yet, as far as our feelings are concerned, it is in two ways: *afflictions* and the other is by his *consolations*. One is by the secret woundings and cuttings of the Spirit, and the other by the secret balm which he drops into the bleeding wound.

1. The first thing we must experience, if we have got sickly in the way I have described, is to have the *wound cut into*, before it can be effectually healed. We must have the affliction before the smile, and the rod before the kiss. The Lord has various ways of bringing this about. Sometimes he sends sharp convictions into a man's conscience, and thus awakes him out of sleep. He has been sleeping on the top of a mast, unmindful of the rolling billows beneath; and, but for God's preservation, one roll of the ship would have hurled him headlong into the sea. But the Lord brings sharp convictions into his conscience, wakes him up, and makes him wonder what he has been about. He is now astonished and ashamed at his folly; how he could so have backslidden from God; how he could have gone on so long with so little prayerfulness and so little spirituality; how everything holy and heavenly had become a burden, and yet, all the time, professing to be a child of God.

2. The Lord sometimes lays sickness on a man that he may *show him his transgressions*, that they have exceeded. He thus dealt with Hezekiah; and Elihu speaks of it as a usual mode of the Lord's dealing: "He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out" (Job 33:19- 21). The Lord afflicts the body with disease, and brings before the eyes judgment and eternity, that he may awake him out of sleep, and show him how awfully he has backslidden from him.

3. Sometimes by *cutting dispensations in providence*, by taking away a child, cutting off a husband or wife, bringing down to

poverty and distress in circumstances, the Lord cures sickness of soul, the black blood of prosperity let out by the sharp lancet of adversity.

4. Sometimes the Lord drives away soul-sickness *by sending a whole troop of fears into his heart*, whether he is a hypocrite or not; sometimes by bringing cutting convictions under the preached Word, or through conversation with God's people; sometimes in reading, by bringing a sentence with convicting power into his heart to show him how little he is like a Christian. Sometimes he cures sickness by a frown on his countenance; so that when the poor soul would get near to the Lord he withdraws himself and veils his face. Darkness covers the face of God, and nothing but darkness is felt in the soul.

Now, by these and various other modes, the backslider in heart is filled with his own ways. The rod of affliction drives out sickness from the soul; as the wise man declares: "The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil: so do stripes the inward parts of the belly" (Prov.20:30). But after these bitter purges have had a wholesome effect, in due time the Lord will manifest himself and restore to him the joy of his salvation, and will overrule this very sickness for his spiritual good. There is no throwing stones at people then. No; not at the greatest backslider. Humility and self-loathing prevail in the soul, and he walks softly before the Lord all his days upon earth.

II. But I pass on, with God's blessing, to consider what are the *symptoms* and, what are the *causes of spiritual health*: "Even as thy soul prospereth." The greatest blessing that God can bestow upon a man is to give him soul-prosperity. We cannot always believe this. We want to prosper in our bodies, in our families, in our circumstances, in that which feeds and gratifies its lusts. To obtain this we would, in our carnal mind, sacrifice all soul-prosperity. So base is our heart, so depraved is our fallen nature, that we would sacrifice the greatest spiritual benefits for a little ease and fleshly indulgence. But the Lord will not let his people rest there. He will, of his own free mercy and grace, cause their

souls, in due time, to prosper. Now when the Lord, by afflicting us, cures us, and thus revives us out of a state of sickness, he strengthens that principle of health which he at first communicated; and, as he strengthens that principle of health, the soul manifestively prospers and is healthy in the things of God. But, just in proportion as the soul prospers and is in health, the old man becomes weakened, the health of the one being mutually the disease of the other; nature decaying as grace prospers, and grace decaying as nature prospers. 1. One symptom of health is to *feel the heart alive to the things of God*. There is a being very cold, dead, and stupid, with the heart as hard as adamant; and there is such a thing as the soul feeling alive in the things of God. When we experience the power of eternal things, and feel them to be our element, our meat and drink, the desire of our heart and the joy of our soul, then the soul prospers; and as the soul prospers, every grace and every fruit of the Spirit prospers with it. It is just the same in soul-sickness. As one grace declines, all the other graces of the Spirit decline too; as faith grows weak, hope and love grow cold; but, as faith prospers, all the fruits and all the graces of the Spirit flourish and prosper with it. It is spiritually as naturally. If one limb of the body decays, the others decay with it; and when one member of the flesh is strong, the other members are strong with it. Now, when a soul is in a state of prosperity, the things of God are our element, and that which we feel most interest in. This is the thermometer of the soul. If the world, the things of time and sense, the cares and anxieties of this present life, most engage our minds, then it shows that the soul is sickly. But if the things of God, the precious realities in the Word of Truth, are the things that we chiefly think of, take most interest in, and give the most attention to, that is a sign and symptom of prosperity in the soul. When this is the case, every member of the new man, every grace and fruit of the spirit, is active and lively too. But how weak faith is when the soul is sickly. It is like the hand of a sickly man; it can grasp nothing; but when the soul is in prosperity and in health, faith is strong; it can take hold of the promises in God's Word, can embrace the things of eternity, feel them to be solemn realities, deal with the Word of God as a divine revelation, and

feed upon it as sweet to the soul.

2. So with *prayerfulness*. When the soul is healthy and vigorous, then prayer flourishes in the heart; it is no longer a burden to bend the knee, but prayer then flows forth freely. There is a spring in the heart, gushing out in living water; there is a thirsting, breathing, longing, and panting after the Lord; and these flow out of the heart; not of custom, not of necessity; but they flow freely like a fountain; gushing because they must gush; freely flowing forth out of the heart into the bosom of God.

3. Again, when the soul is alive to God, *the reality of the truth of God is powerfully felt*. We see the world to be a passing shadow, a dream of the night that affords no pleasure, that yields no gratification, that cannot fill up the aching void of the soul. But the Lord of life and glory, his blood, his righteousness, his grace, his truth, his love, are powerfully felt. They occupy and fill up this void in the soul, and everything connected with Jesus is sweet and precious. The savour of his good name is like ointment poured forth, and all that he is, and has, is blessed and sweet to the heart.

4. Again, in seasons of soul-prosperity we feel *a sweet union with the people of God*; especially with the more heavenly-minded, the deeply-taught. The more powerfully exercised, the nearer they are to us. Our heart flows out towards and feels a sweet union with them, a knitting together in the bonds of affection and love. We then hate the form of an empty profession, and feel no more in union with such than with the profane of the world. We then can cover the infirmities of God's children. There is then no picking out their faults and frailties; no rejoicing in their slips, falls, and backslidings; but rather tenderness, sympathy, and affection.

5. Again, when the soul is in prosperity we can *bear affliction without murmuring or rebellion*. Patience then has its perfect work; sweet submission to the will of God prevails; we can kiss the rod and him that appointed it, and bless God for the very

affliction.

6. *Humility*, sweet humility in *precious exercise*, is another symptom of the soul being in prosperity. A humble heart, melted down to feel itself less than the least, the vilest of the vile, and the very chief of sinners.

7. Another symptom of soul-prosperity is *spirituality of mind and heavenliness of affection*. A heart going out after the Lord, trusting in him, looking to him, communing with him, enjoying his presence, walking in the light of his countenance, tasting his favour, seeing his glory, and being enamoured of his beauty. When a man feels this, his soul is in health; he is under the teachings of God the Spirit; he is like a watered garden; the scents flow out as the south wind blows, and the Word of God becomes to him like honey and the honeycomb.

8. When the man can *look back*, and see how the Lord has led him in providence; how he has appeared for him in time of need, and opened up doors which before were shut; when he can see the hand of God leading him, step by step, in the path he has travelled for years, and can bless the Lord for every crook, and cross, then his soul is in prosperity.

9. When, too, the man can see that the Lord has *led him by a right way*; when he has a clear view of the work of God in his soul, seeing the beginning clear, the carrying on clear, and looking in faith to the accomplishing of it; when he has bright marks and evidences of God's Spirit in his heart, then his soul is prospering.

10. When the man has *the witness of the Spirit* that he is child of God, a pouring out of his heart into his ear as a listening father, and a sympathising parent, then his soul is prosperous and in health. When as he walks he talks with God, enjoys sweet communion with him, prizes one smile from the Lord more than a thousand worlds; when he can delight himself in the Almighty; loves the Lord and the Lord only, and cleaves to him with purpose

of heart, then his soul is in prosperity.

11. When the man's eye is *single to God's glory*, and his conscience tender in God's fear; when he hates the garment spotted with the flesh; comes out of the world; walks in the Spirit; and lives, speaks, and acts to the glory of God in all things, then his soul is in prosperity.

12. When his *temper is subdued*, his pride laid low, his corruptions weakened, and his heart is a quiet principality where the King of Zion reigns, so as to enjoy pardon, peace, salvation, love, and blood shed abroad therein, then his soul is prosperous, and is in health. O what a difference when the soul is sickly and when it is in health! Of all wretched feelings to a child of God, a feeling of soul-sickness is the worst; and of all blessed feelings to a child of God, a feeling of spiritual health is one of the best. Especially if a man has ever enjoyed in his soul the presence and testimony of God, walked with the Lord, had his heart in some measure watered by the blessed Spirit, then he feels the sickness more. It is then the desire of his soul that the Lord would, by any means, make it to prosper. He counts spiritual prosperity to be the greatest blessing God can give, and temporal prosperity without spiritual prosperity little else but a curse.

Now the Lord brings about this state of spiritual prosperity sometimes by his rod and sometimes by his smile. We want both. We need the bitter medicine to purge out the filthiness, and we want the presence of God in the heart to make the soul prosper in his ways. All afflictions will not do; all smiles will not do. If the Lord were to give nothing but smiles, we should be like children pampered with sweetmeats. If we had not sharp afflictions and cutting convictions, we should argue thus: "What does it matter whether I sin or not? My backslidings do not provoke the Lord. It is all one how I live, speak, or act. The Lord smiles all the same." Thus, if the Lord were to throw his favours away, it would feed our pride and sinfulness. Therefore the Lord, to correct this cursed recklessness, fills the backslider with his own ways, teaches him to loathe himself by laying his rod sharper upon him,

and makes him groan and sigh over his baseness, before he applies the blood of Jesus, which cleanses from all sin, and restores to him the joys of salvation.

The apostle John, therefore, could not wish a greater blessing for his beloved Gaius than that "his soul might prosper and be in health." What would it profit Gaius that the farm flourished, that the business was going on successfully, that money was coming in like water, if the Lord frowned, and his soul was sickly.

But if the Lord was prospering Gaius's soul, watering it and making him fruitful, would he not, when he came to be stretched on the deathbed, bless the Lord for his dealings with him, however painful they might have been at the time; mercifully withholding those things which only feed the flesh, and giving him those which made his soul prosper?

## **SPIRITUAL TIMES AND SEASONS**

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Thursday Evening, 8th July, 1841

"A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." Eccl. 3:3, 4

What an instance is King Solomon of the vanity of all creature enjoyments, and the emptiness of all creature attainments! The wisest of mankind, and yet often doing actions of which a fool might be ashamed! Speaking, by divine inspiration, in the Proverbs, the language of most blessed instruction, and yet in conduct violating well nigh every precept which he had given, and acting in direct opposition to every proverb which he had inculcated! Seated in peace upon the throne of his father David, enjoying every pleasure which wealth could minister, supplied with every gratification that his senses could delight in, and then forced in his old age to write "vanity and vexation of spirit" upon them all! In his declining years reaping the bitter fruits of backsliding from God, and giving to us in this book of Ecclesiastes **which appears to be the expression of his repentance** his own dearly-bought experience of the utter vanity and instability of all creature enjoyments and expectations, and brought to see that there was nothing worth having but the fear of the Lord in the heart in blessed exercise, and the testimony of God in the soul!

Now, in this diversified experience through which King Solomon passed, he learned lessons which were not to be arrived at through any other channel. It was not in vain that he had every gratification presented to his carnal mind; it was not in vain that "he made himself gardens and orchards," and "gat him men-singers and women-singers," that "whatsoever his eyes desired he kept not from them, and withheld not his heart from any joy;" for "he looked on all the works that his hands had wrought, and

on the labour that he had laboured to do; and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun" (Eccl. 2:5, 8; Eccl. 2:10, 11). He has thus set up a beacon that we might, with God's blessing, avoid the shoals on which he struck; a light-house blazes forth, that we might not fall foul on the sands on which his frail bark too often ran; and thus, the Spirit of God sealing the instruction upon our souls, that we might steer clear of those reefs which the Holy Ghost has traced out by his pen in this chart of his perilous navigation.

Let no one misunderstand me. I believe that Solomon was a gracious character, and that he is now in glory; but the Lord left him to do many things which showed plainly that he was but a man, and which clearly prove that he was not able to act up to the lessons of divine wisdom which he taught. And he is a striking instance how that, placed as he was in an eminent situation, and not being kept by the grace of God from the many temptations to which his very wealth and station exposed him, he was carried away by them to the future distress of his soul. But in this chequered path of experience he learned a lesson, the fruit of which is recorded in this chapter, that "the times and the seasons the Father hath put in His own power" (Acts 1:7).

Solomon's experience gave the free-will that lurked in his bosom a fatal stab, turned upside down the wisdom of the creature, broke into a thousand shivers all his fleshly righteousness, and convinced him deeply of the sovereignty of God reigning over all his purposes, words, and works. And therefore, as the fruit of this wisdom, which was communicated through the channel of personal experience, he came to this solemn conclusion, that "for everything there was a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven;" that these times are in the hands of God; not to be precipitated, not to be retarded; not depending upon the movements of the creature; not fluctuating with the restless tide of human will and purpose, but fixed in the sovereign decrees of Jehovah, and fulfilled at such a moment and in such a manner as it pleaseth Him "who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11).

But the chief point to which I wish, with God's blessing, to call your attention this evening, is that portion of experimental truth which is set forth in the words of the text.

The work of grace upon the soul may be divided into two distinct operations of the Spirit of God upon the heart; the one is to break down the creature into nothingness and self-abasement before God; the other is to exalt the crucified Jesus as "God over all, blessed for ever," upon the wreck and ruin of the creature. And these two lessons **distinct, and yet so far combined as to tend to one centre—the glory of God in the salvation of the soul** the blessed Spirit writes with power upon every quickened vessel of mercy. "A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance."

i There is, then, "a time to kill"—that is, there is an appointed season in God's eternal counsels when the sentence of death is to be known and felt in the consciences of all His elect. That time cannot be hurried, that time cannot be delayed. All the counsel of parents, all the advice of instructors, all the sermons of gospel ministers, all the reading of religious books cannot hurry forward that time; and all the wretched recklessness and profaneness of our base hearts, all the snares and temptations that Satan is continually seeking to entangle the feet in, all the desperate pride, presumption, hypocrisy, unbelief, and self-righteousness of the carnal mind have no power to retard that time. The hands of that clock, of which the will of God is the spring, and His decrees the pendulum, are beyond the reach of human fingers to move on or put back.

But we observe from the text that the killing precedes the healing, and that the breaking down goes before the building up; that the elect weep before they laugh, and mourn before they dance. In this track does the Holy Spirit move; in this channel do His blessed waters flow. The first "time" then of which the text speaks is that season when the Holy Ghost takes them in hand in

order to kill them. And how does He kill them? By applying with power to their consciences the spirituality of God's holy law, and thus bringing the sentence of death into their souls—the Spirit of God employing the law as a ministration of condemnation to cut up all creature righteousness.

Every vessel of mercy must experience more or less of this killing work in his conscience. God has not indeed, in His Word, fixed any certain mode in which the sword shall enter a man's heart, but He has said positively and decisively that there is "a time to kill". This must be understood spiritually and experimentally, unless we believe that any "time" can legalise murder. Nay, the very words that follow, "a time to heal," prove that spiritual, not natural, killing is intended. The killed soul can be healed, but not the killed body. But if none are spiritually healed before they are spiritually killed, and if none shall see "the Sun of righteousness" but those upon whom He "arises with healing in His wings," every vessel of mercy, according to the depth of the Spirit's work in his heart, must know what it is to have the sentence of death and condemnation take place in his conscience.

But some shall say, "How am I to know whether I have been spiritually killed?" I will tell you. Have you experienced the effects of death? When we see a corpse lying in a coffin, it is not a question with us whether it is living or dead, for we see the pallid features of death stamped upon it. Thus it is with the elect of God. Do you want to know whether you have been killed? Have you experienced the fruits and effects of that killing? Has death been stamped upon your own righteousness? Has the sentence of guilt and condemnation fallen with weight and power into your conscience? Have you seen nothing in self to deliver you from "the wrath to come?" Have you stood before the bar of God an arraigned and guilty criminal? Have you gone to Him, as the six citizens of Calais went before our Edward III, with a halter round your neck, waiting only for the sentence of execution to drop from the mouth of the king? Has all your comeliness been turned into corruption, so that the steam of putrefaction has come up

into your nostrils, and you have been in the valley of Hamon-Gog? (Ezek. 39:11).

These are the fruits and effects of death. I believe we are to measure our experience of this spiritual death, not so much by the way in which we have died, as by what fruits and effects have been felt in our souls. Now you must know very well whether, when you come before God, you come before Him as a guilty criminal or an accepted child; whether you call upon Him as having the sentence of condemnation in your heart, or as having the sweet voice of the blood of Jesus speaking in you better things than the blood of Abel (Heb. 12:24). You must know, if you will be but honest with yourself, whether in solemn moments you expect hells doom as your portion, or the realms of eternal light, peace, and love. You must know whether you are labouring under the "spirit of bondage," or enjoying some measure of blessed liberty; whether in your solemn approaches to God you see anger and wrath in His countenance, and tremble under His frowns, or whether you bask beneath His approving smiles. These are matters of conscience; these are things in experience which cannot be wrapped up, blinked at and evaded by a living soul.

Everyone quickened into spiritual tenderness of heart must have an inward witness that he is on one side of the line or the other. A living man whose religion moves only as the Spirit moves, and whose "faith stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God," is not to be hoodwinked and blindfolded, and led away from inward teachings into uncertainties. The man who has any experience at all cannot get away from that which takes place in those secret chambers, because conscience, though it has a still voice, can neither be bribed into a false verdict, nor overawed into mute acquiescence; though it only speaks inwardly, it speaks with authority; though like Him who is the Author of it, it lifts not up its voice in the streets, yet it secretly bears an inward testimony, which must be heard and submitted to. If you, then, feel a poor, guilty, wretched criminal, condemned to die, one that sees no hope of escape from "the wrath to come" through creature-righteousness, but one that stands self-condemned and

self-abhorred before the bar of the most righteous God—know this, if you feel these things, if you sigh and groan and cry under the heavy burden of them, that "the sword has pierced through your own heart also," and that you have experienced "a time to kill".

But it is not merely man's **righteousness** that God means to kill, but also man's **pride**. O cursed pride, that is ever lifting up its head in our hearts! Pride, that would even pull down God that it might sit upon His throne. Pride, that would trample under foot the holiest things to exalt itself! Pride, that can feed upon the letter of truth as well as upon garbage! Pride, that can wrap up itself in the monk's cowl and flaunt abroad in the attire of the harlot! Pride, that can soar aloft to the heights of creature-holiness, and wallow in the filthy kennel of impurity! That monstrous creature within us, of such ravenous and indiscriminate gluttony, that the more it devours, the more it craves, and "enlargeth its desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied" (Hab. 2:5). Pride, that chameleon which assumes every colour, that actor which can play every part, and yet which is constant to no one object or purpose but to exalt and glorify self!

There is, then, "a time to kill" pride. And oh, what cutting weapons the Lord will sometimes make use of to kill a man's pride! How He will bring him sometimes into the depths of temporal poverty, that He may make a stab at his worldly pride! How He will bring to light the iniquities of his youth, that He may mortify his self-righteous pride! How He will suffer sin to break forth, if not openly, yet so powerfully within, that piercing convictions shall kill his spiritual pride! And what deep discoveries of internal corruption, what a breaking up of "the fountains of the great deep," what a leading into the chambers of imagery will the Lord sometimes employ to dig down to the root, and cut off the fibres of that poisonous tree-pride! The Searcher of hearts dissects and anatomizes this inbred evil, cuts down to it through the quivering and bleeding flesh, and pursues with His keen knife its multiplied windings and ramifications.

But there is "a time to kill" not only a man's pride, but also his **wisdom**; to slaughter it, and, as it were, drain away the life-blood from it. How delusively does this fleshly wisdom of ours act, in endeavouring to substitute the mere knowledge of truth in the letter, for the teachings of God in the soul! And how many are deceived in various ways by leaning to their own wisdom, instead of feeling fools before God, and looking up to Him for His blessed instruction! But the Lord will effectually kill creature-wisdom in the hearts of His people, by bringing them into those straits and difficulties, into those sharp and severe exercises, into those bitter and distressing temptations; where all human reasoning gives up the ghost, where knowledge and understanding are baffled and confounded, and the arm of the creature is so palsy-stricken that it cannot take any one promise out of the Word of God, to administer comfort to the troubled soul.

"I will destroy," says the Lord, "the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (1 Cor. 1:19, 20); The wise man is not to "glory in his wisdom" (Jer. 9:23), but glory in it he will until it is killed, and he learns, at the knife's point, that the Lord "turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish" (Isa. 44:25). The best lessons are learnt in affliction. A man never learns anything to profit while standing upon a lofty mountain. It is in the valley of humiliation, it is in seasons of distress, trouble, anxiety, perplexity, and temptation, that a man learns the secrets of heavenly wisdom, for in them he learns his own folly, and that "the Lord giveth wisdom: out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding" (Prov. 2:6).

**ii** But it is not all killing work. If God kills His people it is to make them alive (1 Sam. 2:6); if He wounds them, it is that He may heal; if He brings down, it is that He may lift up. We cannot see it at the time. I have thought when I was in perplexity of soul, that I never should see what it was for; and I have almost told God

so. It was impossible to see the object intended. Such a cloud of pitchy darkness lowered over it, that I felt in my own mind convinced that I never should be brought to see the reason of the dispensation. But I have been brought to see the reason, and to view the merciful kindness of God in bringing me into those straits and difficulties, wherein He caused the sighs and groans of my heart to ascend to His holy ears. But when we are passing under these exercises, we seem as though we could almost dare to tell God to His face, that even He Himself cannot bring good out of them—as though the matter was too crooked even for His arm to make straight. Such poor wretches are we when left to ourselves!

But there is "a time to heal;" and until the time comes as appointed in the mind of God, there is no effectual healing. We may seek to the physicians, like Asa when he was diseased in his feet (2 Chr. 16:12); we may go and beg some plaister from our friends; may creep under the wing of some minister; may endeavour to persuade ourselves we have received some comfort; may try to treasure up in our bosoms some text; may attempt to act faith upon some promise; may do our best to convince ourselves that we have been cured—and yet the old leprosy breaks out again. After all these make-believes, we do but resemble a credulous patient who has resorted to a quack for some deep-seated disease, and whose complaint bursts forth more violently when the temporary stimulus of the high-sounding nostrum has ceased. He then finds every symptom aggravated, and sinks deeper into despondency, because the remedy which promised to cure has increased the malady.

And so if the Lord has really smitten you with disease, all your quack remedies will fail, and you will be ready at times, like the poor lunatic in Bedlam, to tear off the plaisters that men would put upon you, because they only irritate you. You feel, at times, as though you would away with them all, crying aloud, "Miserable comforters are ye all" and "physicians of no value". Doctrines you see clearly in the Bible, but they afford no relief to **you**; promises suitable to your case, but they bring no consolation to

**you;** children of God walking in the enjoyment of sweet manifestations, but they cannot communicate their comfort to **you;** ministers tracing out your experience, but the Spirit of God does not bless it to **you;** preachers and teachers setting forth Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour, but He does not manifest Himself as an all-sufficient Saviour to **you**.

And so you go on, fearing that the time will never come when the Lord will drop a word of consolation into your soul; believing yourself to be some wretched character who has been thrust into a profession you know not how, and that the day will come when you will be manifested as a hypocrite; crying to the Lord for some blessed testimony, and He never speaking one word; endeavouring to find your experience in the Scriptures of truth, and yet such a veil over the Bible that you are unable to realise anything sweet and savoury there. And yet unable to give up your religion. Trying to throw it away, yet it coming back again; going away distressed and grieved from chapel, and saying, "Oh, I will never go there again; I never get the least comfort to my soul," and yet unable to stay away, as being more miserable at home than you would be there. But you cannot hasten the time. "The times and the seasons the Father has put in His own power" (Acts 1:7). But when the time comes to favour Zion none on earth or in hell can keep back that time, any more than they can prevent the sun from rising.

There is, then, "a time to heal". And how is that healing effected? By some sweet discovery of mercy to the soul, by the eyes of the understanding being enlightened to see Jesus, and by the Holy Ghost raising up a measure of faith in the heart, whereby Christ is laid hold of, embraced in the affections, testified to by the Spirit, and enthroned within as "the hope of glory". Not that I believe all the children of God have the same clear and striking deliverance. Not that I believe that all the living family can speak with equal decision and equal certainty how Christ was made precious to them. We often read in the accounts that gracious men have given of the Lord's dealings with their souls, and hear ministers speak from the pulpit of very clear and marked

deliverances. These are shining characters in the Church of God; their experience is a blessed testimony, and their sweet enjoyments and heavenly consolations are highly to be coveted; but I believe the generality of God's children are not so powerfully and blessedly delivered, as to be able, at all times, to make it out to their own satisfaction, that they have been delivered from going down into the pit. But still there has been an indescribable sensation of pardon and peace dropped into their hearts; there has been a transient visitation of mercy, like a cloud that passes hastily over the sky, and lets fall a refreshing shower, which, for a moment, cools the air, makes the flowers exhale fragrance, hangs the dew-drops upon every sparkling blade, and causes the grass to spring up with fresh verdure; but the next day comes, the shower is dried up, the flowers droop their heads, the grass is parched and withered, and every object seems to labour under the renewed heat; so passing and so transient was the cloud in its effects.

And thus with some of the living family who have received some testimony from the Lord. His favour, like the cloud of the latter rain, was so short and so transient that though it was accompanied with real gospel effects, though the dew-drops of mercy sparkled a while, yet they were soon dried up by the sun of temptation, soon exhaled by the winds that blew upon them from the four corners of the earth. And it is this speedy dissipation of enjoyment, this rapid drying up of the dew which makes many of God's people anxiously and seriously to question whether the consolation came from heaven or not.

But all through the Christian's life there will be "a time to kill, and a time to heal". We sometimes read in books, and hear in conversation, an experience of this kind—a work of grace commencing with very powerful convictions of sin, and the soul brought almost to the very brink of hell, and then a wonderful revelation of Jesus Christ, a powerful application of His atoning blood to the conscience, and a blessed manifestation of God's love to the soul. And then what follows? If we can credit their account, and they are not deceiving us, or not deceiving

themselves, or if we do not misunderstand their statements, they possess an unwavering assurance during the remainder of their sojourning upon earth. Sin and Satan never distress nor wound them; the flesh lies calm and tranquil, like the summer sea, never lashed up by angry gusts into a storm of fretfulness and rebellion; the sea-birds of doubt and fear never flit with screams around them, as harbingers of a tempest, but the gale of divine favour gently fills their sail, and wafts them along till they reach the harbour of endless rest. Is this consistent with the Scriptures of truth?

Does not the Word of God set forth the path of a Christian as one of trial and temptation? Can a living soul ever pass through many scenes without being killed experimentally in his feelings as one of "the flock of slaughter?" Does not a chequered experience run through the whole of a Christian's life? Does the Scripture ever afford us the least warrant to believe that a man can be walking in the footsteps of a tempted, suffering Lord, who continues for months and years together at ease in Zion, without any trouble, exercise, grief, or distress in his soul? David never was there. Jeremiah never was there. Paul never was there. Heman never was there. Asaph never was there. You will find that no saints of God, whose experience is left on record in the Bible, ever were there; but their path was one of change and vicissitude; sometimes down, sometimes up, sometimes mourning, sometimes rejoicing, but never long together in one unvaried spot.

The Spirit of the Lord, in carrying on this grand work in the hearts of God's people, will be continually operating in two distinct ways upon their souls. Jeremiah was a prophet of the Lord, and we read he was "set over the nations and over the kingdoms to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down," thus ran one part of his commission; "to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:10)—that was the second part of his office. These two distinct operations were to run through the whole of his mission; they were "the burden of the Lord," laid upon him at his first call to the prophetic office, and they continued during the whole of his

ministry, a space of more than forty years. Did he, then, merely on one occasion pull down, and on one occasion build up? Was not the whole of his ministration, as evidenced in the prophecies that are contained in the book that bears his name, a continual pulling down with one hand, and building up with the other? So is it then with the ministration of the Spirit of the Lord in a vessel of mercy. He is continually killing, continually healing, continually casting down, continually raising up, now laying the soul low in the dust of self-abasement, and now building it up sweetly in Christ.

**iii** But we pass on to another time—"a time to break down". The expression, "break down," implies that there is a building to be overthrown. What building is this? It is that proud edifice which Satan and the flesh have combined to erect in opposition to God, the Babel which is built up with bricks and lime, to reach the topmost heaven. But there is a time in God's hand to break down this Babel which has been set up by the combined efforts of Satan and our own hearts. Have we not all in our various ways set up some beloved idol, something which engaged our affections, something which occupied our thoughts, something to which we devoted all the energies of our minds, something for which we were willing to labour night and day? Be it money, be it power, be it the esteem of men, be it respectability, be it worldly comfort, be it literary knowledge, there was a secret setting up of self in one or more of its various forms, and a bowing down to it as an idol. The man of business makes money his god. The man of pleasure makes the lust of the flesh his god. The proud man makes his adored self his god. The Pharisee makes self-righteousness his god. The Arminian makes free-will his god. The Calvinist makes dry doctrine his god. The Antinomian makes the perversion of Scripture truth his god. All in one way or other, however they may differ in the object of their idolatrous worship, agree in this—that they give a preference in their esteem and affection to their peculiar idol above the one true God of Israel.

There is, then, a "time to break down" these idols which our fallen nature has set up. And have not we experienced some

measure of this breaking down, both externally and internally? Have not our idols been in a measure smashed before our eyes, our prospects in life cut up and destroyed, our airy visions of earthly happiness and our romantic paradises dissolved into thin air, our creature-hopes dashed, our youthful affections blighted, and the objects from which we had fondly hoped to reap an enduring harvest of delight removed from our eyes? And so as to our religion, has it not been broken down together with the things of the world? Our good opinion of ourselves, our piety and holiness, our resting upon texts of Scripture, our setting up our memory, our hanging upon the opinion of others, our wisdom and our knowledge, our understanding and our abilities, our consistency and uprightness, have they not all been broken down, and made a heap of ruins before our eyes, so that we are brought into this spot, not to have one stone upon the other which stands in its old place?

But there is "a **time** to break down". The time cannot be delayed, the time cannot be hurried. You may sit under the most heart-searching ministers, but you will not be effectually broken down, until the Lord Himself breaks you down. You may be hugging yourself in prosperity and ease, and saying, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire" (Isa. 44:16), and thus be "walking in the sparks of your own kindling;" but when the gust of the Lord's anger blows out this temporary flame, you will not have "a sherd to take fire from the hearth" (Isa. 30:14). You may think that you have passed through it sufficiently, and that there needs no repetition of the work of destruction and demolition; but if you are one of God's children, you will have to be broken again and again both outwardly and inwardly, in your prospects, your expectations, and your idolatries, as well as in your frame and spirit before God.

You will never have any sweet communion with Jesus till your heart is broken to receive Him as a brokenhearted Lord. You will never have any tenderness and sympathy with a dying Saviour till your spirit is made contrite within you, so as to see and believe in an agonising Jesus. But when you are passing through these

exercises, you seem not to have a grain of religion, not any one thing in your soul of which you can say, "This is the work of the Lord; I am sure I am a child of God; I feel the Spirit of adoption in me; I have a testimony which the devil himself cannot contradict—here is a sweet Ebenezer which I can look at with the greatest pleasure, and see that it was set up by God Himself in my soul. "No," say you, "what I once thought religion, I have come now to see was no religion at all. What I once highly esteemed I now look upon with disgust. What I once could lean upon, and prop up my soul with, and think would take me safe into eternity, I now see was only the deceits of the flesh and the delusion of Satan. Of all my sins my profession seems to be the greatest. I can look upon the street-pacing harlot, and think her nearer the kingdom of God than me. I can look upon those who are living in open profanity, and feel that their sins are not equal to mine: for I have been a presumptuous professor; I have touched the holy things of God with unholy hands. I have been thought more highly of by the people of God than there was any reason. I have gone amongst the family of God, have become a member of the church, and partaken of the ordinance. I have been looked upon as a child of God, and now I fear that I had not one grain of true religion, not one spark of vital godliness. And oh! my case seems to be so much more awful than that of any person of whom I have ever heard or read, that I tremble at times lest the wrath of God should be let loose, and the hurricanes of His fury sweep me into hell.

Now these are some of the feelings of a broken-down soul. Were you ever there? Was your lofty religion ever thus smashed? Did God Himself ever step forth into your hearts, and turn all your comeliness into corruption? I do not mean to say that all are broken down into the same depths of self-abasement, but you know nothing of being built up, unless you have been in a measure broken down; for the "time to break down" precedes the "time to build up."

There is, then, "a time to build up," but God will never put His glorious temple upon a rotten foundation. Who would think of

building a palace upon the walls of a hovel? Who would put beautiful columns of marble, and all the splendid ornaments of the residence of a king, beside a pauper's cottage? Shall such a wretched hut deface and defile the royal palace? Sweep it away: remove it out of sight—it is an eyesore to the king. So with our pauper-religion, our hovel of self-righteousness, our hut of creature-wisdom and creature-strength. It must be taken down, removed out of sight, and utterly swept away. That is what God does to our creature-religion. I trust God has done something of it to my religion; and that makes me so earnest in pulling down other people's religion, as seeing how easily the devil has been able to blind me in times past; and knowing what delusions and devices I could rest upon, before the Lord brought me down, it makes me stretch forth my hand as the blind and fettered Samson, and lay hold of the pillars of the temple of creature-righteousness, that I may pull it down upon the heads of the worshippers of that idol.

**(iv)** There is "a time to build up." This building up is wholly and solely in Christ, under the blessed Spirit's operations. But what building up can there be in Christ, except the creature is laid low? What has Jesus, as an all-sufficient Saviour, to do with one who can stand in his own strength and his own righteousness? Such a one wants not Jesus Christ; He is only a nominal Saviour to him; he merely sees Christ in the Bible; he has only some dim speculation floating in his mind; but as to any experimental manifestation of Jesus to his soul, or any sweet communion with Him by the revelation of His love, he knows it not; nor can he know anything of Jesus experimentally, until he is brought into those exercises of soul to which, and to which alone, Christ is suitable.

But the Holy Ghost, when He has broken down a man's religion, begins to "build up," and as His covenant office is to take of the things of Christ and show them to the soul, He will only build him up by giving him a sight of Jesus; by showing him that all saving religion from first to last stands in an experimental acquaintance with Christ, that all his righteousness is in Christ, that all his

acceptance is in Christ, that all his wisdom comes out of Christ, that all that he spiritually is in time, and all that he will be in eternity, springs out of an eternal union with Christ.

When, then, He raises up a sweet persuasion in a man's conscience that he has an interest in Christ, when He brings into the heart one soft whisper that he stands complete in Christ, He builds him up. The temple rises up in a moment; it is not laboriously put together. It is not like the ancient temple, which was the work of many years to raise, and was put together stone by stone, though "neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, was heard in the house while it was in building" (1 Kin. 6:7). But the moment that God the Holy Ghost discovers the Lord of the temple, the temple rises to receive and lodge Him at once in all its fair proportions and complete harmony.

When the soul is built up in Christ, it wants no other religion but to know Christ and the power of His resurrection. It wants no other righteousness to recommend it to God, it wants no other salvation, nor title to eternal bliss. It wants no other hope but that which Jesus sweetly communicates; no other faith but that which He blessedly gives; no other love but that which He deigns to shed abroad. Being crucified with Christ, Christ lives in him; and the sum and substance of his religion is to live by the faith of the Son of God. The religion of the Holy Ghost is for us to be brought to enjoy the sweet testimony that we are Christ's, and that Christ is ours. And then, through the feeling effects of it in our souls, to be laid low in our own eyes, to be abased in our own sight, to have our consciences made tender and sprinkled from guilt and filth, and to spend our breath in praising and blessing His holy name.

But what a different way of building up this is from being built up in the Arminian method on the one hand, or the dead Calvinistic mode on the other! The Arminian says, "You must pray, strive, and do your best; you must be active in God's cause; you must go about collecting money for the missionaries; you must be up and doing: and so in some way or other make yourself fit to

receive the grace of God." The dry Calvinist says, "Away with your doubts and fears, we will have none of that rubbish. Where do you find hope in the Bible? Believers are to rejoice always, and have done with sighs and groans. The gospel is all liberty and peace. Christ is everything, all in all—and therefore away with all your rubbish of experience." So that the Arminian on the one hand pulls down the work of Christ to substitute creature-righteousness; and the dry Calvinist on the other pulls down the work of the Holy Ghost in the soul to build up a nominal Christ.

But the way in which the Spirit of God works is to lay the creature low, by bringing it into nothingness, and crushing it into self-abasement and self-loathing, so as to press out of it everything on which the creature can depend. Like a surgeon, who will run his lancet into the abcess, and let out the gory matter, in order to effect a thorough cure; so the Spirit of the Lord thrusting His sharp sword into the heart, lets out the inward corruption, and never heals the wound until He has thoroughly probed it. And when He has laid bare the heart, He heals it by pouring in the balmy blood of Jesus, as that which, by its application, cleanseth from all sin.

But, as was observed before, this breaking down and building up run parallel with a Christian's life. As pride rises, it must be broken down. As self-righteousness starts up, it must be brought low. As the wisdom of the creature exalts itself against the wisdom of God, it must be laid prostrate. So that the work of the Spirit, continually going on in the conscience of a living soul, is breaking down and building up, breaking down and building up, breaking down and building up. When we are low, He will give us a lift; when we are high, He will pull us down; when we are secretly exalting ourselves, He will give us such a sight of our awful depravity and corruption, as shall lay us in the dust; when we are full of guilt and self-condemnation, He will sometimes raise us up by a discovery of salvation through the blood of the Lamb. So that the Spirit of the Lord, carrying on His twofold operation in the hearts and consciences of God's children, will keep breaking down when needful, and building up when needful;

and thus, in His own time and way, fits them for Jesus, as well as fills their souls with the love of Jesus.

**(v)** But there is "a time to weep, and a time to laugh: a time to mourn, and a time to dance." Does a man only weep once in his life? Does not the time of weeping run, more or less, through a Christian's life? Does not mourning run parallel with his existence in this tabernacle of clay? for "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards." Then "a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up," must run parallel with a Christian's life, just as much as "a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." Living souls will know many times to weep; they will have often to sigh and cry over their base hearts; to mourn with tears of godly sorrow their backslidings from God; to weep over their broken idols, faded hopes, and marred prospects; to weep at having so grieved the Spirit of God by their disobedience, carnality, and worldliness; to be melted into contrition at the feet of a dying Lord, so as in some measure to be led into the path in which Jesus walked as "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

They will have to bewail the falling off of those friends whom once they looked upon as bidding fairer for the kingdom of God than themselves; to weep at the cruel arrows of calumny which are shot against them by professors; to mourn over the low state of Zion, how few there are who really serve the Lord acceptably with reverence and godly fear, and adorn the doctrine in all things. But above all things will they have to weep over the inward idolatries of their filthy nature; to weep that they ever should have treated with such insult that God whom they desire to love and adore; that they should so neglect and turn their backs upon that Saviour who crowns them with lovingkindness and tender mercies; and that they bear so little in mind the instruction that has been communicated to them by the Holy Spirit.

There is many a weeping time for God's children; and if there be one frame of mind in soul experience more to be coveted than another, it is to be weeping at Jesus' feet. We have two sweet

instances of the Lord's manifesting Himself to those who were weeping—one to "the woman which was a sinner," who stood behind Him, and washed His feet with her tears; the other was to Mary Magdalene, who "stood without at the sepulchre weeping." Oh, how different is the weeping, chastened spirit of a living soul from the hardened, seared presumption of a proud professor! How different are the feelings of a broken-hearted child of God from the lightness, the frivolity, the emptiness, and the worldliness of hundreds who stand in a profession of religion! How different is a mourning saint, weeping in his solitary corner over his base backslidings, from a reckless professor who justifies himself in every action, who thinks sin a light thing, and who, however inconsistently he acts—never feels conscience wounded thereby. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4).

But there is "a time to laugh"—not carnally, not with vain mirth and frivolity; the Spirit of God does not mean that, but to laugh as Sarah laughed, when she had on her lap the infant Isaac; to laugh as Hannah, when her countenance was no more sad; to laugh as those whose "mouth was filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing," when "the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion" (Ps. 126:1, 2) to laugh as one who has seen the tricks and stratagems of his enemy defeated.

This spiritual laughter is not one of unholy levity, but such as the Lord Himself intended, when He said, "Blessed are ye that weep now; for ye shall laugh" (Luke 6:21). Spiritual laughter is to laugh inwardly in response to the smile of God; to laugh at seeing Satan baffled, and his temptations overthrown; to laugh at seeing that the way in which the Lord has led us, though it was a mystery to ourselves, has been a way most glorifying to Him.

Oh, how different is this inward laughter of the spirit from the outward laughter of the face! How different is it to laugh thus in some secret corner from exciting the smiles of a congregation, or laughing at some droll event through carnality and lightness of heart! Of carnal laughter and jocund merriment Solomon truly

said that "it is mad"— Eccl. 2:2 The hysteric laugh of the lunatic. But to be secretly smiling because the Lord smiles; to have an inward chuckling of spirit to see how Satan has laid his snares, and the Lord delivered us; to laugh at one's enemy, at seeing how all his toils and stratagems have been defeated, is to imitate "the virgin, the daughter of Zion, who despised Sennacherib, and laughed him to scorn" (Isa. 37:22). Thus to laugh inwardly, without any witness, seriously and in the spirit, is a very different thing from the broad grin of self-delighted humour; and however we may be betrayed into unbecoming levity and mirth, this spiritual laughter is that which the blessed Spirit alone sanctions.

**(vi)** But there is also "a time to mourn, and a time to dance;" we need indeed to mourn over our wretched hearts—that we are so carnal, so stupid, and so earthly; that we have so little power to resist our evil passions that are continually striving for the mastery; to mourn over our lightness, our frivolity, and our emptiness; to mourn over the things that will drop from our lips, whether we will or not; to mourn over the unsteadiness of our walk in the strait and narrow path; and to mourn over our many declensions, backslidings, and secret departures from the Lord. This is mourning—mourning in secret; mourning before the Lord; mourning on our midnight couch; mourning in our solitary chamber; mourning as we sit alone, because the hand of God is upon us.

And there is a "time to **dance;**" not with carnal revelry at the midnight ball, not with those amusements that the devil has invented in order to drown souls in everlasting perdition; but to dance as David danced before the ark. Not to dance as the daughter of Herodias, but as Miriam on the shore of the Red Sea; not the dancing of the children of Israel round the golden calf, but of "the virgin of Israel who goes forth in the dances of them that make merry" (Jer. 31:4). The dancing of which the Psalmist speaks, "Thou hast turned my mourning into dancing" (Ps. 30:11), that is, to dance with inward joy, to leap in one's soul at the presence of the Lord, as the infant John leaped in his mother's womb (Luke 1:41), to dance before the Lord with

solemnity of spirit, and yet feeling such powerful emotions within, as though the heart would dance in one's bosom.

Have you never felt, when the Lord dropped a sweet word of consolation into your conscience, what emotions filled your bosom beyond utterance, and how there was such an inward palpitation of soul, such an inward leaping of your heart in your bosom, that you could spiritually dance before the Lord, though it never affected one limb of your body, or broke out into open gestures? This, then, is the way in which the saints of old danced, and this is the way in which the saints dance now; not with carnal mirth, and wanton tripping of the feet, not with ungodly revelry, but in the inward spirit before God, dancing and leaping with joy to the praise of His name. "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King; let them praise His name in the dance; let them sing praises unto Him with the timbrel and harp" (Ps. 149:2, 3).

But these times and seasons are in the Father's hand; and "what God has joined together, let no man put asunder." Never talk of healing, till you can talk of killing; never think of being built up, until you have been broken down; never expect to laugh, until you have been taught to weep; and never hope to dance, until you have learned to mourn. Such only as are taught of God can enter into the real experience of these things; and into them, sooner or later, each according to his measure, does God the Holy Spirit lead all the ransomed family of Zion.

## Spiritual Union

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, Nov. 15, 1857

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." Ephes. 4:4, 5, 6

In that wondrous prayer which the Lord Jesus Christ, as the great High Priest over the house of God, offered up to his heavenly Father on the eve of his sufferings and death, there is one petition of singular weight and significance. Pleading for the whole body of his disciples, our blessed Intercessor put up on their behalf this remarkable request, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." And as if not content with merely expressing this petition once, he repeats it in the subsequent verse: "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one." (John 17:21, 23.) I do not know, in the whole compass of God's word, a passage of deeper import, and yet, as received by faith, one of greater blessedness. When we look at the incomprehensible, ineffable union which subsists between the Father and the Son as expressed in the words, "As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee," then to believe that the Church of God is to be one in the Father and in the Son with the same close and mysterious union as exists between these two Persons of the sacred Trinity—the very thought overwhelms us with wonder and amazement.

As it is not my present object to unfold the nature of the union between the Father and the Son I shall content myself with thus simply referring to it. But when we look at the aspect of things generally in this day of great profession, do we see union in the Church of Christ as a standing, visible fact? At least, do we behold it so manifestly visible as the Lord prayed that it might be,

so that the world itself might see and acknowledge it? For he adds, "That the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Who that knows anything of the present state of the Church of God can deny that strife and division are far more its prominent features than love and union; and that even in the most gracious and spiritual churches there is a sad lack of brotherly kindness, tender sympathy, and Christian affection? Instead of bearing each other's burdens, some seem most pleased when they can put an extra load on their brother's back; and others, like the petrel, appear most in their element in a storm, or, like the gull, to feed best when the wave of contention brings most garbage to shore.

How, then, it may be asked, can this prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ for union amongst his people be fulfilled? Is it possible, faith inquires, that any petition of our interceding High Priest should fall to the ground? Did not the Lord himself appeal to his heavenly Father that his prayer must ever prevail, when he said, in all the meekness and confidence of filial love, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me; and I knew that thou hearest me always?" (John 11:41, 42.) Can we then for a moment entertain the suspicion that the blessed Lord could utter a petition which his Father would not hear? Carry such a supposition out, and where will it land you but into open infidelity? We must therefore hold firm and fast by this conclusion, that the petition of Jesus was heard and answered, and that there is, or one day will be, a union between the mystical members of the body of Christ as close and as intimate as that which joins together Father and Son in one mysterious essence. If, then, we are still closely pressed with the inquiry how we can reconcile with this intimate and indissoluble union the strifes and divisions that we see everywhere so prevalent in the Church of God, we may answer that we can reconcile it in these two ways: first, by looking forward to that happy season when the members of the mystical body of Christ will all be brought together; when he, as the glorious head, and they, as the glorified members, will form one complete harmonious body; when all the jars and divisions of a time-state will utterly cease, and perfect love and perfect holiness

will reign for ever and ever. Or we may reconcile it thus: that though there are divisions and contentions in the Church of God, yet that the union of member with member is not really affected thereby; in other words, that their union is so vital and so substantial, that the various differences which exist, and which are deeply to be lamented, do not seriously affect it.

We may see, by way of example, this firmness of union in the very face of evident disunion existing in natural objects. Take, for instance, a tree. Look at a noble oak, as it stands in all its native grandeur in a nobleman's park. How far some of the branches are separated from one another; how others grow across each other; and when the wind roughly blows, how they rub against and chafe each other. A person viewing this angry clashing of bough against bough, might say, "What little union there is between the branches of that tree; for see how instead of mutually supporting each other, half of them are on opposite sides, and those which are closest in connection, as soon as the breeze blows only rub and chafe the bark off one another, and sometimes bring down a very shower of buds and leaves." Yet who would assert that either the mutual distance or the rude blows that they give each other destroy or even impair the substantial union which pervades every branch, as being all united in one common stem? Dead branches tied up into a faggot—emblem of a dead church—would it is true lie more closely together, and would not chafe each other. But who would not prefer the living tree with its clashing boughs to a bundle of dry and withered sticks? Or look at a family, all sprung from the same parents, all bearing the same name, and having a common relationship, not only of birth and blood, but of mutual interest, so that the honour or disgrace of one is to the glory or shame of all, and the benefit or loss of one is to the advantage or injury of all. But fathers and sons, brothers and sisters, are not always united. Differences arise, family quarrels, which may keep them at times very distant from each other, and not only much mar their happiness from within, but give much occasion to reproach from without. But still, family jars and family quarrels do not destroy the original union which knits them together as sprung from the same common stock, as

bearing the same name, and having in the main the same family interests. Or take another case, one of closer union still, that of man and wife, who are one flesh. Though bound together in so close, so intimate, so endearing a tie, they may not always be united on every point; there may be differences of opinion in minor matters where love and affection most reign and there may even be at times between them not that harmony and love which should exist in a relationship so close and so tender. Yet these differences do not affect the reality of the union nor the strength of their mutual love: they are still man and wife, still one flesh, still very fond of each other, though there may be occasional jars and differences which for a time interrupt that union and harmony which should subsist between them. So in the church of God: there are painful divisions in most churches, and much jealousy and suspicion at work beneath, which either grace subdues, or at least they smoulder without bursting into a flame. Yet where the life of God is, and of such only I speak, all these differences do not really affect the substantial union which knits them together as members of the body of Jesus.

But whilst I believe this, I still deeply lament that any difference should separate the living family of God; and I declare before all of you who believe in and love the Lord Jesus Christ that such divisions are very grievous, and that it is the duty and privilege of every Christian man to strive after manifest union with the saints of God, and especially with those amongst whom his lot is cast; that he is bound to lay aside all matters that cause dissension and strife, and to seek, as far as lies in his power, "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." But be not deceived in this matter. It is not easy to talk of love and union when your heart is full of strife and bitterness. Without tenderness of feeling and real humility of spirit, there is no walking in union with the children of God, for "only by pride cometh contention" (Prov. 13:10); and if you would live with them in peace and affection it is only by walking "worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love." (Eph. 4:1, 2.)

You will perhaps remember that the passage which I have just quoted immediately precedes the words of our text, in which the apostle urges upon believers to endeavour "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" by showing what is the foundation of that union, and how it is not only generated, but how maintained amongst the members of the mystical body of the Lord Jesus.

In opening up these words, therefore, I shall, with God's blessing, endeavour

I.—*First*, to show *the unity* of the body: "*There is one body.*"

II.—*Secondly*, what is the *foundation* and *source* of this unity, which is no less than the three Persons of the undivided Godhead, as 1, "*one God and Father* of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all;" 2, "*one Lord*," the Lord Jesus Christ, God's co-equal and co-eternal Son; and 3, "*one Spirit*," that is, the Blessed Spirit. So that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in their separate and several relationships to the Church of God, form the grand foundation, as well as the spiritual source and spring of the union of the mystical body of Christ.

III.—*Thirdly*, what I may perhaps be allowed to call *the cementing bands* of this heavenly union, which are "*one faith, one hope, and one baptism*," whereby all the living members are spiritually knit together into the blessed enjoyment of mutual peace, harmony, and love.

I.—"*There is one body.*" This is the body of Christ, as the apostle elsewhere speaks, "Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:27); and again, in the chapter before us, "For the edifying of the body of Christ." (Eph. 4:12.) But the Scripture speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ having two distinct bodies: one *real*, the other *mystical*. Let us take a glance at each, that we may see what is intended here. The Lord Jesus, then, has a real body which he took in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and which the Father had prepared for him, according to those words:

"A body hast thou prepared me. Then said I, lo, I come [in the volume of the book it is written of me] to do thy will O God." (Heb. 10:5, 7.) By this body prepared for him, is meant, however, not only the material body, that is, the actual flesh, bones, and blood which the Lord assumed, but the whole of his sacred humanity, consisting of a perfect human body and a perfect human soul, which the Lord Jesus took at one and the same instant into union with his divine Person when he was made flesh for us. This we may call his *real* body, as distinguished from his *mystical* body; the actual living body in which during his time-state here below he hungered, thirsted, ate, drank, wept, sweat in the garden drops of blood, agonised upon the cross; and which he offered, together with his soul, as a sacrifice for sin upon the altar of his own divinity when he laid down his precious life at Calvary. This is his *real* body, which was raised from the dead, wherein he ascended into heaven, and which he now wears—identically the same, though infinitely glorified—at the right hand of the Majesty on high. In this body he will come a second time without sin unto salvation, when, in union with his Deity, it will shine forth with all the wondrous splendour which it now wears on the throne of his glory—a splendour which all shall behold; for "every eye shall see him and they also which pierced him" (Rev. 1:7); but of that surpassing brightness which, while it fills the hearts of his saints with unutterable joy, will so appal the ungodly that they will call upon "the mountains and rocks to fall upon them and hide them from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." (Rev. 6:16.)

But the Lord Jesus has another body, which is usually termed his *mystical* body. This is the body spoken of in our text, as also in many other passages; as, for instance, "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.) And again, "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. 1:22, 23.) The church, then, according to these testimonies, is Christ's mystical body, the members of which consist of all the

elect of God, elsewhere spoken of as "the church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven." (Heb. 12:23.) But we must bear in mind that as the word "church" is used in two different senses in the New Testament, so it is with the mystical "body" of Christ. It has two distinct significations, meaning, 1, first, the whole collected assembly of the elect; and, 2, secondly, distinct gospel churches in this time-state. I have already named several passages where the body of Christ means, as in our text, the whole collective members, and I will now mention one where a gospel church is called by that term. You will find it 1 Cor. 12., where the apostle opening up the subject of spiritual gifts, shows that they are diversely distributed to the members of the body of Christ, of which a visible church consists. One, he says, is a foot, another a hand, another an eye, another an ear, all of which expressions imply that he is speaking of the different gifts and graces of members of a gospel church, for, ascribing the whole to the goodness and wisdom of God, he says, "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body." Is not this truly applicable to a gospel church in the exercise of the spiritual gifts bestowed upon the various members? One is an eye, having a clear discernment of spiritual things, and able to see almost at a glance where there is a real work of grace and where a mere profession; another is an ear, to "try words, as the mouth tasteth meat" (Job 34:3); another a hand, to minister liberally to the wants of God's saints; another a foot, cheerfully to toil and and trudge on the errands of the church, to be the least and lowest, and yet the most useful and serviceable. And all these members, however different from one another,—for how widely the eye differs from the ear, the ear from the foot, and the foot from the hand!—yet all are component parts of the same mystical body; all have equal union with Christ, their living Head; each is set by divine appointment and by divine power in its peculiar place to do the work that God has intended, and that as no other member could do.

Whether, then, we view the "one body" spoken of in our text as

the collective body of Christ in its aggregate form, as embracing the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, which I think is its meaning, or as a gospel church here below, the force of the words is the same. It is still "one body." This is its glory and this is its strength; and by this it is distinguished in heaven and in earth from all other societies and assemblies which, compared with the mystical body of Christ, are but ropes of sand or disorderly mobs.

II.—But we will now see what is the foundation and source of the union of which the apostle speaks in our text, when he insists on the unity of the one body. I have already intimated that the foundation of this union is nothing less than the three Persons of the undivided Godhead. This, then, is the point which I have now to open up.

i. This union of the mystical body of Christ rests first, then, on *God the Father*, according to the words, "There is one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

Four things are here said of, four blessings ascribed to, the one God and Father of the members of Christ's mystical body.

1. *First*, he is "the God and Father of *them all*." This constitutes them members of one and the same family; for as in an earthly family, all the children derive their origin from one and the same father, so in a higher sense there is one God and Father of all the family of heaven. As being, then, all his sons and daughters, they have the same family name, the same family ties, and the same family interests, because they have the same family origin. In this sense, the glorified spirits above, those whom the apostle calls "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23), are one with the saints still on earth, which made Paul say, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." (Eph. 3:14, 15.) But, as regards those still in the body here below, some in this family are but "babes" in the mother's lap, only just able to draw the breasts of consolation and feed upon the sincere

milk of the work that they may grow thereby (1 Pet. 2:2); others are "little children" farther advanced in growth, who prattle and lisp of the things of God, and speak with childlike simplicity of the glory of Christ's kingdom and talk of his power, as they have seen and felt them; others again are "young men," active and strong in faith and love, full of warmth, energy, and zeal, who fight the Lord's battles against evil and error, and are often personally and hotly engaged in painful conflicts with the world, the flesh, and the devil, but by faith overcome the wicked one; and others are "fathers," not merely by age but also by experience, whom the Lord the Spirit has matured and ripened in the things of God, whom he has led through many conflicts, trials, and temptations, and thus established them firmly and soundly in the faith of the gospel. Now though these differ widely in age, gifts, experience, and grace, yet they all are members of the same living family; for there is one God and Father of them all.

2. But this one God and Father of all is said also to be "*above all.*" How this expression leads our minds to look up to that great and glorious Jehovah who, in the infinity of his Being, is above all men and all circumstances. As the expanse of heaven is above the earth, and above it infinitely, so is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ above all the passing scenes of this lower creation. As ever visibly before our eyes, earth seems to us a mighty domain. It has its lofty mountains, its deep valleys, its flowing rivers, its umbrageous woods, its waving crops, its green fields, its roaring sea, its sandy beach; and, all these seem enough and more than enough to fill every eye and heart, as if all creation here began and terminated. But when we look upward on a clear summer night and view the spangled sky, what are all the mere scanty elements of sight and sound which earth yields compared with the blue expanse that arches over all? What are mountains or valleys, seas or rivers, in magnitude, height, or depth, compared with the heavens stretched with their blue vault above all, gemmed with millions of stars, shining forth in all their placid beauty? So God is so infinitely above all men and things, however seemingly great and glorious, that, compared with the infinity of his eternal Being, all earthly distinctions sink into nothing. As in

nature the highest mountain is but a grain of sand compared with the blue arch of heaven; so in religion, what are all attainments, gifts, graces, knowledge and experience, compared with the infinite majesty, the ineffable glory, the boundless grace of the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ? And see how this blessed truth that God is "above all" bears upon the point in hand—the unity of the body of Christ. We, to our shame be it spoken, too often quarrel and fight with one another; but all our family differences, even our family jars and quarrels, are as nothing in comparison with the boundless magnitude of God's care for each, and the infinite love and affection which he bears towards all the members of the mystical body of Jesus. He is "above all" our quarrels, strifes, contentions, jars, jealousies, suspicions, and surmises,—yea, above all our thoughts and ways, words and works: for he sits upon the throne of his Majesty, viewing men as so many grasshoppers under his feet; for, as the prophet so sublimely speaks: "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing." (Isai. 40:15.) When, then, we look up and see that he is not only the God and Father of all the members of Christ's mystical body, but "above all" their differences, as well as all their attainments, we should not only love them as his children, but should mutually bear and forbear with them, as seeing how vain and foolish are all our petty strifes compared with the grace and mercy of God above us and above them.

3. And he is "*through all*," for as God he pervades by his Spirit all his living family. As the air may be said to be "through" everything, as rushing through every place with its mighty breath, pervading every spot, entering into the closest room through every crevice and cranny, as well as filling every region on this habitable earth with its influence, presence, and power; so God the Father pervades with his Spirit, presence, and grace, and, if I may use such an expression, with his holy breath, the soul of every one of whom he is the Father. May we not, then, say that in this sense he is "*through all*" the family of God, not indeed so manifestly, yet not less really, than on the day of

Pentecost he was by his Spirit "through all" the apostles, when "suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting?" (Acts 2:2.) If believers are "a habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22); if they are his temple in whom he dwells (2 Cor. 6:16); if he act by them, and speak through them (Mark 13:11); and if this is the peculiar and sole privilege of his children, may not God be said not only to be the Father *of* them all, and *above* them all, but also to be *through* them all?

4. But he is also "*in them all*" by his manifested indwelling presence, by his shed abroad love, and by taking up his abode in their hearts. "Will God in very deed dwell with men on earth?" asked Solomon in admiring awe. (2 Chron. 6:18.) Yes, he will; he does; for he dwells amongst his saints, as he said of old: "And let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them." (Exodus 25:8.) That sanctuary is Christ; for his sacred humanity is "the true tabernacle which God pitched and not man." (Heb. 8:2.) Christ dwells in the hearts of his people, as the apostle prays (Eph. 3:17); and God dwells in Christ, as the Lord himself speaks, "I in them and thou in me." (John 17:23.) Thus as God dwells in Christ, and Christ dwells in his people, it may truly be said that God is "*in them all*" by his presence and love. The apostle, therefore, urging union among them, would imply by this, "What are your differences of opinion, your strifes and contentions, compared with this high privilege, this great and glorious blessing?" If there is one God and Father of you all, who is above all, through all, and in you all, does not this call upon you to walk in love and union with each other? If so great, so glorious a Guest dwell in you all, can you, will you, lodge by his side what he so abhors as strife among brethren? If he whose name, whose nature is "love," live in you, can you not love another when he by his love dwells alike in all your hearts? "What a foundation for union is this! What a perennial spring, ever gushing forth in thoughts, words, and works of the tenderest and warmest Christian affection!

ii. But there is another foundation of the unity of the body of

Christ. There is "*one Lord.*" This one Lord is the blessed Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, who is called again and again in the Scriptures of the New Testament, "our Lord," and here "one Lord." The reason why he bears that honoured, that worthy name is not far to seek. He is the Church's risen Head, to whom she owes implicit submission, and to whom she yields up her obedience as well as her affections, for he sits upon the throne of her heart, swaying every faculty of her soul in willing obedience to his sceptre. He thus becomes our one, our only Lord: "For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth (as there be gods many and lords many); but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things and we in him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." (1 Cor. 8:5, 6.) If he has in any way, then, manifested himself to our souls, has he not a right to every affection of our heart; a claim to every obedience of our willing mind? When the Holy Ghost says to us what he said to the church of God of old, "He is thy Lord; and worship thou him" (Psal. 45:11); we can answer, "Other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name." (Isai. 26:13.) He becomes our Lord when by grace we listen to and obey his own words: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (Matt. 11:29.) In bowing to his yoke, we own him as our Lord; for then he becomes our Sovereign, our Head, claiming at our hands not mere lip-service, but all holy obedience to his precepts, for he himself declares: "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 7:21.)

But the apostle in the text, as urging upon believers Christian union, does it on this ground, that to them there is "one Lord." Here, then, is another bond of union that knits together the mystical members of the body of Christ, another foundation of mutual affection, another well-spring of brotherly love. If he is my Lord, I submit to him as such; I adore him, worship him, receive him into my heart, seek to know his will and do it. If he is your Lord, you do the same: you seek to know him more and

more, to worship him in Spirit and in truth, to reverence his name and word, and do those things which are pleasing in his sight. Then if he is my Lord and your Lord, we serve one common Master; we are bound by one and the same allegiance; we owe him the same holy obedience; we are both seeking to know and to do one will; and we are both striving, or should strive, to please him who has taken his seat upon the throne of our affections. Therefore all divisions and strifes must yield in his presence. What should we think of courtiers quarreling in the presence of the Queen? Every contending voice is hushed in the presence of Majesty. Whatever contention may exist in the antechamber, whatever crowding and crushing there for place or precedence, when they come into the presence of the Sovereign all is quiet and respectful submission. Is it not, or should it not be so, in grace? When we by faith are brought into the presence of our common Lord, to worship him as our risen Head, to serve him as obedient subjects, and to stand before his throne in silent submission to his will, should not every contending breath be hushed? What could be more unseemly than to quarrel in the very presence of the Lord himself? The disciples, on one occasion, "disputed among themselves who should be greatest;" but it was not in the immediate presence of their Master, and they held their peace for very shame when the Lord asked them the cause of their dispute. (Mark 9:33, 34.) Has he not as our Lord given us a new commandment that we love one another? (John 13:34.) And how can we better show that we obey him than by doing what he bids?

iii. A third grand foundation of Christian union is, that there is "*one Spirit.*" This one Spirit is the Holy Ghost, by whom all the members of the mystical body are in the first instance awakened from their sleep of death, quickened into spiritual life by divine power, and thus made alive unto God. Every grace and gift which the members of Christ's mystical body possess they receive from this one Spirit, who thus baptizes them into one body, as the apostle speaks: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (1 Cor.

12:13.) Thus, though the people of God differ widely in gifts and attainments, and have very different measures of grace, yet they are all made to repent of their sins with godly sorrow by one Spirit; they are all enabled to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God by one Spirit; they are all taught to pray by one Spirit, who, "as the Spirit of grace and supplications," helps them to pour out their hearts before the throne, to seek the Lord's face, to call upon his name, and offer up those spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Yea, he himself, as their inward Intercessor, "helpeth their infirmities," and himself "intercedeth for them with groanings which cannot be uttered." (Rom. 8:26.) No band is or can be so strong as a spiritual union. Change and mutability are stamped upon all mere earthly ties, however strong they for the moment appear. But a spiritual union is for ever. And bear in mind that it is "one Spirit" that knits together into this spiritual and enduring union all the members of Christ's mystical body who have received life from their covenant Head, and that he breathes one and the same spirit into every living soul. There are not two spirits in the Church of God—a spirit of love and a spirit of strife; a spirit of union and a spirit of disunion; a spirit of affection and a spirit of enmity; a spirit of peace and a spirit of war; a spirit of humility and a spirit of pride; a spirit of harmony and a spirit of contention. It is but one Spirit, though his operations, at least as regards gifts, are different, for "there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." (1 Cor. 12:4, 5, 6.) However then these gifts may differ in kind, or grace vary in depth or degree, it is still one Spirit, for "all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (1 Cor. 12:11); and it is because it is one Spirit that quickens, animates, influences, pervades, and permeates the whole members of Christ's mystical body, that they are knit together in the bands of Christian affection and love.

How strong, then, is this spiritual union, how substantial the foundation on which it rests; how full of life and blessedness the overflowing spring whence it takes its rise, and by which it is

perpetually and unceasingly fed. When by faith we view the three Persons of the sacred Godhead all uniting to create and cement it, we see Almighty power and eternal love engaged on its behalf. When, then, we look up and see God the Father as the "Father of all" who fear his great name, "above all" by his power and love, "through all" by his Spirit and grace, and "in all" by his indwelling presence: what a bond of union is this! When, again, we look up and see the Lord Jesus at the right hand of God, seated on his throne of grace and glory, and we can call to mind what he was upon earth, and what sorrows he endured for his dear people, that he shed his sacred blood for their sake, endured shame and suffering for their sake; died, rose again, and ascended for their sake; and now reigns and rules as Lord and Sovereign over all, swaying by the sceptre of his grace the heart of every saint: what a foundation of the oneness of the body as a fact, and of Christian union as a fruit, do we find to subsist in him? When we look up a third time and see the Holy Ghost, the third Person of the glorious Godhead, proceeding from the Father and the Son, and view by faith how he comes down in his gifts, graces, quickenings, enlightenings, teachings, and in his various other operations into the heart of every saint of God, we see what a foundation there is for Christian union there. Thus the oneness of the body of Christ is not a mere floating idea of brain-sick enthusiasts, not a cunningly devised fable of crafty, designing hypocrites as a means of obtaining power or pelf, but a divine reality, whose foundation is nothing less than a Triune God. And Christian union, as a fruit of this antecedent oneness, is not a mere agreement of opinion with a certain sect or party; not a mere assent and consent to the same creed; or even a being bound together in the bond of a visible church, but something spiritual, heavenly, and divine, and therefore in its very nature, and from its very origin, far more substantial and enduring than any earthly tie. Look at mere natural bonds. How soon the closest and tenderest are scattered to the winds! Take that of a young family, all growing up as olive plants round about their parents' table. How pleasing the sight; but how brief the duration. How fair the blossom; how often blighted the fruit. The father, perhaps "dieth," as Job speaks, "in his full strength, when his bones are

moistened with marrow" (Job 21:23, 24); the broken-hearted mother follows him to an early grave; one son emigrates to Australia; another settles in a distant part of England; a third is wrecked at sea; a fourth dies prematurely of consumption; the daughters marry and have families of their own. Where now is that happy family once so united in their youthful home? A vision of yesterday, a mournful recollection of the past, as shadowy and as unsubstantial to the survivors as the last night's dream. Or look at the tie of man and wife, the strongest, as well as the closest, sweetest, and tenderest that we can have here below; the fairest relic of Eden, the most lively emblem of the union of Christ and his Church! How soon that may be snapped in twain by the death of one or the other, and no mourning of the bereaved one can bring the loved object back. And look at earthly friendships how weak their foundation, how frail their tenure! A word, a look, an unjust suspicion, or a lying tale, may for ever separate those who once were bosom friends. And even what are called or supposed to be religious friendships are often rudely rent asunder, and those who once seemed to love each other in the warmest manner become cold and indifferent to each other's interests, if not secret or open enemies; proving that nature not grace, agreement of creed not union of heart, was the foundation of the whole. It is the very nature, the inseparable condition of all earthly ties, to be of a fleeting, vanishing nature; as fleeting as life itself, as vanishing as the creatures of a day, that, like gnats in a sunbeam, sport their noon and die before night. But the bond of which I have been speaking—the oneness of the mystical body of Christ and the spiritual union of the children of God with each other—is so substantial, so abiding, and so indissoluble, because its foundation is not in earth, but in heaven; not in time, but eternity; not in the flesh, but in the spirit; based not on man, but on the very Triune God himself.

If, then, we see this by the eye of faith and believe in our very conscience that these are most certain and blessed truths, should we not seek to realize them in our hearts, and manifest our belief of them by our lips and lives? It is most important, I might say indispensable, for his peace of conscience, that every child of God

should realize in his own soul two things: 1, his union with Christ; 2, his union with the people of Christ. Love is the evidence by which both are realized. By love shed abroad in his heart, he realizes the blessedness of knowing that he is one with Christ by eternal ties, and by a direct and spiritual relationship; and by love he realizes his union with the members of Christ's mystical body by knowing for himself the truth of those heavenly words, "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." (1 John 3:14.)

He who knows nothing of love to God knows nothing of God, as holy John speaks, "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." (1 John 4:8.) And he that loves not the people of God has no evidence of spiritual life; for, as the same inspired testimony declares, "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." (1 John 3:14.)

III.—But besides the foundation on which the actual oneness of Christ's mystical body, and spiritual union as the fruit of it rest, there are *uniting bonds* called by the apostle in another place "joints and bands," which, as so many internal ligaments, so many living and active joints, knit and bind the whole body together. (Col. 2:19.) If we view Christ's mystical body as a temple, we may call them *cementing bands*, not external to the building, as props and buttresses to shore up a falling structure, or as iron girders driven round it to repair internal decay, but like bond work built up together with the edifice, and strengthening every part alike. These internal ligaments or cementing bands are three, and the firmness of their union, as well as the strength of their cement, are derived from their spiritual oneness in every member: "*one faith, one hope, one baptism.*"

1. The first connecting ligament or cementing band is "*one faith.*" This is the grand distinguishing mark of a Christian. By it he is made and called a believer. A man called upon me some time ago to sell me a book, the title of which was "The Book of Faiths." In this book he had classified all the faiths of all the world. Heathen, Mahometan, Jew, Papist, Protestant, all were down in his book.

This is just the world's book, the very spirit of Pope's Universal Prayer—

"Jehovah, Jove, or Lord;"

as if so many men so many faiths, and all equally good, equally acceptable to God, if only sincere. How strongly, as he was showing me his book full of choice engravings of the different kinds of worship, the words struck my mind, "*One faith.*" O my friends, there is only "one faith," and that the pure gift of God's grace. As the apostle declares, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." (Eph. 2:8.) It is also spoken of as one of the fruits of the Spirit; for when the apostle enumerates the various fruits of the Spirit, he mentions faith amongst them: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith." (Gal. 5:22.) If, then, the special gift of God and the fruit of the Spirit, can there be as many faiths as there are creeds? as many believers as worshippers? If so, the worship of Baal is as good as the worship of Jehovah; and faith in Mahomet is equal to faith in Jesus Christ. As the gift of God, it must be one; for God has but one faith to give. It must necessarily also be one as having one author, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is spoken of as "the author of our faith;" one finisher, for he who is the author is also the finisher; and one object, the same blessed Lord. One text combines the whole three: "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." (Heb. 12:1, 2.) It is one also as having one *end*—salvation: "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." (1 Pet. 1:9.) Having, then, one author, one finisher, one object, and one end, it can be but one faith. Again, if we look at the *operation* of this faith, you will see that it is and can be but one. It worketh by love (Gal. 5:6); and as love is but one, the faith that works by it must be one also. This is faith's grand test—the proof of its heavenly birth—for false faith cannot work by love, there being no union between nature and grace. But spiritual faith can and does work by love: for it comes from the same source, God, who is love; dwells in the same heart as the fruit of the same Spirit

(Gal. 5:22); and obtains the same eternal recompense in the fruition of endless bliss. It is also "one faith" as alone overcoming the world; for there is but one faith that gains this mighty victory. This is John's noble challenge, where he proclaims aloud, "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" It is as if he looked around him and saw what the world was and what the men were who live in it: the world how strong, man how weak. This man he saw overcome by the lust of the flesh; another by the lust of the eye; a third by the pride of life. Looking down from his watch tower upon the crowd below, he saw them all, man after man, sink and fall, and most of them to rise no more, under the chariot wheels of the conquering world; but amongst the vanquished mass he descried one who was able to overcome it, and he saw how this man won the victory, which was by faith, and that upon a special object, the Son of God. Seeing, then, that this man was the victor when all the others were vanquished, he cried aloud as in holy triumph, "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4, 5.)

Again, there is only one faith that can *purify the heart*. (Acts 15:9.) if the heart of man, that cage of unclean birds, is ever purified from the guilt, filth, power, love, and practice of sin, it must be by something of a different nature from that which pollutes it. Now a natural faith is a polluted faith, for, springing from our corrupt nature, it necessarily partakes of its corruption. But a polluted faith can no more purify a polluted heart than foul water can cleanse foul clothes. It must be pure faith, flowing out of the Redeemer's fulness as the water from his wounded side, which can alone purify the heart from the pollutions of sin. The effect of this is "to purify the soul in obeying the truth through the Spirit." (1 Pet. 1:22.) The apostle in Heb. 11. gives us a long account of the faith of the Old Testament saints, mentioning their names and enumerating their exploits. Yet but one faith, the faith of God's elect, dwelt in all their breasts. Abel had not one kind of faith, Enoch another, Noah a third, and Abraham a fourth; but

each that one which is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Believers are said, therefore, "to walk in the steps of the faith of their father Abraham" (Rom. 4:12); and the apostle declares that he and they, to whom he wrote had "the same spirit of faith" with David, when he said, "I believed and therefore have I spoken." (Psalm 116:10; 2 Cor. 4:13.) Does not all this show that one and the same faith dwells in the breast of every child of God now? And thus every true believer has union and communion with all the saints of God who have ever lived on earth, from the days of righteous Abel up to the present moment. What a uniting band is this knitting together the whole mystical body! But if so, why should there be strife and division among the people of God? If you had a natural and I a spiritual faith, or the reverse; or if I were looking at one Object and you at another; if we did not believe in the same blessed Lord, we might well differ. But if I believe in God and you believe in God; if I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; if we both believe in the same atoning blood, in the same justifying obedience, in the same dying love, in the same finished work, in the same salvation by grace; and if my faith works as your faith does, by the same operation, under the same influence, to the same end, and with the same effects and fruits, then surely that one and the same faith should be a knitting joint, a cementing band, between you and me. Why should we quarrel then and dispute about a few minor matters, which, as compared with life spiritual and life eternal, are but as the small dust of the balance? We might do so if we had two different faiths, or believed in two different Lords; but having the same faith in the same Lord, it is a connecting band not only to knit you and me together, but us both to all the members of the mystical body of Christ. Is not this, then, a blessed motive to induce us to endeavour with all our power "to walk in love as Christ also hath loved us?"

2. Again, there is but "*one hope*," which is in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is emphatically called "the hope of Israel" (Jer. 14:8), and "our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1), as being the only object of hope. "Let Israel hope in the Lord" (Psal. 130:7); "In thee, O Lord, do I

hope." (Psal. 38:15.) "Hope thou in God," was David's cheering word to his cast down, disquieted soul. (Psal. 42:11.) But this hope, as a knitting bond of the mystical body, a cementing band of the living temple of Christ, is but one. There can no more be two saving hopes, "for we are saved by hope" (Rom. 8:24), than there can be two saving faiths. Were there no other proof, we should find one in the words of our text, "Even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." There can be but one true effectual calling, and a good hope through grace springs out of it. Apply this to your hope. What does your hope of eternal life spring from? If you were asked to give a reason of the hope that is in you, what account should you give? Would it not be intimately connected with your call by grace? You would say, "It is because the Lord has in times past done something for my soul. He called me by his grace when I neither knew, nor feared, nor loved him; made me pass under the rod, convinced me of sin and my lost, ruined state; and, after a time, revealed his dear Son in me. His word has come with power to my heart, his promises have comforted my soul, and his visitations have preserved my spirit. And all these marks of my heavenly calling have given me a sweet hope in his mercy, to which I cleave as an anchor of my soul both sure and stedfast." Having this hope in your soul, you are led to converse with another child of God, and you seem to want to know the ground of his hope also, that you may have sweet union and fellowship with him, for you feel drawn out in affection toward him from what you have seen in or heard of him. He tells you of what the Lord has done for his soul; how God began the work of grace upon his heart; what trouble and distress he felt, and how the Lord in due season delivered him, and from time to time has blessed him with promises, with smiles, and with words of encouragement in hours of darkness and trouble. You feel at once a sweet union with him, and, in the openness of your heart and the warmth of your affection, you say, "I am convinced that God has begun a good work in you. What you have been telling me is commended to my conscience. I have union with you, because I feel of the same spirit with you." In this way "those that feared the Lord" in times of old "spake often one to another" (Mal. 3:16), and thus obtained and

maintained mutual union and communion. But if he can tell you nothing of what God has done for his soul; if you can see no beginning to his religion, no one gracious mark on which you can lay your hand as being wrought by a divine power as an evidence of his heavenly calling, you have no union with him, because your hope and his hope differ. The hope of the hypocrite, which shall perish, be cut off, and brushed away as a spider's web (Job 8:13, 14), or the hope of a Pharisee, which centres in his own righteousness, is not the same as that in the breast of the child of God, which hangs upon Christ, and the work and witness of the Spirit in the heart. There is no union, therefore, or communion between the two, for there is no knitting joint, no cementing band, of one and the same hope. But where there is this uniting tie, should we not seek to strengthen it, and avoid everything which may tend to weaken or impair it?

3. But we must hasten on to the third and last uniting joint and cementing band—*"one baptism."* This I believe to be the baptism of the Holy Ghost; not indeed to the exclusion of baptism by water, which is an emblem of it. And my reason for saying it is the higher and spiritual baptism which is intended here, is the apostle's own language elsewhere. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free." (1 Cor. 12:13.) But the mere external ordinance of baptism cannot be said to be the cementing band in the same way as the baptism of the Spirit is, for many have been baptized in water who never were baptized by the Holy Ghost, and many have been baptized by the Holy Ghost who were never baptized in water. Baptism by water only incorporates me into the visible church, but baptism by the Holy Ghost incorporates me into the mystical body of Christ himself. The one I believe and practise as an ordinance of Christ; but the other I receive and prize as the greatest blessing the Lord can give. I have not union and communion with every baptized person, for there are many such to whom I would not give the right hand of fellowship; whom I would not receive into my house, nor bid them God speed, lest I be a partaker of their evil deeds (2 John 10, 11); but I desire to have fellowship with all who have been baptized with

the Holy Ghost; and some of them I dearly love who do not see with me as regards the outward ordinances.

Take, then, with me a parting view of these three connecting ligaments of the mystical body of Christ; these three cementing bands of the spiritual temple. How, as internal ties knitting joint to joint, they unite into one compact living frame all the members of the mystical body of Christ. I have attempted to direct your minds mainly to these three points—the oneness of the body; the foundation of that oneness in a Triune God; and the uniting bands which knit every member of that body together. May we, then, ever bear in mind that there is but one body, one church, one fold, one spouse, one bride of the Lord the Lamb. "My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother; she is the choice one of her that bare her." (Song 6:9.) Now if we severally, if we individually, are members of the mystical body of Christ, we shall, as the Lord is pleased to favour us with his Spirit and presence, seek to realise our union with Christ; and as we realise this, we shall desire to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We shall sink our petty differences, drop our little jars, and seek to enjoy union and communion with the whole family of God; to love those whom the Lord loves, and to walk in affection with those whom he has redeemed by his precious blood. Whilst time endures and our nature is what it is, family jars and divisions will always subsist; but every child of God should seek to "follow after the things which make for peace;" not merely with those who are bound up together with him in church fellowship, but with the whole family of God. Our union with all who fear God and believe in the Son of his love we should value beyond all other ties, as enduring when every other relationship fails. As far, then, as heaven is beyond earth, eternity beyond time, and the love of Christ beyond all earthly affection, so should we seek to maintain by all the means in our power union and communion with the people of God. This, however, it is impossible to do without great self-denial and much self-sacrifice; but we shall, sooner or later, reap in our own bosoms the blessed fruit; for as a spirit of strife destroys all inward peace, so a spirit of love brings peace with God, peace with the brethren, and peace in our own

conscience.

## Spiritual Warfare

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Thursday Evening, October 14, 1858

(A Posthumous Sermon)

"This I say, then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." Gal. 5:16, 17

It is sad to a spiritual person to look around and see how that, through the legality of our nature, and through the veil of ignorance spread over our carnal mind, men are constantly seeking to make that perfect in the flesh, which they think deficient in the spirit. They feel how short they come in knowing, feeling, and enjoying what they would know, feel, and enjoy. And in order to obtain this blessedness, they have recourse to all sorts of expedients which are not only foolish, but altogether opposed to the spirit of the gospel. Now the issue of all these attempts to make that perfect by the flesh, which is begun in the spirit, is to lead men to fall into sin; for men, being unable to live nearer to God by attempts of legal obedience, actually fall into the other extremity. The reason of this is, as the Apostle explains in the seventh chapter of the Romans, because the movements of sin are by the law; for the law comes to condemn and curse; but God never promised any strength in the law. The only strength he promised is that which he gives in and by the gospel. Now look at these Galatians, who were striving to make themselves perfect in the flesh, by a legal obedience, and just see what they gained by it. They fell to biting each other, and were ready to scratch each other's eyes out, to fall upon one another with all the animosity of brute beasts. Now the Apostle tells them a more excellent way, that which the law was never meant to give,—*to walk in the spirit*—and what will be the blessed fruit? *Ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh*: because by walking in the spirit there will be

such an influence and power given that you will not actually be able to fulfil the lust of the flesh; for there is no inclination then to do so. He goes on to open up the conflict and struggle which takes place between these two principles, one of which he calls the flesh, and the other the spirit, and he tells us that *the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh; and that these are contrary the one to the other, diametrically opposite, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would*. In opening up these words I shall, with God's blessing, endeavour—

I.—First, to show, What is meant by the *flesh*, and what is meant by the *spirit*.

II.—Secondly, How the *flesh lusteth against the spirit*, and, how the *spirit lusteth against the flesh; these two being contrary the one to the other*.

III.—Thirdly, the result of this conflict,—*that the child of God cannot do the things he would*, which will bring me

IV.—Fourthly, to the Apostle's exhortation *to walk in the spirit*; and if we are enabled to do that *we shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh*.

By the flesh we are to understand that corrupt principle which we inherit from our fallen sire, Adam. God created him innocent, there was no sin in his nature. He did not possess holiness; for that is a new covenant gift produced by the Holy Ghost through the gospel; but he was a partaker of sinless innocence, it being impossible for God to create anything but what was pure. God was not bound to give him grace; for he needed not grace; but God could do no other as being pure, than create a being which was pure also; but he created him subject to sin. He knew from all eternity that he would sin. He had no hand in the matter. He did not tempt man to sin; for he tempted no man with sin; but he permitted Satan to do it, and allowed him to fall under that foul fiend. But this is a deep mystery, and therefore I will not enter more minutely into it.

We still feel the fall, we know that we are fallen creatures, for every movement of sin in our carnal mind tells man that he is fallen; sin works in him all the day long, and every movement of sin in his heart is a proof to him that he is a fallen sinner; so that you need not go further than yourself, you need look no higher, you need look no lower than your own heart to know that you are a fallen sinner before God. And not only so, but being a fallen sinner, your flesh is diseased to the very core; it is true of you as it was true of the church of God of old that *the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot there is nothing but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores*. This then is the flesh—all we were and have as inherited from our fallen ancestor—everything we have, every faculty of our mind, every power of our body, all that we are in this time and state and have derived from Adam is comprehended in that expression used here and elsewhere,—*the flesh*—but still so called because our bodies are composed for the most part of flesh, and therefore the Holy Spirit has used that expression to stamp the whole of the human body and soul in what man is as having a fallen nature, and inheriting sin and death from his father Adam.

Now the word spirit here used is not the Holy Spirit so much as the holy principle that the Holy Spirit creates in the heart of a child of God, as the Lord himself declares in the third of John that, "that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." As the Apostle also tells us in the eighth of Romans, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the Son of God." So that a child of God has not merely the flesh that is a wholly corrupt nature and whose every member contains in itself a proof of its corruption; but he has also another principle called here *the spirit*, and called by Peter *the divine nature*, and *the new man* by Paul. All these expressions refer to the same thing—that spirit which is born by the Spirit, and lodged in the heart of the sinner, and just as the flesh is the seat of everything base and evil, polluted and vile; so the spirit is the seat of everything gracious, spiritual, and holy,

"In me, that is, in my flesh," says the Apostle, "dwelleth no good thing." No faith, hope, truth, love, spirituality, heavenly affections, prayer, nor praise, there is nothing good in it. Just as in a dark cellar there is nothing but darkness and death, spiders and toads and loathsome creatures in every corner, attended by bats and vermin, so of man's flesh, in it there dwells no good thing, and on the other hand, in the spirit in the new man, called by Peter the divine nature, there dwells everything spiritual, holy, and divine, according to the divine measure. And both these principles possess life, or movement; for we cannot say of the flesh that it possesses life; but it possesses movement, power, strength, energy and *lust*; not that base desire of our fallen nature that is usually understood by the expression, but it means desire, breathing, wishing, longing from within, some inward movement; because you could not say, with any propriety, that that which was produced by the Spirit lusteth; if you take that word to signify anything impure, you could not say it lusteth; but you may say there is a desire in the new man of grace, only with this difference from the desire of the flesh, the desire is a holy desire in the new man of grace, whereas the desire in the flesh is natural and carnal.

II.—But the Apostle represents the child of God as carrying in his bosom these two opposing principles; he views them as continually in movement one against the other, two opponents who are always fighting hand to hand, one desiring to spill the blood and see the death of the other. The flesh wars against the spirit because the spirit is against it; therefore the flesh is striving against the spirit; because it is always being checked by it, and it will not be checked; the more it is tied the more it raves against the spirit which binds it. Whereas the spirit is continually striving and contending against the inward movements of the flesh, against what are the lustings of the flesh, everything that is evil, the gratification of every sensual desire, and every other wickedness, for there is nothing too evil, too base, for this flesh always to be lusting after. Not a sin was ever committed by any man or woman upon earth which has not its seed in every human heart. Let a garden be shut up for a time and it soon becomes full

of weeds. Whence come these weeds? From the earth. While the gardener is there, there are no weeds; but when he leaves off cultivating the garden the weeds begin to spring up. So in the heart of man, moral society and education subdue the crop of weeds and hold them under restraint, but when there is nothing to keep under the evils of man's heart, where are they? See what men are in prisons, on board ships when they are taken as convicts! See what they can do in Australia and the more secluded parts of America and other places! There is not a sin from which they are kept back. If anyone is kept back from sin, it is from some restraint in providence or in grace. The spirit is continually prompting to everything good, to prayer, to reading of the Scriptures, to calling upon God's name, to believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, to hoping in his mercy, to loving him with a pure heart fervently, to watchfulness, prayerfulness, and patience in God, and to anything that is good. All this lies in the spirit, and the flesh lusteth against it. It says, "I will not be humbled, I will not be mocked, I will have my way, what do you interfere with me for?" As a parent says to his child, "My dear boy (or girl), why do you do these things?" But on they go in their sin and cruelty, and earn perhaps the wages of infamy. What do they care for their parents? They will have their own way, and drink the poison cup of sin. The parents' advice takes no effect upon the children because they are determined to have their own way. So with the flesh, always determined to have its way, it is so mad after evil that it will not be checked. Now there is a spirit that keeps lusting against the flesh and desiring everything contrary to the flesh, a sweet manifestation of the blood and love of Christ, a sense of God's presence, a tenderness of conscience, to walk in the straight and narrow way; and both these are opposite the one to the other; the spirit lusting toward God and the flesh toward carnal objects, these two are directly contrary the one to the other, the one loving everything that God loves, and the other loving everything that God abhors. And these two opposing principles being in the same bosom are like two persons naturally in one house who never can agree, (perhaps as it too often happens the husband and the wife,) where the house is full of broils, the parties never can agree on any one point, it is a

continual scene of domestic discord; hence arise conflicts, exercises, trials, sorrows, perplexities. The flesh is always running against the spirit; but the spirit is always running against the flesh. These two can never be at peace; nor does God mean them to be so; therefore he says

III.—*"Ye cannot do the things that ye would" in either sense of the term.* The spirit keeps the flesh from doing what it would, or it would break free entirely from all control, would cast away all religion, throw off all restraint; but the spirit will not permit it; therefore it puts a check upon it and holds it back, and will not suffer the flesh to rush forth into these tracks of evil, work out its desires, and speak and do as it wishes. So you will find that your flesh would work evil; but your spirit will not let you do it. When you would burst into a passion, and wicked words spring up into your heart, when you would do evil and infidelity arises in your mind, there is an internal principle that checks you: the flesh may say, "What use is prayer and reading the Scriptures? What good will that do for you? Be like other people; what do you want to be tied down to all this religion for? to be thus continually reading and praying, always going upon your knees before God?" But you say, "I cannot leave my room without bending my knees, and I must read God's word." Here is the flesh casting off everything that is good; and the spirit holding it under restraint; as the horse is held by the horseman, and held back by a powerful hand; so the spirit holds back the flesh. Thus there is a continual struggle between the flesh and the spirit, the flesh suggesting evil courses and the spirit acting in the fear of God, and thus counteracting the motions of sin and for the most part getting the best of the day. You have felt sometimes how much there is to keep you from reading the Scriptures and praying, or perhaps on a Thursday evening from coming to chapel; you have got some business to do, a letter to write, or something else; you find all these idle excuses come into your mind, and when you would read the Bible perhaps, you will find a thousand excuses suggested to turn your eyes from that holy book, and when you would pray the flesh is turning your thoughts to everything that is evil, so that you cannot call upon the God of peace with any

spirituality or hope. Here we have the flesh opposed to the spirit, so that we cannot do the good we would; but in another sense of the term you cannot do the evil that you would—that is your mercy—you cannot be as bad as you would, and that is the infinite mercy of God; you cannot do the good that you would, because of this flesh which watches you as the spider watches for the fly to draw it into its web, it seeks after you day by day so that you cannot do the good you would; but you must look upon both sides of the picture. You would be spiritual, prayerful, holy, religious, and the like; but you cannot because of the flesh. That is one side of the picture; now look at the other side. See what things the spirit keeps you out of! What a wretch would you be if you had not the spirit to keep you! How you would plunge into every evil except the Lord kept you. Looking then at one side of the picture it seems gloomy and dark; but turning the canvass then you see the evil you cannot do; so that you are kept in a straight though rough and rugged path, and the Lord will be on the side of the spirit. He will not let you be tempted above that you are able.

Now if you were all flesh you would feel no conflict; those who are in sin feel no conflict; they obey the lusts of the flesh. Just like an easy workman whose companions say, "Come and have a glass of ale." The man is as willing to have the glass of ale as the comrade who takes him in, and there he sits, and he will sit until he gets intoxicated. So with our base nature. Sin says, "Come enjoy yourself, here is this or that to amuse you, to delight you," and we should come if it were not for the spirit, like the fool to the correction of the stocks, and as the poor silly workman who listens to the suggestion of his mate, so that he spends his wages and comes out as drunk as possible; therefore it is a mercy we cannot do the things we would, because we have the spirit to counteract the desires of the flesh; but were we all spirit we should have no temptations, no battles, no trials all the day long; we should live the life of an angel; but that is not the will of God. He meant you to be a soldier of Jesus Christ, to learn what the flesh was, so that you might prize his grace more, and feel more of his salvation—free salvation through the atoning blood of his

dear Son.

IV.—But now I pass on to our last point, which is to "*walk in the spirit.*" There is a *walking* in the spirit, that is to walk in the light of the spirit, in the way of the spirit, in the midst of it, to be spiritually minded, which is life and peace. Now you may feel at times all the lust of the flesh, in the baser and more usual sense of the term; the movements of the mind, whether pride, or worldliness, anger, evil temper or general carnality, these are all the lust of the flesh from the early bud to the ripe crop. Now our desire in our right mind is not to fulfil the lust of the flesh. We cannot help feeling the lust; because it is not only not dead; but it thinks, moves and acts. You don't carry a dead weight of corruptions; but a principle that breathes, moves; acts, and works, and all towards evil; and you wish as much as lieth in your power not to fulfil what the flesh desires. You want to walk in a path where the flesh shall not have the power to seduce you into words and acts which are unbecoming of a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, never to fulfil the lust of the flesh by bringing forth those wretched fruits that the flesh is ever bringing forth. And you want to know how this is to be done. The Apostle says—"*Walk in the spirit*" that is—live, move, think, act, dwell, walk in and by the spirit; but how? You cannot do it, God must work it in you, he must give you strength and power to walk, and act, and think, and dwell in the spirit, and then the flesh will become weakened and crippled, and unable to do the things it would. Now you may find many things working in your mind, for instance, you may be of a very irritable, fretful temper; you may get up in the morning calm and cool; but something soon crosses you that stirs up that wretched haste of temper that you possess, and it grieves and distresses you that you should be so entangled in this temper. Now if you were walking in the spirit, and God's face were shining upon you and your heart was melting in his love, you would find a stay, a restraint over your mind, a power put forth in your soul that would not suffer this passion to break out into words and actions. Or you may have a wonderful love for money and be continually laying it up, and considering how you can make two into four, four into eight, eight into sixteen, and so

on, and see how you may advance your position in life, and how you may spend the day so as to increase your stock; but suppose you are enabled to walk in the spirit, in the enjoyment of the light of God's countenance, then you say, "What matters it whether I die rich or poor, if I have enough to carry me honourably through this world, why need I be so anxious about the morrow." Or you may feel temptation to go into the world and associate with worldly people, with ungodly people; to be always going to chapel, you may think, how dull it is! to have no worldly company! And the flesh may lust after worldly company, as the children of Israel did after the god of Egypt. But, what would you want wicked associates for, if you had the life of God in your heart? You would say, "What have I to do with these worldly people, who know nothing about Jesus, and of his blood to take away our sins?" Here you are not fulfilling the lust of the flesh. So with temptation to strong drink or baser things than that, you will find so far as you walk in the spirit, there is a power put forth to resist the evil, so that you cannot do the things you would. But directly these influences are suspended and you begin to walk in the flesh, everything evil rises up, and what is the consequence? Why, it is almost like a father who is a good driver himself, driving his carriage; but his son gets upon the box and says, "give me the reins," and what is the next scene? Why, the carriage is upset as soon as it gets to the next heap of stones. As long as the reins are in the father's hand the carriage is safe; so with the soul, as long as the spirit holds the reins then it rides on safely; but if the flesh gets hold of them what work it is! it drives apace to destruction, and only the rich mercy of God can prevent body and soul being damned in hell, and so lost for ever.

## **The Staggerings of Unbelief and the Persuasions of Faith**

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Morning, July 1, 1866

"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." Rom. 4:20, 21

A few words upon the connection of our text with the general subject of the epistle may not be altogether out of place, and may serve, with God's blessing, to cast a fuller, clearer light upon it. I love to make clear work; to act, as far as I can, upon the scripture direction, "Make straight paths for your feet." (Heb. 12:13.) By so doing, I follow also Paul's exhortation to Timothy: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth, (2 Tim. 2:15.) But we cannot rightly divide the word of truth unless we first clearly understand it. No minister, therefore, should attempt to take a subject which he does not fully understand: for if he do, his want of clearness of thought will be sure to produce want of clearness of expression; and what is the consequence? Minister and hearer are soon lost in a fog of confusion. The people go away weary and perplexed, the minister, if he has any right and proper feeling, leaves the pulpit ashamed and disappointed; and what might have been a season of edification to both is little else but a season of weariness, perplexity, and confusion to all. It is, therefore, very necessary, or at least highly desirable, for all ministers are not equally gifted either naturally or spiritually with clearness of thought or expression, that every servant of God should make clear work, and not only understand his subject by the teaching of the Holy Spirit and by some personal experience of it, but be enabled well and fully to clear his ground, and from whatever text he preaches to set forth the truth of God in such a simple, plain, clear, intelligible way that the people may understand his meaning, and derive instruction and edification from his testimony. I would not say a word against the

weakest or the least of the sent servants of God but this I must say, if God has sent them he has sent them with a message to his people; that they stand up in the pulpit to instruct, comfort, encourage, and build up the church of God on her most holy faith; and therefore if they cannot do this work clearly and intelligently, they bear but feeble marks of their message or their ministry being given them of God. All ministers indeed are subject to their seasons of darkness, confusion, and embarrassment when they are miserably shut up both for gracious thoughts and a door of utterance. I feel much of it myself at times, and can therefore feelingly sympathise with others in the ministry who are similarly exercised. But with all this, I never attempt to take a text or to preach from a subject which I do not seem in some degree to understand in its spiritual meaning, or of which I do not in some measure feel the power. Many ministers, especially young ministers of an aspiring mind, aim at fine language and flowery expressions. But flowers are not food, and least of all artificial flowers. It would be much better if they would seek first well to understand their subject by an experience of its truth and power, and then to open it to the people in the simplest, plainest, clearest language that they can find.

The main subject of this epistle, as you are doubtless well aware, is the grand doctrine of justification. It is in this beautiful, or as I may well call it, this grand and glorious epistle, that we find the fullest and clearest solution of that mysterious and tremendous problem, how God can acquit, pardon, and justify a sinner, and yet remain the same pure, righteous, and holy God? None could solve the mystery till God himself solved it in the gift and work of his dear Son; and to open the fruits and effects of this gift and work in the free justification of a sinner is the subject of the Epistle to the Romans, which may, therefore, well stand at the head and front of all Paul's epistles. I have read that more than 2,000 commentaries have been written upon it; and if there were 2,000 more they would still be unable to unfold a thousandth part of the blessed mysteries contained in it.

There always were in the mind of men, from the first promise given after the fall, fleeting hopes and expectations that God might or would pardon sin; but then came this question, Does God pardon all, or does he pardon only some? If God pardon all, where is his righteousness, where the purity and holiness of the divine nature? Is sin so slight a thing that it may be passed by as a matter of small moment with God? Has Justice no claims as well as mercy? Man's natural conscience revolts from the belief of universal pardon; and every day's experience confirms these convictions in the punishment of criminals, condemned to death as much by the verdict of society as by the verdict of the law. Divine justice, therefore, can no more tolerate universal pardon than human justice, which is but a faint reflection of the divine. But if God pardon some and do not pardon all, why does he pardon these and not pardon those? It must either be out of pure mercy, as in the case of an earthly sovereign, or there must be some qualification on the part of the recipient. But what are these qualifications, by whom prescribed, and by whom weighed and decided? How much or how many are required? and in whom are they to be found? Here was the problem. But how to solve it none could tell. Luther lay upon his bed three days and three nights, without eating, drinking, or sleeping, under the weight and pressure of that terrible problem. It has driven some almost to the pool and to the halter. The conviction of sin from a fiery law shut out all hope of salvation by works, and ignorance of the gospel debarred them from a knowledge of salvation by grace. This was just Luther's case. The words which ground him as between the upper and nether millstone were, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested." (Rom. 3:21.) "What!" said he, "does the gospel demand a righteousness of me as well as the law? Then, I am damned by both; for I can no more obey the gospel than I can obey the law." Now in this glorious epistle, as full of logical argument as it is of doctrinal truth, the grand mystery is solved and a full and satisfactory explanation given how "God can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." It is all contained in the compass of two or three verses, which ought to be written, I will not say in letters of gold, but on diamonds and sapphires, like the

breastplate of judgment borne upon the breast of the high priest, in which there were four rows of precious stones, on which were engraved the names of the children of Israel. "But now the righteousness of God." This does not mean God's own intrinsic, eternal righteousness, but the way whereby he justifies a sinner. I mentioned just now Luther's three days' agony from the pressure of these words. I must now tell you his deliverance. As he lay on his bed thus distressed, on a sudden it darted into his mind that the righteousness of God manifested in the gospel, was the way in which God freely justifies a sinner by the imputation of Christ's righteousness. The Holy Ghost bore such a testimony to the truth of this in his soul, that he leaped off his couch in as great a transport of joy as of previous trouble. This made Luther a preacher; to this we owe the Reformation. This, then, is the meaning of the words, "the righteousness of God." "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 3:21-24) These words I have just said should be written not merely in letters of gold but engraved upon diamonds and sapphires for beauty, brilliancy, preciousness, and permanency; but there is a better place still on which they should be written—the tables of the heart, as the apostle speaks: "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God: not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart." (2 Cor. 3:3.) And they are written there when the truth comes home with divine power to the soul, and we are able to read the testimony in our own favour that by faith in the Son of God we are justified from all things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses.

But now comes the question, "What has all this to do with Abraham's faith?" It has this to do with it. When the apostle, under divine inspiration, thus solved the mystery, and showed

how God could, as he elsewhere speaks, thus justify the ungodly, it must have appeared to be altogether a new religion, a novel, unheard-of doctrine, that there was a full and free justification by faith without the deeds of the law. To show, then, that it was no novelty, no unheard-of doctrine, the apostle comes at once in the next chapter to the case of Abraham, who was not only the acknowledged father of the Jews, all of whom came from him by lineal descent, but was "the friend of God;" and was especially called and blessed by him. Now if the apostle could show that Abraham was justified, not by the deeds of the law but by faith, how triumphantly could he establish his point, that righteousness is through faith and not by works. He therefore asks, "What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?" (Rom. 4:1.) Did he find justification by the law? No, surely, "for if Abraham were justified by works he hath whereof to glory." If he could have been justified by his own obedience he would naturally have something to boast of. He therefore adds, "but not before God;" that is, God will never allow any one to boast or glory before him, therefore not even Abraham. But see how he fully proves his point by a direct reference to the word of truth. "For what saith the scripture?" as if that must be decisive; "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." He thus brings forward positive Scripture testimony that Abraham was justified not by works but by faith; and therefore that all who walk in the steps of Abraham are justified in the same way as Abraham was justified.

But this brings us to the words of our text, in which the apostle opens the nature of Abraham's faith. This is really as necessary to understand as the fact itself, that Abraham was justified by faith; for unless we knew the exact character of Abraham's faith we could not compare it with our own, or obtain any satisfactory testimony that we possessed the same faith as he. He opens it, therefore, under two distinct phases, which we may call its negative and positive aspects. He first shows the *negative* side: "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief." He then shows the *positive* side: "But was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what he had

promised he was able also to perform."

In taking up these words I shall endeavour, as the Lord may enable, to bring before you four things connected with the statement thus given of Abraham:—

I.—*First*, the *negative* side: "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief."

II.—*Secondly*, the *positive* side: "But was strong in faith."

III.—*Thirdly*, the expansion of this positive side in the fuller description given of the *nature* of his faith: "That he was fully persuaded that what God had promised he was able also to perform."

IV.—*Fourthly*, "How, thereby he *gave glory to God*."

I.—Taking the great bulk, the generality of the professing people of God, they know more of the negative than the positive side, not only of faith but of the truth generally. They know and must know both sides, for in all true religion there are two sides, the dark and the bright, a knowledge of sin and a knowledge of salvation, an acquaintance with the malady and an acquaintance with the remedy. But taking them in the mass, leaving out of consideration the more favoured of the living family, I think we may boldly say that the greater part of those who are quickened into spiritual life are more acquainted with the dark side than the bright, and know more of the negative unbelief than of the positive faith. This leads me, therefore, to devote a part of my discourse to that side of the question, that I may not overlook or pass by the great bulk, perhaps, here present of those who possess divine life and whose souls are continually exercised with the workings of that monster and master sin—unbelief.

I. The apostle, unfolding what I have called the negative side, tells us very clearly what the effect is of this sin of unbelief, and points out two evils connected with it: 1, first, that it causes us to stagger; and 2, secondly, he points out what the sin of unbelief

chiefly regards, or rather disregards, viz., the promise of God. These two points I shall now, therefore, take up in my description of unbelief.

When the Spirit of God begins to work with power upon a sinner's conscience, one of the very first things he does for him is to convince him of his unbelief. Thus our Lord speaks: "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me." (John 16:8, 9.) Before this convicting work, whatever was his life as regards actual sin, he was living practically in unbelief; he was nothing else but an unbeliever; there was not a grain of what God calls faith in his soul. But he knew it not, for he was shut up in darkness and death, divine light not having yet shone into his mind, nor divine life having yet visited his soul. Though nothing but an unbeliever in the sight of God and in the sight of his people, he fully presumed that he had faith; and this faith might, as we find in many cases, have risen to a great height, and yet in the sight of God been nothing but vain arrogance and daring presumption, as not springing from the power of God, nor connected with holy fear and godly reverence of his great name. When, then, through the entrance of the word with power divine light and life enter into a sinner's soul, unbelief is one of the first things which is made manifest among the hidden sins of the heart. I have said "hidden sins," because usually outward sins are first laid upon the conscience and inward afterwards. But as "all things that are reprov'd (or discovered) are made manifest by the light; for whatsoever doth make manifest is light" (Eph. 5:13), so unbelief is sooner or later manifested by the light which shines into the soul.

1. Now there is one peculiar feature in unbelief which seems specially to distinguish it from other sins, and by which it is made distinctly manifest. It is a sin practically and pointedly *directed against God's faithfulness*; against God's veracity. It is therefore a sin directed against that of his attributes which God holds most justly dear—his veracity and faithfulness. This peculiar feature distinguishes it from other sins. Thus sensuality is directed more

against God's infinite purity; rebellion and murmuring more against his goodness; ingratitude more against his outstretched hand in providence; pride more against his majesty; worldly mindedness against his all-sufficiency and blessedness; covetousness and carnality more against his name and character as a God of blended holiness and love. But the sin of unbelief is directed point blank against his veracity, making God to be a liar. We read: "Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name" (Psa. 138:2); that is, above all thine other revealed attributes. To doubt, therefore, and distrust, or deny God's word, stamps unbelief with the greatness of the sin in proportion to his having so highly magnified it.

2. But unbelief has another feature which stamps upon it a peculiar and detestable character. It is a *mother sin*, a breeding sin; it is not in the heart alone, but gives birth to thousands of sins, all springing up out of its fruitful womb, like the fabled sea monsters. We see in the wilderness how all through all their journeyings the grand, the crying sin of the people of Israel was unbelief. It was the parent of all their fretfulness, murmuring, and rebellion; it lay at the root of everything done by them displeasing to God; gave birth to all their idolatry and all their other sins, and eventually shut out all but Caleb and Joshua from the promised land. Their carcasses fell in the wilderness through unbelief.

3. But it has also another marked and peculiar feature. It is a sin of so *subtle* a nature that, though ever working, it often escapes detection, except from a keen and practised eye. Conscience speaks at once against some sins: they are too flagrant and gross for conscience not at once to raise its voice against them, not to mention the universal testimony of all good or even moral men as loudly condemning them. But there is something in unbelief so subtle; it so intertwines itself round every thought; it so meets us at every turn; it so starts up at the sight of every difficulty, that it will perhaps work most when least perceived. Lurking deep in the recesses of the heart, it escapes the unwatchful eye; as slippery as an eel, when grasped it glides out of the hand. If for a time

seemingly dead, it suddenly starts up into fresh life; if for a time weakened, it seems only to rest till it regains renewed strength.

4. But I must not omit that peculiar feature of unbelief of which the apostle here speaks: Abraham's faith did not *stagger*, or, rather, Abraham did not stagger through unbelief. This is one peculiar characteristic of unbelief, that it staggers, or makes us stagger, at the promise of God. To bring this point more clearly before your mind, let us see how it thus acts in a variety of instances; and observe how it is especially directed against the promises.

For instance, God has given us in his word this gracious and encouraging promise: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9). But now see how unbelief staggers at this promise. Look at that poor, self-condemned, enquiring child of grace, hanging down his sorrowful head, who wants to know the full and free pardon of all his sins, to receive forgiveness into his breast, and so have a testimony of his acceptance in Christ and for Christ's sake. Now here stands the promise, most sweet and suitable to his case, and as if purposely written for him: "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Does not he confess them, and that with many tears, with true penitence and deep sorrow of heart? But unbelief puts that promise aside. He cannot enter into it, receive it, embrace it, or feel the comfort of it, for through the power of unbelief he staggers in it. Now what makes him thus stagger? The greatness of his sins, the holiness of God, the condemnation and curse of a broken law, and a deep sense of his own desperate state and case as a condemned transgressor before the eyes of infinite purity. He feels that his sins are of a most aggravated hue, of a peculiarly deep and desperate character. Had they not been committed under this or that peculiar circumstance; had they not been so much against light and conscience, against conviction, warning, admonition, perhaps against a profession of religion, with all its binding restraints; to sum it all up in one word, had he not been what he has been—for every heart knows

its own bitterness, and it is a subject on which I must, for many reasons, touch but lightly—had he not been what he has been, and done what he has done, he thinks that mercy might reach his heart, and pardon might distil its sweets into his breast. But he staggers at the promise as seeing and feeling the greatness of his sins, the majesty of God, the holiness of the law, and how he ever is to receive it into his own bosom in all its fulness and blessedness he knows not.

Look again at another cluster of promises, which I put together as having a certain connection, spoken by the mouth of our gracious Lord: "Ask, and it shall be given you, seek, and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you;" "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out;" "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." Here is promise upon promise. No vine was ever more richly laden with clusters of grapes than the word of God is here laden with clusters of promises, such as these from the Lord's own lips; and they are all, "Yea, and in him, amen, unto the glory of God by us." They all proceed from the mouth of him who cannot lie; they are all ratified by the oath of the Covenant; all witnessed to and sealed by the blood of the Lamb; and Jesus lives at God's right hand to execute and fulfil every one of them to the utmost. Yet such is the power of unbelief, that there is a staggering in many a gracious heart at the promise, a coyly putting it aside, an inability to avail oneself of it, a hanging back, a shrinking away from it; and though the clusters hang before the eye in all their richness and ripeness, and the mouth waters after them, yet from the shortened hand it is not able to reach one of them and bring it down to the lips.

Now take another promise. "Wherefore 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. 6:17, 18.)

Here we have the combination of an invitation and a promise. The invitation is to come out and be separate from the world; the promise is that God will receive such, and be a Father unto them. But how often is the invitation acted upon; and yet, from the power of unbelief, there is a staggering at the promise. But do they not both go together? Why then should we separate them? Why doubt that God has received you and will be a Father unto you if you have come out from among the ungodly, and are separate from every unclean thing, whether person, doctrine, or practice?

I have no doubt that we have some, if not many here, who are daily staggering at the promise of God, and that through unbelief. They cannot but see that the word of God is full of promises; they cannot but feel how suitable those promises are to their state and case; and yet through unbelief they stagger, and as we read in Psa. 107 of "those who do business in great waters," "reel to and fro like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end," unable to receive these promises through unbelief. Now I would not encourage any one to venture upon these promises except in the strength of that faith which God gives; for I am sure, if we take the promises with a hand which God himself does not strengthen, if we lay hold of them with a faith which is not his gift, we shall be certain to repent of our presumption in so doing, and be driven back from the standing which we have taken. The children of Israel, on one occasion, "presumed to go up unto the hill top," when "the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and Moses his servant, departed not out of the camp." And what was the consequence of their presumption? "Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah." (Num. 14:45.) Therefore, though it is painful, yes, painful in the extreme to the children of God, to be so exercised with the power of unbelief, so to stagger and be at their wits' end, and not be able to avail themselves of the promises which are directed to their case, yet in the end what profitable lessons do they learn in that school; what a sifting there is of the chaff and the dust of unbelief from the pure grains of faith. In that furnace, how their presumption, their vain

confidence, their fleshly arrogance, their false faith are burnt up as by fire, and how they learn in themselves and for themselves—there being no other way of attaining to a practical knowledge of it—that faith is the gift of God, and does not lie in the operation of our own hands, or stand in the wisdom of men.

II.—But I now pass on to the *positive* side of the *subject—the strength of Abraham's faith*. "But was strong in faith."

We have to know both sides of the question; the negative first, and then the positive, for it is a knowledge of both these sides, unbelief and faith, which manifests us to be the children of God. If you had nothing but unbelief, how would you be distinguished from the positive unbeliever? If there were no principle in your breast, beyond those principles of unbelief which are in the breasts of all; if you are ever putting away God's word from you, through the power of unbelief, and were to live and die in that state, what is there in you to save your soul, or distinguish you from those who die in their sins? Therefore, though we hold up the negative side in order that we may enter into the secret feelings, and describe the exercises and perplexities of the quickened saints of God, yet we must bring before them faith in its fruits and effects, and thus hold up a glass that they may see also in it the features of the work of God in their soul, and recognise in themselves marks of divine teaching.

Abraham was "strong in faith." He was to be an exemplar to all believers. He was eminently "the father of the faithful." It was therefore necessary for his own comfort as well as for that of the church of God in all ages, that he should be strong in faith. But let us not for a moment think that Abraham gave himself the faith which he possessed; let us not believe that Abraham's faith, strong as it was, was strengthened by any act of his own. Let us not pour such contempt upon the grace of God, as to ascribe to Abraham any of this strength of faith of which God speaks so highly. If he was strong in faith, God gave him every atom of the faith in which he was strong. To hold any other doctrine is to dishonour God by giving honour to man. The apostle has

expressly told us, that one reason why Abraham was not justified by works, was that he might not glory before God. But if Abraham's faith was of his own giving and strengthening, it would be a work of his own in which he could glory. If he was the author of his own faith, he would be the author too of the works performed by that faith; and thus we should come at once to justification by works. But Abraham, as I shall presently show, displayed on more than one occasion, the weakness of his faith, and God has left this upon record to show us that Abraham's faith was not his own gift, or stood in his own power. It may seem hard to reconcile an apparent contradiction—that unbelief is a sin and a very great one, and yet we cannot give ourselves faith. It might therefore be objected, "Why are we blamed? Why are we punished for unbelief if we cannot give ourselves faith?" But the same objection may be made against our other sins, and upon similar grounds we might argue: "Why are men lost at all? Why punished for their sins if they cannot help sinning?" But the whole objection arises from an ignorance of the nature and depth of the fall. Because we have lost all our own righteousness, must God sacrifice all his justice and holiness? But I cannot enlarge on this point. Let us rather see in what consisted the peculiar strength of Abraham's faith. It had to fight with not only an apparently insuperable difficulty, but with, humanly speaking, a practical impossibility. I need not tell you, you are fully aware of the peculiar difficulty which Abraham's faith had to meet as springing out of his own advanced age and the similar case of Sarah. God gave him three special promises, and every one of these promises was connected with his having a child. One promise was, that the land of Canaan should belong to his seed for an everlasting possession. The second promise was, that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed. The third was that God would be a covenant God to him and to his seed after him. Now all these promises depended upon his having a child and as God had promised that Sarah his wife should be "a mother of nations, and that kings of people should be of her," it was necessary that the promised son should come from her, as well as from him. But, as you well know, two difficulties stood in the way of the fulfilment of the promise, connected with himself and

his wife, and that these were not only naturally insuperable, but gathered fresh strength, so as to speak, every day. The strength then of his faith was shown in fighting against those natural difficulties, and in believing that God who had given the promises would in his own time and way overcome them, and perform what he had promised unto the uttermost. But God saw fit for five-and-twenty years to try that faith. The prospect would become naturally darker and darker, and the promise farther from its fulfilment as years rolled on. Yet Abraham's faith held through all these wearisome years, bearing with Sarah's fretfulness and unbelief, sustaining both himself and her, and manfully resisting every difficulty. By this patient endurance, it was manifested that he was strong in faith, and that he was fully persuaded that what God had promised he was able to perform.

III.—But this brings us to our next point—the peculiar *nature* and *character* of Abraham's faith. He was fully persuaded of the power of God to accomplish his own promise.

We are not to suppose that he was altogether free from unbelieving doubts and fears. His faith was subject to changes like our own, and by this it was distinguished from the faith which stands in the wisdom and power of man; the secret of its strength being that it stood in the power of God. When, therefore, that power was suspended, his faith was proportionately weakened. We have several remarkable instances of the weakness of his faith on some trying occasions. When, for instance, he said to the Lord, "Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?" was not his faith weak? Had not God said to him, "I will make of thee a great nation." (Gen. 12:2.) And again, "And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered." (Gen. 13:16.) Yet, here he laments his childless state, and fears that his steward will be his heir. We see the weakness of his faith more especially manifested in two instances; once at Egypt, and again at Gerar. For in both places he denied that Sarah was his wife, and called her his sister. We

see this weakness also in a more marked degree in his listening to Sarah's carnal advice to take Hagar to wife. It is true that God at that time had not especially promised him a son by Sarah, but he should have known better than to leave his own wife to take another to his bosom. Thus, Abraham with all his faith was not free from the workings of unbelief; nay, they seemed from the instances which I have brought forward to have sometimes risen in him to a high pitch.

And yet, with all the weakness of his faith, which was doubtless left upon record for our instruction, and that no man, not even Abraham, should glory in the flesh, this was the character of his faith, that he was fully persuaded that what God had promised, he was able also to perform. He therefore, in the strength of that faith, overlooked all creature difficulties. Weighed in nature's balance, they seemed insuperable. But he looked beyond all difficulties, and hung his faith simply upon this—God has promised it.

But now let me apply this more particularly to our own faith, of which Abraham's is brought forward as the representative pattern. I have before shown you that faith deals with the promises of God in the word, as Abraham's faith dealt with the promises made to him by God's own mouth. Now, the promises with which our faith has to deal are for the most part of a two-fold nature. 1, There are general promises in the word spoken to characters; and, 2, there are special promises spoken by the mouth of God out of the word to individuals. With both these kinds of promises, faith then has to deal, for we have already pointed out that our faith, if genuine, must be of the same nature with the faith of Abraham; for in this sense he is "the father of all them that believe," and by walking in the steps of his faith we share his blessing, as the apostle says: "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." And observe the conclusion which he draws from this. "So then, they which be of faith, are blessed with faithful Abraham;" and thus, "the blessing of Abraham comes on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit

through faith." (Gal. 3:7, 9, 14.) I cannot here enlarge; but if you will carefully read and compare together Roman 4 and Gal. 3, you will find the whole subject clearly and beautifully opened by the pen of the Holy Ghost in the hand of Paul. Bear then this in mind, that the simple character of faith is that it consists in being fully persuaded that what God has promised he is able also to perform.

Now for the application of this. I brought forward in the first part of my discourse some premises which are spoken to characters, such as the promise of pardon to those who confess their sins; that God will receive graciously and be a Father to those who come out of the world, and separate themselves from all evil; that those who shall seek shall find, those who ask shall receive, and to those who knock it shall be opened; that Christ will cast out none who come unto him; and that whatever we ask in Christ's name he will do it unto us. Now these promises are spoken to characters, to those in whom the blessed Spirit has begun, and is carrying on a gracious work, whom he has fitted for the reception of these promises not only by the first giving of them in the word of truth, but by preparing the heart to receive them, in due time applying them, and establishing and confirming them in the believing soul. The first thing, then, we have to do in the acting of our faith, is to be fully persuaded that what God has promised he is able to perform. He has promised to pardon those who confess their sins; he has promised to receive graciously those who come out of the world, and cast themselves simply upon his favour; he has promised to those who ask, pray, and knock that he will hear and accept and bless them. Now unless we firmly believe that God is able to perform, and that to us every one of these promises, we cannot take a single step forward. Here it is that the children of God first begin to learn their weakness. They see the word filled with promises, and all of them most suitable to their state and case. But when they seek to lay hold of those promises, appropriate them, and make them their own, then they find every difficulty arrayed in the way against them. If they could merely look at, and admire them, as seeing them in the word, and did not want to get into them, and

to find their accomplishment in their own bosom, all these difficulties would at once vanish. But children of God can never be satisfied short of appropriation, for a view of the promise without its personal, experimental fulfilment would make the kingdom of God to be with them in word only. But they know from the testimony of God and the verdict of their own consciences, that "the kingdom of God is not in word but in power;" that it is not meat, and drink, or anything natural and carnal, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Thus, though they perfectly know that what God has promised he is able to perform, the knowledge of that as a bare fact does not satisfy them; nor indeed will anything fully satisfy them until they come into the personal, clear, and happy enjoyment of that promise as fulfilled in their own experience. Still in this they manifest that they are partakers of true faith, of the very faith of Abraham, that they are fully persuaded that what God has promised he is able also to perform; and in the strength of this faith they are looking to him, waiting upon him, and expecting from him in due time its performance.

But I will now take up the other class of promises of which I have before spoken. God sometimes very graciously speaks a special and particular promise to the hearts of his people. In a time of trouble, trial, and deep necessity he has a word for them, exactly suitable to their case, which he speaks into their conscience, and gives them power to believe it shall certainly be fulfilled. But no sooner has he done this than he tries them, "for the Lord trieth the righteous;" and it is the "trial of our faith which is much more precious than of gold that perisheth." He tried Abraham's faith, and he will try ours. But the trial of the faith is in proportion to its strength. As Abraham's faith was the strongest upon record, so was his trial the greatest upon record. As the apostle speaks: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son." (Heb. 11:17.) Thus, every promise spoken to the heart will always be tried; and it will be tried by difficulties arising out of the very circumstances to which the promise is adapted. Everything will go point blank against the fulfilment of the

promise; and yet such is the nature and character of living faith that it will hang upon the promise, and look forward to its fulfilment. And why? As being fully persuaded that what God has promised he is able also to perform. We cannot see, perhaps, how or when God will do it; but faith rests simply upon this one firm point, God is able; and as he is able, so also his veracity is implicated in it. If he fail in this, he may fail in the other; if he has given a promise, and fulfil it not, his faithfulness, his veracity are at stake; he is not the God he says he is—a God who cannot lie. If he can break one promise he can break another, and thus he may break all. So that whatever difficulties be in the way, faith keeps hanging upon this one point: he is able, he is able. Now it may seem at first sight that this is not very great faith; but it is. Abraham had little enjoyment during those five-and-twenty years during which the fulfilment of the promise was delayed; but his faith was always hanging upon one point: God is able. Unbelief might say, "Abraham, you are getting older." But he would answer, "God is able." "Sarah is getting older, too." "God is able." "There is not the least prospect now of a child. More than twenty years have rolled away, and you are further and further from being a father." But still the same answer: "God is able." So, with that one simple word in heart and mouth, "God is able," Abraham met every difficulty. Now our faith, if genuine, will resemble his; for there is but "one faith;" and we have to walk in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham. We read of him: "Who 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." (Rom. 4:18.) Against hope he believed in hope; and this was the strength of both his faith and his hope, that he was fully persuaded that what God had promised he was able also to perform. It is this ability of God to overcome every difficulty, to remove out of the way every hindrance, to still every rising doubt and fear, and to appear for the soul in "its darkest hour, which stamps upon faith its genuine character. The greater, therefore, the trials which encompass that faith, the more insuperable the difficulties which seem to hem the way, the more this faith stands forth as being the gift and work of God, when in the face of every difficulty it can simply say, "Well, God is able to perform that

which he hath promised. He has promised that he will never leave me nor forsake me: then I believe he will never leave me nor forsake me. He has promised that he will bring me through: then I believe that he will bring me through. He has promised that no weapon formed against me shall prosper: then I believe that no weapon formed against me will prosper. He has promised that, as my day is, so shall my strength be: then I believe that, as my day is, so my strength shall be. He has promised that, when heart and flesh shall fail, he will be the strength of my heart and my portion for ever: then I believe that what he has said will be fulfilled; that when my heart and flesh fail, God will be the strength of my heart and my portion for ever." Thus, faith having once got hold of a promise of God, and being fully persuaded that that promise is not only in God's book, but has been spoken by the power of God to the soul, faith embraces and holds on by that promise, on the simple ground that God is able to perform that which he has promised. How simple all this is, and yet how true and scriptural. But this is the very beauty of true religion, as well as of true faith, that it is so simple, when experimentally known, and thus so free from all guile, deceit, craft, and hypocrisy.

But what an encouragement this gives to plead his promises with God in prayer. "Thou hast promised, Lord." What a prevailing plea is this. You may be burdened with guilt; sin may lie as a heavy load upon your conscience. Are you enabled to confess your sins, to forsake them, to mourn over them; and are you begging of God to manifest to your conscience the forgiveness and pardon of them all? Then there is a promise for you, which I have before quoted and enlarged upon, and God is able to fulfil it to the joy of your soul. Plead it, then, with him on the simple ground of his ability to perform it. Or you may be sadly tried with temptations, and may find them so strong and powerful that you daily fear your feet may be entrapped in some snare, and you may fall a prey to the tempter. But God has declared that all things work together for the good of those that love him; that no temptation shall assail you but what is common to man, and that he "is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape that

you may be able to bear it." (1 Cor. 10:13.) Then hold on: God has promised deliverance, and he is able to fulfil it. Or your backslidings may lie with great weight and guilt upon your conscience; you may feel them more than ever you felt even the sins of your youth; for we do feel the pain of backsliding more than even the vile and open sins which we committed in the days of unregeneracy; nay, they seem at times so great as to be scarcely capable of being healed. But God has said, "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely." He has given this promise, and he is able to fulfil it. Now faith has to hold on, to believe he is able, and to wait upon him for its fulfilment.

Or you may have difficulties in *providence*; your path may be very dark as regards your present prospects. You look round on every side and cannot see whence deliverance can come, or what friends can be raised up to help you. There may be few openings in the dark and gathering clouds of providence as in times past. The whole prospect may seem exceedingly gloomy, and you scarcely know how the scene will end, and whether wreck and ruin may not burst upon you. But God has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it." "Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." "The silver and the gold are mine and the cattle upon a thousand hills." Have not you yourself in times past found that God has appeared in extreme moments of difficulty, has raised up friends, and given you unexpected help? He will do it again. Faith's work is to hold up and to hold on, to believe he is able; and if we can but come with a promise or two in our hand and keep pleading with the Lord, "Lord, thou hast promised this; Lord, thou hast promised that thou art able; if I look at myself, if I view my sins, guilt falls upon my conscience; if I view the difficulties which surround my path, I am in perplexity and full of confusion; but thou art able. When in darkness thou canst give light; when dead thou canst give me life; when all things are against me thou canst make all things work for me. Thou art able." If we can thus plead, surely he will appear. O what a struggle there is sometimes going on in the mind when staggering from unbelief. "How can it be? It seems impossible.

The difficulties are so great, the trials so severe, the temptations so powerful, my fears and foes so pressing, how can I ever come honourably through? How ever can I bless and praise God for this trial? How ever can my mouth be filled with singing and my tongue with rejoicing? How ever can I thank, praise, and bless his holy name for this trial, for that temptation, for that painful vicissitude, for that severe affliction, for that heavy loss, and, above all, for that peculiar circumstance which so cut me to the very quick?" He is able. Thus faith simply acts upon this ability of God, that what he has promised he is able also to perform.

But now observe how faith is kept secure from presumption and falling asleep under a sense of God's ability. If we were simply to fall back in our easy chair and say, "Ah, it is all right, it is all right; God is able to perform; I need not trouble myself; God will do it all:" *that* would not be faith. Did such language ever come out of the mouth of Abraham? Hear Abraham pleading with God for the saving of Sodom. Did any such presumptuous language come out of Abraham's mouth? Mark his reverence of God. See how earnestly he pleaded with him, and yet bowed down before him as dust and ashes. With this faith, therefore, that believes the power of God and hangs upon it, there is needed that gracious tenderness, that reverence and godly fear, that sense of the majesty of God which prevent all trifling with him, cut the very sinews of arrogance and presumption, and cast the soul at his feet in deep self-abasement. This is one way by which faith is kept in its right place.

But there is also another. Afflictions and chastisements are mercifully sent to keep the soul from resting in a carnal confidence, a dead assurance, a vain presumption, that because God has said he will perform his promises we may fall asleep in the corner of the carriage, and be sure the train will come to the end of the journey; that we need not get out to stoke the fire or drive the engine. I say, faith is not that easy first-class, passenger in a man's breast sleeping securely in the corner of a well-cushioned carriage. Faith is all alive to difficulties, dangers, trials; is timid, looking out of the window to see what may occur;

and is continually in a state of exercise as to the result, hanging upon God as alone able to preserve the soul and body too from a collision or a crash. God takes care to exercise his people well, that their faith may not be rickety nor fall asleep, and, so to speak, snore its life away with all the intoxication of a drunkard. These trials, afflictions, exercises, reverses in providence, smittings of conscience, doubts and fears, infidel suggestions, and the path of tribulation generally which God's people have to tread, instrumentally serve to keep alive the grace of God in their souls. Thus while God by the secret influence of his Spirit and grace through the power of his truth, keeps us on the one hand from sinking into despondency and despair, or giving way wholly to unbelief, so on the other he preserves us from getting into the chair of the slothful, or turning aside into the by-path of ease by exercises, trials, and afflictions. We are thus mercifully preserved from being driven by the storms of life upon the rocks of carking cares and worldly anxieties on which so many make shipwreck of body and soul, from being sucked in and engulfed in the maelstrom of despair, and from being stranded in the dark upon a lee shore through the sailors going to sleep, and no watch kept on deck upon course, sail, land, sea, or helm. It is thus that the ship of the soul is held on by the mighty power of God in that course by which the sea of life is safely crossed, and the harbour of rest, through every storm and calm, reached at last in the bosom of a glorious and endless eternity.

IV.—But Abraham, we read in our text, gave glory to God, which brings us to our last point; for this is what faith, true faith, always does. *It gives God the whole glory.*

Now if there were anything in us to which we could look, on which we could hang, and which we were sure would be a friend to us when we wanted it, or a neighbour to whom we could have recourse to borrow all that was demanded by our necessities, and who would lend us a helping hand when we required it, we should naturally turn away from God to seek that creature help. It is strange to say, but no less true than strange, that God is the last from whom we seek help. Everybody, and everything else will be

looked to before we look to him; for we never really come to him, to our shame be it said, except when we are absolutely compelled by sheer and hard necessity. When, then, the creature has been resorted to, and proves a broken reed; when natural hope gives up the ghost; and natural faith is unable to maintain its ground; when presumption, arrogance, and vain confidence slink out of the camp and get out of sight, like the children of Ephraim, turning their backs in the day of battle, then poor, despised little faith begins to lift up its humble head, raises itself amid the storm which has filled the whole cowardly crew with terror and confusion, and looks out of the wreck of all creature hopes around. And what does faith, thus left alone, do when there is not a man left even to haul at a rope? It does what Jonah did when he was in the whale's belly: "Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet will I look again toward thy holy temple." (Jonah 2:4.) Nor will it look in vain. It will be with it as with him: "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple." (Jonah 2:7.) And what will be the issue of this prayer and its answer? Giving glory to God. Was it not so with Jonah? "But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay *that* that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord." (Jonah 2:9.) It is when we know that "salvation is of the Lord" that we give the whole glory to him. But Jonah had to learn that salvation was of the Lord in the whale's belly, and even in a worse place still—"the belly of hell."

But how does faith give glory to God? It glorifies him mainly for two things: first, that he should have given in his word promises so suitable to our state and case, promises to meet us in our extremity; and, secondly, that he should so amply and blessedly fulfil them. Abraham gave glory to God by believing the promises made to him of a son before its fulfilment. Our Lord said to Thomas, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." (John 20:29.) Such was the faith of Abraham. He believed the promise without seeing it fulfilled. But it is chiefly when the promise and its fulfilment meet together that we can give glory to God.

Let us apply this to some of the cases I have already named. Take, for instance, the case of a poor sinner convinced of sin, with a heavy burden of guilt upon his back, unable to see how he can be forgiven consistently with the demands of the law and the justice of God. Now what a relief it is to him to be able to confess his sins, and to find as he confesses them mercy coming into his soul, some breaking in of the light of God's countenance, some healing word, some comforting testimony, some melting sense of the goodness of God in Christ Jesus, some sight of atoning blood and justifying righteousness, some persuasion of an interest in redeeming love which he can lay hold on, feel the sweetness of, and in some measure appropriate. It may not bring full deliverance. Many of God's dear children cannot get much beyond gentle intimations of his mercy, passing touches of his gracious hand, and softenings of heart under a sense of undeserved goodness and love; yet they feel sensibly relieved by what their faith thus lays hold of and brings in, and give glory to God. Sometimes again, as they hear the preached word and get a blessing under it, or some precious promise comes home to their soul with divine power, or they are favoured in secret prayer, and light and life break in upon their mind, they see such a glory in what is thus made known to them that they glorify God for what they see and feel.

But more especially when the way of salvation is opened up to them; when Christ is revealed to their soul by the power of God; when they see that wondrous plan unfolded, how God can be just, and yet the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus; then as they view in the greatness of the mystery of the Person of Christ the blessed solution of the problem which has so exercised their mind, they freely and fully give all the glory to God. "Lord," they cry, "who and what am I, that thou shouldest have had pity and compassion upon me, shouldest have touched my heart by thy grace, shouldest have planted thy fear in my breast, led me to pray and seek thy face, and listened to my feeble cries, shouldest thus have given me to hope in thy mercy, and blessed my soul with a manifestation of thy dear Son? O, who and what am I to

be thus favoured, when thousands are left to perish in their sins? O, how glorious art thou! what a good God! how thy mercy melts my heart, and thy goodness softens my soul! To thy name, be all the honour and praise, both now and for ever and ever." Here is giving glory to God. Thus, true faith will always give God the glory: will never take an atom of its own praise to itself, but will ascribe the whole glory to God as its sole author and finisher, until blessings here end in blessings hereafter, and streams of grace on earth issue into the boundless ocean of glory in heaven.

## THE STICKING TO GOD'S TESTIMONIES

Preached on Lord's Day Morning, July 12th, 1840, at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London

"I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame." Psalm 119:31

If I were to say that every quickened child of God finds, at some time or other of his spiritual experience, the feelings of his soul described in the 119th Psalm, I should not state that which varies much from the truth. Now if we look at the state in which the Psalmist was when God the blessed Spirit worked in him "to will and to do," and taught him how and what to speak in this psalm, we shall find he was not at this time in the heights of rapturous enjoyment, nor yet in the depths of sinking despair; but he had been brought down by the work of God in his soul to a meek, quiet and chastened state of experience, so that his posture was now at the feet of his Lord, looking up for those words which should drop from His lips, and waiting for some manifestation of His mercy and favour, as his only food and soul-satisfying portion. Thus in the text he reminds the Lord what He had done for him, and what he himself had been mercifully enabled to do, and makes this a ground for asking more. "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame."

I. Let us *first*, then, see what the Psalmist means by God's *testimonies* here. Does he mean merely the letter of truth, just so much of the Scriptures as were at that time revealed? The testimonies of God mean something more than this. For whatever reverence the children of God have towards the Scriptures, and however clearly and solemnly they receive them as a revelation from God, yet the testimonies to which they cleave are those that come from the Lord's own mouth into their souls. They do not cleave to the bare letter of the Word—the mere vowels and consonants and syllables of Scripture, but to such testimonies as the Lord Himself is pleased to drop into their heart and

conscience through the medium of the Scriptures of truth. Now before we can receive the Scriptures as a revelation from God, it must be shown to us by the Holy Spirit that they were inspired by Himself; and I am well convinced from soul-feeling that no man ever receives the Scriptures as an inspiration from God who has not received some measure of the same inspiration in his own soul. He may believe from external evidences that it is the Word of God, or he may have received it as such "by tradition from the fathers;" but as to any powerful workings in his own soul, as to any solemn feelings in his own conscience, as to any close dealings with God upon the matter, no man, I believe, ever did receive the Scriptures as a divine revelation from God, who had not something of a divine revelation made in his own soul by the Holy Ghost that inspired and dictated those Scriptures. Thus before we can stick to the mere written testimonies themselves as a whole, distinct from any peculiar act of faith on any one portion, we must have living faith in our souls, faith of God's gift and operation, to believe that the Scriptures really came as a divine revelation from God.

Now here it seems to me is one of the first teachings of the Holy Ghost in the soul, to enable us to receive the Word of God as coming from Him; as the apostle speaks, "Ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God." And why? Because "it effectually worketh in you that believe." But this first reception is not of the whole of the Word of God, but of that part only of divine truth which He shall have Himself revealed to the soul; and then, when the Lord Himself has shot forth a gleam of light into the conscience out of the Scriptures, in that light we see light; and that one ray of truth discovers the reality of all other revealed truth, just in the same way as when one beam darts from the sun through the clouds, that one beam gives us to know the existence of that glorious orb of day. Thus by receiving one truth from God into our soul, we receive the Scriptures as a revelation from God. But, if a man has never received a ray of truth into his soul out of the grand source of all truth, out of Him who is "the way, *the truth*, and the life," he at present has no real faith that the

Scriptures are inspired by Jehovah, and has no real acquaintance with the Bible as a revelation from God Himself.

Well here, then, seems to be the first ray and gleam of heavenly light that shoots into the conscience and darts into the soul from the source of all truth. The Lord the Spirit rides as it were upon this beam into the soul, and conveys by this heavenly ray of light such special truth as He sees fit to bring into the conscience. All the children of God are not, indeed, quickened into spiritual life in the same precise way. The same individual truth is not brought with power to the conscience of each and all; but truth, that is, some part of truth, the Word of God in the substance and spirit of it, is applied by the Holy Ghost to the conscience of all; otherwise they would not be "begotten by the word of truth," otherwise they would not be "born again of incorruptible seed by the word of God" 1 Pet. 1:23), otherwise the Spirit of truth would not employ truth to convey to them spiritual life.

1. But we come to the *particular* testimonies which God reveals to His chosen. Now, I believe that one of the first testimonies that God seals upon the heart and conscience of His children is a manifestation of His own being, I mean His *spiritual* being; some discovery of Himself as He really is, some manifestation of Himself as He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures of truth. We may know there is a God of nature by seeing the works of creation; we may in some respects know that there is a God of providence by observing the interpositions of His hand in the various transactions of life; but to know Jehovah as He really is, to have a spiritual acquaintance with Him as He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures of truth, to have such a knowledge of Him as is the beginning of eternal life, none can have such except those to whom He is pleased specially to manifest Himself. Then, whatever notions or opinions we may have about God—and they may be most clear and systematic, they may run most completely in the channel of letter truth—whatever outward notions, speculations, or imaginations we may have concerning the being of God, we only know Him spiritually so far as He is pleased immediately to manifest Himself to our consciences. All

other knowledge stands in the flesh; it is the mere fruit of the creature, and falls utterly short of that knowledge which is spiritual wisdom and eternal life. But when we spiritually learn that there is a God, in learning His being we learn who He is. We learn also by an inward testimony from Himself, by His own mouth speaking home the Word with power to our hearts, that He is just and holy, and will by no means clear the transgressor, and that His heart-searching eyes pierce even into the very secrets of our souls. A man may know all this in the letter, but knowing it in the letter produces no spiritual feeling, no spiritual reception, no spiritual acquaintance with the truth thus laid hold of. But whenever the Lord the Spirit brings home the truth of God with power to the soul, He raises up, by the application of that truth, spiritual feelings, spiritual breathings, and spiritual exercises upon that which He is pleased to communicate. How do you measure your knowledge of truth? Is it by the number of texts that you have learnt by heart? Is it by your being able to explain what you see in the Scriptures? Is it by the understanding that you have obtained by comparing passage with passage? If you have no better knowledge than this, it all stands in the flesh, and it is nothing else but dim letter speculation which leaves the soul barren before God. Measure your knowledge by this test, what feelings are produced by it, what exercises before God, what breathings in the presence of Him with whom you have to do, what drawings forth of heart, what solemn questionings of soul before Him in whose presence you from time to time stand. Now this test will apply to every degree and stage and state of spiritual life, so far as that spiritual life is in exercise.

But when we come to a more particular description of these testimonies, we may divide them into two grand classes—testimonies *against* us, and testimonies *for* us; that is, in the way of experience. In fact, all God's testimonies, whether of the law or of the Gospel, whether of conviction or of consolation, whether of pulling down or of building up—all of God's testimonies are really *for* the soul; but looked at as a matter of personal experience, viewed in the light of our own feelings, and weighed in the balance of our own exercises, all testimonies from God dropped

by the mouth of God into the soul may be divided into two grand classes—testimonies *against* and testimonies *for* us. Now, my object will be to show how the soul that is quickened by God into eternal life sticks and cleaves to both these testimonies; and that it is a mark and test of spiritual life in the soul that it does stick to those testimonies which it has received from the mouth of Jehovah Himself.

We will begin, then, by looking at the soul in its first approaches unto God, in the first pourings out and breathings forth of its wants and desires after Him, in the first speakings of its misery and wretchedness into His gracious ear, in its first solemn convictions of the weight and burden of sin, in the first deep-seated and deep-rooted pangs of a guilty conscience. Here, then, is a soul, into whose conscience God has dropped a testimony; that is, to whose heart He has applied the Word with power, be it in the very letter, or be it in the substance of it. This awakened soul has now obtained some sight of His holiness, some spiritual acquaintance with Him as a God not to be mocked or trifled with. Now no sooner has this testimony been dropped into a man's heart and conscience than he sticks to it; that is, he cleaves to it. Not, at first, with affection, but he cleaves to it with faith; and this is the province of faith, and "the work of faith with power," to cleave to that which God applies. Faith is not a traveller that roams up and down God's Word, as our tourists go exploring foreign countries to see their beautiful productions. Infant faith does not take ship, and travel from coast to coast, and from sea to sea of the Scriptures, to explore their beauties and discover their fruits; but it is a stay-at-home grace, whose province is to cleave to that which God reveals, to be exercised upon that which God manifests, and to deal with that which the Holy Ghost brings home. And he whose faith oversteps that which God applies, he whose faith busies itself in anything but that which is brought home with power to the conscience, he whose faith thus wanders abroad unrestrained, has a mark upon him that he has not the faith of God's elect. Well, then, here is the soul in the first solemn teachings of God, cleaving to that which God has revealed. He has made known His heart-searching presence; the soul cleaves

to that testimony. He has made known His holiness; it believes it, feels it, is exercised upon, and acts towards it. He has manifested that He is not to be trifled with, not to be mocked, not to be insulted by false worship and the vain offerings of the flesh; the soul cleaves to this testimony, believes it, and is exercised with respect to it. He manifests to the soul that every thought, every movement, every stirring, every word and action lie open before Him; the soul believes it, is exercised upon it, and cleaves to the testimony which God has thus sealed and applied.

Now, no sooner does a man begin to cleave to the testimony dropped into his soul, and to stick to that which God brings home with power to his heart, than things arise in every quarter to drive him from it. Here is the grand conflict in the soul, betwixt faith cleaving to the testimony which came into the heart from the mouth of God, and the enemies of faith who would seek to drive and dislodge faith from the position given to it. The Lord drops a certain testimony into the soul: no sooner has the testimony come than faith acts upon it and cleaves to it. Now, then, the enemy from various quarters seeks to drive faith from doing that which it is the province of faith to do, and to dislodge it from the ground which it is spiritually entrenched in. For instance, no sooner does faith begin to cleave to the Scriptures as inspired truth, than *infidelity* begins to start up from the depths of the carnal mind to fight against the solemn testimony which God Himself has brought in. I can speak for myself, that I never knew what infidelity was till I knew what faith was; I never knew what a giant it was, what a son of Anak, and how this giant could carry me away in his arms, resisting indeed and struggling, but unable to resist effectually. No sooner, then, do we receive from God His own solemn testimony that the Scriptures come from Him as a revelation of Himself, and no sooner does faith begin to believe this testimony, than the slumbering giant is aroused, and starts up from his den in the depths of the carnal mind, to grapple with this infant faith, to seize this new-born babe in his arms, and bear it away from that spot where God Himself has placed it. Then here comes the conflict. Faith says, "The Word of God is true;" Infidelity says, "It is not." Faith says, "I believe, because I

feel;" Infidelity says, "Your feelings are no evidence." Faith says, "I know, because I have had a discovery of it to my heart and conscience, I could not resist the evidence;" Infidelity says, "You know nothing about it." So here is the conflict between faith which sticks to God's testimony, and is exercised upon God's testimony, and infidelity which fights against faith, and seeks to bear it down, and to overwhelm it with the floods that are cast out from the mouth of this dragon. But faith must stick to it, because with faith is godly fear, and with faith in its first actings there is guilt and condemnation, and sore exercises, and cutting feelings, and painful maladies and distresses; and all these are so many clasps to rivet down and keep faith in its right spot. Faith, being thus backed by godly fear, seeks to thrust back this infidel monster that would seek to bear it away in his arms. Faith, being mixed up too and working with condemnation, cannot receive the God-dishonouring lie that the Scriptures are not God's word. The soul that spiritually "knows its own grief and its own sore," can never long disbelieve its own feelings, nor give the lie to its own exercises.

*Self-righteousness* again, is an enemy from another quarter, which seeks to dislodge faith from the position it occupies. What does faith believe in these early exercises? That the law requires a perfect righteousness; that God demands perfect satisfaction; that all our own righteousnesses are as filthy rags. Thus speaks faith, acting upon the testimony of God. But self-righteousness would seek to drive faith from this position, to dislodge it from the spiritual receiving of the truth of God, as God has revealed it; would seek to cover it over with a covering not of God's Spirit, and bedaub and besmear that which the Word of God and the testimony of God has implanted; to plaster it over and bemire it, and hide it up, so that it should not shine in the light of God's countenance. Well, then, here is the struggle between faith, amidst guilt, self-condemnation, self-abhorrence, godly fear, in all their exercises towards God; here is the conflict betwixt these and self-righteousness. We, on the one hand, being spiritually persuaded that we are lost, ruined, undone creatures; and self-righteousness seeking, on the other hand, to lull these

convictions, to obscure this work, and to bury it beneath its own untempered mortar. But living faith, sooner or later, breaks through all disguises, heaves up till the untempered mortar cracks and falls; and thus the soul comes forth naked before God, that it may be experimentally clothed in garments of imputed righteousness. Thus far for testimonies *against*, and the sticking to them by faith. We come, now, to testimonies *for* the soul.

2. After a time, then, the Lord shall drop a testimony into the soul that He is gracious, that there is mercy with Him that He may be feared, that there is pardon through the blood of the Lamb, that there is a glorious righteousness through the perfect obedience of the Son of God. He thus raises up, by dropping in some testimony concerning Jesus, some faith "to receive Christ Jesus the Lord" (Col. 2:6) as all our salvation and all our desire. Now, here is still "the work of faith with power" to stick to the testimony. Faith cannot get beyond that spot where God Himself has placed it. If He shows anger, faith believes it and cleaves to it. If He shows mercy, faith believes it and cleaves to it. Whatever the Spirit of God brings into the soul out of the Word of truth, that is the office and province of faith to believe and cleave to. "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies." Well, then, no sooner does faith begin to stick to this testimony, that some word of consolation has been dropped, that some peace has been enjoyed, that some dewdrops of atoning blood have been sprinkled, that some favour has been evidently and manifestly shown; I say, no sooner does the Lord drop such testimony into the heart and conscience than there rises up from the depth of the carnal mind that which disbelieves it, that which fights against it, and that which would fain drive and dislodge faith from that position which it now occupies. O, what a work it is—"the work of faith with power!" Men speak of faith as though faith had no work to do. But there is no workman like living faith. Living faith is always at work; I mean to say when the Spirit of the Lord is working upon it; by "always," I mean to say at such times as the Lord the Spirit is drawing it into exercise; and only so far as faith is working in the soul, nay, and powerfully working too, have we any evidence that it is "the faith of God's elect," or "the faith of the operation of God." Thus, no

sooner does the Lord settle us down into some sweet persuasion that we are eternally His, no sooner is some dewdrop of sweet favour experienced in our soul, than an enemy rises to beat down faith from that position which it now occupies.

For instance, sometimes *presumption* starts up from the depths of the carnal mind, to drive a man out of that place where God has set him down. Now, all God's people are not delivered in the same powerful way; there are degrees of deliverance. Some are delivered very powerfully, by a blessed revelation of Christ to their soul, so as to bring them at once into all the joy and comfort of the gospel; and in these cases the sweet season usually lasts long, and they have a blessed evidence in their souls that they are the children of God, whom He has loved from eternity. But all God's children are not so dealt with; the deliverance in some is not so manifest; the love of God in some is not so powerfully shed abroad; the testimonies of Jehovah's love and mercy are not so clearly revealed. This visit is short and transient; as it speaks in the Canticles (2:9) of the Beloved just "showing Himself" (or as it is in the margin, "flourishing," that is, moving quickly and hurriedly) "through the lattice;" just as we sometimes see a person move rapidly past our window, whose form we immediately perceive, but cannot distinctly see his features. Thus, spiritually, Jesus sometimes moves rapidly and hastily by the lattice, and just gives a transient glimpse of His lovely Person, His grace, blood, and righteousness. Well, this last manifestation is weak and feeble in comparison with the former; it is more transient, and leaves less deep and enduring impressions, and thus it seems to be not that powerful work which the child of God is seeking after. This very thing, then, lays a foundation for unbelief to work upon—for the antagonist powers of faith to take their ground upon in the heart. A child of God who has not been very powerfully delivered, who has received some dewdrops of mercy, some glimpses of love, and yet has not been brought out into the full enjoyment of liberty and peace, falls sometimes into company with those who tell him of their wonderful comforts, their blessed consolations, how sure they are that their names are in the book of life, and what a clear evidence they have

received of their adoption into the family of God. He begins then immediately to compare what he hears with his own experience; he looks at their large estate, and contrasts with it his own narrow field; and as he views his scanty strip, it all disappears, being swamped and swallowed up by the estate of his wealthy neighbour. Now in some cases up starts presumption, that cursed foe to the child of God; and as presumption starts up, it pushes him beyond the testimony which God has dropped into his soul. The testimony was weak, presumption would say it was strong; the visit was transient, presumption declares it was abiding. Thus presumption steps forward to push the soul beyond its real standing into a false liberty, into which God Himself has not set it down. Well, then, the work of faith is to cleave to God's testimony; and here is the difficulty, presumption pushing it beyond its real standing, and faith cleaving to its true spot against presumption; faith working with godly fear, faith simply cleaving to what it has received from God. On the other hand, in some cases, *despair* will work. In the cases of some, presumption will push the soul beyond its real standing into false liberty; in other cases, despair will drive it back from the real standing where God has placed it, so as to make it shrink, as it were, and quiver with fear that mercy has never reached it at all. Each is the antagonist of faith, each seeks to dislodge the soul from its position, to drive it from its true standing, the one acting in one way and the other acting in another, the two winds blowing in opposite directions, but aiming each to drive the ship on one or other of these shoals. Then here is faith sometimes cleaving in spite of presumption, sometimes cleaving in spite of despair; here is faith hanging upon the spiritual testimony which God has given it, though finding it very difficult at times to make out that it was a testimony at all; but still, as it is wrought upon by the Spirit of God, it lives and acts upon that testimony which God Himself has dropped in. "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies." Now if there were no difficulty, no obstacles—if there were nothing in the soul which prevented it from sticking to God's testimony, why does David put the Lord in mind of it? But he puts the Lord in mind that he has stuck to His testimonies, as though he would remind Him not only that He had given him some testimonies, but also

some living faith to cleave to them with purpose of heart.

3. But there are other testimonies of another nature, not so much testimonies *against*, or testimonies *for* our interest in covenant mercies, as testimonies of *divine instruction*. The Lord has said, for instance, in His Word, that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." That is a testimony from the mouth of God; and how does the soul first receive and then stick to that testimony? By the opening up of the depths of corruption in our heart, by the breaking up of the secret fountains of iniquity, that great deep that coucheth beneath. Now this testimony to deep and desperate corruption does not come at first; it is usually after a man has received some testimony of God's favour; for he could not bear it unless there had been some discovery of mercy to his soul; he could not stand his ground unless there were some rock on which his feet were fixed when the water floods broke forth; he could not travel through this deep bog unless there were some standing ground—some dry tussocks on which he could set his feet—and therefore, usually speaking, little is known of the depths of internal corruption and inward pollution until after some testimony of mercy and love has been dropped into the soul from the mouth of God Himself. Well, then, here is a deep discovery of inward corruption; of the "workings of a heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" of the overflowings of an imagination beyond description polluted with evil. His inward feelings now correspond with God's testimony to the desperate wickedness of his heart. He cleaves to this testimony. "I have stuck to Thy testimonies." That is, let men say what they will about the purity of the creature and the dignity of human nature, or what man is able to do, he cleaves to this testimony, having an inward witness of it, that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" that from "the crown of his head to the sole of his feet there is no soundness in him, but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores;" and he sticks to this testimony because he feels the truth of it. He is obliged to cleave to it, and that, not in letter, but in spirit; not in doctrine, but in experience; not to the mere testimony of the Word, but to the testimony of God in his soul. He sticks to it with

every feeling of his heart, that his nature is fallen—that he is a corrupt and polluted wretch before God—that he stands before Him by nature filthy and vile, however he may stand by grace "accepted in the Beloved," through Christ's righteousness.

Again, God has said in His Word, "I, the Lord, hate evil." Now this testimony the Lord speaks out of the Word into the hearts of His chosen. He writes it as with a sunbeam upon the consciences of His living family that He abhors evil, that He hates it with a perfect hatred; and this He transfers from the Word and stamps upon a man's conscience; and he who has never had that solemn truth stamped upon his conscience is destitute of the knowledge of the only true God. "I, the Lord, hate evil." Then, if the Lord hate evil, and if the hatred of God towards evil is made manifest in a man's conscience, he will have workings and exercises towards this solemn hatred of God against it. If he is entangled in any sin, or caught in any snare of the flesh or temptation of Satan, this testimony of God once dropped into his soul, "I, the Lord, hate evil," works in him, and he works towards it; faith is exercised upon it, and a tender conscience brings him down to the Lord's feet to moan and sigh and groan, and to confess what a vile wretch he is to be so entangled with evil, what a monster of iniquity to be so overcome by evil; what a foul, filthy, polluted beast, to have so much evil at work in his heart, and continually carrying him away captive.

Again, God has said in His Word that Jesus came "to seek and to save that which was lost." "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." "He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Well now, here is a solemn testimony that God has given in His Word, and the substance and the spirit of that testimony He transfers from the Word into the hearts of His people. The soul then is exercised towards this testimony. "What am I?" says the soul, "a poor, guilty, filthy, polluted wretch, lost and undone, full of corruption from the crown of my head to the sole of my foot." Now when the Lord sweetly sheds abroad mercy and love in the soul, He brings in a testimony that He came to

save sinners, to seek the lost; that He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; that His blood cleanseth from all sin; and thus faith acts upon this testimony, cleaves to this testimony, is exercised upon this testimony, and cannot be driven nor dislodged from this testimony when God is pleased to keep faith and the testimony close together. Then here is a great work for faith to do. If the work of faith is to stick to God's testimonies, and if the life of a Christian consists in receiving and acting upon various testimonies from God, then faith will have much to do, and will work very busily in the soul. Living faith is no presumptuous security, no Antinomian confidence; it is no wrapping one's self up in the garment of false peace, and lolling on the sofa, or sleeping in the armchair of flesh-pleasing ease; but it is a busy, active, stirring grace in the soul; one which is often hungry and needs food, is often thirsty and needs water, and yet can only feed on that which God Himself speaks with His own mouth to the heart. Then he who finds in his soul no such workings, no such stirrings, no such solemn exercises, has every reason to believe that he is not possessed of the vital faith of God's elect. If there is no testimony to faith in his conscience, and if there is no acting of faith on that testimony; if there is nothing revealed to faith, and faith has nothing to do with what is revealed to it, then we are bound to conclude that a man in this state is dead in sin, or dead in a profession.

Again, sometimes the soul gets entangled in some temptation, backslides from God, goes out after the cisterns, the broken cisterns which hold no water, deserts the living fountain, and seeks pleasure from its idols. Now the Lord will drop into the conscience some reproof—some solemn testimony of His great displeasure against this inward backsliding and departing from Him to worship the works of our own hands. "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." This testimony in the Word falls in with the testimony of conscience. And now come the tossings of the body on the midnight couch, and the worse tossings of the restless spirit, the cries and sighs of the soul under the heavy load of God's displeasure. Well, here is a testimony that God is angry,

that He is justly displeased with our offences. Now faith will not cast it off, and say, "Never mind, I am in the covenant; I stand firm upon the Rock; sin cannot damn me; a believer cannot backslide; my new nature cannot commit sin." I say faith will never stand for a moment in such presumptuous confidence. Faith hates such language from the mouth of ungodly professors. Faith falls down before the testimony of God's inward reproof, embraces it in the arms of feeling, if not in the arms of affection, receives it as from God, is exercised upon it, confesses before God *that* which the reproof testifies against, and thus sticks and cleaves to the testimony of God. Whatever God bears witness *against* in the conscience, *that* faith cleaves to; whatever God bears witness *for*, *that* faith cleaves to. Does He bear witness that we are acting with pure motives for His glory? Faith receives it. Does He bear witness that we are acting from insincere motives? Faith bears its silent though solemn and unanswerable testimony. Does He bear witness that we are backsliding children? Faith receives it; and, as faith receives it, it acts towards God upon it, and constrains the soul to fall down before the throne of His majesty, and loathe itself in dust and ashes. Well, then, here is the posture of a Christian, not towering aloft in vain presumptuous confidence; not scanning, like the soaring eagle, the whole outstretched prospect; nor hopping from twig to twig of God's Word, as the restless sparrow from branch to branch of a tree. Faith is a dependent grace, that can only move as the Holy Ghost draws it forth, and can receive nothing but what is given it from heaven.

Then if this be the case, the posture of faith will be, as the Psalmist describes, "as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God" (Ps. 123:2). The language of faith will be that of king Jehoshaphat when surrounded by his enemies, "We know not what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee" (2 Chron. 20:12). The eyes, then, of faith, are upon God, seeking for some manifestation; and it stands waiting for some deliverance, suing after some testimony, sighing after the application of some drops of atoning blood, panting after

some shedding abroad of His favour, and thirsting as the barren parched ground after some of the refreshing early and latter rain; not resting in presumptuous confidence upon anything which is imagined, but simply hanging upon that which God Himself shall speak by His own Spirit to the soul. Not like Martha, cumbered with much serving, running about the house to procure dishes for her guest's entertainment, in order to gain His favour; but like Mary, "sitting at His feet and hearing His words." Not resembling the mad Gadarene, cutting his flesh with stones; nor like the filthy swine that root up their food from the earth, and wallow in the mire, till at last they rush despairingly down from the mountain to the sea; but like the same Gadarene, "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind," looking up to Him with the eyes of affection and gratitude, and "desiring to be with Him."

Now, my friends, in whatever state or stage of experience you are, it will be your wisdom and your mercy to stick to God's testimony. Has the Lord, then, just begun a work of grace in your heart? Is He showing to you what you are by nature, and bringing before your eyes the sins of your youth, and plunging you in deep convictions? It will be your wisdom, and it will be your mercy, to stick to that testimony; not to be driven from your standing into despair, nor pushed forward into fleshly confidence; but to stick to that testimony which God Himself has implanted. Not to trifle with these convictions, not to patch up the old garment of self-righteousness, not to ease your restless mind by plunging headlong into doctrines, the power and sweetness of which are not known and felt; not seeking to lull the pangs of conscience by saying, "If I am to be saved, I shall be saved; and if I am to be lost, I shall be lost;" but sticking to God's testimony in your conscience, with as much strength as you have.

Has God made you to sigh and cry from the depths of a broken heart?—to fall down before His truth? Stick to that testimony; He will not put you to shame. Again, if the Lord has done a little more for another of you, shown you the least glimpse of mercy and favour, and given you some little testimony of your interest

in the blood of the Lamb; it will be your wisdom and it will be your mercy to stick to that testimony too. You will find those who would push you presumptuously forward, you will find those who would drive you despairingly backward, you will find those who would pull you down into those doubts and fears that their own minds are exercised with, and you will find those who would draw you aside into the vain confidence in which they are themselves standing. It will be your wisdom and mercy to abide by the testimony which God Himself has revealed, and He can work in your soul that faith whereby you can and will stick to His testimony.

But some shall say, "How do I know that I am sticking to God's testimonies?" I would ask what are the feelings of your hearts towards them? Is there godly fear? Is there holy reverence? Is there trembling awe? Is there any exercise of soul, any pouring out of the heart before God, any realising of His presence, any trembling to offend Him, any desire after Him, any solemn feelings whereby your soul is exercised upon His perfections? Then there is reason to believe there is some testimony of God in your conscience, and that you are sticking to it. But if your religion be such as leads to vain confidence, to self-righteousness, to presumption, to false security, and to a careless, light, trifling, spirit, depend upon it you are not sticking to God's testimony, or else you have no testimony from God to stick unto. But if the Lord is bringing into your soul some sense of His displeasure; if you have trifled with Him, and brought guilt into your soul and trouble into your mind, it will be your wisdom, and it will be your mercy to do as the Lord speaks in Leviticus 26:41—"accept the punishment of your iniquity;" to put your mouth in the dust and confess that you are vile; not to turn aside to presumptuous confidence, as though you would blunt the edge of God's sword in your soul, but to receive it in your heart, embrace it in your conscience, and to cleave to it as the testimony of God Himself. "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies." To cleave to everything which God makes known in the conscience, be it judgment, be it mercy, be it a smile, be it a frown, be it a testimony for, be it a testimony against, whatever

it be that comes with power, and is brought to the soul by the application of the Spirit—to cleave to it, keeps the soul in a safe and blessed spot.

But sometimes worldly interest will seek to hinder our sticking to God's testimony. A man is afraid really to stand by that truth which he professes to believe. Sometimes "the fear of man that bringeth a snare" will keep him from sticking to God's testimony; sometimes getting amongst those who fear not God; sometimes a worldly spirit creeping over him; sometimes a light, trifling, careless frame, which is indulged in his carnal mind, and perhaps was first breathed into it from some dead professor—some or all of these hindrances will keep a man from sticking to God's testimonies. Sometimes the secret baits, gins, and traps that Satan lays for our feet will keep us from sticking to God's testimony. Sometimes the applause of empty professors, or even the flattery of the children of God will keep us from sticking to God's testimony, by making us think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think; and sometimes the frowns and scoffs, the jeers and jibes of those who stand in a presumptuous confidence will drive us from sticking to God's testimony. But conscience, as a faithful inward monitor, and the workings of godly filial fear will urge us to stick to God's testimony. Whatever professors or profane may say against us, the work of conscience wrought upon by the Spirit, the work of faith in the conscience is to stick to God's testimony, whatever the testimony be. Whatever has been received in power, whatever has been brought home into the soul with light and life and feeling, whatever has been riveted and fastened down by Jehovah Himself, to that the child of God is bound, and will, as the Lord enables him, cleave and stick. It is the bond of experimental union between God and his soul; it is the link which binds him to the eternal throne; it is the solemn clasping of him in the firm hold of God: and thus, while all the desires of his soul will be to cleave to this testimony, all the opposition in his soul will be to drive him from this testimony. "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies." Aye, stick to them at whatever cost, stick to them at any price, stick to them through evil report and through good report, stick to feeling, stick to an experimental

religion, stick to vital godliness, stick to the inward teachings of the Spirit, stick to that which God works in the soul, for he that sticks to that will never be put to shame. The raven flies abroad over the dripping earth after the carcasses; but the dove cleaves to the ark with the olive branch in her mouth.

I know, by soul experience, that sticking to these testimonies has kept me from many errors. When I have been placed years back, before my mind was established in the truth, in circumstances of great trial; when I have seen dear friends fall around me, on the right hand or on the left, some into one error, and some into another, and my own mind was driven to and fro by these winds and gusts, it was this solemn conviction that made me stick to that testimony which God had dropped into my heart, not to go into things which I had not known, not to rush into doctrines which I was not spiritually taught. I have seen some friends dropping first into Arianism, then into Socinianism; others I have known to become Irvingites; some going into one error, and some into another. And what then kept me? Why this solemn conviction, which I trust the Lord Himself had implanted, to stick to God's testimony, to cleave to what I had felt, to abide by what I had known, and to hang upon that as the only link which held me up from making shipwreck altogether. And thus the Lord kept me by this powerful though invisible tie, when those who seemed to know more than I departed on the right hand and on the left. Therefore, by soul experience, I can, in some measure, say,—"I have stuck unto Thy testimonies;" and since then, I have felt the solid benefit of sticking to God's testimonies in my conscience, though it has cost me many sacrifices, and often made me on the right hand and on the left to encounter friend and foe. But to stick to God's testimonies will bring peace at last.

II. "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies; O Lord, *put me not to shame.*" You see it is the want of sticking to God's testimony, that puts a man to shame. If a man does not stick to God's testimonies at any risk, at any sacrifice, at any cost, he will be put to shame. If he sacrifice his conscience for worldly profit, he will be put to shame. If he does not abide by God the Spirit's

teachings in his soul, but swerves from them to the right hand or to the left, he will be put to shame. He that will not be put to shame is he that sticks to God's testimony, for the Lord will own and bless and keep such, when thousands fall on the right hand and on the left. "O Lord, put me not to shame." Now there are solemn moments when the soul is afraid of being put to shame. Our religion, perhaps, may cost us the sacrifice of all we have. Some of us in this place, I believe, can bear witness to it, that you could not keep a good conscience and keep worldly possessions, that you could not hold the world in one hand and religion in the other; and, therefore, you were obliged "to take cheerfully the spoiling of your goods," and "counted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." Well then, we were afraid lest we should come to poverty. Many a child of God has been harassed, lest his religion should bring him to the workhouse: this makes him cry, "O Lord, put me not to shame." "Here I have been obliged to make sacrifices; I have been obliged to give up this source of gain, and to give up that means of living; I have lost customers in business; I have been compelled to leave advantageous situations for conscience' sake." "O Lord, put me not to shame." Let me pay every man his own; keep me from disgracing Thy cause and "feed me with food convenient for me."

Sometimes the child of God is afraid that he will be put to shame in that solemn hour which must come upon all and each of us, the hour of death; lest when he comes to pass through the dark valley he should be put to shame; lest his religion in that solemn moment should be sifted clean away, and his hope should prove a delusion; and therefore he says, "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies; O Lord, put me not to shame in that solemn hour when I must stand before Thee, without any one to help, or any thing to hope in, except Thyself." Now, he that sticks to God's testimonies will not be then put to shame. He that has known an angry God, and he that has known a smiling God; he that has felt the teaching of God in his soul, and known the power of God in his heart will not be put to shame; he will not die in despair, he will not die blaspheming, but he will die in the fear and love of

God; or, at any rate, will die with a good hope through grace in His mercy, with some rest of soul, and some sweet confidence that he is His.

Sometimes the child of God is afraid of being put to shame openly before men, by being overcome by some sin; but he says, "I have stuck to Thy testimonies." Thou hast said, "I hate evil"—I believe it, Lord. Thou hast shown me what a desperately wicked heart I have—I believe it, Lord. Thou hast shown me my ignorance, and inability to keep myself—I believe it, Lord. Thou hast warned me by solemn rebukes; thou hast hedged me up by inward reproofs; thou hast shown me what I am, and what there is in my heart—I believe it, Lord. Let no sin entangle me, no disgrace overtake me, no corruption prevail against me. Let not the enemies of truth shout "Ah, ah! Ah, ah!" against me. "O Lord, put me not to shame." Again, the soul is sometimes afraid lest a furnace will come, when all his religion shall be proved to be untrue, when Satan shall say, "It is all a deception; it is nothing but the spawn of base hypocrisy; it was not the teaching of God; it was not the manifestation of God to thy soul; mercy never was received; it was but excited imagination; it was but the heated working of thy carnal mind." The soul says, "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies; O Lord, put me not to shame. I cleave to Thy work, I hang upon it, I have nothing else to cleave to. O Lord, put me not to shame."

Thus, we see the connexion betwixt sticking to God's testimony, and the Lord not putting us to shame, and we gather this from it, that those who have never received God's testimony, or those who do not stick to God's testimony will be put to shame. Now, there are many men who are in a vain presumptuous confidence, who are soaring away to the heights of presumption, God Himself never having placed them in their present standing. Well, if these are the children of God—and there is reason to believe there are some such, who have been puffed up beyond their real standing—the Lord will put them to shame. He will put them into the furnace; He will bring them into straits which they never before knew. They are not sticking to His testimony, they have

gone beyond His testimony, and He will put them to shame, and His people shall see that they are not that which they profess to be. Again, there are others who trifle with sin, who say that it will not do them any harm, who are now standing, as they say, firm in Christ, when they are really standing firm in their own confidence; not sticking to God's testimonies of the helplessness, misery, ruin, and guilt of the creature; not sticking to His testimony, that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" not sticking to the testimony, that none are safe but those whom God keeps. The Lord will put them to shame; perhaps, even, by letting them fall, by showing them that they can backslide and do backslide into sin, by making them naked before their enemies, and thus covering them with confusion. Ah, my friends, have not you and I been sometimes put to shame before God and His people, by not sticking to those *practical* testimonies which have been riveted in our conscience? And have we not had to confess with Ezra, 9:6, "I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to Thee?" I have known both sides of the question,—to stick to them, and not be put to shame, and not to stick to them, and to be put to shame. And there are those in the professing church whom He will put to eternal shame, when He pours upon them the fulness of His wrath. So that we have three different classes. We have, *first*, the tried child of God, who has received Divine testimonies, and sticks to them. The Lord will keep him as the apple of His eye. He never shall be put to shame. Then we have a *second* class, who have had testimonies, but by the power of Satan and their own deceitful hearts have not stuck to these testimonies in experience or in conduct. These the Lord will put to shame in this world, though not in the next. He will put them to shame here, so as to prevent their everlasting shame hereafter. He will bring them down from their false standing by painful exercises; by the fiery furnace within, if not by open disgrace without. He will put them to shame, and they will blush and be confounded, that they did not stick to God's testimony, but rushed beyond His work in their soul. And then there is a *third* class who have neither received God's testimony, nor have stuck to it; who have nothing from God in their souls, and therefore, nothing to stick to. These shall be put to shame and

everlasting contempt, in that day when the Lord shall manifest the secrets of all hearts, and pour out His eternal wrath upon the transgressors.

## **The Straying Sheep and the Sin-bearing Shepherd**

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening, July 14, 1967

"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." 1 Peter 2:24, 25

What a difference there was between Peter and Peter,—between Peter in his best of times and Peter in his worst. What a difference, for instance, between Peter making, as the fruit of a divine revelation, that glorious confession: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," and Peter almost immediately after saying: "Be it far from thee, Lord;" thus seeking, as if almost an instrument in the hands of Satan, to turn the Lord away from the sufferings and death of which he had just given his disciples a prophetic intimation. How different was Peter upon the mount of transfiguration, when he said: "It is good for us to be here," and Peter in the garden of Gethsemane, when he was sleeping for sorrow. How different was Peter when with the other disciples he declared himself to be ready to die with Christ, and Peter when he joined them all in forsaking him and fleeing. How different was Peter when he said: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life," and Peter trembling before a servant girl and declaring with oaths he knew not the man. And how different was Peter even after the resurrection, when, as if all were lost, he went back to his old trade and his old fishing nets, and the same Peter when he said: "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee."

But if there be a difference between Peter and Peter—between Peter in his worst of times and Peter in his best, what shall we say of the difference between Peter and Peter's successor, as he styles himself? You have, most of you, I dare say, heard or read a little of the grand doings at Rome, in St. Peter's Cathedral, where

the anniversary of Peter's crucifixion was lately celebrated with such ceremony and grandeur amongst a throng of bishops gathered from all parts of the globe. But how different was Peter the apostle from Peter the Pope. Peter the apostle, who could say: "Silver and gold have I none," and Peter the Pope, who lives in a palace adorned with all the treasures of luxury and art; Peter the apostle, who was an elder, and only an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who warns his brother elders not to be "lords over God's heritage," and Peter's successor, who is styled "Sovereign Pontiff," and "His Holiness," and claims universal lordship and dominion over all men and things. What a difference between him who is said to have been crucified with his head downwards, and his present representative borne upon a palanquin upon men's shoulder's amidst admiring and almost adoring crowds, to bestow what he calls his blessing. How different is the Peter who sets up the Madonna, the Virgin Mary, upon a throne of glory almost equal to that of Christ, making her immaculate conception an article of faith, and the Peter who proclaims of Jesus: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." (1 Peter 2:24.)

But enough of this by way of introduction. I shall, therefore, come at once to our text; and in endeavouring to lay it open before you, I shall

I.—*First*, direct your thoughts to what is said in it of our *going astray as sheep*.

II.—*Secondly*, the *bearing of our sins in his own body on the tree* by the blessed Lord, and our *being healed by his stripes*.

III.—*Thirdly*, the *effect and consequence* of a knowledge of this—that we *become dead to sins and live to righteousness*, and *return* unto the *Shepherd and Bishop* of our souls.

I.—I need hardly observe how continually in the word of truth the people of Christ are called *sheep*; nor need I point out the various

reasons which make that figure peculiarly descriptive of their character and condition. There can, therefore, be no difficulty in understanding that by the word "sheep" in our text the people of God are intended, and chiefly the living and regenerated people, those for whom not only the Lord laid down his precious life, but whom he has quickened by his Spirit, and called by his grace, and whom he will eventually bring home to glory.

But you will observe, that they are here spoken of as "going astray." They were sheep before they went astray, for the straying of a sheep in the literal figure does not destroy its nature as a sheep, or turn it into a goat. That it should leave the fold and go astray is its folly and misery; but however far it may wander upon the dark mountains, it can never lose its original character or change its nature. It needs, indeed, to be brought back that it may not be devoured by the wolf or perish of hunger; but even in its furthest wanderings, when it has most lost its way, and is least able to return, its heart is toward the fold, the flock, and the shepherd.

i. But let us examine more minutely the expression of the apostle, "going astray," and see what meaning we may gather up from the idea thus presented to our mind in harmony with the Scriptures and the experience of the saints. And perhaps it may help us to understand the figure better if we look at the various reasons through which the literal sheep often goes astray; for most likely we shall find some, if not all, of the same causes acting in some analogous way upon the minds of the Lord's family when they go astray.

1. One cause, and that not the least frequent or the least prevalent, is *silliness; their downright silliness*, actual foolish stupidity. Sheep often go astray not from wantonness; not from a natural desire to live like the goat; not from a weariness of the fold or of their companions; not from any sudden antipathy to their shepherd, but from sheer stupidity and besottedness. Is not this true also with the Lord's sheep? Have you not often gone out of the path through sheer stupidity, through actual silliness of

heart? Some silly lust, some stupid folly, some miserable, wretched trifle of no more real weight or importance than a straw, has drawn you aside. You have got out of the path and fallen into some evil which has produced great guilt, and it may be will be all your lifetime a source of inward compunction, through some stupid folly by which you were overtaken in some heedless moment, so as to say or do something unbecoming or inconsistent, which you never can forget, and which, if it has come abroad, has grieved friends, put a reproach into the mouth of enemies, tarnished your Christian character, and brought upon you misery and vexation. You did not do it wittingly, wilfully, or wantonly, but if I may use the expression, blundered into it through sheer silliness of mind and mere stupidity, as being off your guard and caught in a snare before you were well aware. When we look sometimes at the in-and-out path which we have trodden since we made a profession, and what silly, foolish things we have often said and done, how humbling is the review, what shame covers our face; what a low place we are forced to take amongst the family of God; and how every one of them seems to be wiser, holier, more consistent, more sober, prudent and godly, more spiritual and heavenly-minded than we feel ourselves to be. We seem to see how much more they have been kept by the power of God; preserved more tender in his fear, and have lived more to his praise and glory than we have done. It is this continual sight and sense of what we have been and are as sheep that have gone astray which causes us to esteem others better than ourselves, and makes us daily feel that we are the chief of sinners and less than the least of all saints.

2. Another cause of the sheep's going astray is a *hankering after a fresh pasture*, even though there are poisonous herbs in it. The sheep seems to get weary of so small a bite, grows tired of being always penned up closely in a fold, and ever treading up and down the same narrow ground. In looking over a pasture or a field of turnips fed down by sheep, we generally observe that the shepherd keeps them, as it were, to the last bite. Sheep food is too costly to be wasted. They must eat up all and leave nothing. Now, we may well understand that when the sheep sees nigh at

hand a richer pasture, it is easily tempted to leave the fold and the flock to get a fuller feed and a better bite. And yet what danger there may be in it. A friend of mine lost a good part of his flock through disease, brought on, it was supposed, by the shepherd's letting out the flock upon the frosted clover before the sun had thawed and dried it. How needful it is for us to be kept within the fold and under the eye of the Shepherd who will make no such mistake as that, even if the bite is sometimes short, and we may seem to long for a change of pasture. It is in this way that men so often get entangled with error. It seems to offer to them some fresh pasture, some new food, a lively and agreeable change from that round of doctrine and experience of which they have got almost tired, and of which, were it manna itself, they would say, if you could read their hearts: "Our soul loatheth this light bread." The restless desires of the human heart are as innumerable as they are insatiable. What silly baits will sometimes entangle our vain mind. What a hankering often is there after some gratification which, if we got it, would be but a momentary indulgence, and, even that spoiled by guilt and shame at the very moment of obtaining it. How easily, too, we get entangled and drawn aside by some of those "deceitful lusts," of which I was speaking this morning, and which well may be called deceitful as promising much and performing nothing, and indeed worse than nothing, for all they can perform is bondage and misery.

3. But sometimes sheep go astray, drawn aside by the *example of others*. You know how prone sheep are to follow each other, and if the bell-wether does but lead the way, how first one and then another rushes almost madly after him. An old Puritan writer, if I remember right, relates an incident which he himself witnessed at Shrewsbury, where there is a bridge that crosses the river Severn, there tolerably wide. A flock of sheep was passing over the bridge, and one of them took it into his head, as we should say, to leap off the road upon the parapet, which I suppose in those days was of a lower character and of a ruder structure than in our modern bridges. The next sheep followed suit, and the third followed him. But they had got a very narrow

spot to stand upon. Down, then, goes the first sheep into the water, the next follows, the third imitates his example, until the issue was that the whole flock fell into the river. And even in London, there is a familiar example of this following propensity in the device by which a poor sheep is sometimes enticed into the slaughter-house by a stuffed sheep being drawn in before him. How great is the influence of example; and but for God's grace how the river or the slaughterhouse might have been our end, and would be if we followed some examples set before us. How often God's people have been drawn aside by the bad example of this or that professor, or even sheltered themselves under the sins and infirmities of good men. If they see one going before them who is generally received as a saint or servant of God, they think they may safely follow; and yet he may only go before them to lead them into evil. Bunyan, who has left few things untouched, has beautifully hit off this temptation in representing Vain Confidence going before Christian and Hopeful in By-Path Meadow. "Look," said Christian, "Did not I tell you so? By this you may know we are right." But when night came on, Vain Confidence fell into a pit and was dashed to pieces by his fall, and the two pilgrims soon got into the Castle of Giant Despair. It is not the example of good men or bad which is to guide or lead us, but the precepts of the gospel and the example of Christ. Directly you are beginning to justify your inconsistent or unbecoming conduct by the example of some good man, you are falling into a snare. Has God told you to be covetous because it is this good man's besetment; or to be peevish and passionate because this other worthy man has a hasty temper; or to be light and trifling because this minister has dropped from the pulpit some quaint saying which, perhaps, smote his conscience with a pang as soon as it had gone out of his lips? But I have spoken enough on this point if you will listen to my warning voice.

ii. There is one marked characteristic, however, of sheep going astray which I must not pass by. They *never come back of themselves*. They are so silly, stupid, and ignorant that when they stray they never can find their own way back to the fold. The shepherd must himself go after them and bring them back,

or never, never will they come back of themselves. Have you not found it was easier to go out of the way than to get back into it; easier to stray, wander and get upon the wild mountains, or fall into some pit or hole and there get smeared with mud and mire, than it was to get back or get out, and return to the fold? No, we never shall get back unless the Lord himself come out after us, search for us in the dark and cloudy day, lay us on his shoulders, and himself carry us all the way home.

How beautifully and how touchingly is this spoken of by the Lord, in the words of the prophet: "My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them." (Ezekiel 34:6.) And what tender care he manifests towards his sheep thus scattered through all the mountains and upon every high hill: "For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." (Ezekiel 34:11, 12.) And do not the Lord's own words sweetly correspond with the promise thus given in the prophet? "And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep; if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." (Luke 15:3-6.) If ever, then, the sheep that has gone astray returns to the fold, it is because the good Shepherd himself brings it home. And O how tenderly and graciously has he shown himself to be this good Shepherd. "The good Shepherd," he himself has declared, "giveth his life for the sheep." (John 10:11.) But this leads us to our second point.

II.—"Who, his own self, *bare our sins in his own body on the tree.*"

i. The sheep of whom our text speaks have gone astray. This was not only their misery but their sin. To depart from the Lord is not merely to wander away from the fountain of all happiness, but it is a crime of high and exceeding magnitude. The prophet therefore says, "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.) To forsake the Lord our God is not only a bitter thing, and the cause of all misery, but an evil thing and the cause of all wickedness. The Lord, therefore, calls upon the heavens to be astonished and to be horribly afraid at the wickedness of departing from him. "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For 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. 2:12, 13.) And is there one here who must not plead guilty to this charge? Is there one here who has not committed the two evils which astonished the very heavens? Have we not again and again wickedly and wantonly forsaken the Fountain of living waters, and wickedly and wantonly hewn out to ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water? Can we look back without seeing the broken cisterns almost choking up the road, strewing it in all directions, and every one of them dry? And are we not in our vain imaginations, if not in our lives, still doing the same work—hewing out this and that cistern, and finding, when hewn out with great care and labour, it holds no water? Alas! when Adam strayed away from God and godliness, it was as Hart speaks:—

"He ruined all his future race;"

and the infection of his blood makes us wander like him, and that, to our ruin, but for preventing and saving grace.

Now these sins of ours must be atoned for, that they may be effectually put away. And O what a wondrous way was that by

which they were blotted out from the sight of God. The Son of God took flesh, that by laying down his precious life and offering his pure humanity, in conjunction with his Deity, as a sacrifice for sin, he might for ever put it away. This is expressed in our text, in the words: "Who, his own self, bare our sins in his own body on the tree."

How distinctly does our text speak of the imputation of our sins to Jesus. It was "his own self"—his very, his true self, and none but himself, for no one else could have done it; no one else in heaven or earth could have borne the load; no one else have had sufficient dignity of Person; no one else be the only begotten Son of the Father in truth and love; and, therefore, none but his own precious self could have borne our sins in their imputation, in their guilt, in their weight, in their condemnation, and in the wrath of God justly due to them. And it was "in his own body"—not excluding his soul; that is, in the whole of his pure humanity which he offered upon the tree.

But now let us look at this bearing of our sins a little more experimentally, for in that way we come best to see how the Lord Jesus Christ made atonement for them.

When sin is charged home upon our conscience by the work of God's Spirit upon the heart; when we begin to feel its burden and know what it is by painful experience to have sinned against a holy, just, and righteous God, we are made to know a little of the real nature of the sin, and with what a heavy load it presses upon the heart of a truly convinced sinner. Now if each individual thus convinced of sin, feels, in his measure, the weight of his own transgressions, what must it have been to the Redeemer when he bare the whole weight of imputed transgression, and had to atone for the millions of sins committed by his elect people, by bearing them all in his own body on the tree? What must he have suffered in body and soul when the anger of God, due to these myriads and myriads of the vilest transgressions, and the curse of the law attached to disobedience met in his sacred bosom, and he hung upon the cross laden and bowed down with the heavy

burden of all the sins and iniquities of his chosen family?

When our blessed Lord undertook to bear our sins in his own body on the tree, he undertook to bear all the guilt and punishment which were due to them. We, therefore, read, "The LORD hath laid upon him (in the margin, made to meet on him) the iniquities of us all." "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities;" yea, "it pleased the Lord himself to bruise him;" his own Father to put him to grief, and thus to make his soul an offering for sin. But would we especially see something of what the Redeemer felt and suffered in his holy soul, when he bare our griefs and carried our sorrows, we must have recourse to those Psalms, sometimes called the Messianic Psalms, such as Psalms 22, 40, 69, in which he pours out his soul unto God under the heavy strokes of his bruising hand. How we hear him crying in one of these Psalms: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent." (Psal. 22:1, 2.) And again, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death." (Psal. 22:14, 15.) That this Psalm expresses the very language of Christ we know from his own words upon the cross, when, in the depths of his dolorous agony, he cried out in the words I have already quoted: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" How truly were the words fulfilled in him, "All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him." (Psal. 22:7, 8.) And has not the Holy Ghost expressly declared that the words, "they part my garments among them and cast lots upon my vesture" (Psal. 22:18) were written that that Scripture might be fulfilled in him? (John 19:24.) The gospels are for the most part very silent on the sufferings of Christ, both of body and soul. Nor is this surprising. They are chiefly a simple narrative of actual events, and therefore a description of the

personal experience of Christ would have been out of place. Nor, indeed, was it necessary, as the Holy Ghost had already made it known in the Psalms, by previous anticipation.

But O what an unspeakable mercy it is to the Church of God, that the blessed Redeemer did so interpose, as to bear our sins in his own body on the tree, that we might not bear them for ever and ever ourselves; took them upon himself, that they might be dealt with as if they were actually his; for, in a sense, they became his by imputation as much as if he himself had committed them. Is not this true in human affairs? If I undertake to pay a man's debts, and pledge myself by some written contract to that effect, I am as much responsible for them, as if I had myself incurred them. And you will observe, that when the debt is transferred from him to me, he is no longer responsible for it. The law cannot demand double payment for one debt. When, then, our Lord undertook to bear our sins in his own body on the tree, the debt due by us was transferred to him. It was by this vicarious obedience that sin was atoned for, put away, blotted out, and propitiation made; for it was by his precious bloodshedding and death upon the cross, that sin was entirely removed from the sight of God, so that his people might never come under its condemnation.

Now, nothing but a sight of this atoning sacrifice by living faith, can ever bring relief to one truly convinced of sin by the power of the Spirit, and who sighs and groans beneath it as a heavy burden too great for him to bear. Nothing but the application of the atoning blood of the Lord the Lamb can purge the conscience of a truly convicted sinner from filth, guilt, and dead works to serve the living God. We may try and try again to purify our own conscience, and to speak peace to our own troubled heart. We may try in a thousand ways to assure our hearts before God, but it will be labour in vain. It will be with us, as Job speaks: "If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." (Job 9:30, 31.)

We beg of the Lord, sometimes, to give us a broken heart, a contrite spirit, a tender conscience, and a humble mind; but it is only a view by faith of what the gracious Redeemer endured upon the cross, when he bare our sins in his own body with all their weight and pressure, and with all the anger of God due to them that can really melt a hard, and break a stony heart. No sight, short of this, can make sin felt to be hateful; bring tears of godly sorrow out of the eyes, sobs of true repentance out of the breast, and the deepest, humblest confessions before God what dreadful sinners and base backsliders we have been before the eyes of his infinite Purity, Majesty, and Holiness. O, what help is there for our guilty souls; what refuge from the wrath of God so justly our due; what shelter from the curse of a fiery law, except it be in the cross of Jesus? O, for a view of him revealed to the eyes of our enlightened understanding, as bearing our sins in his own body on the tree. O, to see by the eye of faith, all those dreadful sins which have caused us so much inward grief and trouble, all those fearful backslidings and sad entanglements on which we can but reflect with shame and grief; O, to see all we have said and thought and done, which conscience testifies against, and all those innumerable evils that we have never seen or conscience has forgotten; to view them by the eye of faith taken off our guilty head, and put upon the head of the Lord the Lamb. Where, oh, where can we get relief from any other source or by any other way? There is no relief anywhere else. Where can you find pardon sealed upon your breast, forgiveness manifested to your soul, or any expectation of winning heaven and escaping hell, except in the cross, and some testimony in your own bosom of your interest in that precious blood and righteousness, and the knowledge for yourself that the dear Redeemer bare your sins in his body on the tree? I know, indeed, full well, that it requires special faith, a faith of God's own giving and raising up to believe this—an especial manifestation of salvation by the blood of the Lamb to the soul; a blessed bringing in of the power of Christ crucified to the heart. But I believe I do but speak the inmost conviction of every heart touched by the finger of God when I say, that until this is in some measure done, there is no solid relief; no true peace with God; no firm, abiding foundation on

which we can stand, as if for eternity; nothing strong enough to banish the fear of death and open the gates of heaven.

But how both the need and the enjoyment of this salvation through the blood of the Lamb, put an end for ever to all creature merit and creature righteousness, and every expectation which is founded and grounded upon the works of the law. How it leads us to see that our sins were of so deep a dye, of so black a hue, and so merited the eternal wrath of God, that nothing but this sacrifice could suffice; that his own Son, his coequal, co-eternal Son, must come and take our nature into union with his divine Person, and bear our sins in his own body on the tree, that they might be put away for ever from the sight of God; cast behind his back; drowned in the depths of the sea; so that when sought for, they may no more be found.

ii. But we pass on to another portion of our text, holding forth and enforcing much the same truth: "*By whose stripes ye were healed.*"

You will doubtless recollect, that a reference is made here to a passage in Isaiah 53, where we read: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." (Isai. 53:5.)

Let us see, then, if we can gather up the meaning of being healed by Jesus' stripes.

1. I think we may understand the word "stripes" in two senses. First, it seems to mean *literal stripes*; for this was a part of the cross. All persons on whom death by crucifixion was to be inflicted according to the Roman law, were scourged before they were crucified. We thus read of our gracious Lord: "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus and scourged him." (John 19:1.) Thus, our gracious Lord had his back mangled with stripes, before he was taken to the cross. In that sense, the scourging was a part of the cross; in that sense, by his stripes we are healed; for holy virtue

comes out of those stripes to heal the guilty conscience, and speak peace to the troubled heart.

What a wonderful view does it give us of the infinite condescension of our gracious Lord, that when he bare our sins in his own body on the tree, he took, as a part of the cross, that scourging which was always preparatory to, and connected with it. It was not merely the excruciating pain; for the Roman scourge was, to use the language of a Latin poet, a "horrible" instrument of punishment; but the shame and ignominy attached to it was so great, that no Roman citizen was ever allowed to be exposed to it. A great Roman orator, in a celebrated oration, thus breaks forth on the subject: "It is a heinous sin to bind a Roman citizen; it is wickedness to beat him; it is next to patricide to kill him; and what shall I say to crucify him?" We find, therefore, Paul claiming this right of Roman citizenship, when they were about to scourge him: "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" (Acts 22:25.) And yet, all this cruel indignity and shame, from which the lowest and meanest Roman citizen was exempt, the eternal Son of God, the glory of heaven, by whom and for whom all things were created, who is before all things and by whom all things consist, bore for our sakes. It seems at times a sight too great for us to look at, either in its depth or in its height. Our very soul seems to shrink back with horror, when we look down into its depth, and see the Redeemer's back mangled with the cruel scourge. What a view meets our astonished sight, when we realise in the language of the hymn:—

"His back with hardy stripes is hewed,  
Till flakes of gore, and streams of blood,  
Besmear the frightened ground."

And we are as much amazed when we gaze up into its height, and view by faith that he, who suffered such pain and indignity, was with it all and in it all, the Glorious Son of God.

2. But these were not the only stripes which the gracious Lord

endured. We may, therefore, take the words in another sense; and this seems to have been the view of that deeply taught man of God, Mr. Hart:

"His back's with knotted scourges lashed,  
But sharper scourges tear his heart."

And do we not read, that "it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief?" We may, therefore, view the stripes, not only as the literal stripes which fell upon his sacred back from the cruel Roman scourge, but the *inward* stripes of God's vindictive wrath, wherewith it pleased the Father to bruise his holy soul and body as he hung upon the tree in agony. Here was the severer, more deeply, more poignantly felt stripe. Here was not the brawny arm of the Roman soldier, but the heavier, weightier hand of God upon him in the wrath of the Almighty made manifest in his conscience, and his anger, due to sin, discharging itself into his holy soul. Here he was bruised; here was the stripe. It came from a Father's hand, which made it all the heavier. Thus, every manifestation and display which God gave in and upon the cross of his anger against sin; every frown that darted agony into the Redeemer's soul; every hiding of his Father's countenance which distressed his inmost mind, and made him writhe and cry out in agony and sorrow; we may view, as a part of the bruise wherewith it pleased the Lord to bruise him. Even in our experience of the things of God, what is pain of body to pain of soul? Martyrs have rejoiced upon the rack, and the love of God, shed abroad in, and ravishing their souls with unutterable delight, has made them even glory in their sufferings. But how a soul, truly convinced of sin, writhes under the felt displeasure of the Almighty; for as the soul is greater than the body, as eternity is greater than time, as God is greater than man, so are the sufferings of the soul greater than the sufferings of the body. And if this be true in us, how much more was it true in the experience of the gracious Redeemer.

Now, by these stripes we are healed. If God bruised Christ for our sins, he will never bruise us for those sins. Sin has been atoned

for, and as atoned for, is fully put away; for the blessed Lord "was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

But observe the expression: "By whose stripes ye were *healed*." Sin is here compared to a disease. It is, indeed, the disease of the soul,—a disease whereby it is sick unto death. We often find, therefore, in the word of truth, sin spoken of as a disease. "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases." (Psa. 103:3.) So expressing the feelings of his soul under the stroke of God's hand, the Psalmist says: "My sore ran in the night and ceased not; my soul refused to be comforted." (Psa. 77:2.) And again: "My wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my foolishness. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease, and there is no soundness in my flesh." But the Lord, in tender mercy, has appointed a sovereign balm; for there is balm in Gilead; there is a Physician there. The stripes of Immanuel, that is, the sufferings of the Son of God, including his bloodshedding and death, and what he endured in body and soul as the crucified one, form this balm; and God has mercifully appointed, that our guilt, our sin, our shame, our condemnation should be all healed by the application of the precious blood of the Lord the Lamb to the conscience of all who are sick of sin.

III.—But I now pass on to show what are the *effects* of the gracious Lord bearing our sins in his own body on the tree; and of our being healed by his stripes.

Where there is anything done in and for the soul by the power of God, there will and must always be attending effects; for it is impossible for God to work a saving work in the heart by his Spirit and grace, and there to be no result. It would indeed reflect discredit upon the divine Workman, that all his grace and power should leave no effect behind, and that the soul should be just as it was before he wrought in it. The very word "work," implies something done. Now what is the result of God's working in the soul, both to will and to do of his good pleasure? There are several as traced out by the apostle which I shall now endeavour

to lay open.

i.—The first is, "*That we being dead to sins, live to righteousness.*"

We want something to kill, so to speak, the power of sin in us. We want a supernatural strength to mortify, crucify, and put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. We want something communicated to our soul, which we have not in ourselves, and which we are well assured none but the Lord himself can bestow; which shall give us the victory over the daily evils which manifest themselves in our fallen nature. The power put forth to break up and break down the power of sin in us, produces, first, what is called in our text a *being dead to sins*. The figure is obvious enough; for as life implies energy, movement, activity, vigour, strength, so death implies weakness, powerlessness, inability, in a word, everything which is opposite to the idea of life. Thus, whilst we are under the power and influence of the old man, and of our evil heart, we are alive to sin; for sin lives and moves and works in us. Our eyes are going out after objects of sin; our ears are eager to hear something connected with sin; the thoughts of our heart, the imaginations of our roving fancy, are all engaged in the hot pursuit of something evil and sinful. We snuff it up, as it were, with every gale. Like a bird of prey in the air, looking round for a quarry and ready at once to pounce upon it; or like a hound in pursuit of game, tracking it eagerly by its scent; so our corrupt nature is ever on the lookout, ever hunting on the track for sin; for sin is the darling food of the human mind, without which it seems no life to live. To be in this awful state, and in it all are, till called by grace, is for sin to live in a man's breast, and for him to be alive to it.

Do you not see, therefore, that what we want, and what God at times mercifully gives, is a divine power which comes into the soul and puts a death upon that strength and dominion of sin which lives in us, and in which we, but for the grace of God, should live? And thus we get through the cross of Christ not only a testimony in our bosom of what the Redeemer died to rescue us

from in a view of the depths of the fall and the consequences of our transgression, but a deliverance from the dreadful dominion of sin. This is what the law never could do for us or in us, and can be effected by nothing else but grace. "Sin," says the apostle, "shall not have dominion over you." Why? Because you strive against it and succeed by dint of effort after effort in subduing and overcoming it? No, "for ye are not under the law but under grace." There is no other way—we may have tried thousands—there is no other way of getting an effectual death to sin but by coming under the power and influence of sovereign, superabounding grace. Sin is so subtle, has so many lives, works in such unperceived and crafty ways, comes in at so many corners, is so mixed up with every thought and movement of our natural heart, is so strengthened by all we see and meet with both without and within that, unless we can find something as if lodged and placed in our breast which shall work against it in all its shapes and forms; meet it in all its subtle windings, and stand up against it with firm and dauntless opposition to all its movements, we shall be almost certain of being overcome by it. We parley with lusts till we get fairly, or I should rather say, foully entangled in them; strive against sin till sooner or later in the end it gets the better of us. One temptation, if we are entangled and overcome by it, makes a way for another till, but for the grace of God, we should walk altogether in the ways of sin and ungodliness; and concerning faith, make utter and open shipwreck. It is not, then, a common power that we need to help us in this terrible fight. We want something very strong, very powerful, very effectual to come into our breast to meet sin there in its stronghold, and counteract it in all its inward workings, secret wiles, crafty stratagems, and seductive allurements.

Now, this strength, this power, this victory over sin, can only be gained by a view of the cross, by some manifestations of a suffering Redeemer, by some application of his precious blood to the conscience, and some shedding abroad of his dying love in the heart. When, then, our eyes are a little opened to see, our hearts a little softened to feel, our consciences touched so as to be made tender, our affections wrought upon so as to be drawn

up to heavenly things, and we get a view of the Lord of life and glory bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, this puts a death upon sin. "What?" says the soul, with weeping eyes and broken heart: "Can I do this evil thing and sin against the Lord? Shall I wanton with the wounds of Jesus, trample upon the blood of Christ, do that which grieved the soul of the Redeemer, and walk in those ways of unrighteousness which brought, to put them away, such distress upon his body and soul?" Here is something to meet sin in its various turnings and windings, and to put a death upon it. This is a being crucified with Christ—a crucifying of the flesh with the affections and lusts. This is what Paul felt when he said: "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." (Gal. 6:14.) And again: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20.)

2. Now, with this death, there comes a *life*, which is a *life unto righteousness*. We want these two things, dear friends, in lively operation—a spiritual death and a spiritual life. We want death put upon the flesh, upon sin, upon everything which is ungodly, that it may not reign or rule; and we want also the communication and maintenance of a divine life which shall act Godward; exist and co-exist in the same breast, and be in activity at the same moment. Here is sin striving for the mastery; but here also is a view of the cross of Christ; here is a testimony of bleeding, dying love. This puts a death upon sin. But as death is put upon sin and the lust is mortified, crucified, resisted, or subdued, there springs up a life of faith and prayer, of hope and love, of repentance and godly sorrow for sin, of humility and spirituality, of a desire to live to God's praise and walk in his fear. The cross gives both. From the cross comes death unto sin; from the cross comes life unto righteousness. From the cross springs the healing of every bleeding wound, and from the cross springs every motive to a godly life. Thus, in God's mysterious wisdom, there is a way whereby sin can be pardoned, the law magnified,

justice exalted, the sinner saved, sin subdued, righteousness given, and the soul made to walk in the ways of peace and holiness. O what depths of wisdom, mercy and grace are here! Look where you will, try every mode, if you are sincere about your soul's salvation, if the Lord the Spirit has planted the fear of God in your heart, you will find no other way but this. There is no other way that leads to holiness here and heaven hereafter; no other way whereby sin can be pardoned and the soul sanctified. It is this view of salvation from sin not only in its guilt but also in its power, this deliverance from the curse of the law and well-spring of all holy, acceptable obedience, which has in all ages so endeared the cross to the souls of God's family, and made all of them more or less to be of Paul's mind, when he declared that he was determined to know nothing save Jesus Christ and him crucified.

ii. But the apostle goes on to show us another effect which springs out of Christ bearing our sins in his own body on the tree and giving us healing by his stripes. There is a *returning unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our soul*.

We have seen how the sheep went astray and how it would never return unless the Shepherd himself went after it. But when it sees the Shepherd it will come to him; it will not run away from him; it hears his voice and follows him. But O what an infinite mercy it is for you and me that we are allowed to return. We know that we have wandered, sadly wandered, grievously wandered, and have been almost lost upon the wild moor and dark mountain, almost sunk for ever in the gloomy bog and in the thick night. But in the midst of all our wanderings, and perhaps when well nigh in despair of ever getting back, we get a view once more of the good Shepherd, and what he has done in laying down his life for the sheep. A view of his infinite condescension, tender pity, long suffering mercy, compassionate heart and power to save even to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, is granted to the believing eye; and as a soft and secret influence gently steals over the soul and faith that works by love is drawn forth, penitential grief and sorrowful compunction are felt within, and

many earnest desires are raised up with a longing willingness to return, to come back, to cease from wandering, to feel oneself once more under his kind care, to hear once more his heavenly voice, to see once more his lovely Person, and to be fed once more by his gracious hand. How this endears the good Shepherd to a poor wandering sheep; for when once we have strayed how hard it is to return. All hope of return seems at times cut off, and it is as if we must sink down into despair and die. But with all our wanderings—and they have been many;—with all our straying from good to feed upon strange pastures; with all our following bad examples, or going astray through sheer silliness; yet from time to time the gracious Lord does touch the heart with his finger, does move and soften it by his grace, does melt it into contrition, compunction, and godly sorrow, and thus brings it back to his own bosom to find pardon, peace, and safety in him.

Now, it is this opening of his arms to receive poor, penitent, returning sinners, this willingness to forgive, this tender sympathy, and this compassion manifested to wanderers that make him so precious to believing souls. That he should so bear with us year after year, not get tired of us and not give us up to our own folly, to reap what we have sown; should not leave us to ourselves and cast us utterly off in wrathful displeasure, but should allow us and sometimes draw us and enable us to come to his feet, to confess our sins, mourn over our iniquities, look unto him, hang upon him, cleave to him, trust in him, believe in his name, and get some relief out of him,—how this tenderness and goodness of the good Shepherd endear him to believing hearts. No one but he who has wandered knows the difficulty that there is to return; no one but he who has strayed from good pastures and got upon the barren mountain knows what it is for the good Shepherd to come out after him and bring him back; and none but he so much values the good Shepherd, or is so glad to return to be once more under his guiding eye, and within the reach of his bounteous hand.

And he is the *Bishop* of the soul as well as the Shepherd. The word means, properly, "overseer," and is so translated Acts

20:28: "Over whom the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers;" and it would have been as well if the translators had used the same word here, for the present rendering is somewhat misleading. The bishops in ancient times were the same officers of the church as the elders, and were overseers to watch over the flock—not having dioceses to be bishops at large, but having each his own flock as a shepherd has one. Indeed, as at Ephesus and Philippi, one church had often several bishops or overseers. Thus the blessed Lord, as an overseer of his flock, inspects, overlooks, narrowly watches, and takes very tender notice of the sheep that are of his pasture. They, too, are very glad to be under his oversight, that he may overlook and take care of them and deal with them with all the tenderness and care that a shepherd deals with his sheep, who goes about from sheep to sheep to watch over and attend to them. Some, perhaps, he sees struck with the fly, some cast upon their backs, some afflicted with giddiness or other disease, and some with the wool half torn off their back. He has to overlook the sheep very minutely, attend to and take care of every one of his flock without missing or passing by one. He has to bring food to each, to water them at convenient times, to pen them carefully in his fold, watch against prowling dogs and roving wolves, and keep guard over them night and day. He is not merely a shepherd over the flock generally, but is an overseer to every sheep of the flock specially. So the gracious Lord is not only the Shepherd of the sheep in a general manner, but is the Overseer of each particular individual. As such he has to examine their complaints, see what is the matter with each and all of them, attend to them carefully, and deal with each as if there were no other to deal with.

Now it is a mercy when they can bear his inspection; when they are seeking to hide no sins from his sight, or cloak over any hypocrisies; or doing things that they know his soul disapproves of. It is an unspeakable mercy when they can put themselves under his overseeing eye, and say, "Search me, O God, and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting." It is a blessed thing to be able to open one's breast to the Lord and say, "Look here, Lord; thou seest what a

heart I carry in my bosom; thou knowest what a desperate sinner I am and have been; but, Lord, I would not offend thee willingly; I would not sin against thee wantonly. I would desire to walk in thy fear and live to thy praise. Make me right, Lord, and keep me right. If there be any hidden lust, let me not indulge it; any entanglement, let me forsake it; any temptation, deliver me from it; any snare, mercifully break it." Now this is knowing the Lord to be the Shepherd, the watchful Overseer who can take us as the shepherd takes the sheep, lays it upon its back, finds out where the maggots lie, cuts out any diseased place or cuts off those long clags of dung and wool and mud, which so much cripple its movements as they make it unsightly.

O, that we might be thus enabled to lay our souls at the Lord's feet and let him take and examine us to see where we are sick and sore,—to be willing to submit to his hand as a patient under an operation submits to the hand of the surgeon and yields himself up to the keen knife. O, to be able so to walk and act with all our temptations, and all the evils of our heart, and all our hidden iniquities, as to lay ourselves under the Lord's eye and the Lord's hand, and be willing that he should search, try, examine, and see what there is in us which he can subdue by his grace, as well as pardon by his mercy, and wash away by his blood. This is no small favour. If you were a hypocrite, you would be sorry to submit your case to the Lord. You would not dare to come and lie under his eye, lay your bosom bare to his heart-searching gaze, and beg of him to make you right and keep you right. There would be some evasion, some shrinking, some mincing, some slipping away: there would be some mask, some veil, something deceptive: you could not come out honestly with it. But if the fear of God is in your breast, your conscience tender, and the Lord the Spirit has wrought with a divine power upon your heart, though you feel yourself to be one of the vilest and worst of men, one of the basest of all base wretches, yet there is that honesty, uprightness, godly fear, holy tenderness, and spiritual longing to be right which will bring you in sensible experience under the eye of the overseer.

Now try yourself by this test. It is not your sins which will damn you, for they may be repented of, forsaken, and forgiven, but it is your hardness, impenitence, and unbelief; your want of a knowledge of Christ. Those who are lost under the sound of the gospel, are lost because from them it is hid in its efficacy and power. (2 Cor. 4:3.) Those that perish under the preached truth, are those who receive not the love of it, but have pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thess. 2:12.) Don't be frightened at seeing your sins. They are bad enough, God knows; and they are a thousand times worse than you have ever seen yourself or ever will see them. God knows a deal more of you than you know of yourself, and has seen more sin in you than ever you have seen in your own breast. Don't be frightened, I repeat it, at your sins. If you can confess and forsake them, cry for mercy, and have a view of Jesus bearing your sins in his own body on the tree, your sins won't damn you. Conviction of sin is the beginning of divine life; the springing up of the work of God upon the soul; the first effect of the communication of a new nature. These are the movements of the blessed Spirit upon your heart. Confess that you have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek to return; beg of the good Shepherd to find you out; place yourself under his overseeing eye; fall down before him; confess your sins, and he will manifest his mercy sooner or later to your soul. Some perish through self-righteousness, and some through unbelief or despair. God's people shall perish by none of these things. They shall never perish in self-righteousness, for God will strip them of all boasting in the flesh. They shall never perish in unbelief or despair, for God will give them faith and manifest his dear Son to their souls. Thus sooner or later the good Shepherd will bring every sheep unto himself, and make it manifest that he loved them and gave himself for them, that by virtue of his death and of his life, they might live for evermore.

## STRENGTH MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS

Preached on Lord's Day Afternoon, August 29th, 1841, at Allington, near Devizes

"And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness." 2 Cor. 12:9

I have sometimes thought of the craft and subtlety of Satan in confusing the minds of men upon this point—that the apostles who preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, and wrote these blessed epistles for our instruction, had not to learn their religion in the same way that you and I have to learn ours. There is a kind of persuasion in the minds of men—borrowed, I believe, chiefly from the Popish church, and handed down by tradition from the fathers—that the apostles did not learn the things they preached through exercises and burdens; but that they (I am speaking of them here as private Christians) learned to believe, hope, and love without these graces of the Spirit coming into their hearts through the channel of trials, and without their being exercised as we are with temptations and corruptions. They are called *Saint Paul*, and *Saint Peter*, and *Saint John*, as though they were not sinners saved by grace, and sinners to the end of their days; but as if they occupied some intermediate position between angels and men, and were certain holy beings who lived without sin.

Now with respect to the Epistles as being a part of the inspired Scriptures, no doubt the blessed Spirit was pleased to suggest to the writers special thoughts, and to dictate to them special words; as the Apostle says, "Which things we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual," or, as it might be translated, "composing spiritual things for spiritual men" (1 Cor. 2:13). But so far as they had a personal religion, so far as they were individual Christians, so far as they knew the things of God in their own consciences, they had to learn their religion just in the same way—line upon line, here a little and there a little, a

drop here and a drop there, a trial in this point and a deliverance in that—just in the same way that you and I have to learn ours.

I think we have this very strikingly manifested in the description which Paul gives of his experience in the twelfth chapter of his second epistle to the Corinthians. He tells us that he knew a man in Christ fourteen years before the time that he was writing, and that this man in Christ (beyond all controversy himself) was favoured at that time with certain revelations and manifestations such as it was not lawful nor possible for a man to utter. And I would just drop one hint on this subject. It does not appear that the apostle, for the space of fourteen years, had ever once mentioned what his soul had enjoyed, and it was only now drawn out of him through peculiar circumstances. The Corinthians, to whom he had been made so signally useful, and who had been called to the knowledge of the truth by his ministry, were led by the representations of false apostles transformed into the apostles of Christ (2 Cor. 11:13: 1 Cor. 9:1-3) to doubt even Paul's call to the apostleship, and to set aside him who had been made so useful to their souls. Such is the subtilty of Satan, and such is the power whereby he carries on his operations in the carnal mind, that these very Corinthians, who had received every blessing through the channel of Paul's preaching, had actually been persuaded to believe that he was not called to be an apostle at all. They disowned their own father, even at the risk of acknowledging themselves to be but bastards. If therefore the Corinthians, and the Galatians, and others to whom Paul was made so eminently useful, could doubt his call to the apostleship, how are we to expect any other treatment? Therefore when I hear a man or a woman speaking much of being blessed under the ministry of some individual, the favourite of the day, whom they extol beyond all bounds, I expect by and by to see a change take place, and to find manifested in them the same spirit which Paul saw manifested in the Corinthian and Galatian churches. I have had some experience of this, like most other ministers, and it has taught me to be little elated by the praise, and as little depressed by the censure of these fickle hearers.

It was this opposition, this doubt and suspicion cast on his ministry, which drew out of the breast of Paul, where it had lain concealed for fourteen years, the manifestation which God had given him when he was caught up into the third heaven. Now does not this conduct of the apostle make it rather suspicious, when people are so fond of running about the country with their experiences? Did Paul act in this way? Was he in the habit of carrying about his experience as a hawker carries about his jewellery, and going to every door, opening his box and offering its contents for inspection? No; this was locked up fourteen years in his bosom, and most probably would have been locked up there for ever if the conduct of these Corinthians had not drawn it from the secret treasure of his conscience. And I believe that this is the effect of grace in the soul—that a man will keep both his troubles and joys to himself, except they be drawn from him by circumstances. Nothing can be more sweet and refreshing than mention of the Lord's dealings with the soul; but this deep water in the heart of a man needs to be drawn out of the well by a man of understanding, and does not run on babbling like a brook for every ear. A man fed by divine instruction will eat his morsel alone, and prefer to keep back even that which God has done for his soul rather than be throwing it down indiscriminately in all places and in all company.

This blessed apostle, then, fourteen years before the time of his writing this Epistle, had had a revelation of Jesus Christ. He had been caught up, he could not tell whether in the body or out of the body, into paradise, into the third heaven, into the company of just men made perfect, into a view of Christ, and into the hearing of things so sweet, so blessed, so ravishing, that it was not possible, nor was it lawful, for him ever to tell a thousandth part of what his soul had experienced.

Now, doubtless, the apostle, after he had been thus favoured, thus caught up into paradise, thought that he should retain the same frame of mind that he was in when he came down from this heavenly place; that the savour, the sweetness, the power, the unction, the dew, the heavenly feeling would continue in his soul;

and no doubt he thought he should walk all through his life with a measure of the sweet enjoyments that he then experienced. But this was not God's way of teaching him religion. God had another way which Paul knew nothing of, and that was—if I may use the expression—to bring him from the third heaven, where his soul had been blessed with unspeakable ravishment, down to the very gates of hell. O what a way of learning religion! for he says, "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, the *messenger of Satan* to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."

Now this was given to him to serve a particular purpose, to produce a certain effect, to bring him into a certain spot, and to teach him a certain lesson; and unless he was brought there, he could not learn that lesson which it was God's purpose to teach him. We will, with God's blessing, look a little into the words that he makes use of to describe this change.

1. And *first*, it is said that "there was given to him a thorn in the flesh." What is meant by this? Where there is a thorn in the flesh naturally, it is painful, it hampers every movement, it renders the hand or the finger in which the thorn is lodged useless all the time that it continues there; and the part in which it is fixed festers, rankles, and suffers the greatest pain until the thorn is extracted.

Now I think if we carry with us into spiritual things the leading ideas that I have just dropped, we shall see what a thorn in the flesh is spiritually. It is something that gives acute pain, that causes restlessness, that renders the part where it is lodged useless; that rankles, festers, and breeds corruption. Any powerful temptation coming from Satan into our mind produces these effects. *First*, they are painful and distressing to the quickened soul. But what makes Satan's fiery darts so painful? They are not painful to the carnal mind, nor to a seared conscience; they are not painful to a man dead in sin, they have no effect upon him; but they are painful where there is a spiritual

principle, a new nature, a heavenly image, a tender conscience, a holy principle breathed into the soul from the mouth of God. It was so with the Lord of life and glory. What made Jesus feel so acutely the temptations brought before His eyes by the prince of darkness? He had no nature like ours to fall in with the temptations; but these temptations were most acutely painful to Him because He had a holy nature that abhorred them, that shrunk from them, that recoiled from them with detestation. And thus, when Satan would infuse his own daring blasphemies against God into the mind of a living child, what makes him recoil from these temptations? What makes him cry to God to be delivered from their dreadful presence? What makes him feel them a heavy burden on his conscience? Why, it is because he has life in his soul, tender feelings towards God, a new, holy, and spiritual nature, which is galled and fretted by them. *Again*, a thorn in the flesh makes the limb useless till it is extracted. If a labourer has a thorn in his hand, he cannot grasp the flail, he cannot hold the sickle, he cannot master the scythe; because when he presses the handle of the instrument, it drives the thorn into his flesh, so that he is unable to use it until the thorn is extracted. So it is with the temptations which come from Satan; they render a man's hand useless. He cannot lift them up in prayer, he cannot take hold of any branch of truth contained in the Scriptures, he cannot embrace one promise, he cannot grasp one evidence. There is a thorn in the hand of faith, and when this hand would stretch itself forth (for I have usually found these temptations most powerful in secret prayer and other solemn moments), the thorn so pierces it, that it cannot grasp anything of a divine and heavenly nature, and sooner than be thus wounded, the hand of faith drops uselessly down.

But *thirdly*, if the thorn is not extracted, it will fester and rankle; there will be the gory matter at the bottom of the wound which the thorn has made. So it is wherever there is this thorn in the flesh, these temptations from Satan, these blasphemies, these obscenities, these imaginations, this enmity against God and godliness. It will produce corruption in the carnal mind; the wound will fester and rankle; and it is this very corruption that

oozes up out of the wound, it is this very gory matter which issues from the bottom of the ulcer, that pollutes the conscience, defiles the mind, and distresses the soul of one born of God.

2. But the apostle has used another word: he calls this thorn in the flesh, "*the messenger of Satan* to buffet him." I will, in explaining this, proceed as before by showing what it is naturally, as a clue to what it is spiritually. Now what is a messenger? You who are servants, or persons who are employed occasionally to take a message, know this very well—that if you do not take the very message which your master tells you, you are an unfaithful messenger. The messenger has nothing of his own to say: all he has to do is to deliver the message. He has no more to do with the meaning of the message than the postman with the contents of the letter he brings. All that the messenger has to do is to deliver the message given to him; not to add a word, not to omit a word that shall alter the meaning of the message, but simply to be the mouthpiece of the sender; his speaking-trumpet, as it were, through which he conveys his mind to a distance. To be such a mere passive instrument of conveyance is to be "a faithful messenger to him that sends him," and by such passive faithfulness "he refresheth the soul of his master" (Prov. 25:13).

Apply this idea, which every one must admit to be founded on truth, to the expression which Paul uses, "a messenger of Satan." This messenger from Satan must bring with him the mind of Satan, or he is no messenger. When I say to a servant, "Do you go to such a person, and tell him such and such a message," I am conveying my mind to that person; I am telling him my thoughts, my intentions; I am speaking to him through the messenger, just as I have seen a person on the ground floor of a shop speak through a tube some message to a person in the top story—the tube running from the top to the bottom of the house on purpose. I speak through the messenger, and all he has to do is to convey my mind, my intention, what is passing in my heart. A messenger then comes charged with the message which the sender has given him; and when he has delivered his message faithfully, he has fulfilled his office. So this messenger of Satan comes charged

with Satan's wrath, Satan's malice, Satan's blasphemy; and as a messenger from Satan, he breathes the very mind and spirit of Satan, and delivers his message into the carnal mind—the place of his destination, and the quarter to which he is sent.

Then if you and I know anything about the messages of Satan, we shall find that this messenger will bring into our carnal minds that which works in Satan's mind. The same pride, the same presumption, the same arrogance, the same hypocrisy, the same rebellion, the same blasphemy, the same obscenity, the same brutality, the same filthiness that are in Satan's hateful breast, the same things, in a measure, will the messenger bring into ours. Not indeed fully: because a messenger can convey but a part of what passes in the mind of the person who sends him. For instance, when I send a messenger, I do not send by him all that is passing in my mind; I only give him a part, and not the whole of my mind to carry to the person to whom I send him. So when the messenger of Satan comes into the carnal mind, he brings—not all that Satan is (that never can be), but he conveys a part: he brings—as I was speaking this morning,—a "puff" out of Satan's mind. As it is said in James, "The tongue is set on fire of hell" (James 3:6). If a man takes a coal out of a fire, he does not bring all the fire, but a part out of the fire; and so the tongue "is set on fire of hell," when a spark out of Satan is communicated to the inflammable materials which we carry about with us.

3. But this messenger of Satan was sent to do a certain work; and that is expressed in the word "buffet." There is very much contained in this word. The meaning of it is, literally and strictly, to strike a man blows with the fist, either with the flat hand or with the closed hand. And the idea is this—that this messenger of Satan struck the blessed apostle with what Isaiah calls (58:4) "the fist of wickedness;" that is, he struck him such stunning blows as to perplex his judgment, confuse his intellect, confound his understanding, and, if I may use the expression, beat his religion all into a mummy. The idea is that of a strong man beating a weak one, and the strong man directing such violent blows against the head and face of his adversary, that he is so

stunned by the power and weight of the blows as to be lost, and not to know where he is or what he is about, but to stagger like a drunken man, and be at his wit's end.

Now I want you to see the contrast we have here. The blessed apostle caught up into the third heavens, filled with light, life, and glory, enjoying the presence of Christ, and bathing his soul in the river of divine consolation. Now for a reverse: down he comes to the earth, and lower than the earth, for he sinks to the gates of hell. A messenger of Satan is let loose upon him, who buffets him, bruises into a confused mass all his past experience, and beats it into a shapeless mummy. Just as when a strong man beats a weak one, he bruises his features into a shapeless mass; so this messenger of Satan buffeting and pounding, so to speak, this blessed apostle, beat all his religion into a shapeless mummy—no eyes, no nose, no mouth, no features, but one indistinguishable mass of black and blue.

Now this is the effect of Satan's temptations coming with violence into the mind. They so beat and stun a man that he knows not where he is, what he is, or who he is. All his religion seems beaten to pieces, all his experience marred, and all that he thought himself to have known, felt, and tasted seems to be beaten into a shapeless mass, where there are no features of a living child remaining.

"What!" say you, "did Paul know this? What! that blessed saint, that man of God, who was the chiefest among the apostles?" Yes; does he not tell us that there was given to him "the messenger of Satan to buffet him?" And does not the word convey all this? Yes, every syllable of it. All that I have done is merely to open up and explain the force and meaning of his own expressions. This blessed apostle, then, so favoured with manifestations, had to learn a religion that had two sides to it—one side learned in heaven, and another side learned at the gates of hell. Such is the mysterious way in which a man learns religion; there are two sides to it; and that is the way you and I have to learn ours, each in our measure—some greater, some less.

Now what was all this for? Does it not appear very cruel—does it not seem very unkind that, after the Lord had taken Paul up into the third heaven, He should let the devil buffet him? Does it not strike our natural reason to be as strange and as unheard of a thing as if a mother who had been fondling her babe in her arms, suddenly were to put it down, and let a great savage dog worry it, and look on, without interfering, while he was tearing the child which she had been a few minutes before dandling in her lap and clasping to her bosom? Viewed, indeed, in reason's dim light, it does seem an inexplicable contradiction; but what if it were the only way whereby pride, arrogance, and presumption could be laid low in Paul's soul? He himself tells us that this was the reason of these mysterious and apparently inconsistent dealings. "Lest I should be exalted," he says, "above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given unto me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."

Here we have this difficult enigma solved, this mysterious knot untied, and we find that the object and end of all these severe dealings was to hide pride from Paul's eyes.

This, however, the apostle did not at that time understand. To what then had he recourse? He went to the Lord with it, and besought Him thrice with earnest supplication "that it might depart from him." That is, he did not merely three times pray about it, but he had three seasons of solemn supplication, three distinct times of spiritual communion and nearness of access, when he could plead with the Lord as a man pleadeth with his friend, and at these three several seasons he besought his loving and sympathising Redeemer that the temptation might be taken away, for it was too grievous to be borne. The Lord heard his prayer and answered it, but not in the way that Paul expected. His answer was, "My grace is sufficient for thee." As though He should say, "Paul, beloved Paul, I am not going to take away thy temptation; it came from Me—it was given by Me; but My grace shall be sufficient for thee, for My strength shall be made perfect

in thy weakness. There is a lesson to be learnt, a path to be walked in, an experience to be passed through, wisdom to be obtained in this path, and therefore thou must travel in it. Be content then with this promise from My own lips, 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'" The apostle was satisfied with this; he wanted no more; and therefore he burst forth, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

We have taken some time to arrive at the text; but it seemed necessary to enter thus fully into the context that a clearer light might be thrown upon the words of the text itself. It consists of two clauses, which, the Lord enabling us, we will consider separately.

1. "My grace is sufficient for thee." Now are you not sometimes brought into this state, as though Christ's grace was not sufficient for you? Perhaps some of you in this chapel may have such doubts and fears working in your mind, and such distressing convictions on account of sin, as to think it impossible for you to be delivered from the nethermost hell. Now the Lord says to every one of His quickened children, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Has not this grace saved thousands, tens of thousands—I might say, millions? Were their hearts less hard than yours? Was their nature less dark, less sinful, less unbelieving? Were their lives, as far as any natural power of theirs was concerned, more spiritual, more upright, more holy, more turned away from sin, more turned to God than yours? Had they not their doubting seasons, their fearing seasons, their desponding seasons, their agonizing seasons, their wrestling seasons with God? Yea, doubtless, all God's people have passed through these things: and those blessed saints who have got safe to glory, who are beyond gunshot of the devil, who are bathing their souls in the ocean of endless bliss, had to walk in the same trying paths that some of you are called to walk in now.

But say some, "It is not only my doubts and fears that distress me, but that I have been such a sinner. O, if I dared tell what I

have formerly done, the vile sins I have committed, the abominable iniquities I have been guilty of! O, I dare not breathe them into any one's ears: if I did, they would spurn me from them." The Lord says to every one whose heart He has touched with His finger, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Base wretch though you have been, and full of sin as your life has been—if the Lord has smitten you with convictions, and brought you to repentance and confession of sin before Him, He says to you, "My grace is sufficient for thee." His free, and glorious, and matchless grace is sufficient to deliver your soul from eternal perdition.

But, says a third, "I have been so presumptuous a wretch. There has been so much hypocrisy in my religion; I have so deceived the people of God; I have made them think so much better of me than I deserved to be thought of. There has been so much crookedness in my profession, so much insincerity about it. O how I blush and am confounded! I do think," says he, "that of all my sins my presumption cuts most deeply into my conscience. O what shall I do, such a presumptuous wretch!" The Lord still says to every one of His children whom He has cut deep in their consciences on account of their presumption, "My grace is sufficient for thee;" aye, sufficient for those who think it not sufficient; sufficient for those who think that mercy never can reach their souls, or enter with power into their hearts.

But says another, "Since I have been called by grace I have fallen into such backslidings. If it were merely sins which I committed before I made a profession, I could have some hope that mercy would reach me. But oh! to sin against light, conscience, warnings, reproofs, convictions—that seems to stamp sin in such aggravated colours, to make it appear so black and so dreadful!" Still the same merciful and compassionate Lord speaks, "My grace is sufficient for thee." "Return, O backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." He healed backsliding Peter, and backsliding Solomon, and backsliding Hezekiah, and backsliding David, and backsliding Ephraim; He healed them all—His grace was sufficient for them all.

But says a fifth, "I have such temptations—temptations almost too bad to be named; temptations to disbelieve the Scriptures, temptations to commit horrible sins, temptations to doubt the very being of a God, temptations never to pray, temptations to throw aside all my religion, temptations to blaspheme that holy name which I desire to love and adore." The answer is still the same, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Did not Paul know these things? Did not the messenger of Satan buffet him with these very temptations? Was not infernal enmity breathed into his carnal mind from this messenger of the prince of darkness? Did not Satan make use of his messenger, by which seems meant one or more spirits like unto himself, to convey his own accursed wrath and rebellion into Paul's mind? Christ's grace is as much sufficient for thee as for Paul, able to support thee, able to uphold thee, able to keep thee from committing that sin to which thou art tempted, able to save thy soul from the condemnation of it, to purge thy conscience from the guilt of it, and to deliver thy heart from the power of it.

But says another, "I am so carnal, so dark, so stupid, so hard, so barren, so unfeeling. O, it seems at times, as though I had not a spark of true religion in me, as though I had not one single grain of feeling in my soul—no, not one atom of spiritual life, nor anything that bears the stamp of God upon it." The Lord still says to those of His children who are mourning over their barrenness and darkness, "My grace is sufficient for thee"—sufficient to move this load, to water this wilderness, to communicate fruitfulness to this desert—sufficient to bring life, light, and feeling into the soul that He has once touched with His finger.

But complains another, "I have been a professor so many years; I have sighed and cried to the Lord time after time, and I have asked Him to look on me and bless me; and yet things, instead of getting brighter, seem to get darker. Such gloom, such despondency, such melancholy, such a sinking sense in my soul, as though God had cast me off; as if I were only a barren tree in His vineyard; a wretch whom He spares with much longsuffering from day to day, but whom He will at last cut down and cast into

the fire." Still the promise holds good, "My grace is sufficient for thee"—sufficient for all who seek His face, and call upon His name; sufficient for every quickened soul that knows the plague and sore of his own heart; sufficient for every living child that is brought by the Holy Ghost to seek and mourn after God.

But says another, "In times past I did enjoy the light of God's countenance; I could walk in sweet communion with Him; I could tell Him out all my heart, and sincerely say that I loved Him; I could appeal to Him that I loved His people, His ways, His cause, His Word, and that His name was to me as the ointment poured forth. But O, what a change have I seen since then, and what a wretch am I now! I have lost my first love, lost my tenderness of conscience, lost my godly sorrow, lost my contrition and brokenness of heart, my love to the family of God, my love to the Word of God, my love to everything which in times past I was able to love. Was there ever such a wretch?" Must not the same word of promise still suffice? Is your case beyond the reach of the words, "My grace is sufficient for thee?" The free, the matchless, distinguishing grace of God is sufficient for all His people, in whatever state, or stage, or trouble, or difficulty they may be.

Let us examine the words, and see if we can penetrate a little into the meaning; let us press this honeycomb, if haply we may taste a little sweetness out of it. "My grace." What grace is this which He calls "My"? It is His own grace—grace peculiar to and flowing out of Himself. It is the grace which brought the Son of God down from heaven to earth; the grace which moved Him to take part of the flesh and blood of the children; the grace which carried Him through this world, and enabled Him to bear the contradiction of sinners against Himself; the grace which made Him give Himself up into the hands of wicked men, that He might bear the sins of the elect in His own body on the tree, and there enduring the wrath of God in His soul, and shedding the precious blood of His body, He might make full atonement and propitiation for sin. O the sufficiency of this grace! How little, through unbelief, do we know its sufficiency! How little do we venture upon it! How little do we experience the abundance, the fulness,

the freeness, and the blessed efficacy of it! But still it runs, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Not *thy* strength, *thy* wisdom, *thy* prayers, *thy* experience; but "My grace"—My free, My matchless grace, independent of all works and efforts, independent of everything in the creature; flowing wholly and solely, fully and freely, out of the bosom of Jesus to the needy, the guilty, the destitute, the undone.

You that are tried in worldly circumstances, that have to endure the hard lot of poverty—"My grace is sufficient for thee." You who are tempted, day by day, to say or do that which conscience testifies against—"My grace is sufficient for thee." You who are harassed with family troubles and afflictions, and are often drawn aside into peevishness and fretfulness—"My grace is sufficient for thee." In whatever state, or stage, or trial, or circumstance of soul the child of God is, the promise still runs, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

II. But now we come to the second clause of the verse, which explains the former, and throws light on our experience when passing through the former; He says, "for My strength is made perfect in weakness." "Ah," say you, "I can believe what God says in His Word; I can see His grace sufficient for others, but not for myself; I can believe that so and so has the life of God in his soul, and shall never perish; I can see him encompassed by all the mercy of God, blessed with all the love of God, and supported by the power of God; I can see him, or her, on the way to heaven, but as to myself, wretch that I am! I fear that I shall be cast out."

Now the Lord meets this case. He says, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." But that is a lesson which flesh and blood never can receive; it is a lesson contradictory to all the powers of reason. If it had read thus, "My strength is made perfect in strength," we could understand it, because it falls in with our reason. Our reason says, "I must try to be strong; I must resist my sins; I must do my best; I must endeavour with all the strength of my body and soul to get the favour of God; and *then*,

*then*, I can easily understand how He will make His strength perfect in my strength." "No," says the Lord, "that is not the way; 'My strength is made perfect in *weakness*.'" "Well," say you, "if ever there was a poor weak creature, I think I am the man; if ever there was a wretch in the world who was unable to stand against temptation, unable to resist the powers of darkness, unable to do one thing spiritually good; if ever there was a poor creature in this world more unable than another to pray, to repent, to believe, to hope, to love, to lay hold of the promises, to receive Christ, to taste the sweetness of the gospel; if ever there was one poor wretch more feeble, more helpless, more crippled, more impotent than another to lift himself out of sin with all its miseries into Christ and all His mercies, I am the man. And," say you, "as to speaking of any great or deep experience, I leave that to others; but I feel this—that if all the people of God were placed in a row, and I were told that the weakest, the most helpless, the most ignorant, the most vile, the most sinful was to go to the bottom, I know where I should go—I should pass by them one by one, and put myself at the very bottom, as the very last and least of the whole row. But," say you, "this is not what I want to experience; I want to feel the contrary. I want power to believe, to love, to hope, to pray, to conquer my sins, to know the Lord of life and glory, to enjoy sweet communion with Him, and to receive into my very soul that kingdom of God which is not in word but in power."

But have you not mistaken the way whereby this power is to be communicated? You must know your weakness first; and then have divine power, spiritual power, supernatural power, made perfect in that weakness. Like a man who is going to build a house, or even to put down a gatepost, there must be a hole dug for the foundation. The house or the post would not stand if put on the ground; there must be a hole dug for it. But when the foundation is being dug for the house, or the hole is being made for the post to be fixed in, an ignorant bystander might say, "Why I don't see a house being built; you are digging a hole instead of building a house." "But," you would answer, "the house cannot stand on the ground; there must be a foundation; if there is

sand, we must go right through the sand till we come to the rock; and when the soil is very loose and bad, we have often to go very, very deep, till we get to some solid bottom; but all this is building the house." We admit the force of this reasoning naturally, but when we come to the very same thing spiritually (and we know that this is one of the Lord's own figures) we are baffled and confounded. When a child of God has to be taught this lesson experimentally, and is compelled to learn his weakness, to feel his impotency, to groan and sigh beneath his helplessness, he says, "Can this be religion? Can this be experience? Can this be the teaching of the Holy Ghost? Why," says he, "we read in the Scriptures: 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice; My peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you;' 'The kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.' But," he says, "as for me, it is all upturning work, and I can feel none of those blessed enjoyments which I see in God's Word." But does the Word of God say that this peace, and joy, and love, and liberty are to be given to an unexercised heart? or that the Lord gives His blessed manifestations to a soul that never passes through trials and temptations? "It is through much tribulation that we enter the kingdom of God" manifested to the soul. So that the lesson to be learned by the child of God is, his weakness, his helplessness, his impotency to do any one spiritual action, for this very purpose—that he may experience the reality of joy, as being tasted in sorrow; of peace, as felt in bitterness; and of liberty, as communicated in bondage. Therefore, in order to teach him the secret of divine strength, when temptation comes he cannot resist it; when the blast of infidelity blows, he cannot overmaster it; when Satan breathes his dreadful suggestions into his mind, he has no power to shut them out. But why all this? In order that he may sink down in weakness, a poor helpless, ignorant creature that cannot do one thing that he would; that he may fall down before God in the depths of creature nothingness, and come to that spot where Paul came to when he said, "Though I be nothing." What! nothing!—you who have been in the third heavens, and heard unspeakable words; who have seen the blessed angels and the Lord of life and glory with your own eyes;

you, this great apostle who have converted thousands of souls, and have left epistles which have been such rich breasts of consolation to the family of God; the highest and most favoured saint on earth!—you to be nothing! "Yes," says the apostle, "I am nothing—nothing at all; a nonentity after all in self."

This shows us how a real child of God sinks down into creature nothingness; everything in Christ, but nothing in self. Paul did not mean to say that he had no religion, but none in himself. What! could not Paul stand against temptation? Not more than you or I, unassisted by the grace of God. Could not Paul pray more than I can? No, not at all, except so far as the Spirit of grace and supplications was given to him. Could not Paul love more than I do? Not a bit more, nor think a spiritual thought more, as far as self was concerned. But let us not mistake the matter. I do not mean to say that Paul did not pray, believe, and love more than any of us do; but he did not perform these actions in himself one whit more than we can. He says expressly, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing;" and therefore not the good thing of faith, or love, or divine communion. The Lord indeed gave Paul more faith, more hope, more prayer, more love, more spirituality of mind, a deeper insight into the kingdom of God; but mark this—if he had his greater heights, he had his greater depths; if he had his greater consolations, he had his greater afflictions; if he rose higher in Christ, he sunk deeper in self; if he knew more of the fulness of Jesus, he knew more of the nothingness of the creature; and therefore we find him confessing, "Though I be nothing." And what made him nothing? The grace of God stripping and emptying him of everything in self.

Then, when we are passing through this divine teaching, in order to learn our weakness, our miserable helplessness, our inability to perform any one spiritual action—this is the most trying, baffling, perplexing, confounding lesson which a child of God can be taught. But the grace and mercy of Christ run parallel, move side by side, with this weakness; for "His strength is made perfect;" that is, is manifested as complete, gloriously shines, triumphantly reigns, and is powerfully developed "in weakness."

It is perfect in itself, for it is the strength of God, but it is manifested as perfect in the helplessness of the creature. But what you want is *your* strength, some little strength of your own—strength to pray, strength to believe, strength to love; but no, says the Lord—"*My* strength, it must be all My own;" and that strength is made perfect in weakness.

Now when the Lord has brought a soul down to be nothing, He then makes His strength perfect in that nothingness; He communicates strength to pray, strength to believe, strength to hope, to love, to receive the gospel. Just like the poor man with the withered hand, to whom Jesus said, "Stretch forth thine hand." It was withered; he could not do it of himself. But Christ's strength was made perfect in weakness: when He spake the word, the withered hand was stretched forth, and became whole as the other. So with the dead Lazarus—he was asleep in death; but when the voice of love and power penetrated into the tomb, "Lazarus, come forth," life was made perfect in the dead corpse. So with the Old Testament worthies, who "out of weakness were made strong" (Heb. 11:34). And so, each in our measure, it is with us; our weakness, helplessness, and inability are the very things which draw forth the power, the strength, and the grace of Jesus.

When indeed a man is passing through these things he cannot see it, but he will see it afterwards. It was so with Peter. "What I do," said the Lord to him, "thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." And depend upon it, if the strength of Christ is to be made perfect in our weakness, we can never know what that strength of Christ is till we know our weakness. Thus we never pray spiritually but when we cease to pray naturally; we never preach spiritually but when we cease to preach naturally; nor can we believe, or hope, or love, or resist Satan spiritually, till we cease to do these things naturally: and when we cease to do them naturally through utter debility and prostration of strength, the Lord does them supernaturally; when the flesh, so to speak, is dead as Abraham's body, then the life of God begins to work. When man with all his powers sinks down before God as

a helpless wretch, then the Lord puts forth His hand as He did when Peter was sinking in the deep waters.

What then is the object intended by exercises, temptations and distresses to you who are passing through them? Not to destroy you, but to bring you down, and lay you low to break up creature strength, and to reduce it to perfect weakness; and, when you are brought down, to find the strength of Christ made perfect in you, His grace sufficient for you, His blood sprinkling your conscience, His righteousness justifying your person, His love comforting your heart, and His glory filling your soul. And then you will say, "Lord, I am willing to be nothing; I take pleasure in infirmities, in necessities, in reproaches, in distresses; for—mysterious, mysterious thing!—when I am weak, then am I strong."

## **The Subjection of All Things Under the Feet of Jesus**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, Nov. 28, 1858

"Thou hast put all thing in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him."  
Hebrews 2:8

In reading the Scriptures I have been struck sometimes with the peculiar interpretation which is often given by the inspired writers of the New Testament of the passages which they quote from the Old. I do not mean to say that they are not most spiritual and blessed as being beyond question the infallible interpretations of the Holy Ghost, but they certainly are not such as we should have attached to them had we drawn the meaning from them for ourselves. For instance, we find in the first chapter of this epistle, as a scriptural proof of the Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ, this passage: "I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son." Now these words were spoken in the first instance by Nathan the prophet to David in reference to the seed that he should have to sit upon his throne, and were literally fulfilled in Solomon. (2 Sam. 7:14.) We should not, except we had found it here, have had the least idea that the words were applicable to the Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that the Holy Ghost had a reference in them to that glorious truth in addition to the promise given to David to be fulfilled in his son after the flesh. Take another instance of a similar kind. In the second Psalm we find these words: "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." (Psa. 2:7.) We can well understand how these words apply to the eternal Sonship of Jesus, for as such they are quoted in the first chapter of this epistle. But we should not have understood that they had special reference also to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ unless they had been so applied by Paul: "And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their

children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." (Acts 13:32, 33.) So again, "I will put my trust in him," as quoted Heb. 2:13 from Psalm 18:2 is another instance of this peculiar interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures in the New. Should we have thought, except the apostle Paul had attached that interpretation to it, that the words were a testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ taking the flesh and blood of the children? And yet as thus quoted and applied by him we can now easily see their suitability. For does not Jesus speak in the Psalm by the mouth of David, as is evident from various passages in it? And how? As man; for it was only as man that he could trust in God. This, therefore, was a prophecy that he should become a trusting man, and as such should partake of the flesh and blood of the children.

But I do not know a more striking instance of this what we may call divine mode of interpretation than is furnished in the chapter from which our text is taken, viz., Heb. 2. I refer to the interpretation given of Psalm 8, with which no doubt you are, or at least should be, familiar. But, for the sake of clearness, I will quote its opening verses: "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Psa. 8:1, 2, 3, 4.) Now were we to read this Psalm without the interpretation given in Hebrews 2, we should most probably think that David on one occasion, going out on a starry evening, was suddenly struck with amazement at the wonders of the midnight sky, and comparing the beauty of those glorious orbs with the poor, abject condition of man, broke out into a burst of admiration at the greatness of God and the insignificance of the poor worms of dust of which he was one. It seemed to fill him with astonishment when he considered "the heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars which

he had ordained," that so great and glorious a Being as manifested by these works of his creative hand should be mindful of a creature like man, or ever condescend to visit any son of man. And yet David saw that this poor, insignificant man was made at his first creation only a little lower than the angels, and that dominion being given him over the works of God's hands, according to the declaration in Genesis (Gen. 1:28), and all things being put under his feet, God had thus crowned him with glory and honour. This, I say, would probably have been our interpretation of Psalm 8, as indeed it is the literal meaning. But the apostle in this chapter leads us far beyond any interpretation of that kind. He shows us that the Psalm had a special reference to the Lord Jesus Christ; and that the "Man" spoken of was the God-Man—human nature in union with the Person of the Son of God. Let me quote his words. The object of the apostle, you will observe, is to show the superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Mediator of the new covenant to the angels who assisted at the giving of the first covenant, as we find Stephen speaking before the council: "Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it." (Acts 7:53.) And in similar language the apostle himself speaks: "It was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator." "For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the work of thy hands. Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." (Hebrews 2:5-9.) The world (or rather age) to come means the gospel dispensation, that being the term often applied to it at the time when the apostle wrote. Looking, then, to the insignificance of human nature in itself, the mind of the psalmist was as if overwhelmed with wonder and astonishment at the contemplation

of the purpose of God so to glorify and adorn it by investing his own Son with it. If you read Hebrews 2 with a spiritual eye you will see how the apostle thus brings forward Psalm 8 in the way in which I have pointed out, and thus casts upon it a gracious and heavenly light.

Now it is in reference to a passage in that psalm that the words of our text are brought forward by the apostle; for in it the inspired composer had spoken of God putting in subjection to man all the beasts of the field and fowl of the air and all that moveth in the paths of the seas. The apostle then taking those words as his text, shows from them that God had put all things in subjection under the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ in his present glorious exaltation as the God-Man to his own right hand.

These points may appear at first sight a little obscure and difficult to understand; but I trust, with God's help and blessing, to throw upon them sufficient light to make them, as far as I can, not only a means of instructing your understanding, but of furnishing some food to your soul.

In opening up, then, the words of our text, I shall, with God's blessing,

I.—*First*, endeavour to direct your thoughts to *the humiliation* of our most blessed Lord; for without understanding his humiliation, we can have no spiritual or adequate views of his subsequent glorification.

II.—*Secondly*, to the *subjection of all things as put under his feet*.

III.—*Thirdly*, that in this matter *there is no exception*; for "in that God put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him."

IV.—*Fourthly*, that at present this subjection is *not complete*. It is begun, it is carrying on, but it is not finished: "But *now we see not yet all things put under him*."

I.—The incarnation of the Son of God is always spoken of in the inspired volume as the greatest depth of divine wisdom, the fullest display of divine power, and the highest fruit of divine love. As such therefore it is the sublimest mystery that can ever enter into the heart of man or angel on which to exercise their admiring thoughts, whether they adore the wisdom of God in designing, or his love in giving it birth, or his power in bringing it into execution. Angels therefore are represented as "desiring to look into" the heavenly mysteries of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow, as preached in the gospel by apostles and prophets "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." (1 Pet. 1:12.) There is also a remarkable passage to the same effect in the Epistle to the Ephesians. "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Eph. 3:10, 11.) Do you not see from that passage how "the manifold wisdom of God according to his eternal purpose in Christ Jesus is made known by the church unto the principalities and powers," that is the angels, "in heavenly places?" And there seems little doubt that this was intimated by the two cherubim whose faces were made to look toward the mercy seat in the ark of the testimony. (Exod. 25:18-20.)

i. Now a part of this solemn mystery of godliness, into which the very angels desire to look, is the *humiliation* of the Son of God, which I proposed first to consider.

But before we can have any adequate views of the *humiliation* of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must first view him in the glory which he had with the Father before the world was; for he had a *being with God* before the world itself had a being. He therefore appeals to his heavenly Father in that memorable prayer which he offered up before his sufferings and sacrifice: "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." (John 17:5.) But what stronger proof of this eternal being of the Son of God with the Father can there be

than the words which stand in the very front of John's gospel, as though written in letters of light to meet our eyes as we open it? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." What a divine testimony does the Holy Ghost here give by the pen of John to the being of Jesus before all worlds, and that he is God, verily and truly God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Ghost.

But not only does Scripture give unto us this and many other precious and blessed testimonies to the eternal being of the Lord Jesus Christ as a Person in the glorious Godhead, but it also sets before us in the plainest and most distinct terms his *eternal Sonship*, as the mode of his Personal subsistence in the Godhead. Now as this is a point which I consider of vital importance, and one very dear to my heart, I have long felt led strongly to insist upon it;\* and this not only on account of its own momentous importance and its connection with every branch, as well as with the very root of our most holy faith, but because the fearful error is spreading in our day of denying and attempting to overthrow this vital doctrine. Blinded by error and deceived by the father of lies, how little such men understand, or bear in mind those solemn declarations of the Holy Ghost in the inspired word, such as, "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father." (1 John 2:23.) And again, "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son." (1 John 5:9, 10.) Is it not a solemn consideration that he who believeth not the witness which God hath given of his Son maketh God a liar? And is not that also a solemn word, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life?" (1 John 5:12.)

\* It should be borne in mind, that this sermon was preached (Nov. 28, 1858) some time before I wrote and published so much upon this subject.—J.C.P.

But I will now attempt to show you, with God's blessing, some of the reasons why we should hold and adhere to the scriptural doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ with all the strength of an enlightened understanding and all the power of a believing heart.

1. First it *involves the very doctrine of the Trinity itself*. There are two errors which men hold concerning the nature of the Trinity. One is usually called "Tritheism," that is, a holding or speaking of the Trinity as if the three Persons in the Godhead were three distinct Beings or Gods. That is an error in one direction, and does away with the Unity of the Godhead. The other error in the opposite direction is called "Sabellianism," from one Sabellius, an ancient heretic, who introduced or maintained it, which is, that there are not three distinct Persons in the Godhead, but only one God under three different names. Each of these errors is deadly and fatal, for as the one denies the Unity of the Persons in one undivided Godhead, so the other denies the Trinity of Persons in that undivided Unity. Now between these two errors lies the truth, which is, that there is but one God, and yet, that in this Unity of Godhead, exists a Trinity of distinct Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. But if you deny that Christ is the eternal Son of the Father in truth and love, and yet hold, as many of these erroneous men do, the Deity of Christ, you then set up three distinct Gods instead of three distinct Persons in the Godhead; in other words, you really are a Tritheist, and so are involved in fundamental error. But when we see by the eye of faith the Father and the Son ever as the Father and the Son, and so subsisting through all eternity in a way which we can never comprehend and yet can believe, and by the same eye of faith see the Holy Ghost proceeding from the Father and the Son, and yet a divine Person in the Trinity, we hold three distinct Persons in the Godhead; and yet so bound together in the very nature of their personal Subsistence, the Father being eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal, that these three Persons are but one Jehovah in the Unity of one undivided, indivisible Essence. If you ask me to explain how this can be, and how these three distinct Persons can be but one God, or how there can be

an eternal Father, an eternal Son, and an eternal Spirit, I answer at once that I cannot. I cannot explain the nature of my own being: how then can I explain the nature of the being of God? I cannot tell how my own soul and body are united to form one man: how then can I unfold the mystery of the Unity of the three Persons of the sacred Trinity? But as I believe that I have a soul, though I cannot tell how it is united to my body, from the inward testimony of my own being, so I believe, from the testimony of God in the word, and from the internal testimony of the blessed Spirit in my heart, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of the Father in truth and love, and was so from all eternity.

2. Again, to deny the eternal Sonship of Jesus overthrows the grand *distinguishing feature of God's love to the Church*. What read we in John 3? "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16.) There the love of God is set forth as constraining him, so to speak, to give up his only begotten Son. But if Christ be not his only begotten Son, where is God's love in giving him up? Have I not quoted the very words of Jesus himself, and did not *he* know the mystery of his own generation? Has not then the word "only begotten" in *his* mouth peculiar force? And surely if God gave "his only begotten Son," he must have been his only begotten Son *before* he gave him. Did God's love precede his gift, or did his gift precede his love? Did God's giving his Son make him his Son, or was he a Son antecedent to, and independent of God's giving him? Thus this one text is sufficient to decide the whole matter, if men could or would but receive God's own testimony. But take another text of a similar character: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10.) Here the gift of the Son is spoken of as the fruit of God's love. If then he be not his Son, and were not his Son before this gift, what and where is that love? Its very proof at once is gone, and with it the love of God quite overthrown. He is also said to be sent to be "the propitiation for our sins," which involves his Deity, for it was that only which made his bloodshedding and death a propitiatory sacrifice. How much then

is involved in this doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ. Again, we read, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32.) Here the love of God is set forth as being so great that he even *spared* not "his own Son." But if he had not been his *own* Son, his real, true, and proper Son, where is the force of that Scripture? where the nature and value of the gift? If the Son of God be merely a Son by adoption, by virtue of the covenant, by the assumption of our nature in the womb of the Virgin Mary, where is all that wondrous depth of love which constrained the Father not even to spare his own Son, but to deliver him up for us all? Surely he was "his own Son" *before* he delivered him up for us. Thus, by denying that the Lord Jesus Christ is God's *own* Son, that is, his Son by nature, you strike a blow not merely at the Trinity but at the love of God also in the gift of his dear Son, virtually deny propitiation by his blood, and thus overthrow the gospel of the Lord Jesus root and branch. Therefore whatever you do, cleave with all the strength of your mind and heart to that grand truth which shines as with a ray of light all through the Scriptures, that Jesus is the true, proper, and only begotten Son of God. Unless you believe that he is the Son of God, nay more, unless you receive him into your soul as the Son of God, you have no eternal life; and if you go out of life without believing in his name and receiving him as the Son of God into your heart, where he is you will never come. You will see him on his great white throne, but to your eternal dismay; you will see his face covered with a most awful frown, and he will banish you from his presence into an abyss of endless woe, with these words, "I never knew you; depart from me ye that work iniquity." (Matt. 7:23.) But "whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God;" and it is this alone which will give "boldness in the day of judgment." (1 John 4:15-17.)

ii. Having then seen a little of the glory of Christ as the eternal Son of God, we will now look at his *humiliation*.

1. When and where did his humiliation begin? It was at his

incarnation. I have often thought of a passage in the Prayer Book, though older probably than the Prayer Book by a thousand years, in what is called the "Te Deum:" "When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man, thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb." There is much truth and beauty in that expression of the ancient Church. It was there that he took flesh, as the angel assured Mary. "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35.) Here then is the grand distinction between our generation and the conception of the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. In earthly generation there needs must be sin; for a sinful father cannot but beget a sinful child; but there was no sin in the conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary of the human nature of Jesus under the operation of the Holy Ghost: for he sanctified that portion of her flesh which the Lord took by that act and in that very moment. Thus, though the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ in both body and soul was like our own in all points, sin excepted, yet there was in neither any speck, spot, or blemish, because conceived in a supernatural way under the operation of the Holy Ghost. O what a mystery, that the Lord Jesus should be complete man, and yet man without spot or wrinkle; possessing all the faculties of manhood, both in body and soul; as complete a man as any of us, and yet not as we are, stained and defiled by original and actual sin, but possessed of a pure humanity which he united in the very act of conception to his own eternal Godhead. This is the great mystery of godliness, "God manifest in the flesh;" this is the mystery which angels adore, and the contemplation of which will be heaven's eternal joy.

2. Now in taking this nature, Christ voluntarily "descended into the lower parts of the earth," that is, he took the lowest condition man could take. He did not take our nature so as to travel in the highest walks of life; to sit as a king upon his throne, surrounded with pageantry and power. But "he took the form of a servant" and assumed the lowly guise of the son of a mechanic; for

Joseph, his reputed father, exercised the trade of a carpenter, and it is supposed that in his early days the Lord Jesus wrought with him at the same occupation. At least, it was reproachfully said of him, "Is not this the carpenter?" (Mark 6:3.) But whether so or not, and it is no indignity to the Lord Jesus to suppose that he did, certainly when he assumed his ministry he went out himself as he afterwards sent his disciples without purse or scrip, having no property of his own, but living upon alms. We therefore read that "Joanna" and others "ministered unto him of their substance." (Luke 8:3.) Nay he himself said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." (Matt. 8:20.) You, or some of you, may have to travel far and long in poverty's vale; may have hard work at times even to obtain the bread that perisheth for yourselves and families; and being deeply tried by these providential afflictions, may often mourn the hardness of your lot, and secretly envy the prosperity of others. But what an example of patient endurance of poverty's rugged lot have you set before your eyes in the Lord Jesus Christ! Surely you are not yet so poor as he was. You have a place where to lay your head, a bed to lie down on all night, and do not live upon alms, ministered to you by the hands of others. Surely, then, though your appointed lot may be amongst "the poor of this world, rich in faith, you are not sunk so low, even in outward poverty, as your blessed Redeemer." And surely it is for your good that you are walking in that path. The Lord of life and glory chose it for his own, and shall you murmur because he has chosen it for you?

3. But look again at another feature of the humiliation of the Lord Jesus. The prophet describes him as "despised and rejected of men;" *a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*. He adds also, "Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." His tender, feeling heart was ever suffering; for there was no form of human sorrow which did not touch his sympathising soul. We therefore find it recorded: "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." (Matt. 9:36.)

4. He also had, as the apostle speaks, "to endure the contradiction of sinners against himself" (Heb. 12:3); so that on one occasion his righteous soul was even moved with holy anger, "being grieved at the hardness of their hearts." (Mark 3:5.) What humiliation in the Son of God, to be thus opposed as well as scorned by the proud Scribes and Pharisees, and his words of truth and grace wrested into occasion of accusation against him.

5. But the greatest instance of humiliation in the blessed Lord was, as the apostle speaks, in his becoming "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross;" for this includes all his sufferings of body and soul, when he was made a propitiation for sin. It was then chiefly at the last that the Lord came into those floods of suffering, under which he cried, "I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me." (Psa. 69:2.) O how sin pressed him down in the gloomy garden, when the sweat and blood fell thickly (it is in the original "large drops," or "clots") from his surcharged brow! What humiliation as well as suffering were his when he stood before the council, and afterwards in Pilate's judgment hall; when spit upon, buffeted, and his back mangled with stripes; when sunk below the rudest soldier and the lowest servant when Pilate sentenced him to be crucified. What humiliation when he was condemned to endure that most cruel and ignominious death—a death which none but slaves and the worst of malefactors ever suffered. And what humiliation and what depths of suffering when the sentence was actually executed. But it was not the mere bodily agony of the cross, it was not the mere pain, though most acute and severe, of the nails driven through his sacred hands and feet. It was not the being stretched upon the cross six hours that constituted the chief part of the Redeemer's suffering. As a proof of this, he never gave a sigh under his bodily agony; for "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." But it was the almost intolerable load of imputed sin—the imputed sins of millions; it was the tremendous discharge of the wrath of God into his holy soul; it was the hiding of his Father's face, and as the bitter consequence the very pangs

of hell that there caught hold of him. You may have experienced some small measure of the wrath of God, and had your soul tortured by the weight of sin and guilt pressing upon you. This may give you some feeble idea of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ under the wrath of God when he drank the cup of his indignation to the very dregs. In fact, unless Deity had supported the humanity of the Lord Jesus, he must have sunk under the weight. A millionth part of what Jesus suffered upon the cross would burst the soul and body of any man asunder. But as it was the power of Deity that sustained his human nature in the Mount of Transfiguration, so it was the power of Deity that supported that same nature upon the cross. And O what a glorious fruit and issue of atoning blood and dying love! There he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; there he defeated Satan; and through death destroyed him that had the power of death. (Heb. 2:14.) There he reconciled the Church unto God, washed her from her sins in his own blood, and so to speak held her up triumphantly before the eyes of his Father without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. O blessed, thrice blessed are our souls if we have an interest, a clear and manifest interest in that precious blood; if our vile, dreadful, and horrible sins were then laid upon our suffering Surety, and he washed them all in his most precious blood. Here is all our hope, for there is no other sacrifice for sin but this, no other propitiation, no other expiation, no other atonement. If then we have no interest, no lot or part in this atoning sacrifice of the Lord the Lamb, what and where are we? Guilty sinners, exposed to the wrath of God as a consuming fire.

II.—But we pass on to show the *exaltation* of the Lord Jesus in the *subjection of all things* under his feet.

We have viewed him in his humiliation; we have seen him at the cross, beheld his atoning blood, and heard his expiring voice. Now then let us look at him as raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the Father. And you will observe, that he is exalted not only to the throne of dignity but to the throne of *power*. "*Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet.*" This exaltation was the promised reward of his humiliation. This is

clearly put before us by the apostle, when having shown us how Jesus "humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," he adds, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth." (Phil. 2:9, 10.) This was a part of the "joy set before him for which he endured the cross, despising the shame." (Heb. 12:2.) In the verse therefore following our text, the apostle says, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour." Thus his exaltation consists mainly in two things: 1. First, that God has crowned him with glory and honour; 2. Secondly, that he has put all things in subjection under his feet. The last is that which we have here chiefly to consider. The figure is taken from the practice of ancient conquerors, as we find Joshua bringing the five kings of the Amorites out of the cave, and bidding the captains of the men of war to put their feet upon their necks. And I remember to have seen a representation of a picture, still existing in one of the Egyptian tombs, of a conqueror putting his feet upon the necks of those whom he had vanquished. Thus when we read in the text, "Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet," the meaning is, that all things are submitted to the sovereign command of the Lord Jesus Christ at the right hand of the Father. Let us then look at some of these things. How comprehensive the expression; what a wide scope it affords for thought. But time and opportunity only allow me to hint at a few of them.

1. First, *all persons*, from the Queen upon the throne to the pauper in the Union workhouse, are put in subjection under Christ's feet. The Queen's throne is not her own. She is only there because Jesus has put her there, and will only be there as long as he sees fit. We see men high in power and place, the rulers of our land, to whom we owe subjection, as powers ordained of God, on the same gospel principle as we owe honour and loyalty to our Queen. But who gives them that power? Who exalts them to that authority? The Lord Jesus Christ. He is Sovereign king over them all. Now if this be true, and it must be so unless the word of God

be false, how it represents men of every station, rank, and degree as completely subject to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. They cannot move hand or foot, except by his sovereign good pleasure; and to lift up a hand against him, is to lift up a hand against that Sovereign, who, with one frown, could crush them into the very dust. Now could we carry about with us a realising sense of this Sovereign supremacy of Jesus, how little we should fear the face of man. We should still render to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour (Rom. 13:7); but we should stand in slavish fear to no man. You may have those placed in worldly circumstances over you, who seem not only to have the will but the power sadly to oppress you. Need you fear them if you are one of the Lord's? Why need you fear the face of any man? Look around you; view your oppressor; look him fairly and steadfastly in the face. Need you fear his frown, or blench before his angry look? Is he not, with all other men, put in subjection under the feet of Christ? Could he lift up a hand against you, except the Lord Jesus Christ gave him permission? Can he go a single step beyond the will and intention of the Lord Jesus Christ? He cannot. Fear not then the face of the oppressor: he has no power against you, except so far as the Lord Jesus Christ gives him power; and that power he will never suffer him to exert to do you any real harm. I can speak here from experience; for I remember on one occasion being much afraid of one high in power who could have done me, and indeed threatened to do me serious injury. But before the appointed day came for my coming before him, he was in his grave. And O how sweet were those words made to me, "Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?" (Isai. 51:12.)

2. But again, as all persons are subject unto his authority, so *all things* are equally subject to his almighty power. There may be circumstances in your earthly lot which at this moment are peculiarly trying. You look round and wonder how this or that circumstance will terminate. At present it looks very dark; clouds and mists hang over it, and you fear lest these clouds may break,

not in showers upon your head, as Cowper speaks in his hymn, but burst forth in the lightning flash and the thunder stroke. But all things, and if all things then this circumstance also that fills your mind with apprehension, are put in subjection under Christ's feet. The thing cannot take place except by his sovereign will, nor can it move any further except by his supreme disposal. Then make yourself quiet; he will not suffer you to be harmed. It shall only execute his sovereign purposes, and it shall be amongst those all things which, according to his promise, shall work together for your good.

3. But all *trials* are also put in subjection under him. Many are the trials of the righteous, for we read, "The Lord trieth the righteous" (Psa. 11:5); and if the Lord himself try them, how can you escape if you are one of the righteous nation which keepeth the truth? (Isai. 26:2.) But none of these trials come upon them by chance. They are all appointed in weight and measure, are all designed to fulfil a certain end; and however painful they may at present be, yet they are intended for your good. When the trial comes upon you, what a help it would be for you if you could view it thus: "This trial is sent for my good; it does not spring out of the dust; the Lord himself is the supreme disposer of it; for I am sure it could not come without his sending or permission. It is very painful to bear; but let me look up to him who sits at God's right hand; let me believe that he has appointed me this peculiar trial; it is in subjection under his feet with every other circumstance. He will bring about his own will therein, and remove the trial, or give me patience under it, and submission to it." You may be afflicted by sickness. It is not by chance that such or such sickness visits your body; that the Lord sees fit to afflict head, heart, chest, liver, hand, foot, or any other part of your body. If all things are put in subjection under him, has he exempted sickness and disease? Whatever you suffer in bodily disease, if you can but believe that it is put in subjection under his feet, and that he appoints and arranges it for your good, it will give you resignation to his holy and almighty will.

4. Again, if all things are put in subjection under him, then are *all*

*temptations* also put under his feet. Do we not read? "And the God of peace shall bruise (*margin* "tread") Satan under your feet shortly." (Rom. 16:20.) And why under your feet, but because Satan and with him all his temptations are put under Jesus' feet as your risen and exalted Head? How sweet to see and feel this. Your path may at present be a path of great temptation; snares of the most dangerous and most deceitful kind may be laid for your feet in various directions; Satan may be allowed to assault your soul with all his infernal arts and arms. You may have a sad conflict with the vile lusts of your depraved nature, and feel that you have as many sins alive in your heart as there are hairs upon your head. But are not these things put in subjection under his feet? Would it be true that God has put *all* things under his feet if temptations were omitted? Is it not expressly said of our gracious Lord? "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." (Heb. 2:18.) And again, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Cor. 10:13.) "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations" (2 Pet. 2: 9); and we are told, that "Blessed is the man that endureth temptations," so that you are bidden even to count it all joy when you fall into them. (James 1:1, 12.) Can Satan tempt you a single point beyond the Lord's permission? How was it with Job, when Satan was allowed to tempt him? Did not God fix the exact length of Satan's tether when he said, "Touch not his life?" He was allowed to destroy all his property, to sweep off all his children at a stroke, to smite him with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown, and, what was worse, to fill his carnal mind with the most horrid suggestions to blaspheme God and die. But he could not touch his life, either natural or spiritual, or drive him to blaspheme God, though he so far prevailed as to make him curse the day of his birth. "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further," the Lord virtually said to him, "and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." (Job 38:11.) So with you: if indeed you are the Lord's, whatever temptations you may have to endure, they can never touch your life; for that is "hid with Christ in God"—safely

lodged in his heart and hands who reigns supreme in power and glory.

5. So with your *afflictions* also. They too are put under the feet of Jesus. You may think at times how hardly you are dealt with; mourning, it may be, under family bereavements, sorrowing after the loss of your household treasures, a beloved husband, wife, or child; or you may be sorely fretting in your own soul under such afflictions of body and mind, as you could not disclose even to your nearest friend; or you may be even, what is worst of all, murmuring and rebelling against the Lord himself. But O that you could bear in mind that all your afflictions, be they what they may, are put under the feet of Jesus, so that, so to speak, not one can crawl from under his feet but by his permission, and, like chidden hounds, they crawl again beneath them at a word of command from his lips.

III.—But I pass on to our third point, which is to show, that in putting all things in subjection under the feet of Jesus, God *left nothing that is not put under him*.

The apostle seems to add these words as if he would, to use a familiar expression, clinch the nail. A person might say, for instance, "Well, I do believe in a general way that all things are put in subjection under Jesus' feet; but when I take a survey of all the various, I might say, immense and complicated circumstances of this world, I find it very difficult to raise my faith up to that point to believe that every individual thing, through the whole complicated series of human events, is under his positive, immediate, and direct control." Now the apostle meets that difficulty not by explaining it, but by enlarging more fully on his previous declaration. He adds, therefore, these decisive words: "In that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him." It is worth observing the stress and authority which he lays upon God's word. That is his ultimatum—the word of a king, from which there is no appeal. Receive it as fully as he does and your unbelief will stop her mouth. But you may look round and ask, as if still unconvinced, "If so, why do the ungodly

prosper? Why is sin permitted to go to such awful lengths in the world, and to run down our streets unchecked like water? Why are the children of God so oppressed? Why is true religion so hated? And why, if Jesus is so supreme in authority and power, is Satan allowed to carry the chief sway?" I fully grant, that many of the saints of God have been puzzled and perplexed upon these points, and have been scarcely able to answer them to their own satisfaction or to that of others. I fully admit, that one would have thought, reasoning naturally, if the Lord Jesus Christ were at God's right hand, and all things put in subjection under his feet, matters would not be as they are, either in the church or in the world. We should not see saints slip and fall and bring reproach on the cause of God and truth; we should not see hypocrites so abounding in churches and congregations; we should not see the truth despised and hated, and error patronised and loved; we should not see the enemies of truth rejoice, and the friends of Jesus mourn: we should not see in this so-called Christian nation sins only to be paralleled by heathens and savages, and the gospel only known and professed by a few despised and outcast people. Reasoning naturally, should we not say, "How can Jesus be at God's right hand, and all things put in subjection under his feet, yet such evils prevail, and so little good be accomplished? As Lord of all, why does he not cause the gospel to be preached more truthfully, widely, and successfully? Why are not more called out of darkness into light? Why does he not make us really what we are nominally, a Christian nation? Why should he have so few to serve and glorify him, and they so feebly and imperfectly?" These questions, and numberless others of a similar nature, may suggest themselves to a reasoning mind: but the apostle meets all such inquiries with this pointed declaration: "In that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him." We shall presently see another explanation which he gives; but for the present, he beats down all such inquiries by bringing down upon them the hammer of God's word—the full force of God's own positive declaration. Then, reason, be still if thou canst, hold thy peace, and allow faith to come forth and submit to the word of truth. But even look at it thus. If all things were not put under the feet of Jesus, would

this world be habitable? Would not men rend and tear each other to pieces like wild beasts? Could the saints of God dwell in this vale of tears for a single day, had Satan full dominion, surrounded as they are by the most deadly enemies, and hated by all the malice of the wicked one? No, their enemies would swallow them up, the gospel be uprooted, the ministers of truth silenced, and darkness and heathenism spread over the land; nor would there be a single saint of God left upon earth, for such a storm of persecution would break out against them as would sweep every one away. Let us then hold fast this truth, for on it depends so much of our comfort, that, in putting all things under the feet of Jesus, God left nothing which was not put under him.

IV.—But we pass on to our fourth and last point, and one which, as I just hinted, may furnish an answer to some of those inquiries which naturally suggest themselves to a reasoning mind: "*We see not yet all things put under him.*"

i. The same difficulty met the apostle's eye as meets yours and mine. He saw that, viewed by the eye of sense, all things were not put visibly under Jesus, though they were actually; that sin still reigned in high places; that persecution still raged against the saints of God; that this was still a disordered world, presenting little outward evidence that the Lord of heaven and earth was exercising supreme government in and over it. He therefore directs our eyes to a future day. "*We see not yet all things put under him.*" The day is coming when it will be seen by all that "all power is given unto Jesus in heaven and in earth." (Matt. 28:18.) A day is coming when the world shall acknowledge his power and his sway; when there will be a universal reign of righteousness, and it shall be seen by men upon earth as well as by saints in heavenly bliss that all things are put under his feet. It may seem hard to believe this, and many will not believe it: But what has God said? and let God be true and every man a liar. "As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord" (Num. 14:21); and again, "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Isa. 11:9.) How do the waters cover the sea? In whole or in part? So to fulfil the promise

must the knowledge of the Lord one day wholly fill the earth. But that day is not yet come, nor do we know when it will come.

ii. But take another view of the words. Look at them experimentally. Take them as applicable to the various circumstances which continually meet your eye, and especially to the trials that your mind is continually exercised with. Is it not true in this point of view, that though all things are virtually put in subjection under Jesus' feet, yet "we see not yet all things actually put under him?"

1. You may, for instance, be in very trying circumstances as regards *Providence*. These trying circumstances are put in subjection under his feet, but as yet you do not see it. A cloud is over your eyes; unbelief dims your view; and you see not yet that those circumstances which are so trying are under his feet who rules all things. You have proved it so in times past; but as regards your present trial you do not yet see it in subjection to his sovereign sway as managed by him for your good.

2. Or it may be that you are now passing through some very painful and severe *trial* under which you groan, being burdened, nor have you any present evidence that the Lord Jesus is managing that trial for you. Your oppression, or persecution, or family trial, or church trouble, you do not yet see put under his feet. It is still too much upon your own shoulders; it is still too much carried, and that very ineffectually, by your own strengths. But is not this to try your faith? Is it not that you may wait and watch the Lord's hand? And by and by you will see that very circumstance, which seems now almost to escape his notice, put under the Lord's feet. Your oppressor may have still power and even increasing power over you; you may lose a good situation, be deprived of your lawful right, and what you have a fair claim to; be prevented from rising as you ought to rise in a house of business were fair measures carried out: be defeated in your attempts to gain a honest livelihood, and every plan of yours crossed and thwarted. And under all this you may murmur, fret, and rebel that these things are permitted, and that these adverse

circumstances are not yet put under Jesus' feet. But you shall see it. The day will come, and it may be before long, for this painful mystery to be cleared up. You may hear the church bell toll and be one to carry the coffin of your oppressor to the cemetery. You may look into his grave or see his name on a tombstone, and say, "There lies my cruel enemy. What and where is he now who sometimes made me fairly tremble? A heap of dust." So with your afflictions. This affliction of yours that does not at present seem to be one of the things that the Lord is managing for you, you will one day see put under his feet. And you will also see that it was as much under his feet when you did not see it as when you do. And you will then see how it worked together for your good what submission it wrought in you to the divine will: what prayer was offered up in and by it: what searchings of heart it led to: what promises were applied to your soul in and under it to which you were previously a stranger; and what strength was given to endure the affliction even when it pressed the hardest. Then you will see that it was even then put under his feet, and that nothing but your unbelief prevented you seeing it.

3. But you complain, and justly, that your sins are not yet put under his feet. These are your greatest burdens. Pride, lust, covetousness, carnality, and a host of other evils, how they oppress you! You would if you could take these sins and put them under Jesus' feet, saying, "Lord, trample them down, that I may never feel their hateful workings more. O take them and put them under thy feet! O tread them down into the very dust that they may never rise out of their ashes to plague me more!" And yet you see them not yet under his feet. Your lusts still work; pride, covetousness, carnality are still alive and lively. You see them not yet put under his feet, but you will see them. The Lord will crucify the flesh and subdue all your iniquities as well as pardon all your sins, for that is his promise.

4. Or the *temptations* you are assailed by, which seem to gather fresh strength and become stronger instead of weaker; or perhaps some old temptation that you have been freed from for months or weeks, but which now has risen again, like a phoenix

from its ashes, stronger than ever: you see not yet this temptation put under his feet. But does it not give more room for prayer that it may be put under his feet? more reason to abhor yourself in dust and ashes? Or may it not be instrumental in crushing that hydra-headed monster of self-righteousness in you with its seven necks; or the means of bringing you to a spot you were never brought to before, for your mouth to be stopped and you to become guilty before God? Or may it not bring you down to feel that indeed you are the chief of sinners and less than the least of all saints? But you see not yet the temptation put under his feet. But it will be so, when it has done its work, has let out the life-blood of self-righteousness, and convinced you that nothing but his rich, free, and superabounding grace can save your guilty soul.

5. So also may we apply the words to all *circumstances* which may occur in Providence or grace; however dark or mysterious now, whatever dismal line they may wear, however the riddle cannot be read by human reason or explained by yourself or others, whatever mystery may envelop the Lord's present dealings with your soul, it will be seen by and by still to be one of those things which are put under the feet of Jesus.

Do you not wish to be there? To lie at his feet,—is not that your coveted posture? Is there a better posture than that? Yes, there is one: to lie in his bosom. But do not despair of help or hope if you are but made willing to lie at his feet. Are you not willing that he should put under his feet everything opposed to his grace and his glory? Are you not willing that your sins, your lusts, your temptations should all be put under his feet who reigns and rules above? And are you not willing and more than willing that he should be your Lord and King, bear the chief sway, guide you with his counsel, and afterwards receive you to glory? (Psa. 73:24.) Can you have a believing heart in your bosom and not be thus minded? Can the Lord the Spirit have begun and is carrying on a sacred work upon your soul and you not be made willing to lie at the feet of the Lord—not to be willing that he should put his feet upon the neck of his enemies and your enemies? Do you

want any King but Jesus as your spiritual King? We owe all loyalty to our Queen: she has not a more loyal subject than myself. But we have a spiritual King to whom we owe spiritual allegiance, to whom we give what we give to no earthly monarch—the affections of our spiritual mind. Do we then want any one to reign over us but Jesus? We say, "Lord, take us and make us wholly thine. We would be thine here on earth as well as thine hereafter in heaven. Only give us now and then as we struggle through the wilderness a look of love, a cheering word; apply to our heart a comforting promise, and give us a blessed testimony that as we are suffering with thee here, we shall be glorified with thee hereafter. Lord, enable us to believe, to hope and to love, to struggle on through this vale of tears, not giving way to sin or Satan, but ever seeking to know thy will and do it, and ever desiring that thou shouldst be our Lord and God, be the strength of our heart below and our portion for ever above."

## **SUBSTANCE THE INHERITANCE OF THE SAINTS**

Preached on Lord's Day Morning, July 12th, 1840, at Zoar Chapel,  
Great Alie Street, London

"I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment; that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures." Prov. 8:20, 21

The word "Wisdom" occurs very frequently in the Proverbs of Solomon. And we find on several occasions that Wisdom is represented as addressing herself to the children of men; in other words, she speaks as if she were a person. For instance, in the beginning of this chapter: "Doth not Wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths; she 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. 8:1-4). And so in the latter part of the first chapter of this book: "Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets; she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates; in the city she uttereth her words" (Prov. 1:20, 21). Now this is no poetical or oratorical personification of wisdom; I mean as orators and poets sometimes personify qualities—that is, represent them as persons, and put into their mouths such language as persons only can utter. Nor is it Christ's pre-existing human soul that here speaks under the name of Wisdom. The dream of the Pre-existarians is utterly and directly contrary to the truth of God; and those that are wrapped up in this delusion found much of their argument upon this eighth chapter of the Proverbs of Solomon. I call it a delusion, and a dangerous delusion too, because it strikes at the very root of the atonement. For if Christ's human soul existed before the foundation of the world, then that human soul of Christ was never under the law; but we read that "He was made of a woman, *made under the law.*" But if that soul existed before that law was given, there could be no subsequent, *ex post facto* operation of the law upon

that soul; and if it was never under the law, then Christ never could have wrought out the righteousness demanded by the law; and therefore it strikes a deadly blow at Christ's righteousness and Christ's atonement. And this is the case with all errors and heresies; Satan will never introduce a trifling error into the Church—his object is to strike a covert, secret blow at a grand fundamental doctrine; and therefore he will bring forward these errors and heresies in such a masked way that men shall scarcely see their tendency, and yet their real aim shall be to strike at some of those fundamental doctrines, on which depend all the hope and salvation of the Church.

Nor, again, does Wisdom here represent God abstractedly; it does not represent Jehovah speaking merely as being the only wise God.

What, then, does it represent? If it represents neither wisdom poetically personified, nor Christ's pre-existing human soul, nor Jehovah abstractedly considered, what does it signify?

Why, I believe it signifies the Head of the Church, speaking in His covenant relationship—the second Person of the glorious Trinity, who "of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." And if we look at Wisdom as representing the Son of God standing up in the eternal councils as the Head and representative of His Church and people, we shall see what harmony and beauty are thrown upon all that He utters in this relationship. For instance: "The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water," and so on; "then I was by Him, as One brought up with Him; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him; rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth, and My delights were with the sons of men." How aptly and sweetly does this represent the Head of the Church in His covenant relation—the Son of God who was in time to take flesh, Him that was in time to take a perfect human body and a perfect

human soul, viewed and looked upon in the eternal councils as the covenant Head of His Church and people, and as such delighting in them!

It is the Son of God, then, as "made unto us wisdom," that speaks in these words. And now, having seen who the Person is that speaks, our ears may be more open to hear what this gracious Person utters.

What then does He say? "I lead in the way of righteousness in the midst of the paths of judgment; that I may cause those that love Me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures."

I. The covenant Head of His Church, then, is here represented as "*leading*" His people; as the good shepherd that goes before his sheep and leads them step by step. We cannot move a single step without Him; only so far as He is pleased to guide us step by step and foot by foot into the way of eternal life, have we any wisdom, strength, or power to walk therein.

"I lead in the way of righteousness." These words are applicable to His blessed work in the soul, whereby He leads each one whom He is pleased to quicken into eternal life into "the way of righteousness." We will, with God's blessing, then see how He leads them, and into what He leads them.

1. We will commence with the first beginnings of His work upon the soul; for in the very first commencement of His work upon the heart it is true that "He leads in the way of righteousness." And how does He first "lead in the way of righteousness?" By opening up the righteousness of God's holy law, and thus leading the soul into the law. He leads the soul into "the way of righteousness;" which way of strict unerring righteousness is in the law. For the law requires perfection; the law demands unwavering, unflinching obedience; the law is "exceeding broad," and takes cognizance of every thought of the heart, word of the mouth, and action of the life. As long as this law is in the mere letter of it, as long as it stands written upon the tables of stone, it affects us not; we are, as the apostle says, "alive"—("I was alive

without the law once"); that is, we are not yet killed by it, not yet brought in guilty, not yet slaughtered, so as to fall down at the feet of God, seeking His mercy. But the way in which Jesus, as the "Wisdom" of His people, leads them at first, is by leading them into the righteousness of the law. He says, "I lead in the way of righteousness;" that is, He leads them into the law by opening up to their astonished minds its length, and breadth, and height, and depth, its holy requisitions, its eternal sanctions, its awful curse, its devouring flame. Thus He leads them into this "way of righteousness;" He opens up this strict unerring righteousness to their heart and conscience, and shows them that they are guilty, and unable to do that which the law demands.

Now this work upon the soul does not in all cases amount to the same depth of conviction. It is not always carried on with the same terrors; nor is the soul, under the application of this righteous law to the conscience, always plunged into the same depth of anguish and trouble. We can chalk out no regular path of this nature; we cannot say that the convictions shall be so deep, or that the convictions shall be so long. But this we can say—that they must be so deep as to go down to the root; and that they must be so long as to do the work in an effectual manner; but how deep and how long must be left to the unerring wisdom of God. This experience must be wrought with power in every quickened soul—that the mouth should be stopped, and that it should become guilty before God. If the mouth is not stopped, if the soul is not become guilty, if every hope is not cut off, if every prop is not gone, if every rag of righteousness is not cast away as a filthy thing, the law has not done its work; and it must go on extending itself, and widening itself, and spreading its deep roots in the heart, until that work is effectually done. We may illustrate this by a natural figure. We must all die; that sentence passed on Adam must take place in the body of every one of us; but is that sentence executed on every person in the same way? Some are cut down with a raging fever, others linger long under a wasting consumption; some are ill for years before they drop into the grave, and some are cut off in the space of a few days. But all die; they are all brought to the same place; they are all confined

in the same narrow tomb. Thus with the law in its effects upon quickened consciences. All the vessels of mercy must be killed by the law; all must be brought to have no hope, no help, and no strength; but we cannot lay down the precise mode, nor fix the uniform manner, in which every quickened soul has that death inflicted upon it. As the apostle speaks, "We had the sentence of death in ourselves;" but we cannot say how sharp this sentence of death may be, nor how long in taking place. I am always more anxious to know to what spot the soul is brought, than to know the road by which it has come. The grand thing to look to is, not so much causes, as effects; not so much the tree itself, as the fruit which that tree produces. If we see the soul brought down into nothing, and being nothing but a mass of sin and guilt—if that is really and experimentally felt—shall we question the work merely because the path has not been set up by our line, rule, and compass, and not chalked out in that particular way in which God was pleased to lead some of us?

Jesus, then, leads His people *first* into "the way of righteousness," by leading them, through the Spirit's teaching, into an acquaintance with the spirituality and requisitions of this holy, strict, and condemning law.

2. But this righteousness the creature never could fulfil. Nothing less than a perfect unwavering obedience to it can satisfy its demands. And therefore Wisdom leads also in the way of righteousness by leading the soul into an experimental knowledge of Him who has rendered this obedience, who has wrought out this perfect righteousness. And as He, and He only, can lead the soul step by step into the length and breadth and depth and height of the law, so can He and He only lead the soul into the length and breadth and depth and height of His own glorious righteousness, for He says, "I lead in the way of righteousness." And how does He lead it? By casting a mysterious light into the soul to see what the Word of God has revealed; and shedding abroad a mysterious power in the heart, whereby faith is created to receive, lay hold of, and credit that which God has made known. We may read the Word of God for ever in vain, unless

that Word is made life and light to our souls; and therefore it profits us nothing merely to read in the Word of God, "This is the name whereby He shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness;" but when the Lord the Spirit, whose covenant office and work it is to take of the things of Jesus and reveal them to the heart, sheds a mysterious and blessed light upon those scriptures which speak of Jesus as the law-fulfiller, as having brought in a glorious righteousness, as having finished the work which the Father gave Him to do—when He is pleased to shed forth on these scriptures a blessed and mysterious light, and at the same moment raise up faith and power in the heart to receive, credit, embrace, lay hold of, and handle that which He has thus revealed in the letter of the Word—then by His own persuasive power He leads the soul "in the way of righteousness." And O! what a wonderful way it is!—that God should ever find out such a way, as to make all His people righteous by imputing to them another's righteousness! It will be the wonder of all eternity; it will be the theme of the song of the saints through countless ages; it will exhaust all the depths of their finite wisdom to look into these secrets of wisdom, love, and power. Yea, the angels themselves, who so far exceed men in wisdom, are represented as "desiring to look into" these things; and therefore when the ark was made, and the mercy-seat put over the tables which were inclosed therein, the seraphim were framed as looking down upon this golden mercy-seat, representing how the height and breadth and length and depth of these mysteries overpass even the faculties of the angels themselves.

But He leads the soul "*in* this way of righteousness." It is not merely "walking round about Zion, and telling the towers thereof;" it is not as I might walk round some palace, and admire the harmonious proportions of the building; but it is being led into it—into the personal experience of it, into a rich acquaintance with it, into the sweet enjoyment of it. It is this which sweetly satisfies the soul; and nothing but this can satisfy it. Before petitioners are admitted into the presence of the king, there are ante-chambers and many rooms to pass; but he that is brought into the interior of the building will be led step by step and

chamber by chamber into the presence of the king himself. Many poor doubting and fearing souls have but (as it were) just got their feet within the threshold; and they see perhaps others introduced into the presence of the king; and as the chamberlain opens the doors, their eye can catch a glimpse of the glittering apartment, and perhaps even of the person of the king himself; but the door is shut, their turn is not yet come. By this faint gleam, however, they have seen enough of "the king in his beauty" to ravish their hearts; and they are longing for the time when they shall be admitted into his presence. We read of the Lord opening in "the valley of Achor a door of hope;" and so His own dear family, before they are led into the rich enjoyment of these things, so as to see the King and admire His beauty, are led step by step, and have to wait their turn and bide their time, before they are enabled to fall down at His feet, wash them with the tears of their eyes, wipe them with the hairs of their head, and clasp Him as their all in all.

3. But again; whenever the Lord works by His Spirit in the soul, He implants sincerity and godly uprightness; and a man's religion is rotten at the root if there be not sincerity and godly uprightness in his heart. Now these are not the fruits of nature; for "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Jesus, then, leads His people "in the way of righteousness" by implanting this spirit of uprightness in them, this spirit of simplicity and godly sincerity. Thus He not only makes them righteous externally, by the imputation of His glorious righteousness; but He makes them righteous internally, by the communication of a righteous nature. "The king's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold." Here we have this double righteousness. The "clothing of wrought gold" is the external robe of righteousness, which Jesus wrought upon earth and finished on Calvary; and she is "glorious within," by having the implantation of a principle of uprightness, sincerity, godly fear, and that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." He leads the soul, then, "in the way of righteousness," by making it sincere and upright before Himself, before the Church, and before the world. He makes us sincere in our prayers, sincere

in our searching of the Word, sincere in our communion with His family, sincere in the words that drop from our lips, sincere in the actions which we have daily to transact, sincere in all the various relations of life, sincere before Him, as looking to One who "searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins."

In these several ways, then, does Wisdom—that is, the Son of God "made wisdom" as the covenant Head of His Church and people—"lead in the way of righteousness."

II. "I lead in the way of righteousness, *in the midst of the paths of judgment.*" Those that I have mentioned are not the only lessons that Jesus has to teach. Some conceive that all the teachings of the blessed Spirit are teachings of consolation. This is an error. "Blessed is the man whom Thou *chastenest*, and teachest out of Thy law." It is of this chastening, rebuking, reproving work that the Lord seems to speak in these words: "I lead in the midst of the paths of judgment." Wherever He commences a work of grace upon the soul, He sets up a court of conscience within. His vice-regent is the fear of God dwelling in a tender conscience. This fear of God thus implanted becomes "a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death;" and it is by virtue of this fear of God in a tender conscience that Jesus leads us "in the midst of the paths of judgment."

But some may say—Why is it that He speaks of "the way of righteousness" in the singular number, but of "the paths of judgment" in the plural?—as though there were but one "way of righteousness," but "many paths of judgment." It is so. There is only one "way of righteousness" (the others I have mentioned being either preparatory to, or flowing from it)—that is, the way whereby He justifies sinners, by the imputation of His own glorious righteousness; but there are many "paths of judgment"—that is, there are various dealings of the blessed Spirit upon the soul, whereby from time to time He acts as "a Spirit of judgment and a Spirit of burning;" there are various modes that He takes to lead the soul into a knowledge of itself, and various means that He employs to chastise and rebuke God's children for their pride

and iniquity. And these ways are manifold, though they all centre in one.

"He leads" His people, it is said, "in the midst of the paths of judgment." Not on one side of them, but in the midst of them; and therefore there is no crooked walking here. He leads them "in the midst" of those paths; implying that from time to time He leads them into one path, and from time to time into another.

1. Now these "paths of judgment" are when He with His holy eye scrutinises the heart, and brings to light its secret workings. Nature is continually bringing up from the bottom of a deceitful heart something that is contrary to the Word and work of God; and hypocritical and deceitful nature is continually cloaking and masking over whatever it secretly brings forth. For instance, it will bring forward presumption, and call it faith; it will come forth with vain confidence, and term it a good hope through grace; it will produce various excuses for sloth, and carelessness, and indulgence of the flesh, and then to cover them will speak loudly of the helplessness and impotency of the creature. And thus nature is continually dressing up some of her deep corruptions, and covering them over "as a potsherd is covered with silver dross," with false names. But when God leads His people "in the midst of the paths of judgment," He detects, opens, and uncovers the various deceits of nature, and calls things by their right names. How some of us have been entangled in presumption, and at the time did not know it was presumption—have stepped beyond our experience, and advanced ahead of God's teaching in our souls! This is presumption. Whatever ground we stand upon which God has not Himself set us down upon with His own hand, that is presumption. Many of God's people are entangled here. They are drawn on by the example of others. They do not like to come forward in their real character; especially if they belong to a church in which presumption is rife; especially if they sit under a minister who breathes forth presumption with every word that he speaks. "Evil communications corrupt good manners;" and thus by rapid strides they go on in presumption; often mistaking their way, and thinking they are walking in faith. Now when God leads

His people "in the midst of the paths of judgment," by His secret rebukes in the conscience, and by the internal reproofs of His Spirit in the heart, He checks and brings to light this presumption. Presumption is the sin of Calvinists; self-righteousness is the sin of Arminians; and if we shoot our arrows at Arminians for their self-righteousness, they may well shoot their arrows against many who nominally belong to us for their presumption. God's Spirit will never foster nor pass over presumption. How signally has God punished it! When Uzzah touched the ark, he was struck dead on the spot for his presumption. When the men of Beth-shemesh looked into the ark, more than fifty thousand were cut off for this act of daring presumption. God has visited signally with most awful marks of His anger those that have been guilty of this sin; and that a child of God may be entangled in it is plain from these words, "Keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins." But when God leads His people "in the midst of the paths of judgment," He discovers this presumption, and rebukes it "with the rod of His mouth." He reproveth the soul sharply for having gone into this dangerous path. And of all spiritual sins (that is, sins which a spirit may commit) there are none that cut deeper into the conscience of a living soul than this, because he says "If deceived on this point, may I not be deceived on all?" If he has been treading upon false ground here, why may not every step have been wrong? And thus when he is reproveth and rebuked for the presumption into which he has been led unawares, it seems to throw a desponding hue upon every part of his experience—beginning, middle, and end. Thus, then, when God leads His people "in the midst of the paths of judgment," they are judged. As the apostle says, "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged; but when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."

2. So, again, hypocrisy is a sin which God's people are much guilty of. Not that they are hypocrites; there is a vast distinction between being a hypocrite and having hypocrisy. A deceitful heart must needs have hypocrisy in it; but a hypocrite is one in whom it reigns and rules. So that the children of God are not hypocrites;

but they are very often deeply entangled in hypocrisy. Have you never smoothed your countenance? Have you never put on a holy look? Has hypocrisy never in prayer before others brought out expressions from your lips which at the time you did not feel in your heart? Have you never, when a Christian friend has been going from your company, had reason to mourn and sigh that you have been speaking so hypocritically? Not allowedly; but hypocrisy came out of your mouth, whether you would or no. But when God leads His people "in the midst of the paths of judgment," He reproveth this foul spirit in them; He rebuketh this hypocrisy; and He cuts them deeply, and lashes them severely for it.

3. And so, too, when the soul has backslidden—when it has been entangled with some filthy idol—as the apostle says, has "fallen from grace" (that is, not fallen from its standing in grace, but fallen from the reign and power of grace)—has "hired lovers," like Ephraim—when the Lord begins to open up His Word in anger and indignation against those that so start aside from Him, He scourges, rebukes, and chastises the soul.

Thus, then, He leads "in the midst of the paths of judgment," by setting up a court of judicature in the heart, arraigning the soul at His bar; not with vengeance, as punishing a criminal, but as a parent, after the child that has been playing truant all day brings that child to book at night, reproveth him for his conduct, and perhaps chastises him severely. And think nothing of your religion if you do not know these "paths of judgment;" they are very cutting things, but they are very profitable.

III. "I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment; that *I may cause those that love Me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.*"

Here we see why Jesus "leads in the way of righteousness," and why He guides the soul "in the midst of the paths of judgment;" it is that he may cause those that love Him to "*inherit substance.*"

The most of men are hunting after shadows. A dim, visionary religion, is all that most professors are possessed of. And it is nothing but the internal teaching of God the Holy Ghost in the soul, that can ever banish these shadows, and give "substance" in their stead.

1. But what is "substance?" It is something solid, weighty, powerful, real, and eternal. It is something that will not fly off at the last, like the chaff out of the floor, and the smoke out of the chimney. It is something which does not float merely in the visions of the brain. It is power, and feeling, and life, and dew, and the blessed kingdom of God set up with authority in the soul.

But whence springs it that God causes His people "to inherit substance," by "leading them in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment?" A few instances will show us. When He leads them first into the way of righteousness by opening up His holy law, it drives away all shadows. We had been heaping together, with great toil, chaff, and hay, and straw, and stubble; we had been like the man spoken of in Scripture, who "dreamed, and behold, he ate, but he awoke and his soul was empty;" so we were dreaming our life away continually with shadows, with a name to live, with a formal religion, with a mere external show of godliness, content with a few ordinances and sermons, and thinking that these would shelter us in the day of wrath. These were only shadows; of no more avail to deliver our souls from the wrath to come than the shadowy form of a mountain in the morning sun. But when the Lord began to "lead us in the way of righteousness," these shadows vanished. Something was then wanted to conciliate the favour of God; something was needed whereby the soul could escape those piercing eyes that looked it through and through; and the soul began to look after "substance," want realities, need a voice within from the Lord Himself, a testimony of His eternal favour, and a manifestation of His love. There was "substance" needed. The soul began to "hunger and thirst after righteousness," to pant and long after the manifestation of Jesus' love, and to be restless and discontented and weary of everything short of the work and

witness of the Holy Ghost. When the mouth is stopped, and the soul has become guilty before God, it wants pardon, peace, mercy, blood, and love; nothing else can satisfy it, and after this it pants with unutterable longings. And when Jesus leads His people "in the way of righteousness" by showing to them His glorious righteousness, they begin to "inherit the substance" after which they were panting. There is no substance under the law; it is but a preparing the soul to receive substance; it is emptying the soul, that it may be filled; it is stripping the soul, that it may be clothed; it is wounding the soul, that it may be healed; bringing down the soul, that it may be lifted up. But when He "leads in the way of righteousness," that wonderful way whereby the soul is justified by His imputed righteousness, He causes that soul to "inherit substance;" to inherit it even now upon earth, to have a taste of it, the beginnings of it, the earnest of it, and the first-fruits of it.

2. Again; when He leads the soul "in the midst of the paths of judgment," as He by the cutting rebukes and reproofs of His Spirit brings to light the mere shadowy dreams in which we are so often entangled, He makes the soul long after Divine teaching. When He by the internal light which He casts into your heart showed you your presumption (for instance) under the name of faith, He raised up in your soul earnest breathings and cries after the communication of Divine faith to your heart. Taking away the counterfeit made you poor, but taking away the counterfeit prepared your heart for the genuine coin. So that when He leads you "in the midst of the paths of judgment" to take away presumption, He causes you to "inherit substance" by raising up in your heart the sigh and the cry after faith, and then communicating it and breathing it in power into your souls; for "faith is the substance of things hoped for," and therefore he that inherits faith inherits substance. And, again, when He discovered the hypocrisy of your carnal mind, and covered you with shame and confusion of face, that you should have been so inveigled and entrapped into hypocritical looks, hypocritical thoughts, and hypocritical words, He cast a desponding hue over all your religion; but when He did this He raised up in your soul sighs,

desires, pantings, and longings after sincerity and uprightness, godly awe, fears to be wrong, and desires to be right; and then, when He breathed into your soul this spirit of sincerity, uprightness, and godly fear, He "caused you to inherit substance." There is something substantial in sincerity; there is something which has power in it, and reality in it, and life in it, and real weight in it, when the Lord breathes sincerity and uprightness into your heart. And so, when you have backslidden from Him, and got entangled with some idol, and your heart secretly departed from your God, and you had the idol taken away and the backsliding manifested, and your soul was brought to sigh and cry after the manifestation of Him whom you loved, and He was pleased once more to lift up the light of His countenance upon you, He "caused you to inherit substance." Oh! what a dreamy, shadowy thing is a mere profession of religion! And what a delusive cheat is all the pleasure to be gained by sin! How it leaves a soul naked, and bare, wounded, stripped, and guilty before God! We have often promised ourselves pleasure in sin; and what have we found? The wormwood and the gall. All the anticipated pleasure vanished; and its flight left us full of guilt and shame. But if ever God indulged our souls with sweet communion with Him, if ever He brought our affections to centre in Himself, if ever He melted our souls at His feet, if ever He blessed us with the communications of His eternal favour and distinguishing love, there was substance in that, there was weight, there was power, there was the foretaste and earnest of a never-ending eternity.

Thus He "causes those that love Him to inherit substance," by giving them a substantial religion, something real, something that is dropped into the soul from His own blessed self, something that comes out of Himself and out of the fulness of His own loving heart, to make them rejoice and be glad. And I believe that no living soul can be satisfied with anything short of "substance." Oh! how he fears to have "a name to live while he is dead," to be cloaked up in hypocrisy; how he dreads to be wrapped up in the delusions of Satan, and so die under the wrath of God! He wants to have something heavenly, something supernatural, something

breathed into his heart by God Himself. He may very weak, and very doubting, and very fearful and trembling, full of his own vile corruptions, and mourning under them; but with all that, he must have "substance," he must have something solid and real, something from God and from God alone. He cannot trust in doctrines, nor in opinions of men; all these things are mere shadows to him—he wants that which shall draw the soul up into the love of God, and fill it with that "peace that passeth all understanding." This is "substance." And the devil does not care what a man's head is filled with, if he can keep substance out of his heart. It matters not to him what your creed is, or where you come to worship, or what your head is filled with. It is against "substance," the kingdom of God in love and power in the soul, that Satan directs his attacks.

3. "That I may cause those that love Me to inherit substance, and *I will fill their treasures.*" Now this "treasure," is the treasure of the heart. We read, that "a good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth evil things." When the Lord, then, promises that He will "fill their treasure," He means that He will fill their treasure-houses; that is, He will fill their hearts out of His own blessed fulness.

And how does He fill them? With the sweet manifestations of Himself. That fills the heart; and nothing else can fill it. Everything but Jesus revealing Himself to the soul leaves an aching void. All hopes, and all feelings, and all desires, and all pantings, and longings, and hungerings, and thirstings—these do not fill an aching void. Appetite is not food; thirst is not the refreshing beverage; and the mere hungering and thirsting after righteousness, though it is a sign of life, and a sweet testimony of God working in your soul, is not real feeding upon Jesus as the bread that came down from heaven. Nothing short of Jesus in the heart as the hope of glory can ever satisfy a quickened soul. And when He does shed abroad His love, when He vouchsafes His gracious presence, when He applies His atoning blood, the heart is filled. It wants no more; it is satisfied—abundantly satisfied. It

has all it can enjoy, and all it wants to enjoy. And were it always to enjoy this, it would be heaven below.

"I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: that I may cause those that love Me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures." You see, my friends, who those are that God gives this blessing to. It is to those that love Jesus. And who love Him but those who have felt their need of Him, and have had faith raised up in their hearts to believe in His name? "Unto you, therefore, which believe, He is precious." This faith that works by love He implants when He leads in the way of righteousness by giving a glimpse of His lovely Person and glorious righteousness. This is the commencement of the kingdom of God in the soul, the first discovery of the treasure hid in the field of the Word. And this treasure enriches the heart by beggaring it, and writing poverty upon everything else in it but itself. The soul is thus made willing to follow as He leads, even through the paths of judgment, that its treasures may be filled. What are a few coins? They are soon spent and gone. But they teach what gold is, and make the heart long for more. Even the paths of judgment become, if not welcome, at least endurable, when in them treasure is found. But many times we would be glad to have "our treasures filled," but we do not like God's way of filling them. But this is what He says, and can His words be altered? We must be led by Himself in the way of righteousness, we must be guided by Himself in the midst of the paths of judgment, and then at times He will cause us "to inherit substance," and we shall find what a substance there is in His love; and He will fill our hearts with those treasures of wisdom and knowledge, love and power, which it hath pleased the Father should dwell in Him, that out of Him we may receive, and grace for grace.

## **SUFFERING AND ITS BENEFITS**

Preached on Lord's Day Evening, August 1, 1853, at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road

"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." 1 Peter 5:10

When Peter was in the garden of Gethsemane with his suffering Lord, he was not qualified to write an epistle to the Church of God. The hand that grasped the sword which cut off the right ear of Malchus was not the hand to hold the pen of an inspired apostle. Like other good men, in the days of early profession, he had more zeal than knowledge, more fleshly ardour than deep teachings of the Spirit and rich experience of the love of God. Had he then written, he would most probably have used his pen as he used his sword; and in cutting down the foes of Zion he might unwittingly have smitten some of her choice friends. But when he had passed through affliction's fiery furnace, had the dross and tin taken from him, and had become melted and softened by the grace of God, then as the blessed Spirit breathed upon him, and touched his pen with his own sanctifying grace, he was qualified to write these epistles so full of power and blessedness, and so full of rich experience of divine truth. I know not whether you paid much attention this morning, when I read the first chapter of this First Epistle. Many seem to think the reading of God's word a very unimportant portion of the service of God, and in some chapels it is omitted altogether, much, I think, to the loss of the people. But, in reading the chapter this morning, I could not but be struck with the richness and depth of divine truth with which that portion of God's word seemed to me full even to overflowing. We see, then, in the case of the Apostle Peter, how he was melted, moulded, and softened by the furnace of affliction and temptation; and when grace had wrought these blessed effects in his soul, then, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, he could

sit down and pen this epistle for the edification of the Church of God in all times.

The grand point of the words which I have read—and from which I hope with God's blessing to speak a little this evening—is suffering and the benefit of it. But, I shall, with a desire to bring the subject more plainly before your mind, and to enforce it more powerfully upon your conscience, divide my text into four leading branches.

I.—I shall endeavour to speak a little on the **fulness and freeness of grace**.

II.—**The holy and heavenly calling** wherewith the children of God are blessed.

III.—**The necessity and nature of suffering**.

IV.—**The blessed benefits and divine fruits** that spring out of it.

You will find this chain drawn out in our text; and it will be my business, as the Lord may enable, to take up these truths and to lay them before you, looking up to the Lord to bless his own word with power to your consciences.

I.—**The God of all grace**. How sweet is the word "**grace**" to every God taught soul! But there is something, to my mind, singularly beautiful in the expression which the apostle here makes use of—"The **God** of all grace." It is as if he would lead our hearts at once to the fountain; as if he would bid us not look at the stream, but lift up our eyes and view, in the actings of faith, the ever-flowing source of all grace.

We may view this part of our subject **negatively** and **positively**. God is the God of **all** grace; and, therefore, there is no grace but that which is of God. Many seem disposed unduly to magnify what are called "means of grace." They are good when God

through them is pleased to communicate grace; but without his blessing what are they? We see sometimes as we pass along the streets the pavements broken up and pipes and tubes lying about. What are all these pipes for? To convey water; but of what use are they if there be no water to flow through them? Will iron pipes of themselves bring water? So what is all our praying, preaching, and the ordinances of God's house? They are mere pipes; and need the water of grace to flow through them if they are to be of any benefit to us. If the water of grace flow through these into the soul, what do we feel grateful for? The water or the pipe? It is the stream of mercy and grace that flows into the soul for which we are thankful, and not the mere conduit through which that grace is communicated. But positively he is "the God of all grace." But how, and in what sense? Why, of grace in all its various branches, ramifications, and developments.

1.—For instance, there is **convincing** grace; for by the grace of God we are convinced of sin. The arrow of conviction shot into our conscience, making us to feel that we were sinners, and to cry for pardoning mercy came from God. God was the Author of that feeling if it were a spiritual conviction. It was he that wounded; he that pierced; he that killed, he that brought down; and he that opened the wound which nothing but the blood of Christ could heal.

2.—But he is the God of **pardoning** grace. The same grace that led him to wound leads him to heal; the same grace that brought down raises up; the same grace that strips clothes; the same grace that preaches the thunder of the law, preaches the peace speaking gospel; and the same grace that reveals the malady and uncovers the sore, brings the balm of Gilead and reveals the heavenly Physician. Therefore he is the God of **pardoning** grace in the sweet manifestations of the Saviour's love.

3. But the soul often wanders from its heavenly fountain. It backslides from God; and then grace is manifested in its restoration. David speaks of this **restoring** grace when he says—"He restoreth my soul." He brings us back to the spot

whence we have wandered, and manifests the riches of his pardoning love, unsealing the fountain once opened for sin and for uncleanness. He it is who applies to the conscience the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel.

4. But we have walked, perhaps, in temptation's fiery path, and sometimes have been well nigh overwhelmed with a sea of trouble. As one said of old—"All thy waves and thy billows have gone over me." "Then we want **supporting** grace. "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me." "Underneath are the everlasting arms." As we pass through the mazes of affliction, are in the furnace of trial, or are tossed on the deep waters of sorrow, still his arm is underneath to sustain.

5. But as we have by nature a heart "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked;" as we live in an ungodly world, and carry in our bosom the seed of all sin, and are tempted continually to evil, we want **keeping** grace. "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." Of that too he is the Author; for none can stand a single moment except as upheld by the mighty power of God.

6. And when you come to lay your head on a dying pillow, and the cold sweats of death gather upon your forehead; when the eye strings are breaking, and you must take leave of this world, and of all that is in it, you will want **dying** grace to support you in a dying hour.

Thus he is the "God of **all** grace." All the grace that ever the church had; of all the grace the church ever needed or will need he is the God. Look at the sun, that beautiful emblem of the Holy Spirit's own choosing to represent the Sun of Righteousness. How that glorious orb of day has shone for thousands of years! Look at the thousands of harvests which have been reaped under his benignant influence; think of the millions of human beings that have been fed by the fruits that he has matured and ripened. But the sun still shines on in all his original warmth, light, and beauty. He is not exhausted; he manifests no signs of exhaustion, nor has

lost anything by shining; nor have all the rays and beams that have flowed from him drained him of one jot of his light and warmth. He is still the glorious orb of day, shining and shining, and losing neither light, nor heat, nor influence. So it is with the God of all grace? Thousands of hearts he has gladdened by the beams of his grace; thousands of contrite sinners he has comforted by the pourings out of his favour; but he is still the God of all grace, which is ever, therefore, flowing in rich streams of mercy, goodness, and love to the church of Jesus. Oh! why should we be so contracted as we often are, and lose sight of the God of all grace? Why dwell so much upon the creature instead of dwelling upon him whom to know is life eternal? The God of all grace! This is a worthy theme, and I might enlarge upon it, but I have other work this evening before me to do.

II. I must, therefore, proceed with my text. "Who hath **called** us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus."

There may, perhaps, have been this thought in the heart of some present. All this no doubt is true; but what interest have I in it? I hear of the God of all grace; but **have I grace**? Has the God of all grace bestowed his grace upon me? You may well ask yourself that question, considering how few there are, speaking comparatively, upon whom God has bestowed his grace; but just see what gives a manifested interest in it. What makes that grace my own? "Who hath **called** us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus." **Calling**, our second point of consideration, manifests an interest in the grace of God, and in the God of all grace. We are told by the same inspired apostle to "make our calling and election sure." How can we make our calling sure? By wrestling with God till he make it sure in us, by sealing it with his own heavenly witness upon our breast, and making it as plain in our hearts as the sun in the sky. But it is not every child of God who can make his calling and election thus undoubtedly sure. There are some who like Belshazzar cannot read the writing on the wall, and want a Daniel to decipher it for them; but they have not an interpreter who can read one letter. Aye; there are many of God's children who cannot read their own experience; they cannot trace

out their own grace, nor make manifest to themselves their own calling. They need then an interpreter, as Job speaks—"One of a thousand, who can save them from going down to the pit," by showing them how to read the work of faith in their soul. This is the benefit of an experimental ministry, to discover to you what you could not otherwise learn for yourself—opening up the work of God which is locked up from your own eyes.

There is then a being "called." This calling is "of God." It is "through Jesus Christ," and it is "unto God's eternal glory."

Divine calling is a special work of God upon the soul, separating from the world, profane and professing, bringing down high looks, piercing the conscience with convictions, and raising up longing desires after Christ, with a going to him for mercy; leading the soul with weeping and supplication to the feet of the Mediator; and then in God's own time and way making Christ precious, revealing his person, blood, and righteousness, and shedding abroad the love of God in the heart by the Holy Ghost. To know anything of this divine teaching is to be made "a partaker of the heavenly calling," and to experience a saving work in the soul. And consider those striking and heavenly words, "to his eternal glory!" "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." To be called then unto God's eternal glory, to view it hereafter in its full blaze on the heights of Zion, to enjoy it with a soul rendered capable of bearing its full and eternal weight, and the body made a fit treasure-house and immortal companion for the glorified spirit; to be enraptured with the manifestations of God's presence and love throughout a boundless, glorious eternity—what prospects of heavenly bliss are opened up and revealed in these words! What the full enjoyment of this unutterable weight of glory will be is beyond all present human conception, beyond the apprehension of the wisest saint, or the experience of the deepest taught saint of God. At the best, we can only have a faint glimpse of the glory which God has prepared for them that love him. But it is not so of our calling. No matter how desponding some of the Lord's family may be, they

are called unto his eternal glory, to the preparation for it here, and to the rich enjoyment of hereafter.

III. But let us pass a little further onward. We have not yet got into the marrow of our subject; we are still but at the vestibule—we have not yet penetrated into the inner court. We must pass the entrance before we get into the apartments of the palace. There is no entering into glory except through **suffering**; nor is there any getting into the rich experience of grace without affliction and trial. Was it not so with Jesus? What did he say to his disciples? "Ought not the Son of man to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?" And has not the Lord Jesus led the way in which we are to tread; and must we not be conformed to his suffering image here that we may be conformed to his glorified image hereafter? "If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him." If we have no union with Christ in suffering, we shall have no union with Christ in glory; and therefore there is a necessity of suffering with the Lord Jesus. Now it is this suffering which so deeply tries the minds of God's exercised family. If they were not so heavily weighted, they could get on, or at least they think they could; if the road were easy and the path smooth, if there were no trials and temptations, they, at least in their own apprehensions, could travel cheerily on. But when they come into temptation's fiery furnace, and are baptized into a flood of suffering and sorrow, then their faith seems to give way, and their hope to stagger; they reel to and fro like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end to believe there is a grain of grace in their heart.

There is a necessity then for suffering; but though there be this necessity, yet one thing is very evident, that all God's people do not suffer in the same way, or to the same degree. God chooses our afflictions for us. He knows what peculiar trials are needful for every one of those who fear his name. We differ in bodily constitution, education, habits of life, powers of mind, and natural disposition. We differ as widely within, as we differ without; the features of our mind are as various as the features of our face; and therefore my suffering would not be your suffering, nor your suffering mine. We have each our own peculiar path of trial and

suffering which God has appointed us to walk in. Some suffer in mind, others in body; some in their family, others in their circumstances; the trials of some are chiefly in things temporal; others suffer a fiery baptism in matters purely spiritual. But in addition to all other sources of trial, there is one common to all the redeemed family, a daily, hourly conflict with the body of sin and death, and the workings of evil in the carnal mind.

But time will not admit of a minuter detail of the various sufferings which are appointed for the family of God. Some may be deeper, others shallower; some shorter, others longer; but each is designed, to work a like purpose—the conforming of the soul to the suffering image of Jesus.

You will observe that in this chain there is a beautiful proportion and harmony. Suffering does not come at the beginning of the chain. First, we have, "the God of all grace," the overflowing, overflowing fountain of goodness and mercy, being the source of all. Then we have the "calling," whereby this grace is made manifest to the soul, and of which Christ is the blessed Subject, Object, sum, and centre. And then comes "suffering," the third link of the heavenly chain. Grace, first; calling next; and suffering third. If, then, you have not this link, the link of suffering, there is a breach in the chain. If the God of all grace be your God, he has called or will call you; if he has called you, he has appointed unto you a certain measure of suffering by which you will be, as the apostle speaks—"filling up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ," that is not his vicarious sufferings, but his afflictions in his members.

IV. We are now then prepared to pass on, by the blessing of God, to examine our fourth and last point—**the benefits, blessings,** and divine fruits that spring out of suffering, which adds the last link to the chain.

But observe the expression, "After that ye have suffered **a while.**" Suffering is only for a while. Say at the most, that suffering should run parallel with the whole course of your life; say that you live to be ninety, and have day after day suffering

and sorrow; say that every hour brings you pain of body or grief of mind, trial of spirit, or temptation of soul. Say it shall be so, which however is not very probable, for you are not likely to live till you are ninety, nor are you likely to have every day a day of trial, temptation, and suffering; but say it were so appointed, then when your soul is set at liberty from your enfeebled body, to soar upward into the regions of light and love, and drink in rivers of peace and joy at the fountain head, it would, after all, be only "a little while." Measured by eternity, what is time? It is but a point, a thing only of a moment's duration. "Our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

But even in a world like this we are not always suffering. It comes and goes—it is brought today and is taken away tomorrow. When the furnace has done its work, then the gold is taken out. But it is **after**, not **before**. You perhaps say you want to enjoy a clear assurance of interest; to be established in the liberty of the gospel; to walk as an enfranchised child of God; to be favoured with fresh and fresh manifestations of his mercy and love; and have your soul sweetly enjoying the presence of a beloved Lord. But have you been ever tossed on a sea of suffering? or do you think always to be in London Dock without ebb or flow? Does the extent of your spiritual voyage reach no farther than Gravesend, where the scarcely salt river is still far from the sea? You fresh water mariners who sail on so jauntingly in your river built yachts are not fit to do business in deep waters, nor can you see the wonders of the Lord as those do in the great deep. But if you have been long tossed on the stormy main, how welcome does the shore beam on your straining sight; and how then you will drop anchor with an inward peal of joy. It is not **before** then, but "**after** ye have suffered a while" that real soul profit, satisfaction, and joy are realized or experienced within.

But perhaps you are saying—"May not persons be Christians and yet not be much tried or afflicted?" Now, I believe it holds in grace as in nature—whatever is easily got is rarely worth having. As a general rule, a man gets nothing easily that is really

valuable; neither knowledge, nor power, nor learning, nor even glittering gold dust; nothing even that this world values is obtained without labour and pain. And sure I am that no spiritual man gets a rich experience of Divine mercy and love without passing through more or less of soul exercise. He is not fitted for it; his soul has not yet the capacity to enjoy the fulness of the love of God. In order to this he must, like a vessel, have ample tonnage. There must be capacity made in the soul, as in the hold of the ship, to receive the fulness of God's mercy. Self must be baled out before the Lord of grace and glory will come in; the cargo of rubbish must be heaved overboard before the rich treasure of heavenly mercy can find room in the bosom.

It is, then, after we have suffered awhile, and only after we have suffered a while; been exercised in our soul, tried in our mind, tempted of Satan, and gone through more or less of this inward strife and affliction—this sea of storms, that these other links of the heavenly chain are brought, into the heart, of which the apostle speaks—"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you."

Oh that these words might sound in your ears. Oh that they might be graven as by the pen of God in your hearts.

I. But let us look at these blessings in their order. "**Make you perfect!**" What word have we here? Does not this look like perfection in the flesh? Perfection in the flesh! The Scriptures know nothing of this kind of perfection, nor does any experienced child of God. In what sense, therefore, may we understand the word used by the Holy Spirit here? "Make you **perfect.**" The terms have a meaning; we will not dislocate and distort God's sacred word by putting on it a forced construction. Far be that from our wish or thought. I may observe, then, that there are two senses in which the word "perfect" is used in Scripture as regards the saints of God. The first meaning of the word is perfection in Christ—"Ye are complete in him." The church of God is represented as being "without spot or blemish or any such

thing," a view of which draws forth from her divine lover those striking words—"Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee." In that sense the church of God is perfect—perfect in Christ, comely with the comeliness which he himself has put upon her, and so stands perfect in his perfection, holy in his holiness, glorious in his glory.

But that is not the sense meant by the word "perfect" here. She is that already; but the making of her perfect "through suffering." Perfection, then, as here spoken of is not that through Christ's righteousness; **that** is an outward perfection; but an inward, an experimental perfection as wrought in the soul by the grace of God through suffering. What then is this inward experimental perfection? There is an expression in Heb. 5:14, which, to my mind, much clears up the whole subject—"But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." The apostle is speaking here of the difference between those who are weak and ignorant and those who are strong and established. He says that some were babes, and did not even understand the elements of divine truth; but that others were "of full age." It is in the margin, which is the more literal rendering, "**perfect.**" Those, then, are, in an experimental sense, "perfect" who have arrived at the meridian of full age, whose senses are exercised by long and deep experience to discern both good and evil. This, then, is the scriptural definition of experimental perfection. It does not consist in the absence of sin nor in progressive sanctification; nor in being made any better as regards our carnal mind; but it consists in this—in being ripened and matured in the Divine life; in being no longer a child, and ever in want of a tutor of first principles; but "a man in Christ," grown up in him and having a ripeness of Christian experience. This is Christian maturity; and this divine ripeness of soul is only to be obtained through suffering. It is "**after** you have suffered a while" that God thus "makes you perfect"—in other words, matures you, so that you bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, and become an adult man in the knowledge, enjoyment, and experience of spiritual things. The tried soul comes forth from the furnace with the dross and tin

of self taken away, and thus becomes a vessel of honour fitted for the master's use.

2. But the apostle goes on to pray that the God of all grace would, after they had suffered awhile, "**stablish**" them. This extends somewhat widely. It implies an establishing of our understanding, conscience, judgment, and experience not only in our views of divine truth, but also of our own interest in "the truth as it is in Jesus;" that we may not be carried about with every wind of doctrine, but be so established, rooted, and grounded in the truth of God, as never, by any consideration be moved from it. How is this desirable thing to be attained? Suffering, suffering, is still the channel: and the furnace is still the means. It is only "**after** we have suffered a while"—suffered from Satan, from sin, from persecution of enemies, and the unbelief and abounding corruption of our own hearts—it is only after such an experience of personal, inward suffering that we get to be thoroughly established in the truth. Growth in grace is like growth in nature. It is the mushroom that springs up in a night; but the oak is the growth of centuries. We are to grow like the oak, not like the poplar; be a cedar of Lebanon, not a willow by the brook. We have also to take root downward as well as to grow stout and strong upwards—to spread deep and wide roots in the soil as well as to spread forth sturdy branches in the air. And it is that we may thus take root and become established that we are subjected to affliction and sorrow. No instance was ever known of an established Christian who had not become so through the medium of deep and sanctified affliction; and God will not alter his ways to please our vain fancies, "for he is in one mind, and who can turn him?"

3. The next fruit of suffering for which the apostle prayed was that God might thereby "**strengthen**" them. But what a strange way of being strengthened! You feel your weakness; do you not? "Yes;" I may speak for some here—"I do indeed; oh if you did but know how weak I am!" I know it very well, for I know how weak I am myself. If I can read any thing it is my own heart; and in reading mine I can read yours. But you say, "How weak I am."

Well, will you ever be anything else? Would you wish to be anything else? "I would be strong," you reply. So you are. "When I am weak," said Paul, "then am I strong." There is the true secret of all strength! What makes us strong?

Weakness. Weakness make us strong? "That is a flat contradiction." No; it is not. Because when you are weak then the Lord Jesus works strength in you, and thus you resemble the worthies spoken of in Heb. 11, who "out of weakness were made strong." No other strength is worth a straw. Suppose I came here this evening, and into this pulpit all strength in myself. Should I be worth hearing or listening to? But I come all weakness; if I have strength God gives it me. So if you come strong to hear, you will not want for Christ to bless the word and communicate strength to your soul; but if you come weak as one seeking strength from him; if you come as an empty vessel for God to pour his love and grace into, then the Lord will answer you. Was it not so with David? "In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul." But you will say, "I have had a great deal of trial lately; I have had affliction in my body, or trials in my family, or my circumstances have been very distressing, and to make it worse, I have had such darkness of mind and many powerful temptations to grapple with. Under all this my wicked heart has rebelled against God; and I have had hard work, I can assure you, to stand my ground at all." What has that taught you, and to what point has it brought you? It has made you a hearer of the gospel, it has made you to long for the God of all grace to manifest unto you the riches of his mercy; it has weaned you from the world broken the arm of self; destroyed your creature confidence; and rendered you a fit subject for the Lord Jesus Christ to work upon, and in you to will and to do of his own good pleasure. All this good suffering has done, if it has been sanctified to your soul. Look at Moses! How weak he was. He replied, when sent on his mission to Pharaoh, "I am slow of speech;" but God qualified him to speak and act too. Look at Abraham, and the course of God's dealings with him. How the strength of God was made manifest in his and Sarah's natural weakness! Look at David, the beardless

boy, going out against the giant. So your weakness is but the needful preparation for God out of it to make you strong. I hope that some of you here, this evening, if not many, are poor and needy, weak and helpless. So many as are such, are so many cases for God to strengthen.

4. The last blessing for which the apostle prayed as following suffering was, that God would thereby "**settle**" them. I was speaking this morning about a building. Now you know a building must **settle** before it will stand. It is so with every structure. A bridge has to settle sometimes some inches and time for the most part must be given for every edifice to settle before you can be sure that it will stand firm. It settles by sinking, and becomes firm by losing somewhat of its original height; it drops that it may stand; it sinks that it may not fall. So must you be settled, if you are to stand; not settled on yourself, but upon the work of Jesus, the living stone which God has laid in Zion. To be settled is not to be settled down in vain, presumptuous confidence, but to have a firm standing in Christ by the Spirit's teaching and testimony, and so to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. There must be a settling down into and upon the Lord Jesus; a resting the entire weight of the soul's salvation wholly and solely upon him who is mighty to save. And the more the soul is thus settled upon the foundation, the firmer, closer union it has with it.

Now, look at these things, for they will bear examination. I am not afraid of my doctrine being examined. Not that the things I have uttered are worth anything, so far as I am the speaker of them; but the points I have advanced and dwelt upon are solid truths; and I know them to be such. They are in strict accordance with the word of God; and I believe in accordance with the experience of God's saints. Weigh them up then, and weigh yourselves too at the same time. Put yourselves into the scale, and see whether God has stamped good weight upon you. Who is it that has reason to tremble when the surveyors come round to examine their weights and measures? It is the deceitful, dishonest tradesman who fears to see their face. The honest tradesman boldly brings forth his weights and measures, and

does not slink into the back shop with fear and trembling. So the teaching of God in the soul will bear examination. You may be very weak—the tradesman's weights and measures are not all of the same size and dimensions. There is the gill and the quart, as well as the pint and gallon; and there is the quarter and half ounce as well as the stone; but they must be all lawful weight and bear the queen's stamp. So that if you say, your grace is small, I reply, "It may be none the worse for that." If we have gardens, and are fond of flowers, we admire the little shrub as well as the larger one; and there is as perfect a life in the tender flower as in the stronger plant. So, if you are planted into the heavenly garden, the Divine Husbandman will water and make you grow. I would much sooner have a little living shrub put into my garden bed than a dead lofty tree. All the trees of righteousness planted by the hand of the Lord are living, growing, trees, watered and nourished by the dews and rains of the Spirit. See, therefore, whether you cannot find something like the grace of God in your heart. O what a mercy to have one grain of grace! What a mercy to be a living soul! You may be tried, tempted, and exercised; but if you are one of the Lord's people, all this will eventually be for your profit. But always remember that there is a furnace to go through to bum up self-confidence, and bring you forth a vessel fit for the master's use. The trials you are called to experience, and the sighs and groans you utter are spiritual sacrifices, acceptable in God's sight. These things are designed to mature you in the things of God, to establish you in the truth, to strengthen you in faith, hope, and love, and to settle you down into sweet confidence in the Lord Jesus. O, you will say, if this be the case, thank God for every trial; bless his holy name for every temptation; thanks for every furnace, every exercise, and every affliction; they have brought my soul to a firm standing; they have made Christ precious; they have endeared his love; they have led me more fully into the "truth as it is in Jesus," and given me richer and more blessed views of Immanuel, God with us. Now this is the main thing the heart desires; not that we desire the furnace, but we desire the great benefits produced by it. O, may "the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus," in the words of our text—"after that ye

have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen,  
settle you."

## A Suffering Saviour and an Obedient People

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening, June 24, 1866

"Who in the days of his flesh, when he had 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; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." Hebrews 5:7, 8, 9

The high priest under the law was the typical representative of the Lord Jesus as the great High Priest over the house of God. As such he occupied a very distinguished position. The service and ministrations of the sanctuary were limited to his tribe—the tribe of Levi; and the priesthood was confined to his family—the family of Aaron. To him was restricted the supreme administration of all sacred things, and he was the final arbiter of all controversies. In order therefore that his person and office might be invested with a peculiar sanctity, he was inaugurated with great solemnity, being clothed after an ablution of the whole body with the sacred habiliments, and then anointed with a precious oil, prepared and preserved for this exclusive purpose. Besides the usual priestly dress, there were four garments which he wore peculiar to himself. These were, 1, first, the coat or *robe* of the ephod, on the hem of which were fixed seventy-two golden bells, between which there ran an equal number of golden pomegranates; 2, secondly, the *ephod*, which was a vest made of fine twisted linen, splendidly wrought with gold and purple; and on each shoulder strap was an onyx stone, on which were engraved, six on each stone, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel; thirdly, the *breastplate* of judgment of the same texture and workmanship as the ephod, in which were twelve precious stones, bearing, one on each stone, the names of the twelve tribes; and, fourthly, a *crown* or mitre, having on it a plate of pure gold, on which was

inscribed, "Holiness to the Lord." These garments were made "for glory and for beauty" (Exod. 28:2), and were distinct from the "holy garments" (Lev. 16:4) of linen which he wore on the solemn day of atonement. He was thus, as wearing two distinct sets of garments, typical of Christ in his humiliation and his exaltation, of what he was and what he is. Clad in his holy linen garments, he sacrificed the sin-offering and took the blood within the veil; but when he had made an end of reconciling the holy place, the tabernacle, and the altar, had laid the sins of the children of Israel on the head of the goat and sent it into the wilderness, then he put off his linen garments and arrayed himself in his garments of glory and beauty, offered the burnt offering. Thus, in his linen garments he represented Christ in his humiliation when he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; and in his beautiful garments, Christ in his present exaltation and glory.

But his chief office was to offer sacrifice, and especially that peculiar one on the great day of atonement, to which I have already alluded, when he entered within the veil into the most holy place, taking therein, amidst a cloud of incense, the blood of the bullock and of the goat, which he sprinkled upon and before the mercy seat. In all these and various other points, into which I need not now enter, he stood forth as the typical representative of that great High Priest who, having finished the work which the Father gave him to do, is now in the presence of God for us. But his priesthood was necessarily imperfect. It was, at best, but a dim, shadowy representation of what is exceedingly great and glorious, and therefore was in itself necessarily weak and defective; and though full of meaning to an enlightened eye and a spiritual heart, yet to the carnal worshipper was but a mere routine of external performances. But besides the inherent imperfection of the ministration, there was the infirmity of the minister. Though separated in so solemn a manner to the service of the sanctuary, though called upon by every constraint to manifest the greatest purity of life and conversation, and to conduct himself in all things with such holy wisdom as became the visible representative of him who was to come, yet, as a partaker of our fallen humanity, the high priest was but a frail

and fallible man. Aaron himself, though called in so special a manner by God himself to his high and holy office, manifested on more than one occasion great infirmity both of character and conduct. He complied, for instance, with the sinful wishes of the people in the matter of the golden calf, when Moses was in the mount with God, and, so to speak, veiled and cloaked their sin by fashioning the object of their idolatrous worship with a graving tool, building an altar before it, and making a proclamation, "Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord." He took part with Miriam against Moses, when they spake against him because of the Ethiopian woman whom Moses had married; and, as it would appear through jealousy, said, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath he not also spoken by us?" (Num. 12:1, 2.) He joined Moses also in that remarkable act which so offended the Lord when Moses said to the people, "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" just as if it was *they* who did it, and not God by them. I do not name these things to cast any reproach upon the name and character of Aaron, but merely to show how full of sin and imperfection the first and greatest of the high priests was. His two sons, Nadab and Abihu, offered strange fire; and though they had been anointed at the same time with Aaron their father, for that act of presumption died at the very altar, for fire went out from the Lord and devoured them. We know what a poor, weak, and fallible man Eli was, and what vile sinners his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, manifested themselves to be. I need not pursue farther the history of the high priests, or speak of what they were when the Lord was upon earth. I have said enough to show from the word of truth that they were not only frail and fallible, but in many cases very sinful men, and as such utterly unworthy to execute the high and holy office committed to their trust. But no doubt there was a purpose in the mind of God in permitting human imperfection and sin thus to develop themselves, and that these instances should be put upon record, that we might learn from them that man in his very best estate and entrusted with the highest and holiest office is but vanity. Our eyes are therefore taken off the type to look at the Anti-type; to cease from man and fix our eyes wholly and solely upon the Lord. God had determined in his own mind to

bring forward and reveal at the appointed time another High Priest—his only begotten Son, in whom should meet every perfection both of Godhead and Manhood. He was determined to raise up a faithful priest, that should do according to that which was in his heart and in his mind (1 Sam. 2:35); even him to whom he had sworn and would not repent: "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek." (Psa. 110:4.)

But I need not enter at any greater length into these points, as it would not only take up too much time, but would divert us too much from the subject before us. I shall therefore come at once to our text, in which I think we may see these three things, which I shall endeavour, as the Lord may give me ability, to lay open and set before you:—

I.—*First, the prayerful and suffering experience of our Redeemer in the flesh:* "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death."

II.—*Secondly, the lesson which our gracious Lord learnt in that school of prayer and suffering—Obedience.* "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."

III.—*Thirdly, the blessed fruit and result of these sufferings of our Lord, and of the victory obtained by them:* "He became the *author of eternal salvation* unto all them *that obey him.*"

I.—There are two subjects connected with our gracious Lord on which I always wish to speak with very great caution and in a spirit of holy reverence. To a heavenly mind, to a chastened, humble spirit, to one who desires to have the mind of Christ, and to be cast into the mould of divine teaching they are most blessed subjects of contemplation and meditation; yet they are so mysterious in themselves, and so beyond the scope of our comprehension, that we are only safe as we walk strictly within the limits of the written word, and even there tread with the greatest reverence, caution, and circumspection. Those two

subjects are, the *sufferings* of Christ and the *temptations* of Christ. As regards myself, I never feel safe in speaking upon either of these two points except so far as I keep as close as I can to the word of truth, for I see how easily I might be betrayed into some error, or, if I escaped that, into some point of doubtful disputation. Unless well instructed in the things of God, and well fenced and guarded by a reverence to his great name, I might easily advance something inconsistent with the teaching of the Holy Spirit in the word of truth. It is so easy to make a little deviation on this side or on that, and so not be kept strictly within the bounds of the inspired word, that I ever wish to speak with great caution; and yet with that firmness of faith and clearness of utterance which become one who professes to be a steward of the mysteries of God, and desires to feed the church with knowledge and understanding. I hope, therefore, this evening to speak with great caution, and keep as closely as possible to the limits of God's inspired word, that I may say nothing unbecoming God's sacred truth and nothing unbecoming that reverence which we owe to our great High Priest at the right hand of the Father. And yet if we are favoured with a spirit of heavenly wisdom, and can walk in this field with a spiritual mind and a believing heart, receiving the truth of God with the simplicity, docility, and humility of a little child, what a depth of blessing there is in the subject before us! The suffering experience of the Lord, when "in the days of his flesh, he 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," is rich food to a spiritual mind.

But the thought may strike your mind, for such reasonings will sometimes occur, "What need was there for the blessed Lord thus to pray with strong crying and tears? Was he not God as well as man? Was he not the Son of the Father in truth and love? Was there, could there be in his mind any apprehension of failure in his undertaking? Was it not a matter of infinite certainty that he must prevail?" All this I admit. But do you consider what a battle our gracious Lord had to fight? What a conflict, which seemed as it were to rend his very heart asunder? Do you bear in mind what

a mighty work he had undertaken to perform, and what was involved in bearing the curse of God's righteous law and enduring the penalty due to the sins of his people, when he stood in their place and stead, and thus to blot out as a thick cloud their transgressions, and as a cloud their sins, and by clothing them with a robe of righteousness, his own obedience, to present them spotless before the face of infinite Purity?

Now this being the work which he had to do in the garden and upon the cross, the Holy Ghost in the words before us seems to lead our thoughts and hearts into this deep subject by presenting to our view the suffering Redeemer, as engaged alone with God in the depths of his struggling agony. Let us see, then, if by the help of God we may look as it were within the precincts of this place of suffering, and by viewing the agonies and hearing the cries of our gracious Lord, learn something of what the work was which the Father had given him to do, what is the dreadful evil of sin, and from what depths of eternal woe he has redeemed all who believe in his name.

i. To apprehend even in some faint and feeble measure what this was, we must first take a view of his pure and sacred humanity; and we must bear carefully in mind that though his human nature was altogether perfect, and from its very constitution utterly incapable of the least speck, or spot, or stain of impurity, yet it was naturally and inherently weak. The apostle therefore says, that "he was crucified through weakness." (2 Cor. 13:4.) Remember, however, that weakness was not imperfection in him, though it is imperfection in us; for when we speak of the weakness of Christ's human nature, we mean its weakness as compared with the strength and power of his divine nature. We therefore carefully remove from it all idea of imperfection when we speak of the weakness of the humanity of Christ; in the same way as when we speak of his being subject to such infirmities as hungering, thirsting, and being tired, we carefully exclude all idea of his being subject to any but sinless infirmities. Rightly viewed then, as received into a reverent and believing heart, there is something very blessed in contemplating the weakness of Christ.

Hart, therefore, to whom was given to see and know so much of the sufferings of Jesus, beautifully says,

"The strength of God is owned by all,  
But who his weakness knows?"

1. But what are we to understand by the expression "in the days of his flesh?" This leads us to the inquiry, 1, What is meant by "the flesh" of Christ; and, 2, what we are to understand by "the days of his flesh?" By "the flesh" of Christ, then, we may understand chiefly two things: 1, The whole of his pure humanity, as in such passages as, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14); "God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16); "Of whom was Christ, according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:5.) But as this humanity the Lord still continues to wear, carrying it with him into heaven, though exalted and glorified beyond all apprehension, we cannot understand by "the flesh" of Christ merely his human nature. It therefore means, as applied to him in the text, the weaknesses and infirmities, of course I mean the sinless infirmities, to which he was subject when here below. And by "the days of his flesh" we may understand, not merely the whole time of his sojourning on earth, but especially those last days when in the garden and upon the cross all his sorrows, trials, and sufferings came, as it were, to a head, and thickened upon him. It was then in these last days of his abiding in the flesh that he offered up the prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears mentioned in the text. They were a part of his oblation, priestly acts of intercession, and therefore not merely supplications for himself, but necessary adjuncts of his propitiatory sacrifice. He had taken upon himself to stand in our law place and stead, and to endure what but for him his people must have endured to all eternity. O how great a work was this! To expiate transgression, to put away the wrath of God, to appease the ever-burning indignation against sin of Him who is a consuming fire, fully to satisfy the claims of infinite justice and the demands of a devouring law—O what a work was this for the Lord to do! How little do we know, how less do we feel of the holiness of God, of his terrible Majesty, of his inflexible justice, of

his fiery wrath against sin and transgression, and the difficulty, so to speak, of so satisfying these claims that mercy might rejoice against judgment, and grace superabound over the aboundings of sin. It is only when we view by faith the struggles, agonies, and sufferings of the incarnate Son of God when he had to grapple with and overcome these difficulties, that we seem for a short period to see and feel a little of the dreadful evil of sin. Our Lord often prayed in the days of his flesh, and on one occasion spent a whole night in prayer unto God; but he never prayed as in the garden, for his prayers then were attended with most vehement, earnest, and intense supplications, as Luke tells us: "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as drops (or rather large clots, as the word means) of blood falling upon the ground." (Luke 22:44.) And what was the purport of his prayers but that he might be supported in the hour of agony upon the cross, that he might fully do the work committed to him, that the honour of God might be in every point consulted and his glory manifested, that his sacrifice and bloodshedding and obedience might be accepted, and the whole will of God in the redemption and salvation of his people perfectly accomplished? Our Lord felt the weakness of his humanity, for though in union with his eternal Deity, though most blessedly upheld and supported by the power and strength and consolation of the Holy Ghost, yet it was inherently weak, and an experience of its weakness was a part of the sufferings that he endured. Having then to bear as laid upon this weakness the whole weight of imputed sin, the whole curse of the law, the whole indignation of the Almighty, our Lord was brought to a spot where he needed special support. To be brought through that work safely, honourably, successfully, agreeably to the will of God and in the fullest harmony with the eternal purposes—to this point were the prayers and supplications of our suffering Lord directed; this was the solemn conflict which our gracious Lord had to endure in the garden in its beginning and upon the cross in its finishing. We know what he felt—at least the Holy Ghost has given us an account of that solemn agony in the garden, when he said, as in a moment of weakness, "Let this cup pass from me." It was so bitter in contemplation; it was so full of unmitigated wrath; the

ingredients were so mingled with the anger of the Almighty against sin and the manifestation of his displeasure against every one who was chargeable with it, that as he stood there and then as our substitute, in our place, to endure what we must have endured without him, and to bear the whole weight of eternal wrath and indignation, which must have sunk us and all with us, were we millions, to a deserved hell, that he needed the special interposition of the help of God to hold him up as he drank it to the very dregs. It was to obtain this help that he offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears; and it was the vehemency of the conflict which made the blood fall from his brow and tears drop from his eyes, and his whole soul engaged in an agony of mingled grief and horror, fear and supplication, each increasing and stimulating the other, and the whole poured forth with prayers, cries, weeping, and supplications unto him that was able to save him from death: not from the death that he came to die, but to save him from everything connected with the original sentence of death, as involving in it the wrath of God and its consequences.

The gospels, in the simplicity of their narrative, speak but little of the inward sufferings of Christ. They give us an account of his sufferings in the garden, of his "being sorrowful and very heavy," or, as the word means, "overwhelmed with anguish," of "his being sore amazed," and "exceedingly sorrowful even unto death," of his being "in an agony and praying more earnestly," and begging of his heavenly Father that this cup might pass from him; but they do not enter into the cause of his sufferings. And so with respect to his crucifixion; they make little mention of his sufferings of body or soul, though they record his dolorous cry when forsaken of God, and his bodily thirst. Where, then, shall we find recorded the suffering experience of Christ? Clearly in the Psalms, such as the 18th, 22nd, 40th, 69th, 102nd, and others, in which the Holy Ghost has by anticipation recorded the experience and language of the Son of God in the depths of his suffering. There we have his prayers and supplications: "Save me, O God, for the waters are come into my soul. I sink in deep mire where there is no standing. I am come into deep waters

where the floods overflow me." (Psa. 69:1, 2.) There we have his strong crying: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent." (Psa. 22:1, 2.) There we have his weeping: "For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping, because of thy indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up and cast me down." (Psa. 102:9, 10.) And there, especially in Psalm 22, we have set before us in the most lively colours what his holy soul endured when he was bearing our sins in his own body on the tree.

ii. But let me now speak a few words on that difficult expression, "Unto him who was able to save him from death." This of course was God to whom he addressed his prayers. But what is meant here by the ability of God to save? And what is intended by the death from which he besought God to save him?

1. By the ability of God to save we may understand two things: 1, the *actual* power of God; 2, the *moral* power of God. The first is God's omnipotence, the second is God's sovereignty. Now to which of these two powers of God did Christ address himself? To both, but especially to the latter. God was able to save him by his omnipotence—by putting forth his absolute power; and upon this almighty power the Lord cast himself in the extremity of his distress and weakness. But he cast himself more particularly upon God's sovereignty, as displayed in his will, for he came to do his will. To him, therefore, he had recourse in the omnipotence of his power and the sovereignty of his will. His faith embraced the power, his obedience submitted itself to the will of God.

2. But what was the "death" from which he prayed to be saved? It was not natural death, for he came on purpose to die, but moral death. *i.e.*, it was not the dissolution of body and soul, but all that was implied in the sentence, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." In taking upon him to obey the law, our Lord put himself under the curse of the law; and this curse was death. All, therefore, that was contained in the curse of the law, in the

sentence of death, our Lord had as much to sustain as though he had been actually guilty of every sin committed against the law. From this death in the consequences of it, as he reeled under its dreadful weight, he prayed God to save him, that he might come out of it, be delivered from it, and thus, as the surety of his people, might deliver them from it.

iii. But we now come to the acceptance of his prayers and supplications. "And was heard in that he feared." There is something in my mind so extremely mysterious and yet so divinely blessed in the expression, "in that he feared," that I must, if the Lord enable me, give it a few moments' consideration. It is right to mention that there is some little difficulty as to the right rendering of the expression. The word means in the original not so much fear, as indicating dread or apprehension, as a holy reverence and tender cautiousness. It means literally the great care with which we handle brittle vessels, and, as used in the New Testament, signifies a reverential fear of God. It is used, for instance, of Noah, where he is said to be "moved with fear" (Heb. 11:7), and is translated "godly fear" in those words, "whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." (Heb. 12:28.) It does not, therefore, mean fear in any such sense of the word as would imply a servile dread. It does not mean that our gracious Lord was possessed with that servile dread of the Almighty which reprobates feel and those who never were partakers of the grace of God. But our Lord, as an exemplar of every grace of the Spirit, was possessed of that holy reverence and godly fear in its abundant measure of which we have but a small portion. Now just in proportion to the depth of the grace that was in him, the power of God that rested upon him, and the operations and influence of the Holy Ghost in his soul, so was the measure of holy reverence and godly fear which dwelt in his sacred humanity. Contemplating, therefore, the greatness of the work; having before his eyes not so much the bodily sufferings of the cross as all the mental agonies—the distress of soul, the conflict with the law in its load and curse, the indignation of the Almighty against sin in the person of the Surety, the hidings of his Father's

face, and the withdrawal of the light of his countenance,—foreseeing all these dolorous sufferings of the cross, and tasting the first drops of that shower which was so soon to fall upon his sacred head, it seemed as if his holy soul was filled with the most solemn reverence and deep apprehension of the Majesty of God. This is the fear of which our text speaks. It is in the margin "his piety." But reverence, godly fear, holy apprehension, and tender awe convey the meaning of the word much better than the expression "piety." It was prophesied of him that the "Spirit of the Lord should rest upon him, the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord, and should make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord." (Isa. 11:1, 2.) Thus his prayers, his cries, his supplications, and his tears rose up with sweet acceptance into the ears of his Father, because they came out of a heart filled with reverence and godly fear under the promptings and influences of that eternal Spirit who wrought in him every grace both in its possession and its exercise, and through whom he offered himself without spot to God. The church foreseeing this, prayed in spirit for him: "The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion; remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice." (Psa. 20:1, 2, 3.) In answer to these petitions, "the Lord saved his anointed, and heard him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand;" for when the sorrows of hell compassed him about and the snares of death prevented him, he could say, "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." (Psa. 18:6.) O the power of prayer, and what an example has the Lord set before his praying people; for as God heard and answered and saved him, so will he surely hear, answer and save them.

II.—But I must now pass on to our second point, which was, to consider the lesson which our gracious Lord learnt in the school of prayer and suffering. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."

It is perhaps scarcely necessary to make the remark but I could wish that our translators had used the word "was" instead of "were." "Though he were a Son," conveys a little doubt, of which there is none in the original. If we say of any one, "Though he *were* a good man," it almost implies that he might not have been a good man. But if we say, "Though he *was* a good man," that stamps it as a certainty that he was such. So I could wish that our good translators had just put "was" instead of "were;" because the Lord Jesus Christ was God's Son beyond doubt or uncertainty. It was because he was the Son of God, his own true and proper Son, that he was a suitable mediator between God and man. His eternal Sonship and Deity invested with infinite value his work upon the cross. The tears which he shed, the prayers which he put up, the strong crying which he poured forth, were all stamped with the intrinsic value of his Deity, as well as perfumed by the incense of the Eternal Spirit through whom he offered himself without spot unto God; and therefore rose up before the eyes of his heavenly Father not as the prayers and tears and cries of simply his humanity, but as the tears and prayers and cries of the Son of God, and thus were to him for a sweet smelling savour. (Eph. 5:2.)

i. There are three points connected with the Person and work of our gracious Lord which we can rightly understand only by heavenly teaching, and only truly receive by a divine faith. These are, 1, What he was before all worlds as "the Son of the Father in truth and love;" 2, What he became in his humiliation when he was made flesh and dwelt amongst us; and, 3, What he is as now glorified and exalted to the right hand of the Father. All these three things are in our text; for in it we see, 1, his original and eternal Sonship, "Though he was a Son;" 2, His humiliation and incarnation, "In the days of his flesh when he offered up prayers," &c.; and, 3, What he is as glorified, as I shall presently show from the words, "And being made perfect."

But we are now engaged upon what he was in the days of his flesh, and especially, as I have pointed out, his latter days, when he is said to have "learned obedience by the things that he

suffered." Three questions meet us here: What obedience was this? What is meant by Christ's learning it? And how did he learn it by the things that he suffered? Let us consider the second question first.

ii. Obedience may be learnt in three different ways 1, by our coming to know what we knew not before, and thus learn the obedience that is required of us. So David speaks: "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word." By his chastisements God taught him to know and keep his commandments. But this was not the way in which Christ learnt obedience; for the whole law of God was in his heart, and no command of God was new to him or forgotten by him. But, 2, obedience may be learnt by being instructed, guided, and directed by the blessed Spirit, and by receiving gradually supplies of light and grace, partly by the word and partly by afflictions. But this was not the way in which Christ learnt obedience; for there was in him a fulness of grace, wisdom, and truth so that he needed not to be taught what he had to do, or wanted a perfect readiness of will or mind to do it. 3. But there is a third way of learning obedience, which is by an experience of it in its exercise; and in this way our Lord learnt it.

But what was the obedience which he thus learnt? It was chiefly becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; for this commandment was given him of his Father that he should lay down his life; and he therefore laid it down in a way of obedience to the will and word of God. The apostle, therefore, applies to his offering of himself those words of his in the Psalms: "Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God." This obedience was an obedience of suffering; and therefore the Lord Jesus is said to have "learnt obedience by the things which he suffered." He thus obtained a full experience of that special obedience which is yielded through suffering, and by enduring the wrath of God he learnt what distress and anguish attend it, and what humility, self-denial, meekness, faith, patience, hope, and love, and every grace of the Holy Spirit are needful to sustain the soul under it.

But O what an exemplar for us; for our gracious Lord had to learn obedience to the will of God by a personal experience of suffering, and especially by an implicit submission to his heavenly Father's will. And what was this will? That he should take upon himself the huge debt which his Bride had incurred by original and actual transgression; that he should offer himself as a ransom price to discharge and put it away; that he should bear our sins in his own body on the tree, with everything which was involved in being made a curse for us; that he should by death overcome Satan who had the power of death, and deliver them who all their life through fear of death were subject to bondage; and that whatever sorrows or sufferings should be in his path he should bear them all, and learn in and by them implicit submission to the will of God. This was the will of God, for he was determined that his Law should be magnified, his justice glorified, his infinite purity and holiness revealed and established; and yet, amidst all and through all his displeasure against sin, that his infinite wisdom, tender pity, everlasting love, and sovereign grace might shine and reign in the happiness of millions through a glorious eternity. This, too, was the joy that was set before Christ, for which he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God. By these sufferings in the garden and upon the cross the Lord Jesus was made perfect.

iii. But what perfection was this? Let us endeavour to penetrate into the mind of the Holy Ghost in using this remarkable expression. It occurs in a former part of the Epistle: "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." (Heb. 2:10.) The question then arises, What perfection is intended thereby? It clearly does not mean that by these sufferings in the garden and upon the cross our Lord was made perfect as the Son of God, nor perfect as the Son of man, for he was perfect before as possessing infinite perfection in his eternal Godhead, and was endued also with every possible perfection of which his sacred humanity was

capable. He needed no perfection to be added to his Godhead: it was not susceptible of it; no perfection to be added to his manhood, for it was "a holy thing" in union with eternal Deity. But he needed to be made perfect as a High Priest, and this in two ways. 1. It was through his sufferings that he was *consecrated* or dedicated in an especial manner to the priesthood, for this corresponds with his own words: "And for their sakes I sanctify myself" (John 17:19); that is, I consecrate or dedicate myself to be their High Priest. I have before observed that the two main offices of the high priest were to offer sacrifice and make intercession. Sacrifice came first; and the suffering of our Lord in the garden and upon the cross were a part of this sacrifice. He was therefore "made perfect through suffering," that is, through his sufferings, blood-shedding, and death he was consecrated to perform that other branch of the priestly office which he now executes. Thus as Aaron was consecrated by the sacrifice of a bullock and a ram, of which the blood was not only poured out at the bottom of the altar and sprinkled upon it, but put also on his right ear and hand and foot, so was his great and glorious Anti-type consecrated through his own sacrifice and blood-shedding on the cross; and thus being made perfect, or rather, as the word literally means, being perfected, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.

2. But the words admit of another sense, viz., that through sufferings, from the personal experience of it, he became a *sympathising* High Priest; as the apostle elsewhere speaks: "For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." (Hebrews 4:15.) Thus the Lord, by passing through personal sufferings, experimentally learnt not only obedience, submission, and resignation to the will of God, but to sympathise, feel for, and enter into the trials, sufferings, sorrows, and conflicts of his afflicted people here below. Do they feel the curse of the law? He had felt it before them, and can sympathise with them in their sufferings under it. Do they feel their conflicts with Satan? He had those conflicts with the Prince of darkness in the wilderness, and doubtless in the garden and upon the cross, for, speaking of that hour, he said, "The prince of

this world cometh and hath nothing in me;" and again, "But this is your hour and the power of darkness." Do they know the wrath of God in their conscience so as to make them tremble and quake with apprehension? He knew that wrath when he drank up the bitter cup of which we do but taste. Do they know the weakness of the flesh under painful dispensations, how it needs to be upheld by the mighty power of God, how it requires continual supplies of heavenly grace to support them in the hour of trial, to bear them up and bear them through all they may have to suffer? Now it was necessary that our gracious Lord should know these things by a personal experience of them; that he might learn them in the days of his flesh, and carry that lesson with him into the courts of bliss; that thus he might be not only the great exemplar of sufferings, but, having himself been an afflicted Head, might sympathise with his afflicted members in all those troubles and sorrows by which they are conformed to his suffering image. It is sweet to see that he still retains the same heart which beat so tenderly here below, as the hymn says:

"That human heart he still retains,  
Tho' thron'd in highest bliss;  
And feels each tempted member's pains;  
For our affliction's his."

We know nothing but what we have experienced, whether in nature or in grace, and especially as regards sufferings, trials, and temptations we must have felt them before we can be said to have any real acquaintance with them. Theory, judgment, observation, reading, conversation, and other exercises of our intellect may give us a certain knowledge of things; but they do not communicate any real acquaintance with them. We must pass into them, through them, and out of them, that we may really and truly know them. As possessing indeed all the perfections of Deity, our Lord knew everything within the scope of omniscience, and therefore perfectly knew what trials and sufferings are; but it was necessary, according to the will and purpose of God, that he should have a personal acquaintance with every trial, temptation, and form of suffering which any one of his people might go

through, that he might sympathise feelingly with them, through himself having personally experienced them. And thus he sits in heavenly bliss with a human heart, tender, affectionate, feeling, and sympathising, as having himself passed through every phase of suffering, known every trial, been exposed to every temptation, and having had a personal experience of everything that shall befall any of his living family.

This is a mysterious subject. I do not profess to understand or explain it; but I receive it upon the testimony of God's word, and as such, I see in it a great blessedness: mines of grace, treasures of encouragement, a rich source of divine consolation. If you and I are in a trial, there is a sympathising High Priest for us at the right hand of the Father. The widow, the orphan, the poor, the needy, the distressed, and the exercised—whatever be their affliction, there is a merciful and faithful High Priest, who can feel for and with them, whose tender, loving, and affectionate heart is melted with a sympathising sense of what they are suffering here below. When Paul of Tarsus was persecuting his saints, the head in heaven felt the blow struck at the body on earth, and said "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *me*?" The Head felt what the members suffered. Now to believe this, and in trial, suffering, and exercise to go to a tender, sympathising, affectionate, and loving High Priest, and thus realise his pity toward us, what strength and support it gives. Do we feel the burden of sin? He felt it. Are we crying under a sense of guilt? He felt it. He had indeed no personal guilt; but he felt all the guilt we can feel by imputation. Does the world frown? It frowned upon him. Do men persecute you? They persecuted him. Are you oppressed? He was oppressed also. Are you scoffed at, mocked, jeered, insulted? He had all these things to endure. Does God hide his face? Is your soul in darkness? Are you full of fear? He passed through all these things. This made him sympathising, tender-hearted, loving, kind, and affectionate. We know there is something very sweet and soothing in human sympathy. The widow does not go to the bride to get a word of comfort; she goes to her fellow widow. The man in difficulties can talk best to the man who has passed through the same. A wealthy merchant and a poor tradesman are

unsuitable associates. Hard hearts are poor companions for broken hearts, and unfeeling professors for tender consciences. A man who stands high on the hill of presumption is not a good associate for one who lies low in the vale of humility. Like loves like. If your soul is exercised with temporal or spiritual troubles, and has afflictions, difficulties, trials, and perplexities, you can talk best with those who have some personal experience of them; and as you get together and sometimes unfold to each other your mutual trials, you seem to comfort one another. Thus we find from experience that sympathy has a very comforting effect, and that there is nothing so repulsive when in trouble and difficulty as to meet with a hard heart and an unfeeling conscience. But O what a sympathising High Priest there is in the courts above for poor sinners here below. We may tell him all our cares. The secret sins that you are obliged to keep locked up in your own bosom: the painful temptations you are exercised with; the various things that cut deep into your conscience, which you cannot breath into any one's ear—all are open to this sympathising High Priest, all may be spread before that throne of grace, on which he ever sits as our advocate with the Father.

Thus by suffering, he was made perfect—not only perfect as consecrated thereby to be an ever living intercessor, but perfect in his sympathies, perfect as a High Priest adapted to all our wants and woes, as distinguished from an imperfect high priest, such as were the typical priests under the law. Some were bad men, as Hophni and Phinehas; some were persecutors, as Annas and Caiaphas; when, therefore, the poor Israelite went to the high priest, he might have no sympathy for him, but rather be oppressed by him. Eli could not sympathise with afflicted Hannah; and Ananias commanded them who stood by to smite Paul on the mouth. But all who fear God have now a High Priest who is touched with a feeling of our infirmities, and so can sympathise with us in our temptations and afflictions.

III.—But let us now advance to our last point, which was to show, from the words of the text, that being perfected, Jesus "became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."

i. In my explanation of Christ's being perfected through suffering, I pointed out that this perfection embraced two things: 1, his being perfected as fully consecrated to the work and office of the priesthood; and, 2, as being thereby qualified to be a sympathising Head. There were three things by which our Lord consecrated himself; for though he was a man of sorrows from the manger to the last passover, it was only after his partaking of it with his disciples that he was fully consecrated to the office of Priest. These three things were prayer, suffering, and sacrifice. He consecrated himself through prayer, as recorded John 17, through suffering in the garden, and through sacrifice on the cross. He thus became the author of eternal salvation; for salvation was perfectly accomplished by his obedience, sacrifice, bloodshedding, and death. And now he lives, and now he rules, and now he reigns at the right hand of the Father to send down the benefits and blessings of this salvation thus wrought out. Observe that it is an eternal salvation. It was fully accomplished upon the cross in a time-state; but from the dignity of the Person of Christ, and the perfection of his work, it stretches itself into eternity. In it there is no deficiency, shortcoming, or imperfection. He himself declared of it with expiring lips, "It is finished;" and if finished, finished for ever. It embraces the whole election of grace. It has washed away all their sins, blotted out all their iniquities, cast all their transgressions behind God's back, and clothed their persons with a robe of eternal righteousness. Thus it is "eternal salvation;" and Jesus is the Author of it, its sole undivided Beginner, and its sole undivided Finisher.

ii. But how are we to know who these elect are? Do they bear any special marks to distinguish them from their fellow men? They do; and observe what the mark is: "Unto all them that obey him." This marks the character for whom this eternal salvation is obtained and provided. But what is this obedience, for it is of great importance to ascertain accurately its true nature?

1. It is, then, first, the obedience of *faith*; for this is the first act of obedience. To produce this is the grand object of the preached

gospel; for it is "made known to all nations for the obedience of faith." (Rom. 16:26.) The Lord, therefore, in the preached gospel, bids us, invites us, and enables us to believe in him. He presents himself to us in the glass of the gospel; he holds himself forth therein as the author of eternal salvation; and he says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else;" "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" "He that believeth in me hath everlasting life." These are his words in which he holds himself forth in the gospel as the object of our faith; and when the blessed Spirit is pleased to raise up that faith in our soul whereby we embrace him as the Son of God, take hold of him, bring him into our heart, and give him sweet entertainment there, then we have salvation as a manifested reality. Thus we obey him, because we obey his invitations, believe his word, rest upon his promises, twine round his Person, look to his blood, and hang wholly upon his grace. This is fulfilling his promise: "As soon as they hear of me they shall obey me."

2. Out of this obedience of faith flows all *practical* obedience. This is manifested by obeying his precepts, walking in his ordinances, seeking to glorify him by a life, conduct, and conversation becoming the gospel; making his word to be the rule of our life, his will to be our guide, and what he has laid down as the path in which we should walk as the path in which we ever desire our feet to be found. Now there is no rest or peace except in thus obeying him. Get out of the path of obedience, and you get into the path of misery. Cease to believe, I mean in your feelings, and cease to obey him by any temporal deviation, slip, or fall, or by being entangled in the snares of sin and Satan, and you bring guilt into your conscience and distress into your soul. But obey him by believing in his name, walking in his fear, keeping his word, listening to his voice, doing his will, and desiring to glorify him in your body and spirit which are his, and you will find more or less peace in believing and the approbation of God in your conscience. Sin may be sweet in appearance, the snare be hidden from your view, and Satan may present the poison cup, the edge well smeared with honey. We may even long to have a sip, and

sometimes are weak enough to taste some drops of the poisoned cup. But O the guilt, the misery, the darkness, the distress, and the perplexity which you will bring upon your soul if you put to your lips and drink any measure of that poison cup of sin which Satan presents to your imagination as a delicious draught. Thus you see there is a blessedness in obedience. It does not give us, but it manifests our interest in the finished work of the Son of God. There is nothing in the highest acts of faith and obedience that we can take any joy in as accomplished by us, nothing that we can boast of as our own; and yet there is a sacred blessedness in obeying the gospel by believing in the Son of God, by walking in the fear of God, and doing the things as well as professing them which are pleasing in God's sight. At any rate, I can say this, if I can say no more, if you want to be miserable; if you want to walk in a path of bondage, distress, and perplexity; if you want to plant a thorn in a dying pillow; if you want to have God at a distance when you most need him near, and when you come to a trial to have no support in it nor under it; walk disobediently, walk inconsistently, and you will get your wish to the very full. Walk in carnality, pride, and self-righteousness; live after worldly customs and conform yourself to worldly opinions, and if there be a grain of godly fear, or one spark of the life of God in your heart, you will do the best thing you can to bring your soul into misery and bondage. Therefore, though we can take no merit from and make no boasting of any obedience we may render, yet is the path of godly obedience so safe, so blessed, so honouring to God, and so comforting to the soul thus favoured, that it should be and will be the desire of all who truly fear God to be ever found walking in it. And O the blessedness, if we are enabled in any measure to obey the will of God by believing in his dear Son and by walking in his fear, to find under every temptation and trial in life, death, health, and sickness. that we have a gracious and sympathising High Priest, "the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him."

## **THE SUPERABOUNDINGS OF GRACE OVER THE ABOUNDINGS OF SIN**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day morning, October 12, 1862

"But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord."  
Romans 5:20, 21

Wherever we go, wherever we turn our eyes, two objects meet our view—sin and misery. There is not a town nor a village, nor a house, nor a family, no, nor a human heart, in which these two inseparable companions are not to be found;—sin the fountain, misery the stream; sin the cause, misery the effect; sin the parent, misery the offspring.

But some of you may perhaps be inclined to say, "I do not altogether see with you here; I think you take much too gloomy, too melancholy a view of the case. But this is just like you. You are always telling us what sinners we are, and what we feel, or ought to feel, on account of our sins, just as if we were some of the basest, blackest characters in England. I admit there is a great deal of sin in the world; but I do not see so much sin in myself as you represent, nor do I feel so much misery and wretchedness in consequence of it as you are continually talking about." That may be the case, but may it not arise from your want of sight or from your want of feeling? The fact may be the same, though you may not see or feel it. A blind man might be led through the wards of a hospital, and say, amidst all the pain and suffering on well-nigh every bed around him, "I see no disease; where is the disease they speak of? People are always talking about the sickness and suffering in the hospitals; but I don't see any." Or a person in full health and strength might be struck suddenly down with apoplexy, or fall into an epileptic fit, and be really a most pitiable object, yet himself feel no pain or

misery. So your not seeing sin may arise from want of light, and your not feeling it may arise from want of life. You must not, therefore, judge of the non-existence of sin by your not seeing it, or conclude there is no evil in it because you do not feel it. There are those who do see it, there are those who do feel it; and these are the best judges whether such things as sin and misery exist.

But a question may arise, "How came sin and misery into this world? What was the origin of sin?" That is a question I cannot answer. The origin of evil is a problem hidden from the eyes of man, and is probably unfathomable by human intellect. It is sufficient for us to know that sin is; and it is a blessing of blessings, a blessing beyond all value, that we know also there is a cure for it.

Let me give you two illustrations of this. A poor woman has, she fears, a cancer in her breast. She goes to a surgeon and says, "I have a hard lump here, and such sharp, darting pains, just, it seems, as if I had knives driven into me." "O," the doctor says, "my good woman I am afraid indeed that you have a cancer. How did it originate? Had your mother one or any of your family? Have you had a blow there? O," she says, "I cannot tell you: I can only tell you what I have felt and what I feel. Never mind how it came. Here it is, Can you cure it?" Or a young man loses strength and flesh, becomes pallid, is worried with a hacking cough and flying pains by day, and is restless and feverish all night. He goes to a doctor and says, "I am afraid I am ill, my chest feels so bad." "O, my young friend," the doctor replies, after due examination, "I fear there is some disease in your lungs. Was your father or your mother consumptive? Did any of your brothers or your sisters die of decline? Have you been living in close rooms without air and exercise? How do you think your disease originated? Well, I cannot tell you anything about its origin, or whether I got it from my father or my mother. My chief concern is whether it can be cured."

So you see it is not the origin of a thing, whether bodily disease or moral evil, which we have to look to. We may not be able to

tell how evil originated, but, like the poor woman with a cancer, or the consumptive youth, may be able to tell from our feelings that it exists. This, indeed, is the first step in religion, for as the Lord said, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." **Mt 9:12,13** When, then, the deep-seated malady of sin is opened up to our view, and we begin to feel that there is no soundness in us, and nothing but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores, then arises the anxious inquiry, "Is there a cure?" Now, through God's unspeakable mercy, I can assure you, from His word and in His name, that there is a cure for the malady of sin, and that there is a remedy for the misery and distress which are the sure consequences of it when laid with weight and power upon the conscience. Yes, there is "balm in Gilead—there is a physician there;" there is One who says of Himself, "I am the Lord that healeth thee" **Ex 15:26**; One to whom the soul can say, when the healing balm of a Saviour's blood is made effectually known: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases." **Ps 103:2,3**

To unfold the malady and discover the remedy, is the grand purpose of the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures of truth; but I do not know any single passage of God's word in which malady and remedy are more powerfully and more closely brought together than in the words of the text. What sin is and what grace is, are there indeed clearly depicted by the Holy Ghost, written by His unerring pen as with a ray of light. I despair of being able fully or even adequately to open up to your view the depths of truth contained in it, for who can fathom the measureless ocean of abounding sin or lay bare the treasures of superabounding grace? But as the text is one dear to my heart, and one which I wish not to lose sight of for a single day of my life, I shall endeavour, with God's help and blessing, to bring before you something of what I have been led to see and feel in it; and as sin and grace are here so vividly contrasted and brought, as it were, to meet each other face to face, I shall attempt from it to show,

I.—**First**, Sin as **an abounding flood**; Sin as a **despotic tyrant**; Sin as a **cruel executioner**.

II—**Secondly**, Grace as a **superabounding tide**; Grace as a **reigning monarch**; Grace as a **sovereign giver of eternal life**.

III.—**Thirdly**, how all these inestimable blessings are "**through righteousness**" and "**by Jesus Christ our Lord**."

I.—You will find all that I have stated, and much more, in our text. In fact, language can never utter, as heart can never conceive, the depths of infinite mercy which are stored up in it. It has been a feast for millions. The Lord enable me to spread the table with some of the choice provision revealed in it, and give you an appetite to feed upon it—an appetite well sharpened by a feeling sense of your sin and misery; for it is only those who painfully know the aboundings of sin, and blessedly know the superaboundings of grace, who can sit at this table as hungry guests and hear the Lord's words, "Eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." **So 5:1**

1. I said I would show you sin as **an abounding flood**—"where sin abounded," and I shall take as a figure, to illustrate my meaning, an occurrence which caused a great deal of temporal suffering and distress in an adjoining county, and indeed, from its nature and consequences, produced much apprehension through the country generally. Last Spring, if you recollect, there was a flood in Norfolk, which devastated at least six or seven thousand acres of some of the finest land in England, just at a season when everything seemed to promise fair for abundant crops. I shall use that figure to show you the abounding flood of sin. But I must first explain the circumstances to make my figure more perspicuous, for most of you, probably, are but imperfectly acquainted with them. A low lying tract of land, of many thousand acres, called the Bedford Level, besides a large portion of adjoining country, is artificially drained by the River Ouse, and from its naturally low situation is below the level of the sea at high tide. It is, therefore, necessary that there should be strong,

high banks, with flood-gates at the mouth of the river, that it may discharge at low tide the drainage of the surrounding country, and then before the tide again rises that these gates should be closed to keep out the sea. But it so happened, through negligence or some other cause, that a breach was made in this dyke. And what was the consequence? The German ocean, at high tide, entered through this breach, and every successive tide made it deeper and wider, until at last it burst over the whole country, and flooded more than 6 acres of land, the salt water destroying all the crops and carrying consternation and peril through the whole district.

I shall take that figure, therefore, to illustrate my first point—sin viewed as an abounding flood; and, in so doing, I shall consider the German ocean to represent sin; the land smiling in beauty and verdure the soul of man in its primitive state as created in the image of God; and the dyke that kept out the waters man's innocency in Paradise. Look, then, at sin raging in the bosom of Satan as the German ocean tossed its angry billows in wild confusion upon the Norfolk coast. Wave after wave beat upon the shore; but not one drop could get in so long as the dyke stood. But when a breach was made, though in itself but small, then burst in the German ocean. So as long as man stood in his native purity and uprightness, sin might rage in Satan's boiling breast, but it could not enter into man's bosom. But when temptation came and was listened to, giving heed to the tempter made a gap in the dyke of man's innocency, and then through the breach sin rushed in, as the German ocean into the fair fields of Norfolk. And what was the consequence? It flooded the soul of man; defaced and destroyed the image of God in him, utterly ruined his native innocency, and left upon his conscience a whole mass of ooze and sludge, under which he has ever since lain as a guilty sinner before God. This was not like the flood in Norfolk, to be drained off by pumps and carried back to the ocean whence it came. There was no re-constructing of the dyke, no re-building of the floodgates. When once sin had burst in, no power of man could ever throw it back.

I said in my introduction that the origin of evil was a mystery unfathomable by human intellect. But you will observe that there is a distinction between the **origin** of sin and the **entrance** of sin. The origin of sin is not revealed to us, for it existed in the bosom of Satan before it came into this lower world. But its **entrance** into us we know. The Scripture is clear here. "By one man sin **entered** into the world." And the entrance of death is as plainly revealed as the entrance of sin, for the Holy Ghost adds "and death by sin." Nor are its universal consequences less plainly revealed: "And so death passed upon all men; for that [margin "in whom"] all have sinned." **Ro 5:12** That sin at once flooded the whole heart of man is evident in the first man that was born of woman. What was he? His brother's murderer. How abounding, how fatal must have been the flood when, out of mere envy and jealousy, one brother should have shed another's blood, as if only just outside the very gates of Paradise!

But in order to gain some insight into the abounding of sin, let us look at it in a variety of particulars, because we must come to dose detail, to practical facts, to experimental feeling, before we can really be made sensible of the truth of God's word in so plainly and positively declaring that sin "**abounded.**"

i. Look at it first, then, as abounding **in the world** at large. Who that has any eye to see or any heart to feel cannot but painfully realise the pressing, the overwhelming fact that sin awfully abounds there? What dreadful murders, what desperate suicides, what acts of violence and robbery, what hideous deeds of uncleanness, what Sabbath breaking, and that systematically encouraged by cheap excursion trains on the great leading railway lines; what neglect of all public and private worship; what contempt of God and man; what daring rebellion against everything holy and sacred; what awful ungodliness and infidelity are displayed to the most superficial view as running down our streets like water, not only in the metropolis, but in all our great towns. These are but waifs and strays thrown upon the shore by the waves of the sea of sin; mere passing specimens which come to light of thousands of unseen, undiscovered crimes. But even

where the surface of society is unruffled by these waves of open sin, what a sea of iniquity is buried beneath the still water! What envy, hatred, malice, jealousy, cruelty, and sensuality lie hidden under smiling faces, and what a rooted dislike to everything spiritual and holy is covered up under an outward form of religion and morality!

ii. When we look at the **professing Church** are things really any better? Does not sin abound there? It is true there is thrown over it a veil which seems to give it a rather more decent appearance: but under that veil, could it be suddenly torn off, what sins we should see to lurk and work. What hypocrisy; what self-righteousness; what hatred of God's truth; what contempt of the saints of God; what pride and worldliness: what giving way to every sensual inclination; what contentment with the mere forms and shadows of religion and setting them up in place of the substance and the power; what ignorance of the true and spiritual meaning of the Scriptures; and what a deadly opposition to the inward life of God and to all who know it, preach it, or profess it!

iii. But come still nearer home. Look at the Church of God; the little flock, gathered out of a sinful world and a deceptive profession. Do we not see sin abounding even there? What strife, division, contention, suspicion, jealousy, hard thoughts and hard words do we see often rending asunder the Church for which Christ died. What little living to the glory of God; what little walking in humility, simplicity, sincerity, godly fear, spirituality of mind, and godly obedience do we see in many who, we hope, after all, are really partakers of distinguishing grace.

iv. But come nearer, closer still. Look to your own bosom; search and examine well the daily working of sin in your own heart. May we not say, I am sure I can for one, sin abounds? We hope that, by the restraining grace of God, sin does not indeed abound in our words or works—the Lord forbid it should! But if it be kept back and restrained there by the fear of God and the power of His grace, does not sin awfully abound in our thoughts, in our

imaginings, in our desires, in the working of our carnal mind? Who that knows himself in the teaching of the Spirit can say that sin has not awfully abounded in him, not only before he was called by grace and made alive unto God by His quickening breath, but since he has known the truth of God in its power? What sins does conscience register against light, against conviction, against our better judgment, against the warnings of God in His word, and, what is still more painful, against mercies, blessings, privileges, and all that the Lord has done for us both in providence and in grace! What miserable unthankfulness; what base ingratitude; what reckless oblivion of all the Lord's mercies; what self-seeking; what pride; what lusting after evil things; what confusion often in prayer; what unbelieving thoughts; what want of fixedness and steadfastness in the ways of God; what lack of self-denial, crucifixion of the flesh, and doing the things which God has commanded, as well as professing them! Surely, when we take a view of what we are as sinners before the eyes of infinite Purity and Holiness, is there one who knows his own heart and is honest before God who must not say, "Sin has abounded in **me?**" It is our mercy if the Lord restrain by His Spirit and grace the outward acts of sin. But there is not a heart that knows its own bitterness which will not confess that sin hath abounded and still abounds in it.

But there are some other ideas connected with the figure of a flood which I do not wish wholly to pass by.

A flood **penetrates**. It does not merely flow over, but penetrates into every place where it comes. So sin has not merely rolled over the human heart with its polluting tide, but has penetrated into every faculty of body and soul. Into every look, every thought, every inclination, every imagination, every passion, and I may well say every principle of the human mind, has it deeply and thoroughly penetrated so as to defile and pollute them through their whole length and breadth. It has also filled our body with the seeds of sickness and disease, and carried mortality into every thread and fibre of our bodily frame.

But a flood comes down also with **sweeping** force. Such was the flood in Norfolk. Cattle, crops, fences, even houses were swept away by it. So sin, as an abounding flood, has swept away not only man's innocence, but all his strength; and still sweeps away all promises, vows, resolutions, attempts at reformation, and hurls them along in a tide of confusion.

But a flood, also, the **more it is resisted the stronger it is**. So with the flood of sin. It not only sweeps away all the dams and dykes which nature sets up, but is rendered more violent by opposition. This the apostle found: "But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead." **Ro 7:8** He tells us here how sin "took occasion by the commandment:" that is, the very law set up against it only made sin work the more strongly, putting as if fresh life into it; for "without the law sin was dead," that is, was not stirred up into living activity and power.

II. But now let us look at sin under another character, as a **despotic tyrant**. "Sin hath **reigned**." Sin is not a passive thing in man's bosom. It is not contented to lie there as a stone, or even as subject to man's better thoughts. Nothing will satisfy it but the throne, nothing content it but to hold the reigns of government. The very nature of sin is to assert dominion over every faculty of man's body and mind. Nothing less than absolute authority over both will ever content the craving of this restless tyrant: The apostle therefore says "it hath **reigned**." How sin reigns in every worldly breast! What little check is put upon thoughts or words or works, of whatever kind they be, by natural conscience; or if it speak, what little heed is paid to its voice! Whatever sin bids natural men do, they do it eagerly. Sin leads them captive at its will. They have no will of their own, but obey eagerly, obey submissively, whatever sin commands. Sin has but to issue the word, and they do what it bids. Sin has but to lead, and they follow in the path Where it guides. Sin has but to show itself as king, and all knees bow before it; all hands are active to do its behests, and every foot is obedient to move in the directed path.

Nay, we ourselves, who have, we trust, the fear of God in our bosom, and know something of the Lord Jesus Christ by a living faith, have melancholy evidence that sin "hath reigned," if it do not reign now. What were we in a state of nature? Had not sin then absolute and uncontrolled dominion over us? I don't know that I was worse in my carnal days than other young men of my age or station in life. Indeed, I was in some measure restrained by moral and honourable considerations from being altogether given up to gross abominations, and had a not altogether undeserved character at college for a respect for morality and religion. But if ever I was restrained from sin, it was not from any thought about God. If ever I was kept from positive, absolute evil, it was not because I had any sense in my conscience that there was a God above who watched my actions, and who would one day bring me to His bar. I certainly had no conscience about evil thoughts, or light and foolish words, or a general course of pride and worldly ambition. So I know from my own experience that where the fear of God is not, and the conscience is not made alive and tender, we sin eagerly, we sin greedily, we sin thoughtlessly, so far, at least, as regards any spiritual restraint. If we abstain from sin in outward action, it is from respect to our character, or from moral constraints, or from fear of man, or want of temptation and opportunity, or from not being entangled with bad companions, or from some apprehension of damaging our worldly prospects. God is not in our thoughts; nor do we abstain from evil either through a desire to please Him or a fear to offend Him. If, therefore, you have not been altogether abandoned to open crime, nor given way to every vile lust of your fallen nature; if your station in life, your sex, the warnings and example of careful parents, the restraints imposed by society upon general conduct, and other moral considerations have preserved you from outward evil, think not that sin has not reigned the less over you. It has reigned in your thoughts, in your inclinations, in your lusts, in your desires, in your pride, in your ambition, in your contempt of God and godliness, in your aspirations after earthly grandeur, your love of dress, fashion, and respectability, in the general neglect and contempt of

everything gracious and spiritual, heavenly and holy; in building your hopes below the skies, roaming and revelling in a vain paradise of a gross and sensual imagination.

A man does not know himself who cannot look back through a long vista, sometimes of years, and see how in infancy, in boyhood, in youth, in manhood, up to the very time when grace set up a rival throne in his heart, sin reigned in him. He lived not to God, not for eternity, but for time. He lived not to please God, but to please himself or his fellow creatures. He lived not as one who had a soul to be saved or lost, but as one who had a body to feed and clothe, adorn and gratify, and a mind to please, I will even say, cultivate, but not to devote to the service of God and the good of His people. If this be not the reign of sin, tell me what is. Who is our King but he whom we obey? He is our Lord and master whom we serve; and if we serve him willingly, the stronger master he is. Is not this the apostle's argument, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" **Ro 6:16** To be the servant of sin, is to acknowledge sin as our king.

But does not sin even now to a great extent reign even in the breasts of those who desire to fear God? It does not, indeed, reign as before, for its power is broken and checked; but still it is ever seeking to regain its further dominion. How suitable then the precept, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" **Ro 6:12**; and how blessed the promise, "For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace." **Ro 6:14**

3. But sin is worse than this: it is a **cruel executioner**; for we read that "sin hath reigned unto **death**."

In one of the paintings in the tombs of Egypt—for they still retain their ancient pictures in all their freshness in that dry climate—there is represented an Egyptian monarch, of almost gigantic stature, supposed to be Sesostris, the Shishak of the Scriptures

**1Ki 11:40**, holding in his hand a drawn sabre, and pursuing a crowd of helpless victims, some of whom he is holding by the hair of the head, at the same time wielding the sabre to sever their necks asunder. Now this is just the picture which the Orientals drew of their despotic sovereigns, and much corresponds with a similar representation in the Nineveh sculptures, where a warrior king is represented in his chariot with his bow and arrow aiming at a crowd of wretched fugitives. Such is sin in our text; not merely a despotic monarch, as I have already brought him before your eyes, but himself a cruel executioner, for he reigns "unto death," and never spares a single victim the finishing blow. He is not satisfied with the life of his subjects; their obedience to his behests, their implicit acquiescence with all his demands: he craves their blood. He snuffs after it as a hungry tiger or famished wolf, for nothing can satisfy him but the death, the cruel death, of all his subjects. For this sanguinary thirst, this unrelenting, murderous disposition and determination, I call him not only a despotic tyrant, but I style him a cruel executioner.

His reigning unto death carries with it a meaning beyond the mere separation of body and soul; for death in Scripture has three distinct meanings—death temporal, death spiritual, and death eternal. Unto each and all of these three kinds of death hath sin reigned and reigns still, for the sceptre is not yet struck out of his hand, nor the sword wrenched from his grasp.

i. See him, then, first reigning unto death **temporal**; for "by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that [margin, **"in whom"**] all have sinned." This was the fulfilment of God's word to Adam: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." What a reign is here; what slaughter, what devastation, what universal sway! Sin as universal as death, and death as universal as sin.

ii. But there is another death which is more fatal even than this. When sin entered into man's heart and set up its throne there, it not only brought about the death of the body, but a worse death, even the death of the soul: that alienation from the life of God,

that death in trespasses and sins, that moral and spiritual death which the Scriptures speak of, which has paralysed all man's mental faculties Godward, which has utterly ruined the image of God in him, and cast him into a state of enmity and rebellion, misery and helplessness, out of which there could have been no escape but for the interposition of sovereign grace. I have read of a Spaniard who, when his enemy was in his power, promised he would spare his life if he would blaspheme Christ. The poor wretch obeyed, but no sooner had he spoken the fatal word than the Spaniard thrust his sword into his heart. "Now," he cried, "this is revenge, for I have not only killed his body, but I have killed his soul." So it is with sin; it not only killed man's body, but at the same stroke it killed man's soul.

iii. But there is still another death unto which sin hath reigned, which this cruel executioner inflicts as the last purpose of his wicked mind, the last act of his destructive power,—**the second death**, eternal death, banishment, eternal banishment, from the presence of God, into those gloomy regions, where hope never comes; where there is for ever weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth; that abyss of woe, where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. View, then, this cruel executioner bringing out his subjects in their long and gloomy files, and inflicting upon them these three kinds of death: death temporal, death spiritual, death eternal.

But what are we? What are we? Merely hearers of these said things? Merely spectators of the execution, witnessing it as if it were a summer holiday? No; we are all bound and chained together in the gloomy file, awaiting, as it were, our time and turn; for as sin hath reigned as our tyrant, so it is or will be our executioner. There is not a person here present within the reach of my voice in whom sin has not, in purpose, done all these three things. The sentence is passed; you are but awaiting its execution. You are all doomed to die; sin will execute upon you the death of your body; it has already brought about the death of your soul; and it will, but for sovereign mercy, bring about the death of body and soul in hell, where the impenitent and the

unbelieving will for ever lie under the terrible wrath of the Almighty.

These things, however painfully they may strike our mind or chill our blood, we have to see and feel each one for himself; and this is the reason why I so strongly insist upon them, for I am well persuaded that no one will ever know or truly and really value the deliverance which God has provided from them, until he has seen and felt, and is deeply and inwardly persuaded of their reality. But I shall not leave you in this miserable case. God has not left you there, nor should I, standing up in His name, act consistently with my position or profession as His servant if I were to leave you there either. I shall therefore pass on to our second point, which is,

II. To bring before you grace as countervailing sin in three respective points. We will now, then, view grace as **a superabounding tide**; grace as a most **benign and clement sovereign**; and grace **as the sovereign disposer and giver of eternal life**.

It is in these glorious triumphs of sovereign grace that the main blessedness of the Gospel consists. Grace meets and vanquishes sin at every point. Is sin a dark, filthy polluting flood? Has it burst through the dyke of man's primitive innocency, utterly defaced the image of God in him, penetrated into every thread and fibre of body and soul, and abounded even to overflowing in every thought, word, and act of heart, lip, and life? Grace shall meet this abounding flood and superabound over it. Does sin reign with despotic sway over the elect of God, subjecting them to his sceptre and lording it over them with iron hand? Grace shall descend from heaven in the Person of the Son of God, shall wrest the sceptre from his grasp, and reign in his stead. Does sin, as a cruel executioner, deal against his hapless victims death and damnation with every blow? Grace shall beat the sword out of his hand and breathe life into his slaughtered victims—a life which shall never die. These points we have now to consider.

1. First, then, view grace as a **superabounding** tide. The Lord does not take the same means of clearing away the flood of sin as human skill devised and human hands achieved in the case of the Norfolk inundation,—by casting it back into the ocean from whence it came. The Norfolk dyke was after a few failures again reared up; the flood-gates again were fixed; the tall chimneys again smoked; the restless pumps again worked; and the sluggish Ouse again received into its patient bosom and bore into the sea the wide waste of waters which had wrought such destructive effects. But sin's dark, polluting tide could not be so thrown back, nor the dyke of man's native innocency be again set up. God takes, then, another way to repair the ruin which sin had wrought as a polluting flood. He brings a superabounding tide of free and sovereign grace which shall rise over sin, hide it from view, and completely bury it from the eyes of infinite Justice. We read therefore in our text, "Where sin abounded, grace **did much more abound.**" Sin rushed in upon the soul of man as an abounding flood; but grace comes in upon the soul of man as a superabounding tide—not merely to repair all the mischief which the flood has caused; not merely to remove the deluge and restore the fields to their former verdure; but to cover from view the flood itself by a superabounding tide of blood and love.

The superabounding of grace over the abounding of sin is a most blessed theme, and I may well falter in my tongue to set it forth. But let us endeavour to look at it in the light of revealed truth, and see whether it does not meet all our wants and all our woes.

Look, then, at grace in its **sovereignty**, as issuing out of the bosom of a three-one God. I showed you how sin issued out of the breast of Satan as the flood in Norfolk issued out of the bosom of the German sea. This is, you will remember, a scriptural, though it might seem to you a strange, figure: "And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood." **Re 12:15** Now grace issues out of the bosom of a triune Jehovah to superabound over the flood of sin which rushed out of the mouth of Satan.

i. The first rising of this began in Jehovah's sovereign councils, and issued forth in the provisions of the eternal covenant "ordered in all things and sure." God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost—the three Persons of the glorious Godhead—contrived and entered with each other into an eternal covenant, in which every blessing was provided for the elect of God: a Mediator chosen and set up in the Person of God's dear Son; an atonement of sin determined on in His incarnation, sufferings, bloodshedding, and death; a justification devised in His perfect obedience to the law of God; and a salvation provided which should be "without money and without price" on the part of man, but perfectly effectual for every purpose of God. In this everlasting covenant, then, we have the first rising of that superabounding grace which saves a guilty race by abounding over all the floods of sin.

ii. Now come down from heaven to earth. We have seen the fountain: now look at the stream. View the Son of God coming forth from the bosom of His Father, and assuming the flesh and blood of the children into union with His own divine Person. Then by the eye of faith trace Him through His life of obedience and suffering to the garden in which the agony began, and to the cross on which the agony was accomplished, and see in the atoning blood, and dying love of Jesus, the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of superabounding grace. See in the sufferings, the bloodshedding, and the sacrifice of the Holy Lamb of God the rising on earth of that tide of heavenly grace which hides, for ever hides, from the sight of eternal Justice the flood of sin, with all its filth and sludge and ooze, which had ruined the image of God in man, and has swept and is still sweeping myriads into an abyss of endless woe.

iii. But look a little further: come down to the appointed time and hour when the Lord was first pleased to arrest you on the broad road to hell, and see how it was sovereign grace which began that work upon your heart which will never die. This is the first springing up—"Spring up, O well"—this is the first springing up of

the life of God in the soul which was given you in Christ Jesus before the world began. What else could have met and arrested the tide of sin which was bearing you along? How superabounding was grace over that dreadful flood of sin which was fast hurling you into destruction!

iv. Now come a little further on to the happy day when grace in its superabounding tide burst in upon your soul in a revelation of Christ, in a manifestation of His dying love, in some application of His atoning blood, or some view of Him as bearing your sins in His own body on the tree. Was not this visitation of mercy all of superabounding grace?

v. And now next take another view of this deep, rich, and heavenly tide, and see how grace is daily superabounding over all the aboundings of your sin, and guilt, and filth, and folly; how it heals backslidings, pardons iniquities, covers the naked soul with a robe of righteousness, washes out the most damning spots, and brings the vanquished rebel to the feet of Christ, to admire and adore the mysteries of His dying love. Can we speak too highly of superabounding grace? I will say for myself there is not in the whole book of God a text I seem to love more than, or so much as this; nor is there a day scarcely in my soul's experience when I have not reason to make mention of it before the Lord, confessing the abounding of my sin and looking to Him for the superabounding of His grace. It is a passage of Scripture very dear to my heart, for it so unfolds two things which I have had so long to learn in daily experience: the abounding of sin in my carnal mind, and the superabounding of grace in the Person and work of the Son of God, in which alone I can have any well grounded hope.

But let us bear in mind that grace has to superabound over the aboundings of sin, not only in covering it from the eyes of God as with an overwhelming tide of love and blood, but also as a **subduing, restraining** stream. There is a most gracious promise in the word of truth, which should be as dear to us as any of those promises which speak of pardoned sin. "He will subdue our

iniquities;" and observe the connection between the pardon of sin and the subduing of it, for it adds, "And Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." **Mic 7:19** It is not the law but the gospel to which is attached the blessing of sin restrained as well as of sin pardoned. "Sin shall not have dominion over you." Why not? "For ye are not under the law but under grace." **Ro 6:14** I showed you before that the law only stirred up sin, as a dam thrown across a flood makes it rise the higher. "Without the law," says the apostle, "sin was dead;" and again, "For 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." **Ro 7:5** But the glory of grace is that whilst it pardons sin, it also subdues it, and, swelling over its restless tide, holds it down in its bed as by an overwhelming wave.

2. But grace is also represented in our text as a most **benign and clement monarch**. "Sin hath reigned unto death." Shall grace then leave the sceptre in the hand of sin? Shall grace let sin reign over the people of God as it has reigned before, and maintain its usurped dominion? What hereditary right has sin to reign over the family of God? No more right than Pharaoh had to reign over the children of Israel. Are they not redeemed by the blood of the Lamb? Is sin therefore ever to hold them fast in its iron chain? No; grace shall come in all the majesty wherewith God has clothed her princely form, shall wrest the sceptre out of the cruel tyrant's hands, break it asunder, dethrone him, and take her seat upon the heart over which sin has ruled with such daring and despotic sway. O how cruelly has sin reigned in the heart of man! Hurrying him on to every, vile abomination, plunging him into every depth of misery and crime, and then hurling him impenitent and unbelieving into an abyss of endless misery!

But sin is not easily dethroned. It will struggle for power to its latest gasp; will seek every opportunity to recover its authority, and will not let the prisoner go until again and again it has made the iron enter into his very soul, and plunged him sometimes almost into the depths of despair. But God's promises are sure;

they are all "Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus." Grace shall reign through righteousness unto eternal life; and those in whom grace reigns shall themselves reign also: "For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Christ Jesus." **Ro 5:17** Is not Christ stronger than Satan? Is not His righteousness greater and of more avail than all man's disobedience? Is not "the grace of God and the gift of grace" beyond the offence of Adam and all its consequences? As the apostle argues, "But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift; for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification." **Ro 5:15,16** Blessed conclusion to which he brings us! "Therefore as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." **Ro 5:18,19**

This opens a way for the reign of sovereign grace. The removal of sin by the blood of the Lamb and the gift of righteousness by the obedience of the Son of God, lay open a royal road in which grace as a victorious sovereign comes in the fulness of her triumph. As she thus comes, she sweetly guides, softly controls, and reigns and rules in the bosom, not by law but by gospel, not by threats and terrors, but by the greatest and best of all authority, the authority of love. Grace by her gentle sway, constrains the thoughts, enlarges and ennobles the affections, makes obedience sweet, and thus endears the precept as well as the promise. Grace reigns by bringing about submission to God's will under all trying dispensations, by planting the fear of God deep in the heart, making the conscience alive and tender; by producing brokenness and contrition of spirit; by showing the exceeding sinfulness of sin; and by raising up earnest desires and prayers that it may never be permitted to reign in us and over us as it

has reigned before. This is the reign of grace which you must feel and know for yourself as well as its superabounding tide of pardoning love. Has not sin reigned over you? Have you not eagerly, greedily, in times past followed all its behests, given way to every vile lust and base inclination, and been led captive by it at its will? If, then, the reigning yoke of sin is to be shaken off, and you are to be the loyal subject of sovereign grace, in a similar way, you will have to listen to its inward admonitions, to yield to its subduing restraints, and to be as plainly and evidently under the dominion of grace as you have been under the dominion of sin.

How strongly does the apostle urge this, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." **Ro 6:12,13** To be made free from sin in its reigning power and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord, is the distinguishing mark of the people of God. We cannot serve sin and God too. "His servants we are to whom we obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." "To be made free from sin and to become servants to God," will here give us "fruit unto holiness," and hereafter "the end everlasting life." **Ro 6:22** The reign of grace must be as conspicuous as the reign of sin, or it may well be asked, "Whose servants are ye?"

But this is the mercy for mourning saints who are sighing and groaning under a body of sin and death, that God has decreed that grace not only **may** reign, but that it **must reign**. Were it left to us, we could no more rescue ourselves from the dominion of sin than the children of Israel could deliver themselves from the house of Egyptian bondage. But they sighed and groaned by reason of the bondage, and their cry came up unto God. He had respect unto His covenant, and looked upon them and delivered them. **Ex 2:23,25** So God has determined on behalf of His people that sin shall not be their eternal ruin; that it shall not plunge

them into crime after crime until it casts them at last into the gulf of endless woe, but that grace "shall reign through righteousness unto eternal life."

But it must reign here as well as hereafter, for by its reign here its eternal triumph is secured. It must then subdue our proud hearts, and never cease to sway its peaceful sceptre over them until it has secured in them absolute and unconditional victory. Now this is what every sincere child of God most earnestly longs to feel and realise. He longs to embrace Jesus and be embraced by Him in the arms of love and affection. As the hymn says,

Yet now, subdued by sovereign grace,  
My spirit longs for Thy embrace.

He hates sin, though it daily, hourly, momentarily works in him, and is ever seeking to regain its former mastery; he abhors that cruel tyrant who set him to do his vilest drudgery, deceived and deluded him by a thousand lying promises, dragged him again and again into captivity, and but for sovereign grace would have sealed his eternal destruction. Subdued by the sceptre of mercy, he longs for the dominion of grace over every faculty of his soul and every member of his body. "O," he says, "let grace reign and rule in my breast; let it not suffer any sin to have dominion over me; let it tame every unruly desire, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Thus, he who truly fears God looks to grace, and to grace only, not merely to save but to sanctify; not only to pardon sin but to subdue it; not only to secure him an inheritance among the saints in light, but to make him meet for it.

3. But there is one feature more in the character of sovereign, distinguishing grace brought before us in our text which I have still to explain, as countervailing the mighty power of sin. From the words, reigning "**unto death,**" I took occasion to describe sin as a **cruel executioner**, whom nothing could satisfy but the death of his victims. In that description we saw how sin, in establishing its reign to the utmost over fallen man, carried out

its unrelenting cruelty in sentencing him to three kinds of death,—death temporal, death spiritual, and death eternal. Now grace must thoroughly repeal this three-fold sentence, and perfectly undo all that sin has done, or it would not be all-reigning, all-conquering grace. Let us see whether its triumphs extend thus far.

i. Does it, for instance, undo what sin has done by abolishing death **temporal**? Who can say so as long as we have such melancholy proof of the contrary in the sound of every passing bell, in the sight of every yawning grave, every widow's wail, and every orphan's tears? Yet, in spite of all these sounds and sighs of woe, these daily spectacles of mortality, grace does triumph in abolishing death as regards the people of God. Is not this the testimony of the Scripture? Do we not read that the grace which was "given us in Christ Jesus before the world began," is now "made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel?" **2Ti 1:9,10** But how can it have **abolished death** if death still reign? We may thus explain it. Death remains, but its name and nature are changed, for though the saint dies, it is not death to him—it is but sleep.

The word death, therefore, is not often made use of in the New Testament as expressing the decease of the saints. Of Stephen we read, for instance, "And when he had said this, he fell asleep." **Ac 7:60** The Holy Ghost would not allow that Stephen died; He therefore changed the word death into sleep. So we are bidden "not to sorrow for them which are asleep even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." **1Th 4:14** "We shall not all sleep," that is, die, says the apostle, "but we shall all be changed." **1Co 15:51** In this way death itself to the saint of God is turned into sleep. It has not only lost its sting and is robbed of its victory, but has lost also its name and its nature; so that when the saint, after a life of faith and suffering, is at last laid down in his grave, it is but as the laying of a babe in the cradle by its watchful mother, that it may rest in

sleep till the time of its waking. The resurrection morn will come, the trumpet will sound, "the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first." **1Th 4:16** Then the sleeping dust will be raised—not as it was deposited in the tomb in corruption, in dishonour, and weakness, but in incorruption, in glory, and power, meet companion for an immortal soul, and designed to dwell for ever with Christ in indissoluble union in mansions of bliss. Does not grace triumph even here, and take the axe of death out of the hand of the executioner?

ii. But now view the triumph of grace over death **spiritual**. Has not grace reigned over it already in quickening the soul dead in sin? Does not grace give in regeneration a spiritual life, restore the image of God in man so marred and defaced, make the saint of God a new creature in Christ, and thus thoroughly undo that death in sin, that alienation from the life of God which sin executed upon us in the fall? Indeed, without the communication of spiritual life, no other gift of God would be of any avail; for without it there could be no union with Christ, for "he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit;" and without it there could be no life eternal, for this consists in the spiritual knowledge of the only true God and of Jesus Christ whom He hath sent.

iii. But now view death **eternal**, the awful separation from the presence of God, everlasting banishment into the blackness of darkness for ever. Has not grace met and defeated sin in this field also? There is no second death for the saint of God; for him there is no worm that dieth not, and fire that is not quenched. When he dies he only rises to take possession of that "eternal life" unto which grace must reign.

Our text declares, blessed be God, that grace must "reign unto eternal life;" so that unless grace bring the saint of God through all his troubles and sorrows into the enjoyment of eternal life, it would not be reigning grace, triumphant grace, all-conquering grace, but would fail just where and when it was most needed.

This is its chief beauty, this its grand and glorious blessedness, this its distinguishing feature, that it reigns unto "eternal life."

Can we then think too well, can I speak too highly, can I set forth too unreservedly grace like this? Sin, as a destructive tide, stemmed back; sin, as a despotic tyrant, dethroned; sin, as a cruel executioner, met front to front on the battle field by the Captain of our salvation, defeated at every point, his sword wrung from his grasp, and triumphed over unto life eternal!

III. But I must now just drop a few words upon our last point, on which I shall be brief. All these blessings of sovereign grace are "**through righteousness,**" and "by Christ Jesus our Lord." Both these points I must speak unto, and I wish that time allowed me to enter into them more fully, for they are full of grace and glory.

The reign of grace is "**through righteousness,**" and this in several senses.

1. First, all that grace is, has, and does, ever is and ever must be in perfect harmony with the righteousness of God, viewed as being of purer eyes than to behold evil, and as One who cannot look upon iniquity. If any one of God's attributes were to suffer any diminution or infringement, He would cease to be unchanging, unchangeable in all His glorious perfections. We must ever, therefore, bear in mind that in all that God does, He is scrupulously just. The Judge of the whole earth must do right. Grace, therefore, must be in perfect harmony with His eternal and infinite justice. But how can this be? Must not the justice of God suffer if the sinner be unpunished? No. Why? Because the Son of God has obeyed the law which we have broken—obeyed it as we never could have done, and has thus preserved and guarded God's righteousness from suffering the least infringement, nay, rather, has invested His very justice with a new, brighter, and more blessed character. Thus by the obedience of His dear Son, God can now be "just and yet the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." **Ro 3:26.** "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the

obedience of one shall many be made righteous." **Ro 5:19** In this sense, grace reigns, "through righteousness," riding as it were in the very chariot of God's justice, and casting rays of divine glory upon that eternal righteousness in which He shines forth with such resplendent majesty and holiness.

2. But look now at the words "through righteousness," as admitting another and equally scriptural sense. There is a righteousness which the Scripture calls "the righteousness of God," meaning thereby, not the intrinsic righteousness and eternal justice of God as infinitely pure and holy, but his way of saving a sinner through the obedience of His dear Son. In this sense, the apostle uses the expression, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for 'there is no difference.'" In this passage "the righteousness of God" means the way which God takes of saving sinners through Christ's righteousness, as is evident from what follows, that "there is no difference" between one saved sinner and another, either as regards sin or justification from sin, "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," so that there is no difference there; and all "are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:" so that there is no difference there. Through this righteousness, then, grace superabounds over the aboundings of sin, and reigns, gloriously and triumphantly reigns, unto eternal life. Grace, therefore, flows, not as a wild waste of waters over the world, without any banks to restrain and guide its course, but it flows "through righteousness." Thus it flows in perfect harmony with every righteous attribute of God; one bank is His eternal holiness, the other is His infinite justice; the channel between them, so to speak, is the perfect obedience of His righteous Son. Through this channel, then, the superabounding tide of grace flows; and thus not only the mercy of God is declared, but also His righteousness, as the apostle speaks, "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." **Ro 3:21,22,26**

3. "Through righteousness" also does grace reign as regards its administration, for Christ's sceptre is a righteous sceptre. So God Himself calls it when He addressed him in ancient prophecy, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre." **Ps 45:6** Thus, also, we read, "Behold a king shall reign in righteousness" **Isa 32:1**; and of Him it is declared that "he shall judge thy people with righteousness and thy poor with judgment." **Ps 72:2**

4. But there is still another sense in which we may take the words. If grace superabound over sin and wrest the sceptre out of its hand, it is to bring forth those "fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God." **Php 1:11** Grace never leads to sin, but to holiness. The superabounding tide of grace fertilises the soil wherever it comes; for like the river Nile, it carries fertility in its very waters, and manifests itself by the crops of every good word and work which it produces. Its reign is one of beneficence, of doing good to the bodies and souls of men; and thus as it sits enthroned in the believing heart, it manifests its authority by constraining its happy subject to live to the honour and glory of God.

But now a few words upon that expression which seems so fully and blessedly to crown the whole, "**by Jesus Christ our Lord.**" It is all by Jesus Christ. All grace, first and last, is in Him and by Him; for "it hath pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell;" therefore a fulness of grace, for "of His fulness have we all received, and grace for grace." No human merit, no creature works, no natural righteousness have place here. It is a pure temple of grace. No sound therefore "of hammer or axe or any tool of iron is to be heard" in this temple while it is in building. **1Ki 6:7** Like the pure river of water of life which John saw proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, it is "clear as crystal"—unsullied, unmuddied, unpolluted by human merit or demerit.

And as it is "by Jesus Christ," so it is by Him as "our Lord." Is He not worthy of the name? Has he not a right to all we are and have? Is He not "our Lord," to whom we owe our heart's best obedience? "Our Lord," before whose footstool we reverently bow; "our Lord," at whose feet we humbly lie; "our Lord," to whom we look to reign in us and over us by His sovereign grace; "our Lord," of whom and to whom we may well say, "O Lord our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name." **Isa 26:13**

I leave what I have said to your consideration. Be assured it is well worthy of your deepest thought and most careful meditation. But as "power belongeth wholly unto God," I will now only add, may the Lord, the Spirit, if it be His will, seal what I have spoken this morning with His own unction upon your heart and conscience!

## A SUPPLY FOR EVERY NEED

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road, London, on Wednesday Evening, August 16, 1843

"But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:19

With what confidence the Apostle speaks here! There is not in his mind the shadow of a doubt: but he declares it as a positive certainty, that his God would supply all their need. Whence arose this confidence? Not from the flesh, we may be well certain. But it arose from two causes: **first**, from the deep conviction, lodged by the Holy Ghost in the heart of the Apostle, that God would supply all the wants of his church and people; and **secondly**, because he had himself experienced, in his own particular case, this gracious and perpetual supply.

But why should **both these** be necessary? Would not **one** be sufficient? I think not. Say that the ground of his confidence was his own personal experience, and disjoin that experience of his from the truth which I have said was lodged in his heart that God would supply all the wants of his church; take, I say, that great truth away, and his experience would afford him no solid ground for confidence that God would supply all **their** wants. Or look at the other side of the question: suppose the doctrinal truth only was lodged in his heart that God would supply all the needs of his church, but that he himself had not a personal experience of that supply, there would still be wanting a sufficient ground of confidence. His confidence would stand upon one foot only if it stood on either of these truths alone, and would thus be liable to be blown down by every gust of temptation. But when his confidence stood in the firm conviction of a general truth on the one hand, and a blessed experience of that truth in his own case on the other, it then stood firmly upon two feet: and no storm or gust that might arise could drive him down from his standing.

And this must be the ground of **our** confidence too. No Arminian could consistently believe that God would for a certainty supply the wants of the Philippian Church, because, according to his creed, they might be God's children today, and the devil's children tomorrow. Nor, again, if we had not had some experience of God's mercy and faithfulness in our own souls, supplying us from time to time, could we rest upon the mere doctrinal truth, that God will supply the wants of his church? But when the truth of the doctrine and the truth of the experience meet together in the same heart, then there is a solid foundation on which spiritual confidence can rest.

If we look at the words of the text, I think we shall find three things in them. **Want** is the first: "my God shall supply **all your need.**" **Supply** is the **second**: "my God shall supply." And **the Channel**, through which this supply comes, is the **third**, "**according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus.**"

I. A man has no spiritual wants until he is made a spiritual man; this is, to God-taught souls, a self-evident truth. Therefore, until the Lord is pleased to quicken the soul into spiritual life, it has no one spiritual panting after God, no one spiritual desire, for it has no one spiritual necessity. But no sooner does life commence in the soul, than wants and necessities commence with it. As the life of the new-born babe is manifested by its desiring the mother's breast, so is the life of the new-born soul manifested by its desiring, as the Apostle says, "the sincere milk of the word, that it may grow thereby."

He, then, that has no wants is dead in sin, or dead in a profession. But, just in proportion to the depth of God's work upon the soul, will be the depth of the wants; and just in proportion to the continued carrying on of that work with power, will there be the continual springing up of these wants in the soul.

With God's blessing, we will look at a few of these spiritual wants, which God will supply; he himself having caused them to be felt in the soul.

Until the Lord gives us eyes to see, and a heart to feel our real state and case, our true character and condition before him, we can feel no want to be saved from this state—to be delivered from this condition. The very word, **salvation—deliverance**—implies a being saved, a being delivered out of something: and **that**, a state of ruin, wretchedness, and misery. Whatever, then, a man may know **doctrinally** of the truths of the gospel, until he is brought by the special teaching of the Spirit to need something which God alone can give him, he cannot be said to have any spiritual life or feeling in his soul.

1. But what is the first want that the living soul most pressingly and most urgently feels? **Mercy**. Was not that the first cry which was raised up in the heart of the publican: "God be **merciful** to me, a sinner." Mercy was a word that never before had been in his lips: the craving after mercy was an experience utterly unknown in his soul. But no sooner did sin and guilt fall upon his conscience, no sooner was he spiritually convinced of his state as a sinner before God, than a need of mercy was sensibly opened up in his heart; and no sooner was the want raised up in his heart, than the groaning cry burst forth from his lips, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

Now, I believe, in my conscience, that there are hundreds, if not thousands of persons, in a profession of religion, who never once, from their hearts, lifted up that earnest cry to God; the words may have passed through their lips, but the groaning cry before a heart-searching God to visit their souls with mercy, never really burst forth from a broken heart. And if a man has not taken that first step in the divine life, there is no use his talking about how established he is in the doctrines of grace. If he has not come in by "the door," he has clambered over the wall, and is but a thief and a robber. The sweetness of mercy, its suitability to our ruined condition, can only be felt by one who has groaned under the pressure of guilt: and when guilt is really laid upon a man's conscience, nothing but manifested mercy can ever heal his wound, or suit his case. Nor will this need of, and cry for mercy,

be confined just to one or two periods in a man's life: but he will often be, as Hart says

### **"Begging mercy every hour."**

Daily sinners want daily mercies; hourly iniquities cry out for hourly pardon; whatever, therefore, a man may have experienced in his soul in times past of granted mercy, yet, as he is perpetually a sinner against God, and is continually doing things, which his conscience bears its solemn testimony against as evil, there will be from time to time a cry in his soul, that God would look down upon him in mercy, and heal his perpetual backslidings from him.

2. **Pardon—forgiveness**—and an inward testimony that the blood of Jesus Christ has been shed for his sins, is a want, a spiritual need, that God brings every one of his children to experience. It is this need which effectually teaches a man to believe in particular redemption. A man who holds universal redemption can never want to have pardon sealed upon his conscience: he cannot value the blood of Christ, until he knows that that blood was **specialy** shed; nor can he behold the efficacy of atoning blood, until he sees that that blood was shed for particular objects. As long, therefore, as a man is buried in free-will errors, until he is effectually purged by "the spirit of judgment, and the spirit of burning" out of freewill and self-righteousness, and has had all his Arminian sentiments dashed to a thousand shivers in his conscience, he can never know what it is to groan out from the depths of his soul for manifested pardon and forgiveness. But, when he is taught of God to view the depth, the awful depth of his iniquities with one eye, and to behold the virtue and efficacy of the atoning blood of Christ with the other, and yet feels his conscience filthy, guilty, burdened, and in bondage, he, and he alone, will then effectually plead for the manifestation and application of that atoning blood to his soul.

3. **Righteousness**—that he may stand righteous before God, "accepted in the Beloved," his own "filthy rags" cast to the

dunghill, and Christ's glorious robe of righteousness imputed unto and put upon him—is "a need" felt by every quickened vessel of mercy, before the Lord assures him that he stands complete in Christ. His own "righteousness" being opened up to him as "filthy rags," he views himself, as the Lord showed the prophet Zechariah (Zech 3:3) as Joshua, the high priest, clothed with filthy garments, before the angel of the Lord. Nothing can satisfy him, therefore, but that which satisfies God; nothing is acceptable in his eyes, but that which is acceptable in the eyes of infinite Purity—a robe "without spot or blemish, or any such thing." And it is the sigh, the cry, and the groaning desire of his soul, to have that blessed robe brought out of the heavenly wardrobe, where it is stored up for those who believe in Jesus, and experimentally put upon him by the Spirit of the living God.

4. **Wisdom**—that he may understand the mind and will of God—that he may have a spiritual and feeling perception of, and acquaintance with "the truth as it is in Jesus"—is a "need." a spiritual want, felt in every living soul. What poor, blind fools are we by nature! How insufficient is all our earthly wisdom and all our natural knowledge, to guide us into the truth! When the soul really is under divine teaching, how ignorant it feels as to every, single thing it desires to know! What clouds of darkness perpetually hang over the mind! What a veil of ignorance seems continually spread over the heart! The simplest truths of God's word seem hid in the deepest obscurity, and the soul can neither see the truth, nor see or feel its personal interest in it.

Now, when a man is here, he does not go to the Lord with lying lips and a mocking tongue, and ask him to give him wisdom, merely because he has heard that other persons have asked it of God, or because he reads in the Bible that Christ is made of God "wisdom" to his people; but he goes as a poor blind fool, as one completely ignorant, as one totally unable to understand a single spiritual truth of himself, as one thoroughly helpless to get into the marrow of vital godliness, into the mysteries of true religion, or into the very heart of Christ. For it is not a few doctrines received into the head, nor a sound creed, that can satisfy a soul

convinced of its ignorance. No; nothing can satisfy him, but to have that divine illumination, whereby he "sees light in God's light:" that spiritual wisdom communicated, whereby he feels himself "made wise unto salvation;" that unctuous light shed abroad in the heart, which is the only key to gospel truth, and is its own blessed evidence, that he knows the truth by a divine application of it to his soul.

5. And **strength**, too, to walk in God's ways, to believe God's promises, to lay hold of the Mediator's righteousness, to tread in the strait and narrow path that Jesus walked in before him, "leaving us an example that we should follow his steps." Every quickened child of God is deeply convinced of his utter helplessness and weakness in divine things; and he feels, to his very heart's core, in the inward recesses of his soul, that he is as weak as water against all temptations, and utterly unable to do a single thing that God can approve of, unless he is pleased to work it in him with his own powerful and blessed hand.

Until a man gets experimentally acquainted with temptation, he can never know anything of the weakness of the flesh: he may seem to have stood for years in the truth, and made a most flourishing profession, and yet be completely ignorant of his own heart, and of the mountains that lie on the road to glory. But, sooner or later, temptation will come upon him: and temptation, sooner or later, will prove him what he is. If he is nothing but a heady, high-minded professor, a powerful and suitable temptation will probably sweep him at once out of the path in which he has professed to walk: and even if he is a child of God, the first effect of it may be for a time to beat him down. The wind sometimes sweeps over the branches as though it would bow the noblest and strongest oak in the dust: and yet, when the blast has passed away, the tree springs again to its place. So a living soul, when the blast of temptation comes down violently upon it, may seem at first almost laid prostrate; and yet there is a secret strength in a living man, whereby, when the temptation has passed over, he is again restored to his place. The dead tree has no vitality in it, so as to recover itself when the storm has passed

over, and therefore it falls, and great is the fall of it; but where there is vitality in stem and root, there is a springing back of every branch and twig to its place, when the first gust of the storm has blown over. So it is with the living soul; "the root of the matter" is in it; the grace and teaching of God are in the heart; "underneath are the everlasting arms;" and the Lord his God upholds him with his powerful hand. So that though the first effect of temptation may seem to be almost overwhelming, so as to beat him utterly down, yet there is, by the grace and mercy of God, a returning to his standing, so as not to be utterly prostrated by the very roots.

And so with respect to **sin**. No man knows what sin really is, until its nature and power are experimentally made known to him. Many go on for years in a sort of dreamy profession of religion, knowing nothing experimentally of the amazing power of sin in their carnal minds. Many a professor walks consistently for years, sin all the while lying dead and torpid in him, until some mine, which Satan perhaps has been secretly digging for weeks, months, or years, suddenly explodes, and sets all the sin of his heart a fire; and he, not being possessed of grace, and God, therefore, not upholding him by his powerful hand, is at once driven into secret or open licentiousness: and hardly knows what sin is before he is plunged headlong into it.

A child of God never knows what he really is, and what a poor weak creature he is against temptation, until the power of sin is opened up in his carnal mind. But when sin is opened up, when temptation and his fallen nature come together, when Satan is permitted to blow a blast from hell into his carnal mind, and to suit the temptation to the lust, and the lust to the temptation, then a child of God begins experimentally to know the overwhelming power of sin, and to feel as utterly unable to stand against sin and Satan as to perform an immediate miracle before your eyes. But, by this painful experience, he learns his need of divine strength and the necessity of being kept by the power of God from falling a prey to his own corruptions. This unexpected discovery of his own weakness effectually convinces him that God

himself must work in him deliverance from the power of evil, and "strengthen him with might by his Spirit in the inner man," against the swelling tide of his own corruptions, or sooner or later he must be utterly carried away by them.

I believe, in many cases, we go on for some time receiving doctrines as revealed in the Scriptures, and giving, as we think, our full adherence to them, being quite convinced they are true; but not being as yet experimentally grounded in them, after a time we begin to find that we have only half learned them. For instance, we may, perhaps, for years have assented to this doctrine, that Christ's strength is made perfect in our weakness. We have heard ministers preach from it, we have approved of all they said upon it; we have been well convinced it is a gospel truth; but what did we know of it all the time experimentally? Why, perhaps, nothing, positively nothing, absolutely nothing. And so we continued ignorant of our own ignorance until some powerful temptation came upon us, or some lust or corruption was opened up in our heart, when we felt all our fancied strength give way, and found we had no more power to stand against **this** temptation, or to overcome **that** evil, than we had power to raise up the dead from their graves. Thus we learn our need of divine strength; and we now no longer believe it merely upon the testimony of the written word, no longer receive it as a truth because good and gracious men preach it, but we receive it into our conscience as an experimental reality, the weight and power of which we have known for ourselves.

But the words of the text are very extensive. It does not say, "My God shall supply **some** of your need." but, "My God shall supply **all** your need." If, then, we are the people of God, we cannot come into any one state of mind, into any one exercise of soul, into any one perplexing circumstance, into any one spiritual or temporal trouble, to which this promise does not apply. If the word "**all**" could be struck out, what a blank it would leave! How it would foster the doubts, and fears, and suspicions, that arise in the mind! It would at once be suggested by unbelief, "God has not said '**all**;' therefore **your** need is excluded." The tempted

soul would say, "My temptation is not there;" the poor creature, perplexed in providence, would say, "My providential trial is not there;" the tender conscience, groaning under the power of sin, would say, "My exercise is not there;" and thus all might be so continually bringing forward each his own exercises to his own peculiar exclusion, that, by the omission of that little word **all**, Satan might rob every child, of his manifested interest in this promise. And, therefore, to block him out, to keep the Church of God in its right place, as a needy dependant upon the divine bounty, and yet to open up a sweet source of consolation to the living family, that word "**all**" has been introduced by the blessed Spirit, that a child of God may never be in any circumstances, to which the promise should not apply.

But, my friends, we feel **(those of us I mean whom God has taught anything of the truth)** that the Lord must not only give us wants, in the first instance, but that he must from time to time keep alive a sense of those wants in our souls. There are many times with us, when we seem not to have a single spiritual want; when we are, in our feelings, as cold and carnal, careless and stupid, dead and unfeeling, as if a single groaning cry had never gone up out of our heart, as if there had never been any breathing after the presence of God, as if the power of truth had never once been felt, and as if we had no more to do with truth, and truth had no more to do with us, than if there were no God to know or fear, no Jesus to believe in or love, no Spirit to teach or lead us, no hell to dread, nor heaven to enjoy. Through this wretched carnality and recklessness we learn that an experience of our urgent wants must, by a divine power, be again and again brought into our hearts.

But what painful ways does the Lord employ to keep a feeling sense of these wants in exercise! It is not to stretch ourselves in an evening in our arm chair, and say—"I have this want, and I have that need; I will therefore go to the Lord with this want, and ask him, to supply that need!" No, that is not the way whereby the Lord usually raises up a sense of want in our souls; but he permits, in his providence, some powerful temptation to assault

us that we would not have for the world; or he lays some heavy affliction upon us, that brings us down into the dust; or he brings some trouble which we would escape from if we could, and the very sight of which fills us with dread. He thus raises up wants, by putting us into situations, which the flesh naturally shrinks from, and at which, if left to ourselves, we can only murmur and rebel. When he puts us, then, into these spots, where we should never have put ourselves, which we hate when we are put into them, and where we kick sometimes "as a wild bull in a net;" and when he keeps us down in these spots by his own powerful hand—then is the time, and that is the way, that he raises up wants in our souls. But wherever the Lord raises up, by the power of his blessed Spirit, these wants within, he, at the same time, mercifully enables us to pour them out at his footstool, and to ask him to supply them, because it is written upon our consciences that he alone can grant our desires, and mercifully appear on our behalf.

II. And this leads us to consider the **second** thing that we mentioned as contained in the text; which is **Supply**. "My God shall **supply** all your need."

Oh! what should we do without a supply? Want could not satisfy us. Many seem to rest upon wants; they have, they say, a sense of their lost and ruined state, are troubled with doubts and fears, have exercises of mind, and are often assailed by temptations. So far, so good. But their error is, that they rest upon these exercises as satisfactory evidences of a work of grace. Wants are very good when they lead the soul to seek after and prize their supply. But can mere want satisfy us? Suppose we had this year a deficient harvest: suppose the Lord, in anger for our sins as a nation, were to smite down the very wheat from the soil, and not give us our daily bread, would want and famine satisfy us? Suppose the noble river Thames, which flows by this metropolis, were dried up, so that no ships freighted with merchandise could come up to the city of London, should we think, in that case, that want would serve for supply: and that a dry channel would be as good as the present liquid highway? The want indeed makes the supply precious; but who could rest upon the want? No, it is the

supply; it is the Lord causing, year after year, the ground to bring forth its abundant harvests, that supplies our table with bread. It is the same munificent God sending rain, and causing the sea to ebb and flow, that bids the noble river go down into the sea, and bring up the ships. So it is spiritually. It is not having wants **(though spiritual wants are evidences of the divine life, and are so far good)** but it is the supply of the wants, which is the real marrow of vital godliness: and in the receiving of this supply does all the enjoyment and comfort of spiritual religion consist.

Now the Lord has promised that he will "supply all our need;" that we shall not pine away in want, shall not die of hunger, shall not perish with thirst, shall not be utterly carried away by temptation, shall not be borne down the current of sin into hell; but that he will graciously supply those wants which he himself has kindled in the soul. And does he not, from time to time, graciously supply them? Do you not know it so, from time to time, in soul experience, that there is a supply opened up in proportion to the reality and depth of your wants? Have you not sometimes been under heavy **afflictions**, and deeply, sensibly wanted the hand of God to appear, either to remove the affliction or else to give you patience and resignation under it? And has not the Lord, in his own time and way, done both for you? Has he not sometimes removed the affliction? and has he not at other times given you patience and resignation to submit to it, and to look up unto him that it may work in you "the peaceable fruit of righteousness?" So with respect to **temptations**: did we ever go to the Lord with a temptation, which was not more or less taken away? I have known what it is to labour under a temptation so strong and powerful, that I thought it would utterly overthrow me: and I have known what it is to go with groans, and sighs, and tears to the Lord to take the temptation away: and I have had it taken away, so as not to come with the same power again. It is the removing of temptation, in answer to prayer, in this marked and sensible way, that raises up in our souls gratitude to God for his delivering hand.

But temptations, at least, many of them, are such as people naturally love, and so far from their being a pain, they are a pleasure to them, to gratify which is their chief delight. A change, therefore, must take place in us before we can desire to be delivered from them. Few will sincerely and spiritually go to the Lord, and cry from their hearts to deliver them from the power of a temptation, until it presses so weightily upon their conscience, and lies so heavy a burden upon their soul, that none but God can remove it. But when we really feel the burden of a temptation; when, though our flesh may love it, our spirit hates it; when, though there may be in our carnal mind a cleaving to it, our conscience bleeds under it, and we are brought spiritually to loathe it and to loathe ourselves for it; when we are enabled to go to the Lord in real sincerity of soul and honesty of heart, beseeching him to deliver us from it, I believe, that the Lord will sooner or later, either remove that temptation entirely in his providence or by his grace, or so weaken its power that it shall cease to be what it was before, drawing our feet into paths of darkness and evil.

As long, however, as we are in that state of which the prophet speaks, "Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty"; **Ho 10:2** as long as we are in that carnal, wavering mind, which James describes—"A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways;" as long as we are hankering after the temptation, casting longing, lingering side glances after it, rolling it as a sweet morsel under our tongue, and, though conscience may testify against it, yet not willing to have it taken away; there is no hearty cry, nor sigh, nor spiritual breathing of our soul, that God would remove it from us. But when we are brought, as in the presence of a heart-searching God, to hate the evil to which we are tempted, and cry to him that he would, for his honour and for our soul's good, take the temptation away, or dull and deaden its power; sooner or later (I can speak from soul experience on more than one occasion, and, if I thought it right to mention them, could bring forward several instances), the Lord will hear the cry of those who groan to be delivered from those temptations, which are so powerfully pressing them down to the dust.

So with respect to the Lord's **strength**. When is it we find divine strength? It is only when we are experimentally sensible of our own weakness, and feel utterly unable to think, to speak, or to do anything acceptable in God's sight; when weakness is not a doctrine, but an experience; when man's thorough helplessness is believed by us, not merely because we read it in the Scripture, but because we really know it in our own hearts. Then it is, and then alone, that we find the strength of the Lord made perfect in weakness. If we go forward in our own strength, we are sure to get baffled; none of our anticipations are realized; disappointment and mortification are the only crop we reap. But when we feel all weakness and emptiness, we find at times secret and unexpected strength communicated.

So with respect to **righteousness**. When we go to the Lord, hating ourselves, abhorring and loathing ourselves in dust and ashes, and see no more reason why God should have mercy upon us than upon the vilest sinner who is daringly fighting against his Majesty, this is the time when he often gives to the soul a sweet testimony of its interest in Christ's righteousness. When we go puffed up with some conceit of our own righteousness, and thinking, "surely we are not so bad as others, surely there are those who are or have been more inconsistent than we," and thus, as Berridge says, "squint and peep another way, some creature-help to spy," there is a denial, on the Lord's part, to indulge us with a spiritual view of Christ's glorious righteousness. But when the soul stands naked and bare, clothed with humility, and filled with contrition, then the Lord, from time to time, opens up a sight of Christ's glorious righteousness as unto all and upon all them that believe.

And so with respect to every kind of **deliverance**; for instance, deliverances in providence. Until we get into providential difficulties, we know nothing of providential deliverances; until we get into straits, where our own wisdom is utterly at fault, we do not find the Lord stretching forth his hand to guide and deliver us. But when we are brought to this point, that our way is completely

blocked up, that we do not know what step to take, and unless the Lord appear: we must certainly go wrong: when, under these exercises, we are brought honestly and sincerely to cry to the Lord mercifully to appear on our behalf, sooner or later, a secret light will be cast upon the path, and there will be a fulfilment of that gracious promise, "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, this is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." **Isa 30:21**

It was so with the children of Israel. Until they had come out of Egypt, and "the wilderness had shut them in," till they were encamped by the Red Sea, with the rolling waves before, and their furious enemies behind, there was no deliverance from the power and rage of Pharaoh. But the Lord did not tell them there should be deliverance in that way. He left the deliverance to come when the danger came; yet no sooner did the danger come than the deliverance came with it. Have we not ever found it thus? and thus we shall continue to find it. It is when the danger comes, when the perplexity arises, and we have no strength, wisdom, or power, to deliver ourselves, that then, and not till then, the deliverance comes.

We should not know what a God the Lord was, unless things were thus managed. We profess to believe in an Almighty, All-present, All-seeing God; and we should be highly offended if a person said to us, "you do not believe that God sees everything, that he is everywhere present, that he is an Almighty Jehovah;" we should almost think that he was taking us for an atheist. And yet practical atheists, we daily prove ourselves to be. For instance, we profess to believe that God sees everything, and yet we are plotting and planning as though he saw nothing; we profess to know that God can do everything, and yet we are always cutting out schemes, and carving out contrivances, as though he were like the gods of the heathen, looking on and taking no notice: we profess to believe that God is everywhere present to relieve every difficulty and bring his people out of every trial, and yet when we get into the difficulty and into the trial, we speak, think, and act, as though there were no such omnipresent God, who knows the

circumstances of the case, and can stretch forth his hand to bring us out of it.

Thus the Lord is obliged **(to speak with all reverence)** to thrust us into trials and afflictions, because we are such blind fools, that we cannot learn what a God we have to deal with, until we come experimentally into those spots of difficulty and trial, out of which none but such a God can deliver us. This, then, is one reason why the Lord often plunges his people so deeply into a sense of sin; it is to show them what a wonderful salvation from the guilt, filth, and power of sin, there is in the Person, blood, and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. For the same reason, too, they walk in such scenes of temptation; it is in order to shew them what a wonder working God he is in bringing them out. This too is the reason why many of them are so harassed and plagued; it is that they may not live and act as though there were no God to go to, no Almighty friend to consult, no kind Jesus to rest their weary heads upon; it is in order to teach them experimentally and inwardly those lessons of grace and truth which they never would know till the Lord, as it were, thus compels them to learn, and actually forces them to believe what they profess to believe. Such pains is he obliged to take with us; such poor scholars, such dull creatures we are. No child at a school ever gave his master a thousandth part of the trouble that we have **(so to speak)** given the Lord to teach us.

If your child were as stupid, as dull, as intractable, in learning his A B C, as we are learning the A B C of religion, I know not how many times a day he would be put into the corner; I know not how many cuffs our natural impetuosity might not be provoked to give him. But we are such stupid wretches, that God has actually to put us into places where he would not otherwise put us, in order that we may learn the up-stroke of the great A of true religion; in order just to teach us, as the prophet says, "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little." But when we have got a little way into our alphabet, such dull scholars are we that we almost immediately forget it all, and have to go back, and begin with great A again. So we go on

learning and forgetting, learning and forgetting; and, with all the pains taken with us, when we most wish to put our lesson into practice, feeling as if we had not yet learnt a single truth aright. In order, then, to teach us what a God he is, what a merciful and compassionate High Priest—in order to open up the heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths of his love, he is compelled to treat, at times, his people very roughly, and handle them very sharply; he is obliged to make very great use of his rod, because he sees that "foolishness is so bound up in the hearts" of his children that nothing but the repeated "rod of correction will ever drive it far from them."

Now to learn religion in this way, is not like getting hold of a few doctrines in the judgment, and then setting up to be a very bright professor; like a tradesman who borrows all his capital, and then, by puffing and advertising drives for a time a flourishing trade, till the bubble bursts. God's people cannot thus borrow from books and ministers a number of doctrines and texts, and then set up with these as a stock in trade. No; they have to be emptied and stripped of all such borrowed stock and brought into darkness and confusion, that they may learn all they really know from the lips of the Lord himself. They have to pass through many painful exercises and troubles, and all for one purpose—that they may be scholars in the school of tribulation, and thus walk in the footsteps of a suffering Jesus.

III. And this leads us to **the Channel**, through which God supplies all the varied wants of his people. "My God," says Paul, "shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus."

Oh! If there was no Christ Jesus, there could be no "supply." Howling in hell would our miserable souls be, unless there was a Mediator at the right hand of the Father—a blessed Jesus, full of love, pity, and power, co-equal and co-eternal in his Divine nature with the Father and the Holy Ghost, and yet the God-Man in whom "it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell." If there was not such a blessed Mediator at the right hand of God,

then not one drop of spiritual comfort, not one particle of hope, not one grace or fruit of the Spirit to distinguish us from the damned in hell, would ever be our lot or portion. Oh! we should never forget the channel through which these mercies come; we should never, for one moment, think that they could come through any other person or in any other way, than through God's only begotten Son, now in our nature, at his right hand, as our Advocate, Mediator, and Intercessor with the Father.

And this supply is "according to the riches of his glory;" which, I believe, is a Hebrew idiom, signifying **his glorious riches**—riches so great, so unlimited, so unfathomable, raising up the soul to such a height of glory, that they may well be called "glorious." And these "in Christ Jesus:" stored up in him, locked up in him, and supplied freely out of him, just according to the wants and exercises of God's people.

Oh! my friends, when the channel through which these mercies come into the soul, is in a measure opened up to the eye of faith: when we see that we have not to deal with pure Deity, with offended purity, with a justly incensed Jehovah, with a holy God, who, with one glance of his righteous eye, could frown our souls into a never-ending hell, but have to plead with "the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ," with a merciful God, who has sent his dear Son into the world that those who believe in his name should not die, but live for ever; when we see, too, by the eye of faith what this blessed God-Man has done and suffered: when we mark him coming down from heaven to earth, when we view him in the manger, when we trace all his sorrowing and suffering path through life, and see him at the end suspended betwixt two malefactors, groaning out that agonizing cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—when we accompany his dead body to the tomb, and see him raised up thence with power and glory, to sit at the right hand of the Father: oh! I say, when faith receives this blessed truth of Christ's mediation in the love of it, in the sweetness of it, and in the power of it, how it opens up a way for the poor and needy to plead at Jehovah's footstool? How it encourages them to go to

the throne of grace, with all their wants, troubles, and exercises! And how it draws forth their soul into admiring views, hopes, and love towards the Lord Jesus, for having done and suffered such things on their behalf!

The channel, then, through which every gospel blessing and mercy comes into the soul, is through the Mediator at God's right hand: and in him God can be "just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." This is our plea. Not that we have done anything, not that we can do anything; not that we have lived good and holy lives; not that we have said, or done this or that—all such carnal pleas and vain hopes must be swept away. Our only warrant to draw near to the throne is this—the blessed teachings of the Spirit in the soul, whereby he gives the eye of faith to see Jesus, and to approach the Father through his atoning sacrifice and his meritorious obedience, as the Scripture speaks, "for through him we both have access by one Spirit, unto the Father." **Eph 2:18** And as through this channel alone do our prayers flow upward, so through this channel, and through this channel only, does every mercy, and every blessing, and every grace flow downward into the hearts of those that fear God. If it were not so, long ago must we have died in despair: if it were not so, long ago must God have banished us from his presence for ever. But now that there is One in our nature, who has suffered, bled, and died, and made an atonement for sin, God can be holy and merciful at the same moment; he can forgive sin, and yet not have his justice for a moment sullied.

If, then, you are a child of God, a poor and needy soul, a tempted and exercised believer in Christ, "God shall supply all your need." It may be very great; it may seem to you, sometimes, as though there were not upon all the face of the earth such a wretch as you, as though there never could be a child of God in your state; so dark, so stupid, so blind and ignorant, so proud and worldly, so presumptuous and hypocritical, so continually back-sliding after idols, so continually doing things that you know are hateful in God's sight. And if you think that you are the worst, I could find you a companion; I could find you one who could walk side

by side with you in every step; who could put his arm into yours, and compare notes, and if you thought yourself one of the basest, vilest, and worst of all who are hanging upon Jesus, could, from the same lips whose breath you now hear, whisper the same things into your ear that you might whisper into his. But whatever our need be, it is not beyond the reach of divine supply; and the deeper our need, the more is Jesus glorified in supplying it. It is not little sinners that will go to heaven; little sinners can know nothing experimentally of the blood of the atonement. It is not those who can make themselves religious, that God will take any pains with: it is not those who can make a ladder and climb up the rounds of their own piety, that will reach the heavenly Canaan: but those wilt run the race and gain the prize who often feel themselves too base and too black, too filthy and too vile to be saved. It is not those who are walking upon the stilts of their own religion, and raising themselves so many feet higher, who are accepted by him who searcheth the heart: but it is those, who have no power to walk at all, and who cannot move a single step except as God is pleased to "work in them that which is well pleasing in his sight," who eventually will come off more than conquerors through him that loved them, and gave himself for them.

Say not then that your case is too bad, that your wants are too many, your perplexities too great, your temptations too powerful. No case can be too bad; no temptations can be too powerful; no sin, except the sin against the Holy Ghost, can be too black; no enigma can be too hard; no state in which the soul can get is beyond the reach of the almighty and compassionate love, that burns in the breast of the Redeemer.

But do you try him? How many there are who seem to have wants, and yet their wants are not pressing enough to force the cry for mercy out of their souls! How many in religion are like some persons, naturally, that are ailing all their lives, and yet are never bad enough to go to a doctor! They have their dyspepsia, and their bilious attacks, and their rheumatic pains, and their nervous complaints, but they go croaking and croaking on, and

yet do not apply to any physician, or medical man; they are not bad enough for that. So are there not many of God's people, who go croaking and croaking on with their doubts and fears, questionings and suspicions, convictions and complaints, and their other numerous ailments, but in whom the disease of sin is not so deeply felt as to make them sigh, cry, and groan out their souls, and breathe their very hearts into the ears of Jehovah Rophi, that that blessed Physician would apply the balm of his atoning blood to their bleeding consciences?

Until we know what it is to have a disease deeply fixed in our vitals, we shall never have recourse to the Almighty Physician; until we are brought into the depths of poverty, we shall never know nor value Christ's riches; and until our own case is utterly unmanageable by our own wisdom, we shall never find that Christ is made "wisdom" to his church. But when we come into those desperate circumstances, that all the help of men and angels combined could never bring a moment's peace into our hearts—when we come into those straits and difficulties, wherein God must appear, or we must perish at his feet, the supply then will not be long delayed: the answer to prayer then will not be long in tarrying: the wheels of deliverance will be heard approaching; and the Conqueror who rides in that chariot, the bottom of which is "paved with love," will come into the heart of his Hephzibah, and ravish her with his smile. But as long as we can do without him, he, so to speak, will do without us; as long as we trifle and play with our ailments, our doubts, and fears, the Lord will stand back: but when nobody can bless us but he, and nobody can do us good but he, he will not be long in tarrying. **"His heart is full of tenderness, His bowels melt with love"** for poor sinners. He is now behind the lattice, hidden only by the wall; he only waits to hear a few more knocks; and when the soul is so pressed down that it cannot do without him, he will shine from behind the lattice, blessedly appear, and make it happy in himself.

It is a truth, then, which will stand for ever, that "God will supply all our need, according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus." If

any of his people lived and died without their spiritual want being supplied (**I say it with all reverence**), God would forfeit his word. But he will never suffer any one to charge him with that; he will never let any one say that he was not faithful to his promise. He will prove, before men and devils, saints and sinners, that he has never given a promise in the Scripture which he has not fulfilled, or which he will not fulfil to the very letter.

## **THE SWEET LOATHED AND THE BITTER RELISHED**

Preached on Thursday Evening, July 20th, 1843, at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London

"The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet." Prov. 27:7

In revealing the Scriptures God has seen fit to give them to us under different forms. A large portion, for instance, of the Scriptures consists of history, as the historical books of the Old Testament, and the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles of the New. Another considerable portion of Holy Writ is revealed in the form of prophecy, as the prophetic books of the Old Testament, and the Revelation of John. Another portion is in the shape of epistles or letters, as the Epistles in the New Testament. Another portion is in the form of devotional meditations, hymns, and prayers, as is more particularly the case with the Book of Psalms, and other scattered portions of God's Word. And another shape in which God has been pleased to reveal His mind in the Scriptures is that of Proverbs, that is, short sentences, moral apothegms, under which spiritual instruction is couched. There is perhaps no book in Scripture that contains deeper wisdom and a more experimental vein of divine truth than the Book of Proverbs; and its beauty consists much in this, that under apparently mere moral sentences the deepest spiritual wisdom is taught; so that whilst the world may see in the Proverbs much to admire in a moral sense, the child of God, enlightened by the Spirit, sees much to admire and much to feel in a spiritual sense; and whilst the carnal are playing with the shell, God's people are at times privileged to feed upon the kernel. I need scarcely bring forward instances of this twofold meaning, as we can scarcely read a single verse of the book of Proverbs which does not more or less contain it. Even the text, which we shall find, I hope, with God's blessing, to contain a savoury meaning and a sweet flavour of experimental truth, has a natural as well as a spiritual signification. It is true literally that a man when full-fed loathes

even the sweetest food; and it is also literally true that to one who is hungry even food which is bitter, so long as it is nutritious, is sweet.

But we need not trespass on time and patience by entering into the literal meaning of the text; that is sufficiently obvious: and therefore we pass on to consider the spiritual and experimental vein of truth that lies couched under it. And in so doing I mean, with God's blessing to break it up into two distinct portions, so as to explain, as far as the Lord shall enable me, more clearly its spiritual meaning.

"The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet."

I. Who is this "full soul?" He is one whom God has never quickened by the Holy Ghost into spiritual life, one lying still in the death of nature. But is that all? Will that be a sufficient description of what the Holy Ghost means by the expression, "a full soul?" We must add something to the definition I have already given to afford us a clear idea of the meaning of the words. It represents, then, not so much one dead in sin, as one dead in a profession; it points out not so much the carnal who make no profession whatever of religion, as those who make a pretension, and nothing but a pretension, to the possession of godliness.

But let us, with God's blessing, enter a little into details. Generalities do not suit God's people. They want something particular—something that shall come direct to the point—something that shall anatomize the inward man, dissect him, lay him bare, and point out what a child of God is, and what a child of God is not; so that each may have a testimony in his own conscience whether he is under the teachings of the Holy Ghost or not.

"The full soul," then, we may define by one single expression, as "*one full of self.*" Self in one or other of its forms has complete

possession of him; and he has never yet taken that first step which the Lord of life and glory lays down as the door of entrance into His kingdom: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24). Self has never been denied, or crucified; and he is therefore full of self, because it has never received a death blow in him. But this self is such a hypocritical creature; he can wear such masks, he can assume so many forms, he can rise to such heights, he can sink to such depths, he can creep into such holes and corners, that it will not be sufficient for me to say that "a full soul is full of self," unless I try to act the part of the police, so as to find out the felon, track him to his hiding-place, and drag him out into the light of day.

1. One form of self then is *self-righteousness*; and we can scarcely believe what a subtle wretch this said self-righteousness is. There are many persons who would scorn the idea of being Pharisees, in whom the heart-core of Pharisaism never has been touched. And I believe in my heart and conscience that every man is a double-dyed and treble-distilled Pharisee, unless God has begun and is carrying on the work of grace in his heart; and perhaps the greatest Pharisees that walk abroad in the light of day are some in a Calvinistic profession of religion, who have a name to live, but in the eyes of God are dead in sin. Unless a man is taught and brought to know experimentally these two things—the law and the gospel—he must be more or less a Pharisee. If he knows nothing of a sentence of inward condemnation and death under which he falls down before the throne of the most high God a ruined wretch without hope or strength, the heart-core of Pharisaism is not yet touched in him. And if he do not know more or less of the gospel, so as to see by the eye of faith a blessed and a blessing Jesus, Pharisaism will still lurk and work within him. A man must rest upon *something*; and if he do not rest by faith on the blood and righteousness of the Son of God, he must rest more or less upon himself.

2. But again, "the full soul" is one also who is *full of notions, doctrines, views, sentiments, and opinions*; but none of which he

has received from God. The deception of the human heart is past the power of man, and I might say of angels, to dissect. The depths of human hypocrisy are beyond the ken of the most keen-eyed man to scrutinize, and beyond the power of the ablest man to lay bare. Now, there are hundreds who have received from books or from ministers sound gospel doctrines; but as to receiving them from God into a broken heart and a contrite spirit, as reviving cordials for a fainting soul—of that they know absolutely nothing. But they have received the doctrines as they stand in the Word of God, or as they come from the mouths of ministers, without ever having had them, as the apostle James says, "grafted" into their hearts: "Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21). The truth has not entered nor grown into a wounded heart, as the grafted scion enters and grows into the wounded stock.

3. But again, "the full soul" may also represent one who is *full of presumption*. My friends, of all spiritual sins (that is, sins that a spirit may commit) I believe the child of God dreads most the sin of presumption. "Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me" (Ps. 19:13). And if God has let loose His wrath against one sin more than another in the Word, it has been against presumptuous transgressions. Now a man who has no fear of God in his heart, no spiritual apprehension in his soul of the greatness, majesty, justice, and holiness of Jehovah, if he should take up religion, must necessarily be presumptuous. Under the Levitical law, if anyone entered into the Holy Place, and still more into the most Holy Place, unless he were privileged, in the one case as a priest, and in the other as high priest once a year, he would be guilty of presumption, because he was not the person whom God had appointed to enter there. And thus if a man take hold of religion, and God do not by His Spirit lead him into it, his taking hold of and laying claim to the solemn truths God has revealed in His Word is an act of presumption. And the higher he soars into the truths revealed in God's Word without the Spirit's teaching him, the greater is his presumption, and the more daring intruder he is into the sanctuary of the Most High.

4. Again, "a full soul" is one who is *full of pride*. And what sort of pride? Not necessarily worldly pride, but what is commonly called spiritual or religious pride. Whenever presumption lodges in a man's mind, pride is sure to be its inseparable companion. A man who has had no soul humbling sight of God, no debasing view of himself, no feeling acquaintance with the depths of the fall, no insight into his own lost, ruined condition, and who therefore knows nothing experimentally of vital godliness, must needs be a proud man; for he has had nothing to break the neck of pride within him. Nay the more religious he is without divine teaching, the more proud he will be; and the more he is stiffened up with the form of godliness, while he denies the power thereof, the more will pride work, reign, and rule within his heart.

But we go on to consider what is said of this "full soul;" and may the Lord enable you to look into your consciences, and see whether you are the character or not.

"The full soul *loatheth an honeycomb*." What is this honeycomb? Some may say, "It is Christ;" and doubtless in some sense it does signify Christ. But we may gather, I think, from another portion of God's Word something of what is meant by this honeycomb. The Psalmist, speaking of God's statutes, says, "Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb" (Ps. 19:10). By the honeycomb, then, I understand the Word of God dropping with power and sweetness into the soul; not Christ merely, but everything that God has revealed in His blessed Word connected with Christ, and flowing out of Christ, as experimentally made known to the conscience. Should we say that the honeycomb merely represents Christ, it might justly be said that there are "full souls" who do not loathe that honeycomb. Why, there are many persons, and there may be some such here, who would not give a rush to hear a sermon, "unless," say they, "it is full of Christ." But what do they know really and experimentally of Christ? Theirs is a doctrinal, a notional Christ. Christ in the letter of the Word they love to hear preached; because a mere doctrinal preaching of Him touches upon no rotten places within, exposes no hypocrisy,

drags to light no secret presumption, brings no painful convictions to their mind. But Christ experimentally made known—the sweetness of God's truth distilled into the soul, the application of the Word with power, savour, dew, and unction, that the Spirit drops into the heart, just as the honey drops out of the full honeycomb—this, the very essence and marrow of vital godliness, "the full soul loatheth." Anything but application of God's Word to the soul by the Spirit, anything but power and savour, anything but what touches the conscience and drops into the heart as the dew from heaven on the parched ground—anything but *that* for the "full soul." As many notions, as many doctrines, as many sentiments as you please; but the real work of the Holy Ghost upon the conscience, the vital teaching of "God unto profit," attended with melting power and a soul-dissolving effect—anything but *that*. "We leave *all that* to the poor groaners, the muck-worms, and corruptionists; that does not suit *us*—we want to hear about Christ." O what a dangerous, O what a subtle devil have we to contend with! He can use the very name of Christ, and the very doctrines of Christ, all the time that he is luring by them his deceived victims to their ruin. So that a man dead in a profession, with no more grace in his heart than Satan himself, can hear and can rejoice to hear Christ doctrinally preached. But when we speak of and insist upon a conscience touched with godly fear, and a heart melted and softened by the Spirit—when the hand is firmly put upon some rotten spot within, he writhes like a serpent which you suddenly trample on in your path. And thus the very things that God's people love, and the only thing that can satisfy them, "the honeycomb," and the sweetness of God's truth dropping into their hearts—the only things that can really profit, cheer, strengthen, and encourage the souls of the living family, are the very things that "the full soul loatheth."

But how much is contained in the word "*loatheth!*" It does not mean merely hate; it is something stronger than hatred; it implies a turning away from with abhorrence. The word "loathe" is sometimes applied to the feelings that God's people have of themselves, as in the passage, "Ye shall loathe yourselves in your

own sight for all your evils that ye have committed" (Ezek. 20:43). When a man loathes himself, it is not merely that he hates himself; but that he looks upon himself as a vile, detestable wretch. We loathe toads; some loathe spiders; we loathe filth. Loathing, then, not merely implies hating a thing, but hating it as a thing we cannot bear to look upon.

The "full soul," then, crammed with doctrines, sentiments, and notions, full of pride and presumption, "loatheth the honeycomb." When he hears, for instance, an experimental ministry, what is the effect of it upon him? His secret language is, "I cannot bear this; I hate to hear a parcel of feelings spoken of; such petty preaching, such preaching of self does not suit me." Thus the "full soul" turns away with hatred and contempt from the power of truth, and from the instrument through whose lips it comes. And whilst some of God's poor, needy people, are perhaps feeding on the truth dropping with sweetness into their souls, enmity, malice, wrath, hatred, and "all uncharitableness," as the Church of England service says, rise up in his heart.

II. But we pass on to consider the other side of the question; for it is by looking at a thing in two lights that we sometimes see it more clearly.

*"But to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet."* We have, then, a contrast here. We have seen the "full soul." We have been looking at him, analysing him, trying to pull off a few of the coverings from him, just peeping under the mask, and taking a glance at his features. Let us now look at the other side of the subject, and see what the "hungry soul" is.

We will begin with what the Lord Himself says upon this point: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Mat. 5:6).

But what is implied by the expression "hunger"? When the Holy Ghost uses natural figures, it is that we may get a spiritual meaning out of them. What then are the chief causes of hunger?

*Hard labour* is one; *short commons* is another; and *long intervals* betwixt taking our food is a third. Take these three ideas into spiritual hunger—hard labour, short commons, and long intervals between refreshment—and, if you know these three things spiritually, I will say that you are a "hungry soul."

1. The first requisite, then, to hunger is *hard labour*. But what is spiritual labour? There is, first, a labouring under *the law*, when a man tries to be righteous in the sight of God; and that is something like a steep street not very far from this place called "Labour-in-vain Hill." There are many persons who have toiled and struggled up "Labour-in-vain Hill." And when they have about, as they thought, got to the top, they have slipped down to the bottom, and had to try to climb up it again. There is no more painful labour than to labour to establish our own righteousness. The labour of a porter at the docks is not to be compared for a moment to that of a soul labouring to work out its own righteousness. The hardest manual labour that a man can undergo is nothing compared to the labour of a poor soul to "do its duty," and to work out its salvation, that God may look upon it with satisfaction. And why so? Why, when the labourer at the end of the day looks at his work, he sees that he has *done* something. He has ploughed so many furrows; he has threshed so many bushels of corn; he has raised up so many bales by the crane; he has carried so many loads on his back. He has something to look at as done. But when the poor child of God, working at the law, looks at what he has done, he finds not only that he has done nothing, but that he has been undoing all that he had been trying to do. Instead of getting forward, he has only been going backward; and so he has not only lost all his labour, but at the end of the day he is further from the place for which he set out than he was in the morning. No manual labour therefore can ever be compared to the labour of a soul trying to establish its own righteousness.

Again, there is *labouring under sharp and painful temptations*; and this is labour indeed. Labour naturally will bring the sweat to a man's brow; and labour spiritually will send the sweat through

the pores of a man's skin. To have the devil tempting a man to all manner of infidelity, to all horrible blasphemy, all foul obscenity, all vile sensuality,—continually harassing the attention, and suggesting all manner of filthy abominations to a man's mind—this is labour; and if this does not force the sweat through a man's skin, not all the hard manual labour in the world can do it.

There is also a labouring *under trials and afflictions*, under burdens put upon a man's shoulders, under difficulty of circumstances, with a distressed family and children; all these things, when they come upon a man, make him labour. Talk of labouring for the good of others; talk of the labour of Bible societies and missionary societies—it is all play, compared to the labour of a soul exercised with afflictions and temptations.

2. But I hinted that there is another thing which makes a man very hungry, and that is short commons; when he could eat a good piece of a loaf, to have only just a quarter or an eighth of what he could consume. Short commons, then, will make and keep a man hungry; and I believe that God's people are, for the most part, kept on very short commons. They are not, for the most part, turned into rich pastures, where they can feed and lie down at ease; but they have a nibble here and a nibble there. Real spiritual blessings, depend upon it, my friends, are very rare. If you listen indeed to what people say at the doors of chapels and elsewhere, you would think that God showered down blessings as thick as hail, or drops of rain in a thunderstorm. But you must not always attend to what people say at the doors of chapels—where one cries, "What a blessed man is this!" and another, "What a blessed man is that!" and a third, "What a precious sermon we have had to-day!" If you believed all this chit-chat, you would think that gospel blessings were rained down from on high; but God's true children know that they are very rare indeed. I have heard that a good man once said, "If he could get six crumbs in his life, and go to heaven at last, it was as much as he could expect." Not six *loaves*, mind you, but six *crumbs*. Now this man had been taught the difference between real blessings and mock blessings. And I believe when one comes

to know the difference between nature and grace, between what God gives to man and what man steals for himself—when a man's eyes are thus opened to see and feel what are *real* blessings, he begins to feel how few they are. Why, there are some people who if they hear a minister preach, can carry away pretty well the whole of his sermon; can tell how it was divided, and how the subject was treated; and will go home chattering to everybody about it. While perhaps some of God's poor broken-hearted children all the time they were listening to it, had the devil pouring all manner of filth into their minds, and setting all sorts of worldly schemes before them. Or if they have just got a few words to touch their consciences, or a little drop of divine comfort in their hearts, they have to live upon it for weeks. Such is the difference between reality and imitation; such is the difference between what nature can furnish, and the real work of the Holy Ghost in the soul. Now, when you go home to-night, take—if the Lord shall enable you—a solemn review of how many times the Lord has blessed you in your lives—how many times you can solemnly say, "God blessed my soul at this time and at that;" and if you can count half a dozen conspicuous times when God signally blessed your soul, and made it like a watered garden, you are a highly favoured man indeed. I do not mean to say that there may not have been sips and drops, a little nibble here and there, and that your soul may not have been sensibly encouraged and kept alive; but if you examine how many *conspicuous* blessings there were, and sum up the number of times that the God of Israel has visited, watered, comforted, and blessed your soul, I believe that, if God has made you honest, you will find the fingers of one or two hands will suffice to count them.

3. And this leads me to the *third* thing that makes a man hungry, and that is, *long intervals* between taking food—not five meals a day, breakfast, luncheon, dinner, tea, and supper. God's people are not like turtle-fed Aldermen, revelling and rioting on all the delicacies and luxuries of the season; but what they get is given at very long intervals; not merely scanty in quantity when it does come, but coming at great and distant intervals, so that if they are blessed—really blessed—once in six months, or once a year,

they are well off.

These three things, then, working together make a "hungry soul." But to be a "hungry soul," a man must *want* something. The "full soul" wants nothing; he "loatheth a honeycomb." But the "hungry soul" wants something; and what is it that he wants? He wants *suitable food*. Take a hungry man naturally; give him a lump of clay, a piece of chalk, or a bit of wood. Can he eat it? No; however hungry he may be, it is not food for him. He wants something to nourish and support him, something to relieve his famished appetite. So it is spiritually. (I love to run the comparisons together, for out of them we can sometimes extract that spiritual nourishment which the soul requires.) If a man is hungry, would you give him ashes? If you do, they will not feed him. There is a disease in the West Indies, which I have sometimes thought is applicable to many a spiritual sickness in England. It is called "dirt-eating;" and I will tell you what it is. The negro children, and sometimes the negro men, are afflicted with a depraved appetite; and this is continually craving after and feeding on dirt. The poor children are constantly found rolling in the dirt, and by stealth feeding upon it, and the filthiest offal they can procure. And what is the consequence? They gradually pine away and die; so that when this "dirt-eating" gets into a plantation (for the custom becomes infectious), the planter knows that unless it be stopped he will lose all the children. I think there is a good deal of this negro "dirt-eating" in the religious community—that is to say, there is a depraved appetite which loathes wholesome food, and which can feed upon everything and upon anything except the flesh and blood of God's dear Son. And what is the consequence? Why, these people must needs pine away and die. If they can feast upon offal, and eat husks and ashes; if they can feed upon anything short of the savoury flesh of the Lamb of God, they are nothing but "dirt-eaters;" and "dirt-eating" will bring them to eternal death. The children of God want nutritious food; they hunger after divine truth and consolation. Nutritious food is as needful for the "hungry soul" spiritually, as nutritious food is needful for the hungry body naturally.

But the text says, "to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet." What does that mean? Does it mean that the bitter thing is sweet *at the time* it is eaten? I cannot think that it does. But it is sweet *after* it is eaten. And the "hungry soul" so craves solid nutriment, that he can put up with a considerable measure of bitterness in his food, in order to get at the nutriment it contains. Some of us when very hungry may have had bitter bread set before us; yet we have eaten it, and we have found that the bitter bread did not disagree with our stomachs; but after we had lost the bitterness on the palate we felt refreshed by the nutriment in it. But we could not but taste at the time the bitterness: the bread itself was not sweet, but the nutriment which we afterwards got out of it was so. As the apostle says, "No chastening *for the present* seemeth to be joyous but grievous; nevertheless *afterward* it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." The bitter then is not converted into sweet, but there is a blessed nutriment in it which becomes sweet afterwards.

What bitter things, for instance, *temptations* are—temptations to unbelief, to blasphemy, to obscenity, and all the other base temptations of the devil—how bitter they are to a man's conscience, when made tender in God's fear! But then temptations, when they have passed away, have left a sweetness behind them; there has been a good resulting from them. They have brought the Christian out of the world; they have made him abhor himself; they have broken to pieces his former idols: they have made him to know himself to be a lost and ruined wretch before God. The man is glad he passed through them; he feels it sweet that he has been tempted, on account of the good he has got out of these exercises.

So of *afflictions, trials, and sorrows*; they are very bitter things. And they must needs be bitter, for God never meant that they should be otherwise. God does not deal with His children as an indulgent parent does with a spoiled child, when he just tips him with the end of the rod by a kind of make-believe, or perhaps strikes, in a fit of apparent indignation, the child's clothes, but

takes good care not to hurt him. God does not play at make believe in this way. But when He takes the rod, it is to *make it felt*; and when He brings trouble on His children, it is that they may smart under it. Our text therefore, does not, I believe, mean that the "bitter thing" is sweet when it is taken; for then it would cease to be bitter; but it is sweet on account of the blessed nourishment that is brought to the soul out of it. I remember reading many years ago the travels of Franklin to the North Pole; and a very interesting book it is naturally. But there is one incident mentioned in it which just strikes my mind. In wandering over the snows of the circumpolar regions, there was no food to be got for days, and I think weeks, except a lichen or kind of moss, that grew upon the rocks, and that was so exceedingly bitter (something like "Iceland moss") that it could only be taken with the greatest disgust; and yet upon that they lived. They had no alternative; they must either eat that or die. But that bitter moss became sweet after it had passed their palates; for it had a nutriment in it which kept their bodies alive. And thus many of God's people who have endured the most dreadful trials, have afterwards found nutriment to spring out of them. What bitter things are God's reproofs and rebukes in the conscience! And yet who would be without them? I appeal to you who fear God, whether you would deliberately choose never to experience marks of divine disapprobation, and never feel the frowns of God's anger every time that you go wrong? I believe in my conscience that you whose hearts are tender in God's fear would say, "Lord, let me have Thy frowns; for if I have not Thy frowns and a conscience to feel them, what sins should I not recklessly plunge into? Where would not my wicked nature carry me, if I had not Thy solemn reproofs!" These very rebukes then become sweet, not in themselves, nor at the time, but because of the solid profit that comes out of them.

And thus an experimental minister who pulls you down from your lofty tower, strips you and leaves you bare, and sends you home hanging down your head, and exclaiming, "O Lord, look down upon me in Thy mercy!"—such a minister may say things that are felt at the time to be very bitter; but you will afterwards find that

solid good has been produced. If I were to come to London to please even all God's people, I should have come in vain. I like to see people at times hanging down their heads, and crying to the Lord, "Am I right, or am I wrong?" I like to see some purpose effected, some hearts wounded, some secret device of Satan unmasked, that people may not go home buzzing and fluttering about like so many flies, but humbled and broken down, and if need be troubled; and that when they go to bed they may begin to roll about, and cry, "Search me, O Lord, and try me." I was at Bradford, in the north of England, a few weeks ago, and the Lord enabled me, I trust, to be a little faithful with the people there. They heard me with much attention; and I was not sorry to learn next morning that there had been among them some who had spent nearly a sleepless night. I think that was a better mark for them and for me too, than to see them flitting about on the wings of self-congratulation. It is a bitter thing, I know by experience, to roll backwards and forwards on one's bed in soul trouble and anxiety; but it is far better than to lay one's head comfortably upon the pillow, and say, "I care not what the man says; God has done this, and Christ has done that, and I am safe and secure," when the poor deluded creature has no work or witness of the Spirit in his soul. It is better to have an honest heart crying to the Lord with many groans, than to have one puffed up with self-pride and importance. To have one's religion all pulled to pieces, brought out of the secret depths of the heart, and exposed to the light of day, is a bitter thing; but you may depend upon it, that it is sweet in the end; for a man will find that there is a solid good in these dealings of God with his soul. He will find that there is a sweetness coming out of these very bitters; and thus, while "the full soul loatheth an honeycomb, to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet."

Now, which are you? A "full soul" or "a hungry soul?" Do you loathe the honeycomb? Do you dislike experimental preaching? Do you hate to have your conscience with the fingers of the minister inside it? Do you hate to have your heart probed and searched, and all your religion torn to pieces? Oh! you may depend upon it that if you do, you are a "full soul." But if you are

a "hungry soul," you "hunger and thirst after righteousness." If you hunger and thirst, you must experience painful want at times. There may be here many poor people—and it is the poor whom God has for the most part chosen to be rich in faith—there may be here many poor people, who know what it is to have a hungry belly. But does it not make you want food? So the hungry soul too has its wants. Yes, it is full of wants; and what it wants is something that God alone can supply. And the mercy is, that spiritual wants shall never be unrelieved: for the Lord has promised to feed the hungry with good things, whilst He sends the rich empty away.

## THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

A Discourse Delivered on Lord's Day Afternoon, December 27, 1840, at Trinity Chapel, Alfred Street, Leicester

"For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Hebrews 4:12

If we look at this passage in connexion with the context, there appears at first sight some ambiguity. What are we to understand by the expression "the Word of God?" If we read the verse that immediately follows the text, "the Word of God" seems to be a person. "Neither is there any creature which is not manifest in his sight but all things are naked and opened **unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.**" The pronoun "**his,**" and the words, "the eyes of **him** with whom we have to do" clearly point out a person; and yet no person has been before mentioned but "the Word of God." But again, if we look to the effects ascribed to the Word of God in the text, they seem more applicable to a thing than a person. So that we may say that there appears at first considerable doubt whether by "the Word of God" we are to understand the Incarnate Word, the second Person of the glorious Trinity, of whom John speaks in the beginning of his gospel, as "with God" and as "God;" or whether we are to understand the written Word, that is, the Scriptures of truth, the lively oracles handed down to us from our fathers.

Now, I conceive that this very apparent ambiguity has a great beauty in it, and throws much light on the meaning of the text. Much is said in our day about the Scriptures, and wonderful effects are ascribed to them. By their instrumentality and universal diffusion, it is expected by many that the whole world will be gradually converted. But whilst so much is said in praise of the written Word, little is said in praise of the power of the Incarnate Word, and men talk and preach as though the

Scriptures possessed in themselves some inherent power to regenerate the nations. Now the written Word has no power whatever but in the hands of the Incarnate Word; no, no more power than a sword has to leap out of the scabbard and slay a man, independent of the arm that wields it; no, no more power than a law passed by Parliament has to execute itself, or a medicine to administer itself. Thus I look upon this very ambiguity, if ambiguity it be, as full of beauty. Paul, speaking of the effects of the written Word, and how it acts as a two-edged sword, immediately glances off to the Incarnate Word, in whose hands it is alone effectual; just as a man describing the edge and temper of a Damascus blade, would turn from the sword to the swordsman, from the dead weapon to the living hand, without whose skill and strength its sharpness were of no avail. So that if we look at the words of the text they describe the written Word as producing certain powerful effects; but only so when wielded by the Lord of Hosts, the King of armies, the Word of the living God, who rides forth, girt with his sword upon his thigh, conquering and to conquer. And that this is the true meaning of the passage is clear from **Re 1:16**, where, in the description of the Son of God, as seen in Patmos by John, we read that "out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword;" implying that the written Word is then only a two-edged sword, when it comes out of the mouth of the Incarnate Word into the hearts of God's people.

Bear in mind, then, that all the effects which in opening up the text I shall ascribe to the written Word, are to be ascribed to it wholly and solely as an efficacious instrument in the hands, and out of the mouth of him, who is Lord and King in Zion.

"For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Now, if you and I have ever felt anything of the power of God's truth in our souls we shall be able, if the Lord shines upon his

own work, to trace out in our own experience some of those effects, which the Holy Ghost here ascribes to the written Word in the hands of the Incarnate Word.

1. The first word, then, that demands our attention is the expression, "quick." "The Word of God is quick." But before we go into the meaning of this expression, we are stopped at the very threshold with this question—Does the written Word of God, of which the text speaks, mean the very letter, the exact text of Scripture as it stands in our Bibles? In other words, is it **the letter** of Scripture, or **the substance** of Scripture, that is a two-edged sword? and must a man feel the direct application to his conscience of the exact words of the Bible, or is the substance and meaning of the words sufficient? I believe, for my own part, that however sweet and beautiful the exact words of Scripture are, yet that the substance of them is sufficient to do God's work in the soul. What does the Lord say? "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." It is the truth, then, contained in the Scripture that produces the effect, and we may have the substance of the truth, without having the very exact letter of truth. I grant that it is more clear and satisfactory when we have the very words of Scripture; but I believe we have many spiritual feelings, the first entrance and subsequent maintenance of which in the soul it would be somewhat difficult to trace up to the application of exact passages of Scripture, and yet they are spiritual feelings, and have been produced by the power of the Holy Ghost working in and through the Scriptures, for we know and experience nothing aright which is not in, or out of, the Scriptures. For instance, we carry about with us more or less of a sense of God's heart-searching eye, and of his unblemished purity, and hatred of sin. Whence arise our feelings of guilt and trouble under the burden of sin, but from some such consciousness in the secret chambers of our heart? But if we were very strictly and closely questioned what were the precise Scriptures in the exact letter, chapter and verse, by the direct application of which these feelings were produced, we might, some of us at least, be much puzzled to put our finger on the very passages. And yet how should we know that God was the

searcher of our hearts, and hated sin with perfect hatred, if he had not told us so first in his Word, and then told us so out of the Word in our consciences? But it is the truth, not the letter of the text,—“I the Lord search the heart and try the reins,” “I the Lord hate evil”—that has produced that inward consciousness; and I, for my part, would sooner have the spiritual feeling produced in my heart by the substance of truth, than a doctrinal knowledge produced in my head by the letter of truth. The light cast into the heart from the word of truth is like a ray of light reflected from a mirror; there is no light in the mirror itself, but it casts upon that object to which it is directed a ray from the sun. So the Word of God has no light in itself, but only reflects that light which the Sun of righteousness communicates to it. Now, suppose a man were to take a number of small pieces of looking glass, and so adjust them that they each should reflect their separate rays on one object, and meet in one focus; then there would be an assemblage of various rays, each intermingling its light, and it would be difficult to say from which piece of the looking-glass all the light came. Thus one text speaks of God's heart-searching presence, another of his infinite purity, another of his hatred of sin, another of his inflexible justice, and so on. All these detached texts, when shone upon by the Divine Spirit's light, and brought to bear in one focus on a sinner's conscience, cast a mingled light within, in which he sees light, and he falls under the convictions which this light produces. But how can he turn to a text, and say, “This passage showed me God's presence, and that verse convinced me of God's purity,” and so on, when he is too much occupied with the feelings themselves to analyze them rigidly, much less to examine how they were produced? Paul fell to the ground under the light which struck him down on his way to Damascus, and I dare say did not stop to examine whether it came north, south, east, or west.

I speak this because I know that many of God's people are often exercised because conviction or consolation has come into their minds without the exact letter of Scripture, or even without the Scripture itself. A word or sentence from the pulpit not in the language of Scripture, or a line from a hymn, or a passage in the

writings of a good man, has afforded relief; but this not coming in the exact words of Scripture, Satan and unbelief have pulled at it till they have pulled away all its consolation. Well, but if it be Scriptural, if it be in strict accordance with Scripture, if it be contained in other parts of God's Word, why need we care because it did not come in the very letter of Scripture? We want power, not word; spirit, not letter; substance, not shadow; truth, not letters and syllables; wine, not the wine glass; unction, not the oil flask. If we have the spirit and substance of Scripture, we may let the letter and form go: and though I acknowledge, to have both is more sweet, abiding, and convincing, as coming in a more direct channel, yet if I can have but one, I would sooner have the feeling without the word, than the word without the feeling.

Now, the first thing that is said in the text of "the Word of God" **that is, as I understand it, the truth of God in the hands of the Spirit**, is that it is "quick." What is meant by this expression? That it moves with swiftness and velocity? It is certainly said of God's Word **Ps 147:15** that "it runneth very swiftly;" but that is not the meaning of the word "**quick**" in the text. It there means "living," and corresponds with the expression **Ac 7:38** "lively **or living** oracles." It is an old English word signifying "living;" as in the expression, "who shall judge the quick and the dead" **2Ti 4:1**—that is, the living and the dead. So we read of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram "going down quick **that is, alive** into the pit." **Nu 16:30** So the Lord is said to have "quicken'd **that is, made spiritually alive** those who were previously dead in trespasses and sins." **Eph 2:1** The word "quick," then, means not moving with velocity, but living, or rather communicating life, and thus distinguished from the dead letter. Truth, as it stands in the naked Word of God, is lifeless and dead; and as such, has no power to communicate what it has not in itself, that is, life and power, to the hearts of God's people. It stands there in so many letters and syllables, as lifeless as the types by which they were printed. But when the Incarnate Word takes of the written Word, and speaks it home into the heart and conscience of a vessel of mercy, whether in letter or substance, then he endues it with Divine life, and it enters into the soul, communicating to it a life

that can never die. As James speaks **Jas 1:18**—"Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." And so Peter—"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which **liveth** and abideth for ever." **1Pe 1:23** Eternal realities are brought into the soul, fixed and fastened by an Almighty hand. The conscience is made alive in the fear of God; and the soul is raised up from a death in sin, or a death in profession, to a life heavenly, new, and supernatural.

But now we come to the experience of this life. How do we know that it has been communicated? How, I might ask, do we know that we are naturally alive? Why, we perform certain actions that can only be performed by living persons. I eat, I drink, I breathe, I talk, I walk, I think, I feel. All these are living actions, and I have besides an inward consciousness of possessing life. So spiritually if there is life, there will be the movements and stirrings, the breathings and actings, that are peculiar to that life.

Let us look a little back, then. Can we find a beginning to our religion? And if so, when and what was that beginning? A good clear beginning is a blessed evidence, when the Lord shines upon it, to help us through many a dark day; and I believe that a good beginning usually goes on to a good middle, and terminates in a good ending. But all God's family cannot find this good beginning,—at least not such as is good in their eyes; for their good beginning is a striking beginning, and God does not give to all his children this striking beginning. We must come, then, to fruits and effects. If the fruit is good, the tree must be good; if the effect is spiritual, then must the cause be spiritual; and if there is supernatural life in the soul, then there must have been a beginning in that supernatural life. What I want is to put my hand on that life, and touch the secret strings and chords of Divine feeling in your conscience, that when I strike the keys, as a player on an instrument, there may be a sound in your soul, an echo in your heart, that shall thrill and vibrate under the touch.

Now, what is the first fruit and effect of Divine life? Is it not the fear of God in a tender conscience; according to those words,

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom?" Now, what fear is this, filial or slavish? for we read **1Jo 4:18** that "perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment." But surely one grace of the Spirit cannot cast out another grace; and, therefore, the fear cast out by perfect love is not the filial fear that is the beginning of wisdom, but the slavish fear which is a member of the old man. But the fear which is a grace of the Spirit is a new covenant blessing, and put into the heart by the Father of mercies; according to those 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** But before perfect love casteth out slavish fear, both kinds of fear work in the hearts of God's quickened family; and it is sometimes very hard in soul experience, to find out the difference between them. We see this slavish fear working in Peter's mind, when, struck with the miraculous draught of fishes, "he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." **Lu 5:8** Here the very same fear worked in Peter's mind which Job speaks of as in the mind of the reprobate, "who say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not a knowledge of thy ways." Filial fear does not drive the soul from God, but carries it up in solemn reverence to God. Therefore we read that "in the fear of the Lord is strong confidence" **Pr 14:26**; and that it is "a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death." So we read of the Churches "walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost." **Ac 9:31** Then what is the cause of slavish fear? The law of God, as a ministration of death and condemnation and gendering to bondage, produces this slavish fear, which works in the carnal mind, until cast out by the Spirit of adoption and perfect love. Filial fear will be manifested by a holy reverence of God, by a trembling at his word, by a desire not to offend him, by solemn feelings of his presence, by a hatred of hypocrisy and deceit, and by honouring him in our inmost thoughts. But, say you, "How am I to distinguish between these two fears? I feel myself a guilty, filthy wretch, an unclean monster of iniquity, and I am afraid I shall be cast into hell, and be damned for ever. Is this filial or slavish fear?" Now, let me ask you, how does this fear

work? Does it work by faith? Does it bring you to God, or drive you from God? Does it work in sighs, cries, groans, desires, pantings after God, and hungerings and thirstings after Christ or does it work in a kind of reckless despair that never keeps you from sin? If it works in the latter way, then it is slavish fear which hath torment. But these two kinds of fear are, after all, so blended, that we can hardly distinguish them; but when the Lord, after a time, brings Christ near, and a sense of his mercy is tasted, then slavish fear slinks back, and filial fear goes forward; slavish fear retires into the depth of the carnal mind, and filial fear goes upward with faith, hope, and love, into the presence of God.

Thus when the Lord by his Spirit condescends to visit the soul, it is like the magnet which approaches the iron filings on a table; every grace of the soul leaps forward to meet him—faith, hope, love, humility, filial fear. But this same heavenly magnet repels slavish fear, because, being of the old nature, it can have no union or affinity with the Lord. If ever you have had your affections drawn forth to Jesus, faith has received him, hope anchored in him, love embraced him, and fear revered him. You did not say, "Depart," but, "Come near," you did not cry, "Torment me not," but "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." And I firmly believe that this filial fear must exist, and does exist, before there is the spirit of adoption to cry "Abba, Father," as a child may fear his father, before he can call him "father," or know him as his father; but when the Spirit of adoption comes, it will be more fully known as filial fear, and will be fed by and work with the spirit of adoption. Now, if you have anything of this filial fear, the Word of God has been made life to your soul.

Again; wherever the life of God is in the soul, there will be faith. Now, the province of faith is in the depths of the heart. There is all "the work of faith with power." For faith is "the substance," that is, the realisation, of "things hoped for;" and where can the truths of God be realised and turned into substance but in the heart? and it is likewise "the evidence of things not seen," that is,

by the natural eye; and therefore this evidence must be a witness within to the truths without. Again, it is said, "to purify the heart," and therefore must be in the heart that it purifies. Faith then realizes and bears testimony to those truths which the Holy Spirit takes out of the Word of God, that vast magazine and storehouse of truth, and turns them into food and substance. Faith, therefore, can never outstep the Spirit's inward teaching. The moment that faith sails abroad into the letter of the Word, and steps beyond or aside from the Spirit's inward teachings, it becomes presumption. Thousands of dead professors are here, whose faith stands not in the power of God, but in the wisdom of man. They stand in presumption from first to last, beginning, middle, and end; and all their religion, so called, is one enormous act of presumption. Aye, and the child of God, too, may be, and I believe often is, entangled in a snare, by being thrust beyond his own experience into a presumptuous faith. But say you, "Can a child of God be entangled in presumption?" Not so as to damn him, not so as to reign and rule in him, but certainly so as to entangle and cast him down. Let us hear the prayer of a child of God. "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me; then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." **Ps 19:13** Had David no fear of presumption when he poured forth this cry? Surely he had felt its secret workings, and had groaned under it as the great transgression. And I believe, from what I have known and felt of the matter, that there are two classes of sins which cut deepest into a living conscience—the base lusts of the flesh as carnal sins, and presumption and hypocrisy as spiritual sins. There is no sin more rife among the Calvinistic Churches, than that of presumption; and it is the besetting sin of Calvinists, as self-righteousness is the besetting sin of Arminians. But whenever a child of God gets upon this ground, he has an internal conviction that he is on trespass, that he is treading in slippery places, and he fears lest an earthquake should open under his feet. He therefore has to fall back upon the blessed Spirit's teachings, and has no more religion than he feels his Divine operations. Faith, therefore, being thus hemmed and shut in, walks only as the Spirit leads, and feeds only on what the Spirit

gives. As the Spirit unlocks the storehouse of God's Word, faith receives the provision as it is dealt out. When the Spirit opens a promise, faith advances; when he applies a rebuke, faith draws back; when he brings home a precept, faith bows its neck and puts on the yoke; and when he makes Christ known, faith leaps into the Saviour's arms. Thus faith and fear work together in every quickened soul, and he that knows nothing experimentally of these things is destitute of the life of God. I am not setting up here a standard six feet high, and cutting off everybody's head who cannot reach it, but endeavouring to put my hand into your conscience, that I may touch the secret springs of life in your soul. What know you of a spring of living water within, such as the Lord spoke of to the woman of Samaria? "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" not a rain-water tank, not a dead pool of doctrinal knowledge, always stagnant and often stinking, not a cistern of human wisdom, not a reservoir of creature ability, but a spring of living water, ebbing and flowing, sometimes out of sight, sometimes running over, but always fresh, and more or less as the Spirit secretly calls, "Spring up, O well" bubbling and gushing forth in living actions towards a living God. He that has felt anything of this springing well, has experienced that the Word of God is "quick," he having been quickened by it into the inward life of God. The next thing said of the Word of God in the hands of the Incarnate Word, is that it is **powerful**. "The word of God is quick and **powerful**." By "powerful" is here meant its efficacious work in the heart and conscience of the elect. "The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power;" and it is through the Word of God in the hands of the Spirit, that this kingdom is set up in the soul. All God's people are agreed on this point, that they have no more religion than they have inward power. And all the living family are sighing, each according to his measure and season, after the manifestation of this Divine power in their souls. Those that are under the law, and toiling under heavy burdens, are sighing after relief, and for that relief to come in Divine power—power that shall cast all their sins into the depth of the sea. Those who, having tasted that the Lord is gracious, have lost their first love, are at times breathing out their inmost desire

after power to revive their souls. Those who are beset with powerful temptations, and struggling, often ineffectually, with base lusts, are crying after power to deliver their feet from the fowler's snares. Those who are hard, need power to soften them; those who are doubting and fearing, need power to give them faith; the backsliding need power to return, and the sinking need power to swim. By power I understand something solid, real, substantial, heavenly, supernatural. How do we measure the capabilities of a steam engine? We say that it has so many horsepower. But who in his senses would construct a steam-engine of two hundred horse power to break sticks, and pick up straws? We measure power by its effects. We proportion the one to the other. Now, the Holy Ghost, the God of all power and might, would not put forth his mighty and efficacious hand to break sticks and pick up straws in the soul. No. His work is worthy of a God; a "work of faith with power," because springing from a God of power. The God of Israel is not a Baal that is sleeping and needs to be awakened, or gone a journey and therefore too far off to come when needed, but "a very present help in time of trouble." By this secret power, false hopes, are swept away, rotten props removed, creature righteousness brought to an end, and the soul helped and enabled to lean upon the Lord. This power is not noise and rant—**if I speak loudly now, it is only that I may be heard**—but the still small voice of Jesus in the soul. The people of God want no outward voice **though they often are so earnest after the blessing, that they look and listen with almost suppressed breath, as I have sometimes done, hoping and expecting some voice to sound behind, or around them**, but they are seeking after that secret voice of atoning blood in their conscience, that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. The inward whisper of heavenly love sounding in their soul—not the earthquake of terror, not the fire of Divine wrath, but the still small voice of pardon and peace—makes them bow themselves before the Lord, and wrap their faces in their mantle. The Queen of England need not shout aloud in her palace, to give her commands effect. Where the word of a king is, there is power, whether from an earthly monarch or from the King of Zion. We want, therefore, no

noise, bustle, and excitement, no raving and ranting about religion; but we want inward feeling, the very kingdom of God set up in the heart.

3. But we come now to another distinguishing mark and test of the power of God's Word when divinely applied. It is said in its effects and operations to be "sharper than **any** two-edged sword." Here it is not only compared to a sword, but is said to exceed any two-edged sword in its sharpness, and piercing, penetrating effects. Wherein consists this sharpness? Why, in this; that the sharpest blade that human artificer ever forged, however fine its temper, polished its surface, or keen its edge, never could do more than divide asunder soul and body. A natural sword can never produce anything greater or higher than natural effects. But "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow." But how does this two-edged sword divide asunder soul and spirit? I believe in this way. A natural man has but two things, a body and a soul; but a spiritual man has three things **the third being superadded in regeneration**, body, soul, and spirit. Therefore the Apostle says, "I pray God, your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." **1Th 5:23** Now, in natural men who have a natural faith, and hope, and love, and so on, where is the seat of this natural religion? Surely not in the body, which is but a lump of flesh, sinews, blood, and bones. The seat of their natural religion, then, must be in their soul; for that alone can think and feel. The word translated, "natural," in **1Co 2:14** "the natural man", means literally "the soul man," or rather "the man possessed of a soul" and no more, in contradistinction to "the spiritual man," who has "a spirit," or a spiritual nature; according to those words, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with **our spirit**" **Ro 8:16**—"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." So the same word is used **Jas 3:15**. "This wisdom is not from above, but is earthly, **sensual**, devilish;" where the word "sensual" literally means "belonging to the soul," as opposed to that which belongs to the spirit. I look upon "the soul," then, in this passage, and in others where it is distinguished from the

spirit **for sometimes it is used synonymously with it**, to signify the seat of natural religion. Now, as the elect have two kinds of religion in them, natural and supernatural, fleshly and spiritual, the religion of the first Adam in their natural conscience, and the religion of the second Adam, as a quickening Spirit, in their natural conscience, a separation, a dividing asunder must needs be made between the precious and the vile religion that is in them. And this nothing can do but the two-edged sword of the Spirit, which with its piercing point and double edge, penetrates between these two religions, letting out the life-blood of natural faith, natural hope, natural love, and natural prayer, and rends them asunder from the work and witness of the Holy Ghost in the man. All false hopes, lying refuges, dim expectations of general mercy, self-applause and vainglory are maimed and wounded, as this two-edged sword enters. So nicely guided is this keen blade, that it never touches or wounds the life of the spirit, though it makes sad work with the flesh. But in soul-feeling this piercing sword cuts away all our religion. Were you ever here? Has this work been done in you? And if so, when and where? Did you ever lose all your religion, and stand before God without an atom, in soul feeling? If not, depend upon it the two-edged sword has never yet entered into you to divide asunder soul and spirit. Were you ever in those situations and trying hours, when natural faith, hope, and love, all gave up the ghost, cut asunder by the piercing sword of God's Word, as holding forth salvation only to the elect, and to them only as possessing a divine supernatural work in their consciences? The man that was never cut off by the Word of God, was never brought in by the Word of God; and he that was never wounded by the truth, has never been healed by the truth. "But how cruel and unkind," say some, "to cut and wound the soul!" Cruel and unkind! Is the gardener cruel and unkind to the tree, when he sees the ivy clasping and strangling it in its embrace, pulls out his knife, and cuts it to the ground? I believe in my conscience, that there are many in this town so strangled and clasped by the ivy of false religion, so grappled by forms and ceremonies and doctrines and duties, that there is scarcely anything of life visible in them, but a few green leaves by way of tuft at the very top of the stem, which the ivy has not yet

reached. But all this green and bushy religion **for you know how thick and bushy this evergreen ivy is with all its slender stem** must be cut away, and the tree left naked and bare to keep it from being strangled.

And what is a minister worth, who never uses this two-edged sword, and never divides and separates between fleshly and spiritual religion? Can he be "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth," who knows nothing of this work in his own soul, and never in his ministry divides asunder soul and spirit? He cannot faithfully preach the Word of God, if the two-edged sword be not in his hand.

4. But this two-edged sword is said also to divide asunder "joints," as well as soul and spirit. What are joints naturally? Why, certain hinges of the body, pivots and centres of motion, without which a man would be as motionless as a log of wood. By joints I move my arm to take food, by joints I move my limbs to walk. I understand, therefore, by "joints" spiritually what are usually called "motives." Now all that we do and say springs from motives; and as we possess two natures, so our motives will be some spiritual, and others carnal. These secret motives man cannot see. As our natural joints are concealed and buried in our body, so are our spiritual joints—the secret motives and workings of our minds—concealed from the view of others; aye, and from our own, until the two-edged sword of the Spirit pierces and divides them asunder. Oh! what a discovery is made of crooked, selfish, base, filthy, hypocritical motives, when these inward joints are riven asunder, and our carnal motives are laid naked and open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do! Oh! what searchings of heart as to the root and ground, the reality and spirituality of our religion! "Did I begin with God, or did God begin with me? Did I take up religion, or did religion lay hold of me? What were my motives for making a profession? Were they natural or spiritual? Was there any secret under-hand rotten motive? Was it natural fear or filial fear; fleshly convictions or spiritual convictions; the work of God or the work of the devil? Is my faith feigned or genuine; my hope an anchor within the veil,

or a spider's web; my love to Christ and his people natural or spiritual?" The two-edged sword of the Spirit pierces even to the dividing asunder of these motives, and rends them apart so that they shall not cleave together. What know you of this solemn soul examination, with sighs and cries to have your heart right before God, and an inward condemnation of all your fleshly motives? For remember, that a child of God is full of crooked motives, but in his right mind he allows them not, and would fain have none but spiritual motives alive within him.

I should like to know what motives have brought you here this afternoon, and how many of them are spiritual. Some of you are perhaps come as spies, to watch something from my lips, lest I drop a word to disparage any other minister, that you may run home with it, and make out of it a wonderful tale. I am not going to gratify you, as I did not come here for that purpose, but to preach the truth, as far as I am acquainted with it. But the work and business of a man of truth is to run his sword right up into motives and lay them naked and open before the eyes of an enlightened conscience.

5. But we read of this two-edged sword piercing also to "**the marrow.**" What is spiritually meant by **marrow**? By the spinal marrow all feeling is communicated from the brain to every part of the body. From it, as it passes down the spinal column of the back, nerves are continually given off, which communicate what is called nervous energy and feeling to every muscle, limb, and organ, internal and external. This I understand the marrow to signify "feeling;" and as the two-edged sword divides asunder soul and spirit, and rends apart the joints—natural and spiritual motives—so it pierces and separates between natural and spiritual feelings.

And here is the grand deceit and awful delusion of natural religion, that it has feeling as much connected with it naturally, as spiritual religion has feeling connected with it spiritually. Feeling, therefore, in itself is no test of true religion, as there are false feelings as well as true feelings.

I know this is tender ground, but I equally know that it is true ground. Had Esau no feeling, nor Herod, nor Felix, nor Judas Iscariot? Aye, and deep feelings too. And so a child of God may have what many think religious feelings, which are not spiritual feelings. He may have tears, and sighs, and burdens, and griefs, and sorrows, and these not produced in his soul by, nor flowing from, Divine operations. He may be melted naturally and cheered naturally, mourn naturally and rejoice naturally; and think himself all the time that his feeling's are spiritual. Now, the two-edged sword of the Spirit, opening up the secrets of his heart, divides asunder that which is natural and spiritual; and thus, when He produces heavenly feeling, there accompanies it a Divine evidence of its birth and origin. There is a depth, and a power, and a sincerity, and a reality, and a solemn feeling of God's presence, and a drawing upwards of the soul, which all stamp spiritual feelings as divine and heavenly.

But a man who has never had light shine in his conscience, to see and feel the difference between natural and spiritual feelings, can never have had the two-edged sword in his marrow, and is as much exposed to Satan's delusions as an angel of light. Old nature has its crocodile tears, as well as its joys of crackling thorns. **Ec 7:6** But there is one test that marks them both as of the earth earthy, and that is, that they centre in self, and feed self-righteousness at the very moment that they are at work, whereas all spiritual feelings, whether of sorrow or joy, mount upward to the source whence they came down.

6. But to draw to a close; the last effect mentioned in the text of the Word of God, when spiritually applied, is, that it is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." These words seem to show that the joints and marrow have been correctly explained, as the apostle drops the metaphor, and uses once more plain language. Now these four things—motives, feelings, thoughts, and intents—may be, and indeed are, all partly natural and partly spiritual. As there are natural motives and natural feelings, so there are natural thoughts and natural intents; and

so likewise there are spiritual thoughts and intents, as well as spiritual motives and feelings. Now, the word of God in the soul, as the light of life, the candle of the Lord searching its inward parts, discerns, that is, finds out the difference between natural and spiritual thoughts, and natural and spiritual intents. That is, so far as they wear a religious garb. And it passes an unsparing sentence of condemnation on all religious thoughts and intents that are not spiritual thoughts and intents.

For instance, some such flaming sentence as this is written on the conscience, "The flesh profiteth nothing," "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," "Without me ye can do nothing," "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin;" the substance of these revealed truths works in the soul, and as each fleshly thought and intent comes forward it is seized, examined, tried, and condemned. No thoughts are considered good but what God gives, and no intents are deemed right that the Spirit does not prompt; and thus all a man's religion is inwardly weighed up and stamped as it passes through his heart.

And now, my friends, what know you and I of this religion? Depend upon it, if the Word of God has ever entered our heart, it has produced, more or less, some of these effects. And it is to be feared, if you never knew anything of these searching separating operations of the Spirit in your conscience, you are dead in sin, or dead in a profession. It has been my endeavour this afternoon to take forth the precious from the vile; and it is my desire that God may be glorified and his people profited; that his enemies may be covered with shame, but upon himself his crown flourish.

## **THE TEMPLE BUILT BY ZERUBBABEL, AND ITS SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICATION**

Preached on Lord's Day Morning, March 19th, 1854, at Oakham

"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you." Zech. 4:9

The history of the Old Testament is little else but a record of the perverseness of man, and of the goodness and mercy of God. From the day that the Lord brought the children of Israel out of Egypt to the close of the canon of the Old Testament, their history is but one unmingled series of perverseness and rebellion. And all God's dealings with them from first to last were but repeated instances of His unparalleled long-suffering, rich forbearance, and unspeakable goodness towards them.

But though the Lord thus displayed His goodness and mercy towards them, we must ever bear in mind that He hated their sins, and was justly provoked by their iniquities. He, therefore, from time to time, raised up prophets to testify against their sins, and to denounce His displeasure against them. And not only so, but He sent chastisement after chastisement, and sold them again and again into captivity, in order to bring them to repentance for their disobedience. The most remarkable instance of this is what is generally called the Babylonish captivity, when they were sent captive to Babylon, and there continued in durance vile for seventy years. But at the end of seventy years, when the time fixed by God's purposes was completed, He stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, the king of Persia, to permit them to return to their own land.

"Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, The Lord God of

heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth: and He hath charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is the God), which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:1, 2, 3). This permission being granted, a remnant of the captivity returned to Jerusalem. Their first object on their return was to rebuild the temple, which lay in ruins, having been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. By so doing, they showed a zeal for God's honour, and clearly manifested where their heart and affections lay. The leaders of the remnant which returned were two, Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, their temporal head, being a lineal descendant of the last king of Judah; and Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, their spiritual head, the lineal descendant of the last high priest. Thus, under the rule and guidance of these two heads, their spiritual head in the person of Jeshua, and their civil head in the person of Zerubbabel, they returned to their own land. As it would take a considerable time to re-build the temple, the first thing they did was to build an altar on which they might offer sacrifices morning and evening, according to the Levitical law. The next thing was to lay the foundation of the temple, and this was done by the hand of Zerubbabel, in the presence of Jeshua, the high priest, and the assembled people, with great ceremony, of which an account is given in the third chapter of the book of Ezra. But this good work was scarcely begun before it was interrupted. To see the temple of God commenced stirred up the enmity of adversaries, and these adversaries had such power and access to the successive kings of Persia, that the completion of it was hindered for nearly twenty years. At length, by God's good hand turning the heart of Darius, king of Persia, in favour of the undertaking, the top stone was put on, the temple completed, and the house of God shone forth in its beauty and glory, inferior indeed in every respect to the temple of Solomon, but honoured above that, according to Haggai's prophecy, by the personal entrance into it of the promised Messiah. "And I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is Mine, and the gold is mine, saith

the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts" (Haggai 2:7, 8, 9).

Now all this was not merely a literal, historical transaction, but there was also something typical and figurative intended thereby. Thus the words of the text contain not only a literal promise for the comfort of the desponding Jews, who saw their temple so many years unfinished, but a promise for the Church of God to the end of time.

In considering, therefore, the text this morning, I shall endeavour to explain it, if the Lord enable, in a spiritual and experimental sense. "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, his hands shall also finish it, and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you."

I. The first point which, with God's blessing, I shall lay down and enforce is, the spiritual and typical meaning of the temple.

II. Secondly, whom Zerubbabel typically represented in laying its foundation. "*The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundations of this house.*"

III. Thirdly, the completion of the work which he had with God's good pleasure begun. "*His hands shall also finish it.*"

IV. And fourthly, how in the beginning, carrying on, and finishing of this temple the authority of God in sending His servants to prophesy good of it is made manifest. "*And thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you.*"

I. The temple was a type and figure of two things; chiefly and primarily of the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. As He Himself said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Holy Ghost expressly tells us this, "But He spake of the temple of His body" (John 2:21). The second typical meaning of the temple I shall presently explain. But as a figure of the human

nature of the Lord Jesus the temple was very significant. Let us devote a few moments to the consideration of this figure.

1. First, in this temple God specially dwelt. He is said therefore in Scripture "to dwell between the cherubims," which He did in the manifestation of His glory in the divine Shechinah, the holy light which rested on the top of the ark. In this sense the temple was a representation of the human nature of Christ, for as God visibly and manifestly dwelt in the temple, so the fulness of the Godhead dwells in Jesus bodily. 2. Again, it was in the temple, and in the temple only, that sacrifices were offered. Sacrifice was not allowed to be offered anywhere else. "Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt-offerings in every place that thou seest. But in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt-offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee" (Deut. 12:13, 14). Now this prohibition plainly signified that the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross is the only propitiation for sin, the only sacrifice which God has accepted, and with which He is ever well pleased. 3. Thirdly, in the temple was all spiritual worship offered up. In the dedication prayer of Solomon, as recorded in 2 Chron. 6, there were special petitions put up that the Lord would hear the prayer of those who prayed toward that place. Therefore we find that the publican went up to the temple to pray. And so we read in the Acts of the Apostles of the disciples, Peter and John, going up together into the temple at the hour of prayer (Acts 3:1). Yea, we find their divine Master Himself continually resorting to the temple, especially in the last week before His crucifixion. Thus all spiritual worship is only acceptable to God as it is offered in and through Christ, the temple in which the fulness of the Godhead dwells. No prayer, petition, supplication, or desire is ever acceptable to God except as passing through the mediation of the Lord Jesus, for He is the only Mediator between God and man. Viewed in this light, the temple stood forth as a beautiful and blessed figure of the Lord Jesus, and especially of His human nature as God-man Mediator.

2. But the temple has a further signification. It signifies also

believers in the Lord Jesus. The Apostle therefore says, "Know ye not that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost?" intimating thereby that every believer is the temple of God, because in him God dwells; according to those words, "I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (2 Cor. 6:16). The believer is also the temple of God, because God has set up in his heart His spiritual worship, and given him an altar on which is laid the sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Thus the temple of old had a double signification, but in both represented the temple of mercy; first, in the human nature of the Lord Jesus, and secondly, in the person of a child of God.

II. But I pass on to consider the laying of the foundation of this temple, which was by the hands of Zerubbabel. Now as the temple was a typical thing, so was Zerubbabel a typical person. He was, as I before pointed out, the son of Shealtiel, sometimes called Salathiel (1 Chron. 3:17); and also in the New Testament (Matt. 1:12). This Shealtiel, or Salathiel, was the son of Jeconiah, or Jehoiachim, king of Judah, and died in Babylon. Zerubbabel was now, as his heir, the lawful king of Judah, and therefore, though not actual king, the right of the crown belonged to him. In this sense, he was a lively type of Jesus, representing Him as king, but not as priest. Here is the inferiority of all human type and figure. It could not be said of him, "He shall be a priest upon his throne," as was said to Joshua, the son of Josedech (Zech. 6:13), for he did not unite in himself, as the Lord Jesus does, the distinct offices of priest and king, being merely a temporal prince. But as civil ruler, temporal head, and royal prince, Zerubbabel was a type and figure of the Lord Jesus Christ, King in Zion. It is worthy of note that both Zerubbabel and the Lord Jesus were of the stock and lineage of David, so that each might be called the son of David. Zerubbabel, then, as king of Zion, laid the foundation of the temple at Jerusalem. Here he was the representative of the Lord Jesus.

Now in order to see how the foundation of the temple of Christ's human nature was laid, we must look back into the ancient

settlements before the world had a being, because it was in the mind of the Three-One God that the foundation of this temple was originally laid. It was the eternal purpose of God to make manifest His glory. It was for this purpose the world was formed. It was for this purpose Adam fell. It was for this purpose the Mediator came. For God can have no higher, no dearer object than His own glory. We may even say, though we approach the subject with solemn awe, that hell itself was made for the glory of God, and that all things in heaven, earth, and hell, were made that this glory might be made known.

But chiefly in the work of sovereign grace and distinguishing mercy does the glory of God shine forth; and therefore the foundation of the temple of mercy, which was to be built upon the Person of the God-Man Mediator, was laid in the mind of God from all eternity. That this foundation might be fixed and firm, the whole was settled by divine decree, so that it never should be moved. The waves of time were to beat against it; Satan was to assault it with all his force; the Fall of man, the ruin of the creature with all the sins and evils of the human heart, were all to conspire to overthrow this temple of mercy. It was necessary, therefore, that the foundation should be laid broad and deep. Therefore we read of the Lord swearing thus, "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips. Once have I sworn by My holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and His throne as the sun before Me" (Psa. 89:34, 35, 36). And again in the same Psalm (verses 19, 28, 29), "Then thou spakest in vision to Thy Holy One, and saidst, I have laid help upon that One that is mighty; I have exalted One chosen out of the people." "My mercy will I keep for Him for evermore, and My covenant shall stand fast with Him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and His throne as the days of heaven."

But we must draw a distinction between the foundation as laid in the mind of God, and the actual laying of this foundation stone. The foundation stone was first actually laid when He became incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary. The moment when the

Son of God took the flesh and blood of the children, as conceived by the Virgin Mary, under the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost, He laid the first foundation stone. The foundation being thus laid on earth, the next step was to rear up the walls. These walls are the work of salvation, as the Lord speaks, "Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." Thus His holy life from the moment of His birth to His death on the cross; all His words, actions, miracles, with every thought which passed through His holy bosom as working out salvation, were rearing the walls and bulwarks of the temple, piling up, as it were, stone upon stone. When He came to the cross, and said with expiring lips, "It is finished," this reared up the last stone of the dome. And when, on the resurrection morn, He left the sepulchre, and rose triumphant from the dead, then He put on the last and topstone of the temple, and the building, not made with hands, shone forth in all its glory and beauty. Thus the hands of Zerubbabel laid the foundation, and the hands of Zerubbabel brought forth the topstone of the spiritual temple with shoutings of Grace, grace unto it.

This divine Mediator is now in heaven, sitting at God's right hand to lay the foundation, and rear up the walls, and put on the topstone of every temple of mercy here below. And this brings us to the work of grace on the soul, to the experimental teaching of the blessed Spirit in the heart, whereby the temples of the Holy Ghost have their foundation laid, their walls reared, and their topstone put on. To help us in our meditations upon this sacred subject, we will give a glance at the condition of the first temple when their captivity was turned, and the forlorn exiles returned to Jerusalem. In what condition would they find the temple? In ruins. What desolation must have been made in the space of seventy years, especially in that hot climate, when buildings soon fall into ruin. What rank vegetation in the space of seventy years would be spread over those ruined heaps on which fire had previously done its work. What then would they find where the beautiful temple of Solomon formerly stood? On that noble site they would now find little else but a mass of heaps of burnt fragments covered over with thorns and briars, where serpents

and vipers were creeping in and out at every hole, and where the owls of the night and jackals of the desert found shelter.

It is in this point that the temple, as typical of a believer, differs from the temple as typical of the human nature of the Lord Jesus. There was, there could be, no heap of ruins in the latter; there is little else in the former. Now, is not this state of ruin in which the returning exiles found the temple, a lively type of the state of the soul of man when the hand of the spiritual Zerubbabel comes to lay the foundation? Is not the site overgrown with weeds, thorns, and briars—a desolate ruin, a heap of rubbish? The fall of Solomon's temple is a lively figure of the fall of man, the building of God hurled down into a mass of ruins. What, then, would be the first thing which the returning exiles would do before they could take the first step in erecting the building? They could not lay the foundation without removing these heaps, cutting down the briars and thorns, driving away the wild beasts, and burning the serpents out of their holes. Heaps upon heaps of rubbish were to be wheeled away before Zerubbabel could come and lay the foundation of the temple. So in grace. The soul, being through the fall a heap of ruins, needs much preparatory work before the foundation stone can be laid. And this is of God, according to the blessed Spirit's testimony: "The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord" (Prov. 16:1). We must neither despise nor set aside preparation work, for it is of God; and in most cases there is much preparation work before the foundation stone is laid. Heaps of rubbish are to be removed; in some, of open profanity, in others, of graceless profession, worldly besetments and connections in which we are entangled, family ties and ensnaring acquaintances, hard to be thrown aside; the hypocrisy, self-righteousness, and delusive religion in which we have been cradled and brought up, have all to be wheeled away.

The mattock and spade of the law must be used to remove these heaps of rubbish. And till this is done there is no possibility of laying aright the foundation. But do you not see that there is a wide distinction between the foundation and the foundation

stone? Let me illustrate this. Here is a site for a noble building, but it will not do to take a huge stone, and lay that as a foundation stone upon the top of the ground on the loose sand and hollow soil. If there be rubbish, it must be removed; if loose soil, the soil must be taken away. Before the dimensions of the building can be traced out the spade and mattock must be set to work, not only to remove the rubbish, but also to dig down deep, so as to make a firm and solid place for the foundation stone to be laid. So in grace. The work of the law in the conviction of sin, the manifestation of God's holiness and justice to the soul, is not only to clear away heaps of self-righteousness, but also to dig deep into the human heart to make a suitable place for the reception of the foundation stone.

But what is the foundation stone? In the temple rebuilt by the returning remnant the foundation stone was laid by Zerubbabel. This points out that it must be the hands of Christ which lay the foundation stone in the heart. This foundation stone is, then, the first manifestation of mercy to the soul, the first application of the gospel to the heart, for as the law came by Moses, so grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Thus the first promise that comes home to the heart, the first testimony of interest in His precious blood and righteousness, the first smile from His heavenly countenance that raises up a good hope through grace, we may believe, agreeably to Scripture and experience, to be the foundation stone laid in the heart by the hands of the spiritual Zerubbabel.

But what took place almost immediately upon the foundation stone being laid? It appears that the adversaries of Jerusalem employed all their influence to defeat the project and prevent its being executed. If you read the first six chapters of the book of Ezra, you will find a detail of the difficulties and impediments thrown in the way of the completion of the temple. And so successful were the enemies of Zion in their machinations that for nineteen or twenty years the building was suspended. Is not this an emblem of the opposition made by sin and Satan to the building of the spiritual temple? What opposition do most of the

children of God find from without and from within to the work of grace! What with their own carnal mind, and the workings and risings of sin within them, what with their own desponding feelings, and the doubts and fears by which they are often beset after some manifestation of mercy, the work seems at a standstill, and as if it never would be completed. When the Lord has given the soul some testimony of interest in Christ, this is laying the foundation stone, and it seems to believe that the work must and will go successfully and happily on. But this very testimony raises up the malice of the enemy; sin, Satan, unbelief, and all the associate evils of the wicked heart, combine to hinder the carrying on of the good work. But, doubtless, this foundation stone, being very small compared with the whole building, lay much concealed from observation. During also these twenty years, briars and thorns must have grown over it, the dust of the wilderness must have swept over and overwhelmed it, so as well nigh to bury it utterly out of sight. Thus there would be seen, after the lapse of twenty years, but few traces of the foundation stone which the hand of Zerubbabel had laid. Many gloomy doubts and much fearful despondency would therefore take possession of the breast of those that feared God, seeing so little yet done, and so much remaining to be accomplished. Well might they fear whether the whole was not an act of presumption in them which God would not sanction; and therefore suffer their enemies to prevail against them.

Now what did the Lord do under those circumstances? He raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, and sent them with a message in their mouth to stir up as well as encourage the hearts of the desponding people. The message of Haggai was a mingled one. Sometimes he rebukes them for saying the time was not come to build the temple of the Lord, and for dwelling in their cieled houses whilst the house of God lay waste, and sometimes he encourages by promises, such, for instance, as that the glory of the latter house should exceed the glory of the former. But Zechariah came chiefly with words of promise, especially in the chapter from which the text is taken. How encouraging to them must have been the words of the text, declaring that as "The

hands of Zerubbabel had laid the house, his hands should also finish it;" and assuring them thereby that when this was accomplished, it should be known that the Lord of hosts had sent His prophet unto them to testify of this.

IV. And this brings us to our fourth and last point, how the truth and authority of God in sending His servants is made known by the carrying on and finishing of the temple of mercy. It is here we see the peculiar work as well as the benefit of the ministry of the gospel. Haggai and Zechariah urged the people on, sometimes by promises and sometimes by sharp rebukes, and thus instrumentally helped on the building of the temple of the Lord. So the ministry of the gospel is specially designed to carry forward the building of the temple of mercy. The ministry of Zechariah was evidently intended to inspire in the hearts of the people a confidence that, as Zerubbabel had before their eyes laid the foundation stone of the temple, these same hands would, by the special appointment of God, surely finish it. Before this, all imaginary difficulties would disappear. "Who art thou," the prophet says, "O great mountain?" However lofty thou mayest be, art thou too great to be removed? "Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." How many great mountains stand in the way, especially after the foundation stone is laid. Doubt and fears whether the work be genuine, an evil conscience loaded with guilt and fear, deadness of soul in the things of God, coldness of affection toward the Lord Jesus Christ, hardness of heart, and darkness of mind—how all these things apparently hinder, though they cannot frustrate, the completion of the spiritual temple. But the Lord still says, "Who art thou, O great mountain?" be as great as thou may, let thy height rise up to the skies, let thy roots sink down into the deep, let thy dimensions be ever so broad or long, let thy materials be ever so hard and compact, still the same question comes from the Lord's mouth, "Who art thou? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." It shall be as though thou wert not. Thou shalt disappear into the valley, and My people shall pass over thee as over a perfectly level spot. Now who has not, more or less, this great mountain to encounter? Some trial, some temptation, some besetment, some cause of daily anxiety.

The mountain may not be great in itself, but it may appear so to us, for as faith makes mountains into mole-hills, so unbelief makes mole-hills into mountains. But the Lord still says, "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." In spite of earth and hell, in spite of every difficulty or obstacle, He will, in His own time and way, "bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." Thousands have proved this, and thousands will prove it again. Many a dear child of God, who all his lifetime, through fear of death, has been subject to bondage, when he has come to a dying bed, has had such a blessed manifestation of the love of God to his soul, such a clear testimony of his interest in the precious Redeemer, and such a firm persuasion of an eternal inheritance in the realms of bliss, as to make his bed of bodily pain a bed of roses. Death, which previously had been such a subject of dread and horror, loses its sting, and is welcomed as a release from sin and sorrow, and a gate of entrance into an eternal weight of glory. As this is realised, there often comes with it the remembrance of days gone by, and a sweet persuasion of the mercy and love of God in sending His servants in days past to promise to them in their low estate that this deliverance would surely one day come. Now then that they are in the enjoyment of the promised blessing, they have in their own consciences a firm and clear evidence that it was the Lord who sent His servants unto them in their days of darkness and trouble to prophesy unto them blessings to come. When the returning exiles witnessed with their own eyes the topstone put on, in spite of all their former fears to the contrary, what an evidence would they have that the Lord spake in and by His prophets. Now you may have sat under the ministry of the gospel for years, and not yet have had that clear testimony and blessed revelation of the love and blood of Christ to your soul which you have been long desiring and seeking after. But if the hands of the spiritual Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of the temple of mercy in your heart, His hands will surely finish it. But do not think that you have derived no benefit from the gospel because it has not yet come in demonstration of the Spirit and of power so as to set you free from all your fears, and bless you with an overwhelming

manifestation of God's love. It is a great and blessed thing to have received any token for good, any mark of God's favour. Has it not from time to time, in the midst of your doubts and fears, raised up a blessed persuasion that the Lord has done something in your heart which you hope will one day prove to have been the earnest of good things to come, yea, of every blessing that God can give? Thus it is good to be found waiting upon the Lord in hearing the preached gospel, for every blessed persuasion raised up in your soul that you are a child of God will strengthen your faith and hope in the Lord. Nay, have you not found sometimes that in comparing your experience with the experience brought forward, you have derived great comfort and encouragement? "Well," you answer, "I must say I have an evidence that I have gone through the things that I hear traced out as marks and evidences of grace, and I feel thus far a sweet persuasion that the Lord will perfect that which concerneth me; that He will show me those things which at present I do not know, and will never leave me until He has done all that good which He has spoken to me of." Now this is not to be thought little of, or rejected, nay rather, it should be highly prized and closely cleaved to. So should any mark communicated to your soul whereby you are encouraged still to hope in the Lord, to wait on Him in faith and prayer, and reject all hope of salvation in any other way than by grace, or through any other channel but the Saviour's blood and righteousness. The Lord in His own time and way will do you more good than He has yet done; will bring forth the headstone in your soul with shoutings of Grace, grace unto it; and when this shall come you will have in your conscience a clear testimony that the Lord of hosts sent His servants unto you to strengthen the work of grace in your soul, to point out Christ as the way, the truth, and the life, and to preach the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Many of the dear children of God have said on their deathbeds, if not before, "O I have now a firm conviction that what I experienced in days of old under such and such a minister was the real teaching of God, and though I could not see it then, I feel it was His blessed work upon my soul. I have a testimony in my own conscience that the Holy Ghost spoke in and by His servant, for I have the substance of the

gospel he preached now in my heart." Such a one can now bless the Lord for bringing him in the leadings of His kind providence under the sound of the gospel, for convincing him of sin, for beginning the work of grace in his heart, and leading him to Jesus as the Rock of ages under the preached word. He can now bless the Lord a thousand times for His wondrous superabounding grace, feeling how it has superabounded over all his sins and backslidings, guilty doubts, and enslaving fears.

The whole work of salvation is of God's good pleasure from first to last. Here is no admixture of human will and worth. Merit and power are excluded here. The hands of Zerubbabel lay the foundation, the hands of Zerubbabel build the walls, and the hands of Zerubbabel bring forth the topstone, and it is all of grace from first to last. Can you subscribe to this with heart and soul? Is there no secret if or but? Can you receive this as the truth of God, agreeable to all true Christian experience, and especially to your own? Have you love or enmity towards this precious gospel? Does this joyful sound raise up hope or rebellion in your heart? What is the effect of the gospel upon you? To soften and encourage hope, or to stir up opposition and dislike? Now if the gospel is to you a sweet message, does it not seem to bring a measure of peace with it, and encourage you to hope in the Lord? The gospel is a savour of life unto life, as well as a savour of death unto death, and if to you it be a savour of life, it will bring sweetness with it. Bless God then for what you have attained unto; enjoy it to the utmost of your power, for the Lord will perform all His promises, and will not let one word fall to the ground. For it will be as surely with the spiritual temple as it was with the literal temple, that as the hands of Zerubbabel laid the foundation, his hands will also finish it.

## **Temptation, its Dangers and its Safeguards**

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road, on Tuesday Evening, August 10, 1852

"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Matt. 26:4

Dark was the hour, gloomy the scene when the Son of God entered upon his great, his last, his victorious conflict with sin, death, hell, and Satan. From the manger to the cross the Lord Jesus was indeed "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." It was not in the garden of Gethsemane, nor upon the cross at Calvary, that he bore sin for the first time. From the day of his circumcision, when his blood was first spilt, and he became bound to obey the law and suffer its penalty, he took upon him the weight and burden of sin. But until he came to the gloomy garden of Gethsemane, he tasted, as it were, but the first drops of that bitter cup which he was to drain to the very dregs; he received but the first mist and spray of that baptism of suffering with which he was to be baptized.

We have in the chapter before us a description of the Lord's sufferings and prayers in the garden of Gethsemane; and coupled with it we have what but for a knowledge of human nature we should little have anticipated—the weakness and desertion of his disciples. As Jesus then entered into the garden of Gethsemane, and began his last conflict, it seems as if he wished his three most eminent disciples, who had witnessed his transfiguration, Peter, James, and John, to be with him, that he might derive from their company some little support. But this was denied him. It was the purpose of God that he should fight the battle alone, that he should have neither companion nor friend; as Hart says, "Our Captain fought the field alone."

It was desirable for the edification of the church in all time that there should be witnesses of this scene of suffering, that they

might be able to say not only "that which we have heard," but that also "which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon," of the sufferings and sorrows of the incarnate Word, "that declare we unto you." He therefore takes with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee to be eyewitnesses of his sufferings, and, if God so willed, to derive some support and help from their presence. But the throes of sorrow commence as he enters the gloomy garden. "He began to be very sorrowful and very heavy," that is, dejected and sad, borne down and overwhelmed with distress. "Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here and watch with me." As a woman in labour has monitory pangs before the great struggle, so it was with Jesus. The monitory pangs of that great struggle which he had to endure with sin, death, and hell, now came upon him; and we find him leaving the three favoured disciples, as he had before left the main body, bidding them watch, for the place and the hour was not one for sleep or negligence. The law slumbered not, for the cry of God to it was, "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd." Satan slumbered not, for it was "the hour of the power of darkness." Angels slumbered not, for one was despatched from heaven to strengthen Jesus in his agony. Bad men slumbered not, for in the hall of Caiaphas they were plotting his destruction. Judas slumbered not, for they were numbering into his palm the price of blood. When the enemies of Immanuel were thus awake, should his friends sleep? "Ye cannot help me," might the Lord say, "ye cannot share the battle with me; but surely ye can watch with me, and deny your eyes their wonted slumber." But no; he was to drink the cup of sorrow to the very dregs, and one ingredient of it was that he was to be forsaken of man as well as abandoned of God. When, therefore, he had bidden them watch, "he went a little further, and fell on his face, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Here we see the weakness of Christ's human nature. There was a time when he said, "I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" But now the weakness of this humanity showed itself; and it was this which made him so earnestly pray, as the Apostle speaks, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had 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." The Father heard his cries, and though it was not his will that the cup should pass away, he gave him resignation to bear it: "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

We read that "he cometh unto his disciples, and findeth them asleep." O what is man! These who had been his companions and brethren, these who ought to have been the first and foremost in watchfulness as they were in pre-eminence, who had been specially selected to be vigilant and wakeful, who should have been ready to succour and sympathise—that friends like these should sleep when foes were awake, that faithful disciples should slumber when a traitorous disciple was giving neither sleep to his eyes nor slumber to his eyelids—well may we be amazed at their inconsistency! When he comes, then, and finds them asleep, he saith unto Peter, in that beautiful, touching language of rebuke, yet not of complaint, "What, could ye not watch one hour?" "What, ye, my disciples, sharers of my sufferings here and destined partakers of my glory hereafter; who are to be apostles to preach my gospel, and, if need be, to suffer martyrdom for my sake; could ye not watch with me one hour?" And then he adds, in the words of the text, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

But the words admit of a wider range than the occasion of which they were spoken; they are not only suitable to the slumbering disciples, but to all who are exposed to temptation, and need to be preserved from it.

Four things, I think, constitute the leading features of the text, I. *Temptation*. II. *Entrance into temptation*. III. *Preservatives from temptation—watchfulness and prayer*. IV. *Motives why we should watch and pray; the willingness of the spirit, and the weakness of the flesh*.

I.—*Temptation* is the common lot of God's people; it is a warfare from which none of Christ's soldiers are exempt. The Captain of

our salvation had to fight this great battle, and his soldiers have to fight under his command against the same formidable enemy. James says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;" and again, "Blessed is the man who endureth temptation; for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life." The Lord also said to his disciples, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations, and I appoint unto you a kingdom as my Father hath appointed to me." But temptation, though the common lot of God's family, is indeed in itself a thing most dangerous and most to be dreaded; and by none is it feared so much as by those who know their own weakness against it.

i. Looking at temptations generally we may divide them into two classes; temptations which are *distressing*, and temptations which are *enticing*. Both are dangerous, yet those temptations which entice are more dangerous than those which distress.

But temptation, whether to distress or allure, would have no power over us if there were not that in our hearts which listens to it and has a natural affinity with it. Satan tempted the Lord Jesus. In Matt. 3 we have an express account of those Satanic temptations; and we read in Luke 4 that when Satan ceased to tempt him he departed from him "for a season." The Lord Jesus, however, could say what we cannot, "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me." If we had no nature susceptible of temptation, no heart akin to it, no combustible materials in the bosom for the match of temptation to set on fire, we need not dread its approach. But what makes temptation to be temptation to us, is that we have that in our hearts which is allied to it. Temptation without and sin within are like the positive and negative electricity of which philosophers speak; if they do but approach they leap to each other; thence the lightning's flash, thence the thunder's roar, thence the rushing hailstorm, and overwhelming shower. It is mutual affinity which gives temptation such fearful power.

1. It is evident from Scripture that Satan has great power in tempting us to evil; he is therefore called emphatically "the

tempter," "when the tempter came to him;" "lest by any means the tempter have tempted you." For instance, he provoked, or stirred up David to number Israel; tempted Job to curse God and die; sifted Peter; and entered into Judas. But as he generally tempts by working on the corruptions of our nature, the question has been sometimes asked whether we can always or often distinguish between those temptations which spring from our own evil heart and those which are presented or infused by Satan himself. In some cases I believe we can; in others I believe we cannot. Some temptations, I have observed, are of a distressing kind; for instance, infidel doubts as to whether the Scriptures be of divine inspiration, whether Jesus be the Son of God and God, whether religion itself be not altogether a delusion, whether there be such a thing as the inward work of the Spirit upon the soul; such "fiery darts," as the Scripture calls them, seem to come specially from Satan; and however firmly fixed a man's creed may be in the truth of God, he is not always proof against such suggestions, nor free from such insinuations. Suggestions of this kind, plied by Satan, would, but for the grace of God uproot a soul from its very foundation. But a lever needs a fulcrum, a point of support, a firm solid spot on which it may rest. Infidel suspicions are Satan's lever, and strong is the hand that grasps the power; but its fulcrum, its point of support, is the human heart, for there is in our fallen nature a deep-rooted infidelity, on which Satan places his engine of attack. There is a traitor in the garrison ready to yield at the first summons, "an evil heart of unbelief," a braggart in peace, and a coward in war; he is therefore rarely found out until the day of battle. Many children of God, till called by grace, are utterly ignorant that they possess by nature an infidel heart; and those who in days of unregeneracy never doubted the Scriptures have been shaken to their very centre about them after God has begun his work of grace upon their souls.

2. Again, many of God's children are deeply harassed by blasphemous insinuations and imaginations, which are better hinted at than described—what Hart justly calls "Masterpieces of hell." These bear upon them the footmark of the foul fiend,

wallowing now in the darkness of hell as once he sat in the glorious brightness of heaven. Satan, from whose fiendish nature such abominations alone could come, would if he could, gladly persuade the poor distressed child of God, that these are the deliberate thoughts of his own mind. In the blacksmith's forge the back ugly nozzle is hidden that blows up the flame; the pickpocket will sometimes thrust the stolen watch into the pocket of an innocent man. So Satan, hiding himself in darkness, blows up the flame; so would he gladly make the child of God an accomplice in his crime, and a partner of his guilt. He would make him believe that these thoughts are his own, that he gave birth to them, that he consents to them, and therefore lies under the awful condemnation of them. But the very circumstance that these things distress the mind is a proof that they come from Satan. And I will give you another proof; these distressing suggestions have a remarkable, and at first sight unaccountable circumstance attending them—they do not, when they have passed away, leave great guilt upon the conscience. They are like a flash of lightning when we are in bed in a dark night; it may awaken or alarm us, but it passes away without damage, leaving only a momentary surprise or fright. So these fearful insinuations flash into the mind and fill it with horror; but when gone, whatever darkness they may occasion, they lay no weight of guilt upon the conscience; they distress, deeply distress the soul, yet leave no burden behind, such as an indulged lust or angry word would produce. This is a proof that they are not the birth of our own mind or will, but are arrows from the infernal archer in the places of drawing water, fiery darts from spiritual wickedness in high places.

3. Some of God's children Satan tempts to believe that they have committed the unpardonable sin; and others he urges to blaspheme God and to speak appalling words against the Holy Spirit.

4. Others he drives well nigh to despair, plagues them night and day, and urges them on to suicide and self-destruction by telling them that there is no use attempting to live, for they will certainly

be his when they die.

Now these temptations, though they acutely distress the soul, and have driven some of God's children into a madhouse, are not the most dangerous, because there is in the heart of a child of God a principle of holy abhorrence whereby these fearful insinuations are rejected. They are not drunk down nor eagerly swallowed, and thus do not become theirs. Their nature, tendency, and end, are foreign to the soul. They are intruders, interlopers, not natives of the soil; outlandish villain, not home-bred, domestic rogues. Their speech betrayeth them; and by the life of Pharaoh they are spies come out to see the nakedness of the land.

ii. But the other class of temptations are not distressing, but *enticing*, and from that very circumstance they are the more dangerous. How strong in many are the lusts of the flesh! What power they have over the imagination! And how seductive they become, if in the least degree indulged, till the heart becomes a cage of unclean birds! The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eye have sunk many a poor child of God into the deepest bondage.

But besides these grosser and more sensual temptations which make many a poor child of God deeply sigh and groan, what temptations does the world present! There are two worlds, the reflex and counterpart of each other, the world without and the world within; for what is the world but a collection of human hearts? The tiger in the den is of the same breed as all the tigers in the jungle. There is everything, then, in the world without to act upon the world within. The electric battery in London moves the needle in Edinburgh. The maxims, principles, and spirit of the ungodly world act upon the needle of the soul, and turn it from its right direction. Hence the danger of any connection with the world. It is best to sever the wire at once, and cut off its electric influence. Pride, covetousness, worldly-mindedness, over-anxiety in business, conformity to worldly fashions in dress and furniture, society with those who fear not God; what crying evils are these in our day and generation!

II.—But we have now to consider *the entering into temptation*, which is a different thing from temptation itself. "Watch and pray, that ye *enter not into* temptation." A temptation presents itself, draws near us, or we draw near to it. If conscience sound an alarm, and we keep, so to speak, to the windward of temptation, we are for the present safe. Temptation is a lee shore on which the wind fiercely blows; it is a coast strewn with a thousand wrecks, and with the bleached bones of innumerable drowned mariners. Keep the ship's head to windward, and she may weather the point; neglect sail and helm, and she will go ashore. David and Joseph were exposed to a similar temptation. David entered into it and fell; Joseph was kept from entering into it and stood. In the country you often see a footpath across a field; if we keep in it we are safe. But we may be tempted by various objects to diverge a little, to gather a flower, or saunter upon the banks of the river, or make a short cut across the fields. Whilst we are in the footpath temptation may be very near, but we have not yet entered into it; we are upon the borders of it, but we have not yet entered into its territory. Few, if any, enter into temptation without falling by it. The fly hovers round the spider's web; to touch it is to enter into it. The bird flies around the fowler's snare; to peck at the bait is to enter the trap. The moth flutters round the candle; to enter the flame is to burn its wings. The Lord's words were not, "watch and pray *against* temptation," but "that ye *enter not into* temptation." Few come out of temptation as they entered into it. How clearly James has described the difference between enduring temptation and falling by temptation. He does not say, "Blessed is the man who is *free* from temptation," but "who *endureth* temptation." Blessed is the man who is kept in the footpath, who sees temptation on every side, but endures it, is not drawn out of the path by it, for "when he is tried he shall receive a crown of life." He has fought the good fight, won the battle, and shall receive the crown. But he adds, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God." He must not say that the Lord presents temptation to him, and is therefore chargeable with it if he falls. "No," says James, let that thought be abhorred. "God cannot be tempted with evil,

neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." Here it is—our own lust, the inclination of our own carnal mind, the passions and corruptions of our fallen nature—these draw us out of the footpath into the field—these entice, as Delilah enticed Samson. As long as Eve did but look upon the fruit she was safe; and though Satan, in the guise of a serpent, kept urging her to touch and take, until she stretched forth her hand she stood. When the lust of the eye began to work in her mind, she was first drawn, then enticed, and then she took, and ate, and fell. So long as we merely see the temptation, and groan under it, and endure it, without giving way to it, we are safe, at least we are so far uninjured; but as soon as we lust after the forbidden object, and are drawn towards it, and so enticed by it as to close in with it, we fall. James wonderfully describes the fearful chain that links sin and death to temptation, "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin." Lust is not alone; it has a partner, a paramour, and that is, temptation. When lust and temptation come together there is first a *conception*. The embryo of sin is engendered in the womb of lust. "The thought of foolishness is sin." The projects and plans for its accomplishment, its heavings and risings, and its strugglings to come forth, manifest the conception of the monster. When conceived, unless mercifully perishing in the womb, there is next a *birth*: "It bringeth forth sin." The monster is born. Keep temptation and lust asunder, and there is neither conception nor birth. There is no sin in temptation, for the Lord Jesus was "tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin." Nor in lust is there practical, though there is speculative sin. It is when two meet and embrace, and the will consents to the union, silencing the voice of God and conscience, that sin is produced. And thirdly follows the fearful and fatal *fruit*, "Sin, when it is finished bringeth forth *death*;" that is as I understand it, death in the conscience, guilt, condemnation, and misery, and the deadening of all the fruits and graces of the blessed Spirit.

III.—But the Lord Jesus gave the sleeping disciples two grand preservatives—"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into

temptation." He did not say, "Watch and pray that ye have no temptation;" that could not be, for temptation is the appointed lot of the child of God; but he said, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into it." The *entrance*, then, into temptation is the thing to be watched and prayed against.

i. But why should the Lord have laid these special injunctions upon their heart and conscience? Because these alone, in the hands of God, could keep them from entering into and falling under the power of temptation. With God's blessing we will examine these two safeguards separately.

1. To "watch" implies *having one's eyes open*. Here the disciples failed. When they should have had their eyes open they were overcome with sleep. But *how* are our eyes open? Do the words merely mean opening the eyes as the babe does in the cradle? To keep the eyes open implies something more than lifting up the lids. Does temptation always come in the garb of temptation? Is it known and recognised when it first knocks at the door? Does it never come in the dead of the night muffled up and disguised? It does. We must then know something previously of temptation, in order to recognise it. In this metropolis there is a small, select body of men called the Detective Police. They do not wear usual police dress, nor display any outward mark of their office; their business being to know by sight the London thieves, their haunts and habits, and to learn to detect the feeblest trace of crime. A detective who does not know a thief by sight under the most artful disguises may let him into a place of general concourse from which he should exclude him. So with us and temptation. We must know temptation by sight; we should always have a detective glass at our eye, so as to recognise its features, however disguised, and whatever garb it may assume. If we fail in this, we do not watch. The thief has got in because we did not recognise him.

2. To watch also implies *to be upon our guard*. How little we are upon our watch-tower! Examine all the slips and falls you have been guilty of, and you may trace them nearly all to one point—

being off your guard, descending from the watch-tower, or falling asleep in the sentry box. It is being off your guard that allows you to fall into the spirit of the company you may be thrown into, to drop a joke, or to utter words which are justly called "unguarded." When we are upon our watch-tower, alive to the evil of sin, sensible of our weakness, knowing that God has his holy eye upon us, and is able to preserve us, then we are kept out of the snare of the tempter. Temptation may come, but we do not enter into it so long as we are on our guard.

3. Again, watching implies *perseverance*. The sentinel who sleeps at his post is, by the articles of war, condemned to be shot. It will be no excuse for him to say; "I was awake one hour, or two hours," when the rule required him to be awake the whole time he was standing sentinel. Generally speaking the eyes get heavy with watching; it was so with his disciples. We can scarcely believe that they went to sleep immediately the Lord left them; but their eyes were no doubt gradually overcome with heaviness. We read that Jesus found them "sleeping for sorrow." Like children, they had cried themselves asleep. It is not, then, being merely once or twice upon our guard that will suffice; we must be so constantly if we are to be kept from the power of evil.

But who is equal to the continual maintenance of this indispensable safeguard? Is it in the power of the creature thus perseveringly and unceasingly to watch? Can a man put himself on guard in the first instance; or can he ever after keep himself so? It is only as the fear of God is implanted and maintained by an almighty power in a man's soul, that he is either put or kept upon his guard. But the children of God, for the most part, learn lessons painful and yet profitable in this important matter. The burned child dreads the fire. If you have been caught napping, it may make you wakeful for the future. If we sleep we are sure to fall. And yet perhaps the very person who is most sensible of the danger of falling asleep, and most energetic in cautioning others, may himself be the first to nod. An instance occurs to my mind which I read many years ago in "Cook's Voyages." A party had landed in the extreme southern continent, and were ascending a

snowy mountain. Dr. Solander, an eminent naturalist, and used to snowy countries, was with them, and he warned them not to go to sleep; "for," said he, "if you sleep you die." He himself, however, was the very first to give way to sleep, and was aroused and saved by the others with the greatest difficulty. How easy is it to warn and caution others! how hard to follow one's own advice and act on one's own caution! And yet after all our watchfulness we must still say, "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

ii. But the Lord added another safeguard—*prayer*: "Watch and *pray*, that ye enter not into temptation." This is the grand preservative. If a man do not pray he is on the brink of temptation; if he do not continue praying he will enter into it, and probably fall. Prayer is God's appointed way to keep the soul from entering into temptation. Not that prayer will act as a kind of mysterious charm, to drive it away, as Papists believe that crossing themselves will frighten away Satan. Prayer is only efficacious as enlisting in our defence the God of prayer, as taking hold of his strength and obtaining help from him. Satan, therefore, directs all his artillery against it. For instance, when distressing temptations assault the soul, Satan immediately plies all his artillery against the use of prayer: "You pray! Will God hear you? It is mockery, it is presumption, after your base neglect, rebellion, and ingratitude. You had better not provoke God by it, for you will only increase your eternal condemnation. Look, too, at your prayers; see how wandering and broken they are. Besides, you have no faith to believe that God will answer you; nor can you pray with any consistency. You keep doubting and disbelieving. And what infidel thoughts you have about God hearing your prayers and what a poor bewildered, confused wretch you are! Look, too, at all your sins and backslidings. Will God hear and answer a wretch like you?" Now unless the Lord Jesus were pleased to keep alive the Spirit of supplication which he first freely gave, the voice of prayer would be effectually silenced by all this artillery of hell. Nay, under the pressure of these cruel assaults, it is often silenced in word, but not in spirit; in utterance, but not in feeling; in language, but not in sighs,

cries, groans, and tears.

Again: temptation, when it becomes very powerful and we enter into it, stops the mouth of prayer. Temptation, if it gain any footing within, and if lust begin to mingle with it, defiles the conscience, and when the conscience is defiled prayer is restrained, and at times almost dumb; for it seems mocking God to call on his name. Now arises a mighty struggle betwixt temptation and the poor tempted soul. Satan presses the temptation on, the flesh hankers after it, as the fish after the worm, coming nearer and nearer to the bait till it is well nigh swallowed. The poor soul is all weakness; but it continues praying, crying, groaning, sighing, seeking deliverance, and yet finding little or none. O how many of the Lord's family are engaged in this hand to hand conflict with sin, death, and hell! But however pressed down with temptation, must they give up for lost, cease to watch, lay aside crying, abandon all approach to the throne of grace? That would please Satan well; that would give great power to temptation; that would be like taking away the battlements as the enemy approach the town, opening the wicket when the foe was thundering at the gates. Resistance to the last is the only thing left. "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." But this is not in us. Resistance is only as God is pleased to "teach the hands to war and the fingers to fight." But the Lord "knoweth our frame." Though he himself never entered into temptation, for temptation never entered into him, yet was he "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." He therefore can sympathise with us, and "with the temptation can make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it."

IV.—The Lord, therefore, knowing our infirmities, deeply acquainted with our weakness, in the tenderest sympathy of his compassionate heart, though he gently rebuked his slumbering disciples, and set before them the best safeguards, yet mercifully added, "*The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*"—aye, weak as water, unable to stand against the least temptation, except by the special help of God.

i. First, there is *the weakness of the flesh*. Why is flesh so weak? Because it is fallen, because it is sinful, because it has an alliance with the temptation which is presented to it. It is weak against temptation for the same reason that a man who loves strong drink is weak against the offered dram. If we had no inward lusting after evil, no pride, no rebelliousness, no fallen nature, no carnal mind, no vile affections, nothing in us earthly, sensual, or devilish, need we fear temptation? No; for then we should be proof against it; it would be like dipping a match in water. Here our weakness lies. If we could always resist we should conquer, but resist we cannot, except by the special power of God. This is a lesson we all need to learn. The weakness of the flesh manifests itself continually in compliance, in non-resistance, in giving way, in yielding, often almost without a struggle, nay, sometimes in acting a worse and more wicked part still. How striking are the words of Hart!

"That mariner's mad part I played,  
Who sees, yet strikes the shelf."

Is there any one here that knows and fears God who can say he has never played that mad part; never seen the rock ahead, and yet run upon it; never mourned, sighed, cried, groaned, and repented, and yet been again overcome; never seen the evil of the snare, never felt the wire round his neck, and yet been entangled, I was going to say strangled? It is through these things that we learn the weakness of the flesh; weak to believe, weak to hope, weak to love, weak to fight, weak to resist, weak to overcome, weak to watch, weak to pray, weak to stand, weak to everything good; strong to everything evil. The flesh indeed is weak. What are all resolutions, all promises, all desires, all endeavours, all strugglings, all strivings, except the soul is held up by the mighty power of God?

ii. And yet *"the spirit is willing."* Here the child of God is distinguished from those who are given up as a prey to temptation. He has a willing spirit, which they have not. But how

is the spirit willing? It is made "willing in the day of God's power." It is a new spirit, a holy spirit, a gracious spirit, and therefore a willing spirit. But what is it willing to do? Willing to obey, to watch, to pray, to be conformed to the will of God, to crucify the lusts and affections, to put off the old man and put on the new. And how does it show its willingness? By the very struggles it maintains against the flesh—flesh and spirit pulling contrary ways; the spirit all willingness, the flesh all weakness; flesh twining around, spirit struggling under the firm and strong embrace of flesh. Hence the conflict; the spirit willing to read God's word, to pray and seek God's face, and pour out the heart before him; the flesh weak, and finding prayer a burden. The spirit willing to make sacrifice, endure persecutions, bear afflictions, carry the cross, suffer with Jesus, resist even unto blood, striving against sin; the flesh weak, dragging the spirit down with it, unable to stand a single moment, complying with every suggestion to evil, listening to every insinuation of Satan breathed into the ear, hearkening to the tempter, and almost as bad as he.

This then, the willingness of the spirit and the weakness of the flesh, is the reason why there should be watchfulness and prayer. If there were no willing spirit there would be no need of watchfulness; it would be useless; nor of prayer, for it would not ascend with acceptance into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. If there were nothing but flesh the believer would be all weakness; possessing spirit, there is in him some willingness, and this God looks at.

Contrast for a moment the case of Judas with that of Peter. There we see this matter brought out in its true colouring. The flesh of Judas was weak, and he fell under the power of temptation, which took full possession of his heart when he received the sop. He fell through the power of covetousness and of enmity against the Lord Jesus. He neither watched nor prayed, for he possessed neither watchfulness nor prayer; he fell, therefore, finally and everlastingly. Peter's flesh was weak; he was sifted like corn in a sieve, riddled to and fro, unable to withstand the temptation

presented to him; yet he had a willing spirit, loved the Lord, and believed in his holy name. His heart was sound and right, and his spirit willing, but his flesh was weak. He could not stand against the power of temptation; he quailed at the question of a servant girl. But how different the ends of Judas and Peter! The one fell, not being upheld, for he was the son of perdition, and fell to rise no more; the other fell through weakness, yet was possessed of a willing spirit, that struggled in his bosom labouring for the mastery, and through the power of grace gained the day. The Lord Jesus prayed for him that his faith might not fail; and thus, though he fell in the hour of temptation, he fell not finally.

But Peter learned some great and profitable lessons from his temptation. It winnowed pharisaism out of his heart; it cut to pieces all his creature strength; it laid the great man, the prince of the apostles, low. Peter entered into the temptation a giant, and came out of the trial a little child. We shall do the same if we know anything of the power of temptation. Nothing brings down the heart like it; nothing lays the soul so low in the dust before God as to know the power of sin through the power of temptation. Nothing so effectually roots out self-righteousness; nothing makes the grace of God so precious; nothing so much enhances in value the atoning blood of the Lamb; nothing makes the poor soul cleave with firmer grasp to Christ on Calvary than a deep acquaintance with the power of temptation.

And yet the Lord says, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." He bade his disciples pray, "Lead us not into temptation." It is well to have temptation; it is ill to enter into temptation. It is well to endure temptation; it is ill to fall beneath temptation. It is well to fight against temptation; it is ill to be defeated by temptation. It is well to suffer, well to groan, well to sigh, well to resist even unto blood; it is ill to be overcome, to be defeated, to be laid low, and in our feelings to be slaughtered by sin and Satan.

Now nothing but watchfulness and prayer, the special gifts of God, can ever keep any poor soul from entering into temptation

and being overcome by it. I do not believe there is one man in a thousand who comes out of temptation unscathed; no man comes out of it as he goes in. You might as well think of putting your hand into the fire and not be burned, as to go into temptation without being scorched by the fire of temptation. The Lord, therefore, laid this so strongly and warmly upon the heart and conscience of his disciples; "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation"—into the bowels of temptation, into the dominion of temptation, into the strongholds of temptation, into the territories where Satan is master, as king of the power of darkness. For if we enter into temptation and are overcome by it, there the right arm is broken, there the eyes are put out, there the legs are crippled, there the hands are unnerved, there the knees are loosened, and all the joints paralysed. It is one thing to walk by the brink of the river, and another to fall headlong into it. It is one thing to be annoyed by the stench from a filthy sewer, and another to stumble into it and smear our garments. It is one thing to walk surrounded by temptation, fearing every moment lest we should fall into it, and another to lie down in its embrace. I was once travelling by the railway, and a gentleman got into the carriage who appeared to have been fishing. He soon took out his book of artificial flies, of which he seemed to have a large and beautiful assortment. As he turned over leaf by leaf, a thought struck my mind as I looked silently on; Ah! here is a fly for every fish that swims, differently made and differently coloured, for different seasons, different weathers and different waters. O what a picture is this of Satan and of his book of artificial flies! How that angler for souls has a fly for every fish! How he knows exactly what fly to dance before our eyes! And when he handles his rod with all the artifice of which he is so complete a master, what but the grace of God can keep us from swallowing the hook?

Well, then, may we pray, "lead us not into temptation." And may it be our sweet and blessed experience to be able to watch and pray, that we enter not into it. But if, through the weakness of the flesh, we do enter into it, and feel the miserable consequences, may we ever bear in mind that if there be a willing spirit, God, who knows the weakness of our flesh, regards this

willing spirit, hears the groans of the poor captive and the cries of the prisoner that under the power of temptation so often feels himself appointed to die.

## **THE THIEF'S PRAYER AND ITS ANSWER**

From a Sermon preached at Oakham, on Feb. 2nd, 1847

"And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." Luke 23:42, 43

God has given in His Word some astonishing instances of the freeness and sovereignty of His grace, but I do not know that we have a more striking instance than the one before us. It is true indeed that every called and saved vessel of mercy is an astonishing instance of the sovereignty of God's grace; and I believe every truly convinced sinner who is brought to the footstool of mercy, and made to receive salvation as a free gift, is convinced in his own experience that he himself is one of the most marvellous instances of sovereign grace. Yet there are several instances in the Scriptures that seem to shine forth with more distinguished lustre. For instance, look at the case of Paul, and compare it with that of the thief on the cross. I do think that all through the Scriptures we can scarcely find two more striking instances of the fulness and freeness of sovereign grace than these two. One a complete Pharisee, the other a thorough profligate. Which was farthest from heaven? We can scarcely say. Yet the same sovereign grace which could arrest the bloodthirsty Pharisee on his way to Damascus, was able also to snatch from death the expiring malefactor.

In looking, then, at these words, we will endeavour to consider,

**I. The character of the man before he was called by grace.**

**II. The sovereignty of God in calling him.**

**III. What the man was after he was called by grace.**

**IV. His prayer.**

## **V. The Lord's answer to it.**

I. First, then, let us consider the **character of the man before grace called him. When** do you think grace called him? There are some people whose eyes, like owls and bats that cannot bear the full light of the sun, have been so dazzled by this glorious effulgence of sovereign grace that they have endeavoured to show that this man was not so bad as the other, and that there were some marks in his character which were not to be found in the other malefactor. In the saving of the one and in the leaving of the other there is such a display of God's electing decrees that these owls and bats could not bear its full lustre. But I think, if we compare the parallel places in the other Gospels, we shall find that the thief who was saved was not one whit better than he who perished. For we read, "The thieves also which were crucified with him cast the same in his teeth" **Mt 27:44**. So that it appears up to the moment when sovereign grace touched this sinner's heart, he could unite with his brother thief in reviling, blaspheming, and casting reproaches on the Redeemer. "If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us."

It would appear that this man who was being executed upon the cross for his crimes was not a common malefactor, but one of an extraordinary nature; for it seems that the Jews selected two of the vilest wretches they could pick out, in order to throw the greater disgrace on the Lord. So great was their enmity, so intense their hatred against the dear Son of God, that to cover Him with the lowest disgrace two malefactors were chosen, and He was put between them, as though they should thereby loudly declare, "Here are three criminals, and the One in the middle the worst of the three." But there is another reason why we may suppose both were hardened characters. In those days, history tells us that Judaea was much infested with highwaymen, and these two men seem to have been companions of Barabbas, of whom we read, "And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection" **Mr 15:7**. Then here we

have a hardened malefactor, a wretch who was justly dying upon the cross.

## II. Observe **the sovereignty of God's grace in calling him.**

Try to represent to your mind these two malefactors, each on the side of the Lord Jesus Christ, reviling and blaspheming with their tongues, and thus hoping to find some little relief in railing upon the Lord of life and glory. Well, can you see any difference here? These two men are writhing on the cross, a few hours will close the scene, here is a hell opening her jaws to receive them, here is the wrath of God ready to burst forth. What should there be in one man more than in the other? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Why, then, did one pray, and the other not pray? How is it one was called, and the other left? Why, wholly and solely—let men cavil and blaspheme as they may—because sovereign grace interposed, and God's electing decrees were carried out in the salvation of one and the ruin of the other. But then someone might say, "Was not God unjust?" How can that be? Would not God's justice have left them **both** to perish? But His mercy interfered in the behalf of His child, whom He had decreed eternally thus to call and save.

III. We will now look a little at **his character after he was called by grace.** This is a very important point. The man was not saved and taken to heaven without a change. The words of the Lord must ever stand: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" **Joh 3:3**. Thus this dying thief must have had a new birth, that mighty revolution wrought in his soul, or else he never could have been with Jesus in Paradise. Regenerating grace touched his heart, the scales dropped from his eyes, the veil of unbelief was taken from his heart, faith was given him, and repentance unto life. And what was the fruit of it?

1. We will look, first, at the man's **faith.** I believe we have scarcely through the Scriptures such an instance of strong faith as this. It may be said, "Abraham's faith was very strong." It was. When he offered up his son Isaac, his faith was strong, perhaps as strong as the dying thief's. But looking at all the

circumstances of the case, I think that, except the Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of believers, we have scarcely one instance of faith so strong as his. Was there not everything in the circumstances to damp and extinguish faith? Look at His own disciples; they all forsook Him and fled. His own followers, who had walked with Him for years, deserted Him in the last extremity. But to believe and acknowledge that Jesus had a kingdom when He was dying as a malefactor, O what strong faith must God have given him! When he looked on the agonizing body of Jesus—to believe He was the Son of God, and had a kingdom to bestow! For was there not everything without and within to damp and extinguish faith, so that no sooner did faith lift up its head than everything conspired to destroy it? Like a man drowning, when his head is just got above water, there comes a high wave and dashes him back again, yet he stretches forth his hands again, in spite of death and hell; so it was with this thief on the cross. There was everything to destroy his faith, yet it survived. Might not this have been the language of the man on the cross, "If indeed He be the Son of God, would He not deliver Himself?" No! faith triumphed in spite of all without and within, in spite of all the infidelity and unbelief of his heart, in spite of all those outward circumstances which would seem to have extinguished the strongest faith in the world.

2. We see also his **repentance**. It was not naked faith, but there was repentance mixed with it. See how he reprov'd his fellow malefactor: "And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering, rebuked him, saying, Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds" **Lu 23:39-41**. Here was repentance unto life, the acknowledging of God's righteousness in bringing him to die on the cross.

3. We see in him another grace of the Spirit—**prayer**. He had not time or strength to pray very long. But what virtue there was in his prayer! How it entered into the ears of the Lord Jesus! And

what an answer of mercy, peace, and salvation it brought out of Him to his soul!

IV. This leads us to consider **his prayer**: "And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." "LORD." Here he acknowledged the Godhead of Christ. O what a wonderful thing was this, that the Lord was pleased to raise up such faith in his soul that he saw the Godhead shining through His agonizing humanity! Others saw it not. His enemies could revile and blaspheme Him. But this poor, writhing malefactor had faith given him to believe that He on whom his eyes were fixed, suffering the same accursed punishment, was the Lord Almighty. It is very easy to talk about these things; but could we put ourselves for a moment into his circumstances, what strength of faith was here! But we see in him not only faith, but confession. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" **Ro 10:10**. He said, "Lord." He thus worshipped Him, and owned Him as Lord. He looked to Him, though in his feelings he was indeed at the ends of the earth, and cried. What faith was there in that cry!

What did he say besides? "Lord, **remember me.**" Religion with him was a personal thing; the salvation of his soul was his chief concern. There were but a few hours before his eyes must close in death, and what an eternity was about to receive him! This he felt; this was deeply wrought in his conscience; and this brought out the cry from his soul, "Remember me." As though he should say, "Lord, whomsoever Thou forgettest, remember **me**, think upon **me**, save **me**, deliver **me.**" And is not this the feeling, the cry of every God-taught soul? "**Remember, think** upon me; do not forget me. Let my name be precious to Thee, before Thine eyes and in Thy heart. Thou hast many things to think upon, Lord; but Lord, **remember me.** I am a perishing wretch, a guilty malefactor, a condemned criminal deserving to die a thousand deaths, and to suffer a thousand hells. But think on me, do me good, cast me not away."

Observe also that this dying malefactor knew that **the Lord had a kingdom**. What faith is here! Yes, and that He would one day come into that kingdom. And when He came into His kingdom, surrounded by all His saints and angels. then the cry and desire of his soul was that Jesus would remember him. And observe he did not ask for a high place in this kingdom. What do people go to heaven for? to sit on high seats? O, God forbid! "In my Father's house are many mansions" **Joh 14:2**, but not exalted seats, one above another. All are equal there. What is their joy? To see Christ as He is face to face, and to have done for ever with this wretched body of sin and death. I believe every living soul will be brought there. O, could there be degrees in heaven, what confusion there would be! But when those who are saved are saved as this poor malefactor was—by sovereign grace, by the blood of the Lamb - this takes away all contention and jealousy about the highest place, and makes the soul thankful to be saved at all.

V. This leads us to the last point—the **answer that the Lord Jesus was pleased to bestow**. And O what an answer it was! How encouraging it is to poor souls! Can you find by searching the Scriptures a single instance where a soul earnestly, honestly and sincerely cried to the Lord Jesus Christ when He was upon earth, and He turned a deaf ear to his cry? It is true, when some came to Him and said, "What must I do?" and so on, the Lord sent them to the law. But we never find a poor, guilty wretch who came to His footstool crying and sighing for mercy that He turned away.

What was the answer? "**Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.**" In a moment the word came, "Verily!" It is the faithful Amen that speaks the word; what He says may be depended upon. There is great force in that word, "Verily,"—"Amen, I say unto **thee**, thou malefactor, thou standing with a thousand crimes, thou fearing the wrath of God, thou awaiting a justly merited doom—I say unto **thee.**" O how the words must have dropped like honey into the poor sinner's heart! What peace and joy must have flowed into his soul as the

words fell from the Redeemer's lips! "Verily I say unto thee." And immediately faith doubtless was raised up in his soul. He received the promise, felt the sweetness of it, and died in the enjoyment of it, . Blessed man! blessed faith! but above all, blessed Redeemer, who gave the faith and saved the man!

"Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." "**Today**—before the sun sets, before night comes on, on the very day that the words are spoken to thee—shalt thou be **with me.**" What could he, what would he, want more than to be with Jesus, the Lord of life and glory, in the sweet enjoyment of His love, to see Him face to face, and be ever blessed with the manifestation of His presence? In spite of sin, in spite of death, in spite of Satan, the Lord said, "Today shalt thou be with me—safe in my arms, safe in my bosom, safe under the wings of eternal love." What could he want more? That fills all.

"In Paradise." There have been various opinions about it. Some have thought that Paradise means the place of departed souls, at least of happy departed souls, before they go to heaven to be with the Lord for ever. But I think the safest way is to see what the Word of God says. Man's opinion is of little weight, unless established and confirmed by the Word of the living God. The Word of God says, "I knew a man in Christ about fourteen years ago **whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body I cannot tell; God knoweth**, such a one caught up into the third heaven. And I knew such a man **whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell; God knoweth**, how that he was caught up into paradise." Here we have Paradise identified with the third heaven. So that **wherever the third heaven is, where God is pleased to manifest His glory, there Jesus took the thief: there he was with Him in Paradise, in bliss.** It is true that the Lord Jesus Christ had not then ascended up to where He was before, visibly in His body, but the soul of the thief was with the soul of Jesus in Paradise. But what does the word Paradise signify?. Paradise was the garden where Adam and Eve were placed when created. And thus it seems to signify in the language of the Jews **and the Lord saw**

**fit to use the same,** the eternal abode of the blessed, where the tree of life grows, where the face of God is seen, and where all joy and happiness are to the very full. That very day he was with Jesus in Paradise, and he is in Paradise now, in the happy enjoyment of the face of God, bathing his ransomed soul in the streams of the waters of heaven; and there he will be till time shall be no more.

Is not this very encouraging to the Lord's poor, self-condemned, sin-harassed people? Whatever more can we want than such a free and full salvation? Is not sovereign grace what your soul longs at times earnestly to enjoy? Depend upon it, whether you feel it or not, that you need the same salvation that he did; nay, you need it to be received in the same way, and to be manifested to you in the same manner. If the Lord has ever humbled you, and made you to feel the guilt of sin, and the evils of your heart, you have not a stone to throw at that crucified malefactor; but in your feelings are every whit as bad as he. Nay, I believe there are thousands in hell who have not been half such sinners as you and I. I can say so for myself. Therefore let men talk of merit as long as they please, let this be all our hope and all our expectation—to be saved freely by the manifestation of sovereign, distinguishing grace. I am sure it is the sweetest song a sinner can sing upon earth, and the sweetest song a sinner can sing in heaven. What discordant notes there would be, did any get to heaven by works! We should have discord in the very court of harmony itself. Manasseh, Mary Magdalene, Paul of Tarsus, Peter the swearing fisherman of the Galilean lake, the thief upon the cross, and thousands of double-dyed sinners would be singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive honour and power and glory!" And there would be a semi-chorus of Arminians and workmongers shouting, "Worthy are we to receive honour and glory and blessing, because we have got to heaven by our good works!" But such discord will never be heard in the courts of heaven, where harmony and bliss and peace must ever reign. If you recollect, no man could learn to sing the new song but the hundred-and-forty-four thousand who were redeemed from among men. **Re 14:3** What taught it them? The manifestation of

sovereign mercy and distinguishing grace, pardoning the sins that lay upon their consciences.

May the Lord, if it be His gracious will and purpose, encourage any poor, self-condemned sinner here. Remember, my friend, remember the thief on the cross; was not his case as bad as ever yours can be? You say your heart is so bad. So it is; worse than you have ever seen it. Your sins are so great—you have never seen a thousandth part of them. Your heart is so full of evil; full, yes, fuller than ever you saw it, or ever will see it. Yet sovereign grace has saved hundreds as bad as you. O may this encourage some of the Lord's despairing saints to lift up their eyes and hearts, and believe that the same grace which sufficed to save the dying thief is sufficient for them. Depend upon it, if they had the same faith that inspired his heart, they would say, "Lord, remember **me**." And they will have sooner or later, if not the same words, yet the substance of them, spoken to their hearts, "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

## **THE THINGS FREELY GIVEN, AND THE SPIRIT BY WHOM THEY ARE MADE KNOWN**

Preached in West Street Chapel, Brighton, on Thursday Evening, August 14, 1856

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." 1 Cor. 2:12

In the beginning of my experience in the things of God, which is now more than twenty-nine years ago **c. 1826**, I had this truth impressed upon my conscience, as I have reason to believe, very powerfully and very distinctly, by the finger of God—that I could know nothing, but by divine teaching; have nothing, but by divine giving; and be nothing, but by divine making. And this truth thus impressed upon my conscience, so far from being erased by any subsequent experience, either of myself or of the Lord, has only been more and more deepened from that time to this. I think I can at times see the wisdom, as well as the goodness, of God, in tracing that truth on my heart in the first beginnings of grace; for I can perceive several benefits springing out of it. Just at that time my natural mind was very strongly bent upon human knowledge, for I had spent many years in various studies; and had it not been counteracted by divine teaching, I might have attempted to make myself a Christian, as I had previously made myself a linguist.

Again, it set grace as a divine jewel in my heart's affections; and compared with it, every thing else, in my eyes, was but dung and dross. A third benefit which I see at times to have sprung out of it, was, that it brought me to admire grace in others, wherever I might see it. It not only brought me down to stand on a level with the most ignorant and uneducated who possessed grace, but very often in my soul's feelings sunk me very far below them; for I could see in them clearly that grace which darkness of mind had often hidden from myself. Grace in the first instance having thus

been commended to my conscience, it has taught me ever since so to esteem, admire, and love it, wherever I can recognize it. Nor do I think that I should be very far from the mark, if I say that the apostle Paul, though I would not be so presumptuous as to compare myself for a moment with him, was not of a different mind, for who so much as he exalted the grace of God, and the teaching and testimony of the blessed Spirit.

What I have thus far said may form an introduction to the words of my text: in opening up which, I shall, by God's blessing, call your attention to four prominent points, that seem, to my mind, to stand visibly out of it.

I. What "**the spirit of the world,**" is, which the apostle declares that "**we,**" meaning thereby himself and fellow-believers, "**have not received.**"

II. What "the Spirit which is of God," is, and what it is to "receive" it.

III. "The things that are freely given to us of God."

IV. The way whereby we come to "know" them.

I. We draw a distinction between "the world" and "the **spirit** of the world." Of "the world," God's own testimony is, that "it lieth in wickedness," or "in the wicked one." "The world," viewed as a corporate body, is one mass of evil—a vast aggregate of the corruption seething and swelling in millions of human hearts. But it is not "the world" that we have so much to fear; it is "the spirit of the world" which the apostle here speaks of. That is ever our greatest enemy, and the just source of our truest dread.

Let me help our conception, here, by a figure. In this street lies a dead corpse; in another rolls along a noisome sewer; in a third is a person lying in bed afflicted with small pox. It is not the dead corpse, the noisome sewer, or the diseased person, that could infect us, if there were no effluvium, no emanation, no miasma

given off, by these various objects. Nor again would the dead corpse, the noisome sewer, the person ill of small pox infect with illness the passer by, unless there were a certain principle in his blood or constitution with which the miasma or effluvium that is given off intermingles, and their union produces disease. Just so spiritually. The world would not hurt us if there were no giving off of a noisome influence; and it is this influence, which is "the spirit of the world." As therefore the world gives off this influence, and this spirit mixes with the seeds of corruption in our carnal mind, sin is the consequence of their intermingling, just as disease is the consequence of infection reaching the natural body. Therefore, as we would go to the windward side of the dead corpse, give a wide berth to the reeking sewer, and not, unless compelled by duty or affection, approach the patient ill of typhus fever, so would this man of God caution us against going near the world, lest, sensibly or insensibly, we be contaminated by "the spirit" or influence which the world gives off.

But I think that the apostle here is not speaking so much of the spirit of the world viewed as **profane**, for the saints of God for the most part are preserved from open evil; as of "the spirit of the world" carried into religion; in other words, the spirit of the **professing** world; for as pride, self-seeking, and self-indulgence, are characteristics of a worldly spirit in natural things, when the same spirit is carried into the things of religion, it exerts a similar influence on the professing church. The spirit in fact is just the same. As Satan transformed into an angel of light is Satan still, so the spirit of the world is the same in a dead profession as in a profane ungodliness.

Now the world being altogether in a state of opposition to God, being filled with deadly enmity against his truth, people, principles, precepts, and ways, and thus diametrically opposed to everything which God delights in, this spirit of the world naturally and necessarily interferes with everything in the spiritual mind that is for the glory of God, or for the good of the soul. Therefore the apostle says boldly, "We have not received the spirit of the world:" such a spirit as the world breathes, be it pride, self-

righteousness, self-seeking, or self-dependence, such a spirit never came from God. Such a spirit exists, and the world is full of it; but we, children and saints of God, "have not received this spirit" from above; it never came to us in regeneration; it never was breathed into our hearts by the Spirit's operations; it never came with a holy afflatus from God: if it come, if it influence, or infect, it comes from the world around us, or the world within us, and we have nothing spiritually to do with it; we discard it; we disown it; we will not recognize it as coming from God.

By this mainly those who are alive unto God are distinguished from those dead in profession. Were this profession duly analysed, it would be found to be a worldly spirit carried into religion. The same spirit that breathes in the world at large, and is given off in clouds of infectious vapour, enters into the courts of Zion: the same pride, covetousness, worldly-mindedness, self-exaltation, self-indulgence, that live and move in the world at large, the very breath of the carnal nostrils, act in a religious form, come disguised with a professing mask, array themselves in a gospel garb, and claim to be "the Spirit of God." Whereas if its true character were laid bare, it would be found to be "the spirit of the world," only all the worse because dressed in a gospel dress, christened with a gospel name, and assuming gospel pretensions. But, says the apostle, this spirit "we have not received." We hate its pretensions: we disown its influence; we discard it; we trample it under our feet: we cannot keep altogether from it, but we will not take it into our bosoms: we see it pervading the whole world, but we will keep as separate from it as possible.

II. But I pass on to shew the opposite of this; for the apostle here draws the grand, distinguishing line betwixt receiving "the spirit of the world," which men do in a profession of religion, and receiving "the Spirit of God," which is the distinguishing characteristic of the saints of Zion. The professing church, under cover of religion, receives "the spirit of the world," which they mistake for "the Spirit which is of God;" but the children of Zion, the saints of God, those who are taught of the Most High, receive

the Spirit of God, which is as distinct in birth and origin, and in consequences, fruits, and effects, from the spirit of the world, as Christ from Belial, or heaven from hell.

i. Let us look for a few moments at what "**the spirit which is of God**" is, and what it is **to "receive"** it. "The Spirit of God" means the Holy Ghost; the Third Person in the glorious Godhead; the Promised Comforter; the Divine Teacher: the inward Intercessor, of all the election of grace: and "the Spirit of God" is "received" when communicated, when the Lord Jesus Christ, who "ascended up on high, and received gifts for men," pours it forth. But for the most part when "received." we can only know it by the effects it produces on the heart and conscience. These are great, signal, memorable.

I cannot think that a revolution, which changes the current of a man's thoughts: which makes him altogether a new creature: which turns his face from hell to heaven: I cannot think a revolution of this kind can take place in a man's heart, and leave no trace in mind or memory: that a man is to get up in the morning as he lay down at night, and have had a mighty revolution take place in his soul and know nothing about it: where it met him; what it produced: what feelings were created, what effects were wrought. Surely the Spirit's work must be felt. If a finger ache, or a nerve be out of tune: if we stumble against a stone, or have a twinge of rheumatism, some feeling is communicated: and shall we receive "the Spirit of God," and experience a mighty revolution from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, and yet know nothing about it, in some degree, at least, where and when it commenced, and what effects were produced thereby?

I do not mean to say that all the saints of God can trace, with equal clearness, when, where, and how God began his mighty work upon the soul: but it is a mystery to me, that a man can pass through such a mighty revolution as grace effects, and yet not know somewhere about the time when the revolution began in his soul. If we have received the Spirit of God, we received

certain operations, which manifest themselves in sensations, and it is by looking at these, that we can recognize in ourselves, or others, the beginning of this mighty revolution, that we can watch its progress, and see its results. Let us examine some of them.

Whensoever the Spirit of God is received, it is as the **spirit of conviction**, and especially of the sin of unbelief. Can a man have eternal things laid upon his conscience—have his soul brought to the bar of an offended God—have righteousness laid to the line, and judgment to the plummet—can a man see what the law of God requires, in its breadth and spirituality—and yet have no feeling under it? Why if the Spirit of God convinces a man of sin, wounds his heart, and pricks him to the quick, there must be some feeling under its convictions. In times of old, they cried out, "What shall we do to be saved?" The publican said, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." and the effects produced in the conscience, when the blessed Spirit leads a man down into the depths of the fall, may be seen in the Psalms and Lamentations, in the sorrows of Job, the complaints of Hezekiah, the mournings of Heman **Ps 88**, and the confessions of Asaph.

But we receive the Spirit of God, also, as a **spirit of grace and supplication**, whereby we pour out our souls before God, with sighs, groans, tears, and many a wrestling at a throne of grace, and you cannot give over till Christ is revealed as the power of God. It was so with me, when the Lord began with my soul; there were all these cries, tears, supplications. I used to ride nearly every day on horseback those days, and being in much mental trouble, as well as spiritual labour, the pommel of my saddle has often been wet with my tears, in seeking the Lord, amid the wild glens and dales of Ireland, where I was living at the time of the first beginnings of grace. And from my own feelings and experience, I have ever contended that it is the living soul that cries, and that none of God's children are still-born.

Again. In receiving the Spirit of God, we receive it as a **spirit of faith**. Some assert there is no faith in the soul till Christ is revealed, and mercy manifested. But tell me, if you can, what it

is that believes the justice of God? what it is that trembles at his sovereign majesty? what it is that apprehends his dreadful wrath? what it is that comes unto him with sighs, cries, and groans? If it be not faith, what is it? The apostle says, "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Now tell me, whether a soul that cometh unto God in prayer and supplication, has faith or not? Is it unbelief that prompts the prayer? raises up his cries? makes him seek for mercy? If not unbelief, what is it? Is it despair, superstition, self-righteousness, or presumption? These are the spirit of the world acting under a religious garb; but this we have not received. It is then a living faith: but not acting upon a revealed Christ, for Christ is not yet revealed; not acting upon pardon of sin, because pardon of sin is not manifested: but it is a living faith, as much as when the soul enjoys the full manifestation of God's love.

Look at the hand of a babe—how tender, how weak. I remember when my first child was born, looking at the little finger, it struck me, how weak it was. But these weak fingers how they expand and grow: and in a male infant, into the hand of a large man. The waterman on the beach, who pulls his boat with so strong and muscular a hand, had once little, tiny fingers. Is that hand which grapples the oar amidst the stormy wave, a different hand from those tiny fingers which the infant had when it hung upon its mother's breast? And is the faith in a Christian's soul, which lays hold of pardon and peace through the blood of Christ, different from that which apprehends the majesty of God in a broken law? Can you find two faiths in a spiritual man? It must be the same faith, for I read of only "one faith," as well as "one Lord," and "one baptism."

In receiving the Spirit of God, we receive him, then, as a spirit of faith; and as the hand to which faith is compared, grasps the object which is put within its hand, whether small or great, hot or cold, so faith in the living soul lays hold of that which God puts into it; and as it is the same eye that views different objects, sometimes beautiful, sometimes terrible; sometimes gazing upon

the sea ruffled with storms, and sometimes, like yesterday, smiling under the beams of the sun—so it is by the same eye of faith that the sinner views the majesty of God in a broken law, and the smile of a loving Father in a gracious gospel.

As the Lord leads the soul along, opens up the truth, sets before it the plan of salvation, applies some sweet promise to the heart, we receive the Spirit of God as a **spirit of hope**; an anchor which enters into that within the veil.

As Christ is revealed and made manifest to the soul by the power of God, the Spirit is given as a **spirit of wisdom and revelation** in the knowledge of Christ, and thus we come to know him and the power of his resurrection.

When he is enshrined in the heart, and made dear and precious, and the love of God comes with him into the soul, the Spirit of God is received as a **spirit of love**.

When there is a view of him in the garden, and upon the cross, and the eyes flow with tears, and the heart melts with godly sorrow for sin, we receive him as a **spirit of contrition and evangelical repentance**.

When the eyes are enlightened, and we see blessed things in God's truth, we receive him as a **spirit of understanding**. It is not a different spirit, but the same Spirit of God in his various operations, teaching and leading us into one truth after another, and establishing our souls in faith, hope, and love in them, and towards them—and all this in a sovereign way, for we only receive the Spirit just as God is pleased to communicate it to us. As then the children of Israel gathered the manna in the wilderness, so that "he who had gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack," so in the reception of the Spirit, none can boast over his neighbour, "I have more grace than thou." All receive their measure of the Spirit, as the apostle says, "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the

measure of the gift of Christ;" and are by it baptized into the same body, and united to the same glorious Head.

Thus, no one member of the mystical body of Christ can glory over another. Shall my little finger be discontented because it is not my thumb? and my thumb because it is not my hand? and my hand because it is not my arm? Are not all these content with possessing each its appointed place, and performing each its office, for the good of the body? So with the Church of Jesus Christ, the family of God, the election of grace, all the members of the mystical body of Christ occupy their destined place, and perform their appointed function. This is beautifully traced out in **1Co 12**, where these blessed truths are written as with a ray of light.

III. But I pass on to our third point, which is "**the things that are freely given to us of God.**" We must never, and shall never, if rightly taught, view God as doleing out his gifts, as a churchwarden doles out parish allowance; grudging the bread as he places it into the pauper's hand, and doleing out penny after penny, as though he was drawing his own blood from his veins. Such paltry, miserable views we are not to entertain of the merciful Majesty of heaven. He is a kind and loving Father to his people, and he does not grudgingly dole out his favours, as if he measured his grace by their deserts. I have thought sometimes of the sweet figure of Solomon, as a type of Christ, in his royal munificence to the queen of Sheba. We read of him that he "gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, besides that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty." So our Royal Benefactor gives more to the sons of men than is in their heart to ask for. And what he gives, he gives freely, out of his royal bounty. As freely as the rain drops from the sky; as freely as the sun casts forth his glorious beams and ripens the fruits of the field: as freely as the wind courses over the earth: as freely as the dew drops upon the morning grass: so free are the gifts of God to his Church and people: freely given, not niggardly or grudgingly doled out.

i. But what are the things freely given? The first, and that which comprehends all the rest, is the **gift of his dear Son**. In giving Christ, he gave every thing. The apostle declares, he "hath blessed us with **all** spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." We must never look upon spiritual blessings as broken fragments of the love of God, mere shreds and patches, scattered crumbs, waifs and strays, like floating pieces of some shipwrecked vessel; but we must look on the blessings of the gospel as all stored up in Christ our covenant Head. Whatever is given, is given out of Christ, in whom it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell; and it is by virtue of union to him, and out of his fulness, that all these blessings are received. The apostle therefore beautifully says, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

How can we lift up our thoughts—how raise up our hearts—adequately to conceive of the gift of God's only-begotten Son—his eternal Son—the Son of the Father in truth and love—given out of the bosom of God that he might become incarnate, suffer, bleed, and die; and by a suffering life, and meritorious death, offer a sacrifice acceptable to God, a sacrifice whereby the sins of God's people were for ever put away. The grand source of all the admiration and adoration and the eternal blessedness of the saints, will be the holy enjoyment of the mystery of an incarnate God. The incarnation of the second person in the glorious Trinity—the eternal Son of the eternal Father—his taking human nature into union with his own divine person—will be the mystery that will ravish the hearts and fill the lips of God's saints with an endless theme of admiration and joy through the countless ages of a never-ending eternity. In this mystery of an incarnate God—in this gift of God's dear Son—every other blessing that the Church can receive, or has received, is treasured up and contained: and, with God's blessing, we will look at a few of these things freely given.

1. One is **ETERNAL LIFE**. Has your soul ever anticipated in any degree the pleasurable sensation and prospect of eternal life? I

remember when I was in the Church of England, and, be it known, I was neither a dead man or a dead minister then, for if I have the life of God in my soul now, I had it then: and I have living witnesses that my ministry then was blessed to the quickening of souls. But when in the Church of England, I had one day to bury a little child; one of the sweetest children in the poorer walks of life that I ever knew. The funeral being a little delayed, I stood at the grave till they brought the corpse for me to bury; I was very poorly in body, but favoured in soul: I looked into the grave, and felt, O how sweet to lie down there; I never shall be happy in this life; it is but a scene of affliction and sorrow, and I never shall have a body free from sickness and sin till I have a glorified body. How sweet to look forward to a happy eternity! What a glorious prospect, when realized by faith—eternal bliss in the presence of God; joy for evermore in that happy, eternal home.

2. Again; **RECONCILIATION WITH GOD BY THE BLOOD OF HIS DEAR SON**; that we, who were enemies to God by wicked works, should be reconciled and brought near; that sin should be put away; the grand cause of strife for ever removed; and a sense of this bringing peace into the heart. O what a free gift is this!

3. **JUSTIFICATION BY CHRIST'S SPOTLESS OBEDIENCE, SO** as to stand before the throne of God without spot, or blemish, or any such thing; every sin pardoned through the blood-shedding of the Incarnate God; and the robe of imputed righteousness put on and received by faith. This is one of the things freely given to us of God.

4. **ADOPTION**: the adoption of children unto himself, whereby the family of God are manifested as sons and daughters of the Most High. This is a gift freely given of God; for who could merit or claim such wondrous grace as this?

5. **AN INHERITANCE AMONG THE SAINTS**, of which God himself is the substance: heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ: an

inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. This is not the least amongst the things freely given of God.

6. **POWER**, in a measure, at least, **OVER SIN**: SO that it is subdued, not suffered to reign: according to that divine declaration, "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." No man ever yet subdued his own sins, or came off conqueror in his own strength. It is the free gift of God, received out of Christ's fulness.

7. **FINAL VICTORY OVER DEATH AND HELL**; the king of terrors put to flight, and heaven opened in sweet anticipation; the pleasures of God's right hand revealed to the eyes of the astonished soul. This is another thing freely given to the saints of God.

The blessings of the gospel, in fact, are as numerous as the stars in the midnight sky, or the sands upon the sea shore. Take all the blessings with which God has blessed the Church, in every place, with every testimony, every token, every smile, every manifestation, every ray of comfort bestowed upon the election of grace, from the days of righteous Abel to the end of the world, all are comprehended and embraced in "the things freely given to us of God;" for they all flow from eternal, unchangeable love: they are all stored up in the fulness of Christ, and from his fulness are they all received by the heirs of glory. There is nothing too great for you to ask, if your soul is under right teaching; for the Spirit of God intercedeth for us with groanings, which cannot be uttered. "Open your mouth wide," says God, "and I will fill it." There is enough in Christ for all the wants of his people; for all their troubles, trials, afflictions. Though you may sink in your feelings to the gates of hell, in Christ you shall rise again to the gates of heaven. There is no pit of misery into which you may fall, but the power of Christ can extricate you there from: no danger from which there is not deliverance for you in "the things freely given you of God."

IV. The last point is, **KNOWING THE THINGS FREELY GIVEN US OF GOD**. What thick clouds of darkness spread themselves at times over our souls: all things out of sight: our signs and tokens buried, as it were, in mist. It is like a sea fog, that comes out of the bosom of the vast deep, and hides all objects from view. The ships are on the sea, notwithstanding, but this deep fog prevents their being seen. So with our souls at times, all is misty, cloudy, and no signs can be seen of the work of God upon our hearts. And yet we "know" them, by receiving the Spirit of God, for it is the only way whereby they can be known. We can only see light in God's light; only believe by God's faith: only love by God's love: therefore we can only know the things freely given to us of God by the revelation of the Spirit. What we know savingly, experimentally, feelingly, we know only by divine teaching.

The apostle prayed that God would bestow upon the Ephesians the spirit of prayer and revelation in the knowledge of him, and that the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened. How dark our mind often is; how low we sink at times; it is only the Son of God that can enable us to rise; only by the revelation of his Spirit to believe that we are his. We know he is God when he shines forth, as we know the sun when it blazes forth in the summer sky. We know him by the teaching of the Spirit, but cannot see him till our eyes are divinely opened. The sun may shine in all its glory—does that communicate light to the eyes of the blind? or warm the corpse lying in the coffin? The blind see not; the dead hear not; the living, the living alone see and know the Son of God.

Thus you see that what I stated in the beginning, I have kept consistently to, to the end. It was written on my conscience in early life; it is written now. We can know nothing but by the teaching of God the Holy Spirit. Will this lead to carelessness, presumption, Antinomianism? Some men wrest truth to their own destruction; but a child of God will not do so; he feels his ignorance before God; he is drawn by the Spirit of God into prayer and supplication, that he may teach him, lead him, reveal Christ in him. The dead in sin harden themselves, like clay, unto

more ungodliness, by the same sun by which others are melted into repentance and love. But shall we blame the Scriptures—the God who revealed and inspired, and the Holy Ghost who applies, precious truth to the heart, giving us to know the things freely given to us of God.'? We must clear God from all fault in this matter. Let God be true, and every man a liar. He will clear himself: none shall arraign him—and woe to the man who lifts a finger against the Majesty of heaven! It is a fearful war to be engaged in. If the people of Israel prevailed against the children of Amalek, surely the God of Israel will prevail in his war against all contenders against his power. If any fight against God and truth, it is to their own destruction, misery, and woe! Bless his holy name if any of us are brought down to acquiesce in his goodness, mercy, and love. The Lord bless the word spoken, for his name's sake. Amen.

## **The Things which God hath Prepared for Them that Love Him**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Afternoon, May 2, 1858

"But as it is written, 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." 1 Cor. 2:9, 10

Multitudes of men and women in this so-called Christian country live and die without ever bestowing one serious thought upon eternity. Carrying, as they do, an immortal soul in their bosom, they seem as insensible to what will be the eternal destiny of that soul as the very beasts that perish. In London and our large manufacturing districts, hundreds and thousands of people never enter within the walls of church or chapel; never take into their lips the name of God except to profane it; and never speak of the holiest things except in a way to make us shudder. Many, very many, of the most intelligent and skilful operatives in town and country are avowed infidels, or, where not abandoned to such open denial of God and his word, are practical atheists, or, to use the apostle's emphatic language, have no hope and are without God in the world. Nor are they the only speculative or practical infidels. From high to low, from rich to poor, from the learned scholar to the untaught rustic, from the colonial bishop to the poor curate, from the fashionable lady to the cottager's wife, infidelity, seated in the head or in the heart, reigns everywhere with fearful sway. This mixed multitude then we may set aside by themselves, and call them the *infidel class*.

But all are not stamped with this open or secret ungodliness, this avowed or practical infidelity. Religion, in some measure or in some form, has been as it were forced upon them by external circumstances. Their station in life demanding some outward attention to the forms of religion, without which they would be

viewed in society with a suspicious eye, compels many to an attendance at their parish church and a decent respect to external ceremonies. Others, if not altogether influenced by such motives, feel themselves almost compelled, for decency's sake, to go to some place of worship, and this habit of attendance enables or induces them to bestow a few passing thoughts upon religion; though of what religion really is, what it means, what is its beginning, who is its author, and what its end, they are as ignorant, taking the mass, as those daring infidels or practical atheists of whom I have just spoken. These, then, we will arrange under our second class as *outwardly religious by mere force of circumstances*.

But again, there are others who seem to have more thought about religion, a great deal more than either of those two classes I have named—who think themselves and are thought by others, very good, very serious, and very religious people. None can be more strict or consistent than they in their outward deportment. They are for the most part good husbands and wives, good fathers and mothers, excellent neighbours, animated often by the most kind and benevolent feelings, extremely attentive to every religious duty, subscribing according to their means to Societies and Institutions for the good of others, and in their way full of good words and works. It surely seems very hard, very bigoted, very narrow minded, and therefore very wrong to cast the least slur upon, or express or imply the least suspicion of such excellent people. But when we come to the law and the testimony, to the strait and narrow way, to the path in which the Lord the Spirit leads the family of God, to the work of grace upon the heart, to a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to a knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins, will this class stand the searching trial any better than the two preceding? As a proof, when you come to place before these very religious people the doctrines of free and discriminating grace as they are revealed in the Scriptures of truth; when you come to set before their eyes the sovereignty of God as ruling all things after the counsel of his own will, and especially when you bring before them such divine truths as predestination, election, particular

redemption, and final perseverance; when you insist upon the necessity and nature of a work of grace upon the heart, and describe in some measure the experience of God's people, and what a man must know and feel by divine teaching and testimony to make and manifest him a Christian in reality and not merely in profession—then you will at once see these very religious people, with all their religion and all their profession, rise up in the bitterest anger, enmity, and prejudice against what you know yourself to be the solemn truth of God. Seeing these things before our eyes as a matter of almost continual experience, can we say that this class is really any nearer the kingdom of God than the two preceding, and may we not describe them as *having a form of godliness and denying the power thereof?*

But leaving for a while these classes and merely viewing the matter in a broad light, may we not say what dreamy, indistinct, confused ideas have the great majority of men about heaven, a future state, an eternity in the presence of God? This indeed is not to be wondered at, when we know from Scripture and experience what a veil of ignorance is spread by nature over man's heart. But perhaps even some of the saints of God themselves may have very indistinct, dreamy, and confused ideas upon these grand and glorious subjects. But what says the word of truth? How speaks the Holy Ghost by the mouth and pen of an inspired apostle? He declares, quoting the language of Isaiah, that "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."

If we rested here, we need not wonder that the glorious realities of an eternal state should be altogether not only invisible but inconceivable. But you will observe with me that our apostle adds some remarkable words, whereby he shows that these eternal realities may be apprehended if not comprehended, felt if not seen, known if not understood. "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." He does not say that God will reveal them to us by and by in a future state; but that "he hath revealed them," that is, hath done it already, and that not by catching us up into

the third heaven, but by his Spirit here upon earth. The things therefore which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, are not so much the things that God hath prepared for those that love him in the realms of eternal bliss; not so much the joys of heaven, which are inconceivable and unutterable, as the apostle speaks of what he saw and heard in Paradise, as the things which God hath prepared upon earth; for it is upon earth that there is a spiritual revelation, whereas in heaven there will be a seeing Christ as he is face to face, and knowing even as also we are known. And observe how it is that we come to know them; "for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God;" implying that the things which God hath prepared for those that love him are to be and will be searched into by that holy and blessed Spirit which searcheth the heart.

But I hope we shall see these blessed truths a little more clearly, if I am enabled to bring before you with any degree of wisdom or utterance the heavenly truths lodged in the bosom of our text.

I shall therefore, with God's help and blessing,

I.—*First*, set before you *the things*, or rather some of the things, *which God hath prepared for them that love him*.

II.—*Secondly*, I shall endeavour to show how *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man* these things.

III.—*Thirdly*, That God *reveals* these things unto us *by his Spirit*.

IV.—And *fourthly*, that the Spirit who reveals these things to the soul, *searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God*.

I.—But in showing or attempting to show the things which God hath prepared for them that love him, I must first trace out the character of those of whom the apostle here speaks, for if there are certain things prepared for those that *love God*, we must

have some testimony that we love God before we can see and realise our personal interest in these heavenly blessings.

i. Now we may lay it down as a most certain truth, that no man in a state of nature ever did or ever could love God. The Holy Ghost has given a sufficient testimony of what man's heart is by nature most abundantly to prove this, where he says: "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be." But you will say, perhaps, "What is meant by the carnal mind, for it may be a description not of what all men are, but of what some men are; and it may be a picture not of man's heart by nature, but of man's heart as corrupted and depraved by a long course of wickedness? Let us look then at the exact meaning of the word. It signifies the whole bent of the flesh—what it thinks, pursues, breathes, inclines to, and eagerly follows. It therefore signifies not what certain wicked men are, but what all men by nature are; for flesh is opposed to spirit, as nature is opposed to grace, and thus comprehends everything in man which is not spiritual. If then this explanation be true, and the carnal mind is enmity against God, there can be no love of God in the natural heart of man; for I think that I have already clearly shown that the carnal mind and the natural heart are one and the same; and we must therefore, if we believe the Scripture, come to the conclusion that the carnal mind is not merely an enemy, but "enmity" itself against the God of heaven.

Now from this solemn truth there necessarily follows this consequence. There must be a regenerating work of grace in and upon a man's heart to constitute him the character of whom the Holy Ghost speaks—that God hath prepared certain things for him. Is not this then an important question for us to have determined in our own hearts and consciences whether we are amongst that favoured number? How, then, are we taught and brought to love God? To this I answer that he must first love us. The apostle John has laid down in the clearest, strongest manner: "We love him because he first loved us." Observe John's "because:" he tells us the reason why we love God, if indeed we do love him. So speaks the Lord also by his prophet, "I have

loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." There is no other basis or foundation, no other source or spring, no other cause or origin of the love of God as felt in the heart toward him. All, all our love springs out of, and is grounded upon the love that God has towards us. But we cannot of ourselves raise up this love to God: it must be shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Ghost; it must be brought by God's own testimony and his own immediate presence and power into our conscience. Is not this most evident? For if there be no love to God in us by nature, it must be communicated, diffused, imparted, revealed, and shed abroad by a heavenly work, a divine operation, and a gracious influence, or true spiritual love to God we can have none. But love to God is not the first thing felt in the soul toward him. We must first learn *to fear* this great God; for "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" and if it be the beginning of wisdom it must be the beginning of all true religion, for "wisdom" in the Scriptures is often used in the meaning of vital godliness. But when I speak of the fear of the Lord, I mean that filial, holy, and godly fear which is the effect of divine teaching because there is such a thing as learning the fear of God by the teaching of men, which God condemns in these striking words: "Wherefore the Lord said, forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men." (Isa. 29:13.) Thus we see that there is a fear toward God which is consistent with, and in fact encourages the basest hypocrisy—a drawing near to God with the mouth and an honouring him with the lips, when there is a removing of the heart far from him. But a holy, godly fear of his great name is put by himself into our heart, according to his own covenant promise: "I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me."

But what is the first effect of thus fearing his great name? Does it make us love him? Surely not; because at first we do not know he is a God of love; that he loves us or that we may love him. He is seen at first in a broken law; as a God of infinite justice and

majesty, of unspeakable holiness and purity; and we see and feel what we are in his sight as sinners before him. The light of God shining into our heart and the life of God moving in our conscience makes us see, know, and feel that we are sinners against this great and glorious, holy, just, and righteous Jehovah. There is no love to God under the law, no love under the conviction of sin, no love in doubt and fear as to our state, no love in wrath and terror, no love under sore exercise and distress, because the love is not yet come. It is not revealed, shed abroad, manifested, or made known; yet the fear of God at work in the heart leads on to a knowledge and an experience of it in due time. For as "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," the soul's choice treasure, and a fountain of life, it must eventually issue and open into a knowledge and enjoyment of the love of God; for without it there would be no completeness of wisdom, no wealth of treasure, no flowing of the fountain of life into the fulness of the sea of love. Wherever, then, the fear of God is in a man's heart, and the work of grace is going on in his soul, there is at the same time communicated with it a spirit of repentance which makes him confess his sins, a spirit of faith which in due time embraces and lays hold of the Person and work, blood and righteousness of Christ, and enables him to believe in Jesus unto everlasting life. As thus the Lord is pleased to raise it up and draw it forth in the soul, there is a going forth of faith unto and upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and through this faith looking unto and embracing him, God is pleased to manifest himself to the soul in the face of his dear Son; and by revealing him in the heart to shed abroad his love. Then, and not till then, do we love God; at least so as to have any sensible experience or assurance of it. We cannot love an angry God; we cannot love a holy and just God whilst we are sensible that his holiness and justice are condemning us every day. But when we begin to see his Fatherly mercy shining forth in the face of a Mediator, and some friendly beams of his blessed countenance dissolve the heart at his feet; when there come over the mountains and hills of our sin and shame a reconciling word, a soft whisper, a heavenly smile, a tender touch, then the Lord himself being the communicator of it, there springs up in the soul a simple, sincere love to God the

Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, Israel's triune Jehovah; and this is that which enables us to love God.

ii. Now God hath *prepared* certain things for those that love him. They are all prepared before-hand. Our love to God does not give us an interest in these things prepared, nor does the work of Christ upon the heart give us an interest in the things prepared. The things are prepared before-hand. It is in grace as in nature. A person designs to invite a certain number of guests to partake of his hospitality. What is to be the dinner is all thought of before-hand. The letters or cards of invitation have not been sent out; but the people who are to come and what they are to feed upon when they do come is all in the mind of the person who invites them. Now when the letter of invitation comes, that does not give the guests any knowledge of the dishes provided. It gives them a title to come: it gives them an intimation that if they come there is food to be eaten; it gives them an assurance that they shall not be turned away as uninvited guests. But the invitation itself does not provide the number and nature of the dishes to be eaten, or carry upon the face of it a command or a request that each guest should bring with him his own food. That is in the heart and hand, in the bosom and liberality of the giver of the feast, for all is prepared in his mind and spread by his hand. So it is in grace. God hath prepared certain things for those who love him; but he has prepared all these things before-hand. As we read of Wisdom in Proverbs: "Wisdom hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table." (Prov. 9:2.) And thus the prophet speaks: "And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." (Isai. 25:6.) Observe, then, that the Lord has already prepared a feast on earth, and this feast on earth is a foretaste of, and whets the appetite for the fuller and richer feast provided in heaven.

Let us look, then, for a few moments at some of the things which God hath prepared upon earth for those that love his name, and which he reveals to them by his Spirit.

1. He hath prepared *redemption*, a full and complete redemption from all their transgressions, and all the consequences of their guilt, filth, and folly. This indeed he has already accomplished in and by the Person and work, blood and obedience of Jesus Christ; for by his bloodshedding upon the cross he is declared to have "obtained eternal redemption" for us. (Heb. 9:12.) This sacrifice of himself, whereby he put away sin, is a complete redemption from that miserable state of bondage and captivity into which sin cast those that love God. Redemption is a finished work. Nothing can be taken from it, nothing added to it. When Jesus with expiring lips cried "It is finished," then the work was done.

"Holy Ghost, repeat the word,  
There's salvation in it."

Everything was then done that was needful to be done. The last penny of the price was paid. Justice had all its claims satisfied. The law had every demand it could possibly make, and the holiness of God had rendered to it everything that the purity of God could claim. Here then—let me hold it up before your eyes—is one of those things which God hath prepared for them that love him: a redemption from all the misery and wretchedness, guilt, bondage, wrath, and terror that sin charged home upon a sinner's conscience can inflict in this world or the world to come. And if you love God by his shedding abroad his love in your hearts, here is redemption prepared for you; and you are invited as a guest to the banquet, to feed upon that precious flesh and to drink that precious blood. As the Lord himself said, "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." Do not dream of preparing a redemption for yourself—an atonement for your own sins. Rather look unto him who hath said, "Look unto me, and be ye saved all the ends of the earth."

2. Again, *justification*, that you may stand before the bar of God, clothed in the obedience of the God-Man; that not only all your sins might be washed away in the fountain of atoning blood, and

you have an interest in the price paid by the Lord Jesus Christ upon Calvary's tree, but might have a glorious righteousness imputed to you and put upon you, that you might stand before the great white throne without spot or blemish or wrinkle or any such thing. This is another of those blessed things which God hath prepared for them that love him. O what a righteousness is that of the Lord Jesus Christ! What is our own? Well has Scripture described it as "filthy rags." Who dare stand before the Majesty of heaven clothed in filthy rags? What access can any sinner find into the courts of the Most High, if he has nothing on at the last day but his own filthy rags, not fit for a beggar's back? But if he is clothed in Christ's imputed righteousness, if the wedding garment is put upon him, then he can sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb; he is an accepted guest, is prepared for it as it is prepared for him. Had not the father already laid up in the wardrobe the best robe, which was brought out and put on the returning prodigal? The flax had not to be spun, nor had the weaver then to take it from the spinner to make it into a beautiful robe. It was in the wardrobe already prepared for the prodigal's naked back, and all the father said was, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him." So it is with the saints of God. Christ's righteousness does not begin to be wrought for them when they begin to believe: it is already wrought for them. It was wrought out by his sacred and suffering Majesty when he was upon earth; in every thought that he conceived, every word that he spoke, every action that he performed, the robe of righteousness was wrought out; and this is our only justification before the throne of God. These then are two of the choicest things that God hath prepared for them that love him: pardon of sin in the manifestation of mercy, in the application of atoning blood to the conscience, in the discovery of salvation to the soul, and justification before God, through the imputation of the righteousness of God's dear Son. But it may be prepared and not revealed; for it is prepared before it is revealed—prepared in the counsel of God and in the finished work of Christ, before it is revealed in the heart. Many a dear saint of God has an interest in redeeming blood, is really clothed in justifying righteousness, but is exercised continually with doubts and fears, and a burden of

guilt still remaining upon his conscience, for want of the application of atoning blood and the discovery of Christ's perfect obedience with such a divine power as shall enable him to believe that all his sins are pardoned and cast behind God's back. But he has prepared pardon for you, timid and tempted souls, who are thus tried and exercised, that it may come in due time into your heart, be revealed to your conscience, and you may have the sweet sense of justification made manifest to your soul by the power and witness of the Holy Spirit.

3. I told you I could only just name a few of the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But I may sum them all up in a *precious Christ, in an incarnate God*, and in what he is to the Church of God, as "the way, the truth, and the life," and "of God made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." The heights and depths of his dying love; the superabounding of his grace; his compassion to and sympathy with his poor, tried, tempted people, with everything in him which is suitable to our case, and whereby he becomes precious to them that believe—all this may be summed up as among "the things prepared for them that love God," and which he reveals to the heart by his Spirit.

4. But we may even stretch our eyes beyond this time-state and cast a glance at those mansions of heavenly bliss which are prepared for those that love God. Did not the Lord himself say to his sorrowing disciples, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." (John 14:2.) O that we could lift our eyes to those blest abodes, those mansions of heavenly bliss, where no sorrow intrudes, where sin is unknown, where tears are wiped from off all faces, where there is no languishing body, no wasting sickness, no pining soul, no doubt, fear, darkness or distress; but one unmingled scene of happiness and pleasure, and the whole soul and body are engaged in singing the praises of God and the Lamb. And what crowns the whole, there is the eternal enjoyment of those pleasures which are at the right hand of God for evermore. But how lost are we in the contemplation of

these things; and though our imagination may seem to stretch itself beyond the utmost conception of the mind, into the countless ages of a never-ending eternity, yet are we baffled with the thought, though faith embraces the blessed truth. But in that happy land, the immortal soul and the immortal body will combine their powers and faculties to enjoy to the uttermost all that God hath prepared for those that love him.

But do not these things raise the question in our breasts, "Am I one of those that love God?" How shall this point be settled? Where are my evidences, my tokens for good, my landmarks, my Ebenezers? Was I ever visited in any measure with the love of God, and did my heart ever melt and dissolve under his blessed beams, so as to feel that I could love him and delight myself in him, so that I could say with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee?" If thou hast ever had the love of God in any measure, but a drop of it shed abroad in thy heart; if ever you could say before a heart-searching God, in the language of Peter, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee," you are one of those for whom God hath prepared all these feasts upon earth and this enduring banquet in heaven.

But you say, "I am often cold, lifeless, and dead; I often sink into doubt and fear; my mind seems so much and so continually occupied, carried away, and overcome by the things of time and sense, and any feeling I may have had of the love of God is so out of sight and out of reach, that though I cannot altogether give up what I have tasted, felt, and handled in times past, yet I find it so difficult to maintain any firm assurance either that I love God or that he loves me." But these complaints are common to all who love and fear God. We are encompassed with a body of sin and death; our nature is carnal and corrupt; helplessness and inability are ever present with us, so that the good that we would we do not. We do not justify ourselves for our carnality and death, for our want of love, for our inability to all good, and our proneness to all evil. It is our burden and a source of daily condemnation. This is a vale of tears, and we have to weep and

mourn over the want of that love to the Lord and to his people which it is so sweet to feel. But in this time-state we are to live by faith and not by sight; and therefore the sweet discoveries of Christ and manifestations of his presence which create love, are rare and with long intervals between. When, then, they are withdrawn or suspended, it is the trial of faith to believe he is still the same, and that those whom he loves he loves unto the end. The very seeking after them, the very longing for their return, is a proof that love is not extinct in the heart; for if there were no love to the Lord there could be no longing desire toward him.

II.—But to pass on to our second point, in which we have to unfold the meaning of those remarkable words of our text: "*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man.*"

The apostle is here quoting the language of the prophet Isaiah, though the words read a little differently: "Since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither have the eyes seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him." The same character that is spoken of by the apostle as loving God, is described by the prophet as "one that waiteth for him." There is no contradiction, no inconsistency, no discrepancy here, nor any clashing between the two men of God. Prophet and apostle speaks of the same person and virtually of the same thing. Indeed to my mind their very difference sheds a beauty and blessedness upon the description, and by bringing it down a stage lower adapts the promise to those who seem to feel that they cannot climb or stand upon the higher. If you love God you wait for him, and if you wait for God you love him.

But let us now look a little more closely at the words before us.

1. The apostle first declares that "*eye hath not seen*" what God hath prepared. Now the eye hath seen a great many things. The eye hath seen and perhaps your eye has rested upon splendid prospects upon earth. The mighty sea, the lofty mountain, the

verdant vale, the hanging wood, the waving corn, the grassy meadow spread with flocks and herds through which a noble river glides—all this beautiful landscape may have lain stretched out before your eye. These I have seen; these I have admired and even now admire them still, especially when I can view them as created by an Almighty hand. When the eye is in some way thus anointed to look upon the works of God, it sees beauty in every bird that flies, in every butterfly that flutters from flower to flower. The eye can also see great beauty in the starry heavens, when the moon walks in glorious brightness, and the firmament is studded and spangled as with myriads of diamonds. The eye, too, of some can see great beauty in the various productions of art and science, in pictures and statues, in noble cities adorned with the triumphs of architecture. The eye can see all this and much more than this; in fact, what is there of an earthly nature that the eye cannot see? But the eye—that is, the natural eye—for it is of this that the apostle speaks, hath never seen the things that God hath prepared for them that love him. Or if we give the word a little further bearing, and explain it of the eye of him who is destitute of the teaching of God and of the revelation by the Spirit of which we have spoken, in this sense eye hath not seen the grace and glory of redemption by the blood of the Lamb, or of justification by Christ's righteousness, or the Person and work of the Son of God, or salvation by free grace, or the visitations of the love and presence of God, or what is reserved in a future state for those who love Christ's appearing—none of these things hath eye seen, either the eye of the body or the eye of the carnal mind. Even the Old Testament saints who died in faith did not clearly see the blessings which were to be revealed. The Lord therefore said, "But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." (Matt. 13:16, 17.)

2. *"Neither hath ear heard."* The ear has heard an infinite number, an unbounded variety of sounds; for what an inlet of knowledge and understanding has it been to our mind. As much

or probably more has been learnt through the medium of the ear than of the eye; for how much more intelligent are those who are born blind than those who are born deaf. What pleasure too has presented itself to the mind through the ear. It has heard the eloquence of oratory; the dulcet notes of music; the warm, impassioned language of love; the artless, engaging prattlings of infancy, so sweet to a parent's heart. Where would be our mutual intercourse with each other, or how could we convey to the minds of others our thoughts, feelings, and desires were there no language to which the ear could listen and the mind apprehend? How many things, too, has the ear heard which have pleased and charmed the natural mind and highly gratified the natural taste. But the ear, the natural ear of man, has never heard the things that God hath prepared for those that love him, for they are out of the reach, out of the province of the natural ear. God speaks to the heart: it is not the outward ear that hears his voice when he reveals his love and mercy to the soul; it is not the natural eye that sees either him or what he makes known. There is indeed the inward ear of faith as there is the inward eye of faith; but as the outward eye has never seen the glorious Person of the Son of God, and yet loves him, as the apostle speaks, "Whom not having seen ye love," so the outward ear has never heard the things that God hath prepared for them that love him.

3. *"Neither have entered into the heart of man."* Many things have entered into our heart: many conceptions, many ideas, many wishes, many wants, many longings, many feelings of love and sorrow, of mirth and joy. Our heart is a wonderful domain of thought—a very sea, "full of creeping things innumerable," which is never still, even when most apparently calm. Or, to change the figure, like a bee or a butterfly, it is ever roaming from field to field, roaming from object to object, from thought to thought, from idea to idea. But the things that God hath prepared for those that love him, in their beauty, blessedness, fullness, sweetness, grace, and glory, have never entered into the natural heart of man. The wisest, the greatest, the noblest, the strongest, the most educated, the most learned, if destitute of grace, have never conceived anything of the beauty and

blessedness of Christ and his salvation. It has not ever entered into their heart; no, not a single ray of light has penetrated into the thick darkness so as to make the things of God known by any natural apprehension of them. Need you wonder, then, that men are so ignorant of what true religion and vital godliness are? Need you wonder, that notwithstanding all you say to them or lay before them of divine and spiritual truth, they are unable to apprehend it? Why? They have no inward faculty whereby they should apprehend it. Their eye sees natural objects, and their natural mind apprehends them—their colour, shape, and dimensions; their ear hears natural sounds, can discriminate between what is pleasant and painful, or by means of language gather the widest, fullest information upon all mere intellectual subjects. Their heart conceives natural things, can compare them together, reason from them, or dress them out in all the hues of fancy and imagination. But none of these natural faculties, whether eye, ear, or heart, can ever enter into the domain of spiritual things. To see, to hear, to understand, to feel, realise, and enjoy these requires a new eye, a new ear, a new heart; in a word, a new spirit, which springs from being born of God, and being blessed with regenerating grace.

III.—This leads me to our next point, which is, that *God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit.*

i. Now if the things that God hath prepared for them that love him were things only to be known by and by, things to be enjoyed only in heaven, the apostle would not have said, "God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit." They are therefore things revealed by the Spirit to the heart and conscience of God's people upon earth. There is a secret in religion, according to the Lord's own testimony, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant." There is then a secret called "the secret of the Lord;" and it is the secret which God hath prepared for them that love him; for where hath he prepared it but in and by his covenant?

ii. But now let us see how he reveals them. I have already

endeavoured to show you some of the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

1. One of these was *redemption* as accomplished by the finished work of Christ, salvation by his bloodshedding and death upon the cross, whereby he offered a perfect sacrifice for sin. You never could get into the mystery of redemption by the blood of the Lamb so as to lay hold of it, appropriate it, and feel the saving power of it, by anything your natural eye saw, anything your natural ear heard, or anything your natural heart could conceive. It must have been revealed by the Spirit before you could receive its blessedness, or feel its cleansing power.

2. So with *justification*, the robe of righteousness, of which I before spoke. You may have heard of the doctrine and accepted it as a grand scriptural truth. But the beauty, blessedness, and suitability of justification to your soul; the glory and dignity of such a garment as Christ wrought out and brought in by his active and passive obedience, its imputation to you to shield and shelter you from the wrath to come, and how you are wrapped up in it from the searching eye of justice and the condemnation of a broken law—the beauty and mystery of a justifying righteousness is only received by faith as revealed by the Spirit of God with his own divine unction to the heart.

3. So again look at the solemn mystery of *an incarnate God*—God in the flesh and suffering for sin in the depths of his humiliation. This is beyond all sight and hearing and conception. The doctrine may be received as a doctrine, as a scriptural truth, but the power, the mystery of love and mercy, grace and truth couched in it; the heavenly blessedness, the liberating efficacy, and the feeling enjoyment of the glorious Person of the God-Man,—this is hidden from the eye, ear, and heart of the natural man, but is revealed to those that believe by the Spirit. Have you never had a view of Christ in your soul, such as you had no conception of before it was given? Can you not look back upon a solemn moment, when the Spirit of God was pleased to reveal and make him known to your heart with a divine power? Or if you cannot

lay your hand clearly and plainly upon such a season, have you not had a glimpse at times of the blessedness of the Redeemer as able to save to the uttermost; a view by faith of the exceeding grace and divine glory of a suffering, incarnate God, which you never could express in words, but the power of which you felt in your inmost soul? Here is the Spirit of God revealing to the heart the glorious Person of the Son of God.

4. So it is with the *flesh and blood* of the Lamb. People go to the sacrament, and call that eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ; but that is merely the emblem, the figure, the representation of a divine mystery which can only be received by faith. The flesh and blood of Christ are quite distinct from the mere elements of bread and wine, and can only be received by faith as they are revealed by the Spirit of God to a feeling heart. When we have a view of Christ in his sufferings and love and blood; when we see to what a state of humiliation the darling Son of God submitted his holy body and soul; and when the Holy Spirit is pleased to take of these precious things of Christ, and to show them unto us, and to raise up faith in our hearts to believe them, hope to anchor in them, and love to enjoy them, then the Spirit of God may indeed be said to feed us with the flesh and blood of the Lamb of God.

5. So it is also with the *glory that is to be revealed*. The foretastes, the sweet anticipations, the dropping in of what is to be enjoyed when time shall be no more,—this is what "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man." For as our Lord said to Nicodemus, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" (John 3:12.) But the Spirit reveals these things, manifests them, brings them in, makes them known, gives faith in them, makes them life and spirit, invests them with a solemn reality, and clothes them with enduring substance. So that we can say, so far as God has blessed us with faith, "we have not followed cunningly devised fables, in making known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," or in believing them ourselves. Religion is a divine reality. The things

of God are handled, tasted, fed upon and known to be enduring substance. Thus indeed runs the ancient promise: "That I may cause them that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures." (Prov. 8:21.) Men may call us what they please—fanatics, enthusiasts, blind bigots, pursuing vain dreams or mere delusions of a wild, excited, and sometimes lunatic imaginations. But if the Lord has done anything for our souls by his Spirit and grace, and given us anything to taste, handle, realise, and enjoy for ourselves, we know there is a substance and reality in the things that we believe. Religion is our chief employment: our daily meditation or exercise—the main concern of our thoughts and what lies with the greatest weight upon our minds. And justly so; for it is our all. If we have religion, the religion of God's giving, it will be uppermost in our heart. It is true we are surrounded with and often hampered by a body of sin and death; we have many worldly cares and anxieties which will intrude upon our minds; and those engaged in business have many things especially to drag them down from heaven to earth. Still, religion will be for the most part uppermost in a man's soul, where God has begun and is carrying on a gracious work. It is like oil in water; you may try to mix them but you cannot; the oil will float to the top. So true religion will be uppermost in a man's thoughts, be the first thing in a morning and the last at night, and sometimes work in his mind all the day long. Not but what he is often very cold and dead, lifeless in his prayers, and unfeeling in his affections; not but what he may be carried away by the things of time and sense and dragged down into darkness, carnality, and death; but with it all, there is something in his bosom that struggles upward—there is that in his heart which goes after the precious things of Christ, and the solemn realities of eternity. So that if you could take away his hope of eternal life, you would make him of all men the most miserable.

IV.—But to come to our last point, the searching of the Spirit into the hidden mysteries of divine truth: "*The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.*"

i. The Spirit here means the Spirit of God in a believer's heart, and corresponds with that expression in the book of Proverbs:

"The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly" (Proverbs 20:27); for the "spirit of man" there signifies the spirit which is in man—that is, in a believing, regenerate man, which is the Spirit of God in him. Now this inward Spirit "searcheth all things," that is, it seeks to penetrate into their nature and blessedness, their fulness and power. It does not mean that the Spirit searcheth all things as distinct from and independent of the things of God; but all things which are connected with the word of God and his work upon the heart.

ii. But he is said in our text to search the *deep things of God*. These are the deep and solemn mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, containing in them depths of grace, mercy, and truth utterly unsearchable by the wit or wisdom of man. Consider, for instance, for a moment what a deep thing the *Person* of Christ is. An incarnate God, God and man in one glorious Person, Immanuel God with us! O what depth is in this divine mystery! How surpassing all the thought and expression of men or angels! Look again at the mysteries of electing love, of sovereign grace, of redemption by Christ's finished work, of the teachings, influences, and operations of the Holy Ghost upon the soul; in a word at everything connected with God and godliness; what deep things they all are! The apostle speaks of the love of Christ as having "breadth and length and depth and height," and yet he says that "it passeth knowledge." (Ephes. 3:18, 19.) So he speaks also of "the unsearchable riches of Christ." (Ephes. 3:8.) Compared with these deep mysteries, what shallow things all worldly things are. Perhaps I have read as many books at various times of my life as most persons have who have had the same opportunities and the same desire for knowledge and information; but O, how shallow all these things appear to my mind compared with the deep and weighty realities of eternity. I do not say that I always see and feel this. But when my mind is under any gracious influence, what trifles, what toys, what empty vanities do I see the great bulk of men pursuing, not only those who labour with the hand, but those also who labour with the brain. But what weight and power there are in the things of God, as they are brought with any measure of divine teaching and

testimony into the heart. What solemn feelings the grace of God produces in the soul; what exercises of mind, what breathings after the Lord, what goings forth of spiritual desire to know him and the power of his resurrection; for we feel our ignorance and the deep necessity of divine teaching and divine operation to make the things of God experimentally felt and known.

iii. Now the Spirit of God which dwelleth in a man, making his body his temple, *searcheth* the deep things of God; for there is in these deep things a most heavenly treasure, which is to be searched into that it may be found, as the wise man speaks of knowledge and understanding: "Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." (Proverbs 2:3, 4, 5.) Now as these treasures are thus opened up to the understanding, and their sweetness is felt in the heart, there is a proportionate desire to get into them, to penetrate into their reality, fulness, and power, so as to experimentally know them, appropriate them for ourselves, and enjoy them as having a clear and blessed interest in them. But this is got by searching. The Christian therefore has to read the Scripture perpetually, to come continually to a throne of grace, to meditate upon the things of God, to try his heart by the word of truth, to examine his own state and standing, and thus see how matters stand between God and his soul. Now the more he examines and searches into the things of God, the more depth and solidity, reality and power, does he find in them. But this no man can do of himself, and therefore the Spirit of God in a man's bosom searches for him the deep things of God, so as to lead him into a spiritual and experimental knowledge of them. What depths do we sometimes see in a single text of Scripture as opened to the understanding, or applied to the heart; what a depth in the blood of Christ: how it "cleanseth from all sin," and if from all sin it must cleanse away millions of millions of the foulest sins of the foulest sinners. What a depth in his bleeding, dying love, that could stoop so low to lift us so high! What a depth in his pity and compassion to extend itself to such guilty, vile transgressors as

we are. What depth in his rich, free, and distinguishing grace, that it should superabound over all our aggravated iniquities, enormities, and vile abominations. What depth in his sufferings, that he should have voluntarily put himself under such a load of guilt, such outbreakings of the wrath of God, as he felt in his holy soul when he stood in our place and stead to redeem poor sinners from the bottomless pit. What depth in the eternal counsels and unspeakable wisdom of God to contrive such a plan as was accomplished and brought to light in the incarnation and death of his dear Son, that thus mercy and justice might meet together without jar or discord, every attribute of God be fully honoured, and yet that those who deserved hell should be lifted up into the enjoyment of heaven. What depths, too, there are in our own heart, not merely of sin but of grace, for true religion has its depths which the Spirit searches and brings to view. Thus if we have any faith, it lies very deep, for it is hidden in the heart, and sometimes so hidden as to be almost, if not altogether, out of sight. The Spirit then searches for it, and bring it out and up. So if we have any love, it strikes its root into the inmost recesses of our affections; and therefore needs to be searched into; or any hope, it lies like the anchor at the bottom of the sea. It therefore has to be searched into that it may be made manifest that it is sure and steadfast and enters within the veil.

In this way, then, the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. And the more it searches, the more it finds; the more it looks, the more it wonders; the more it examines, the more room there is for admiration, love, and praise.

You see, then, from all this, if I have handled these matters aright, that religion is not a thing merely to be attended to on a Sunday. It does not consist in turning over a Bible now and then, reading a chapter or a few verses night and morning, and then falling on your knees and uttering a few words of prayer. All this you may do, and yet be very far from the kingdom of heaven. Religion, if it be of God, will take fast and firm possession of a man's heart, thoughts, and affections. It will make him a new creature, and thus prepare him for an inheritance incorruptible

and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for the saints of the Most High. But as all is of grace from first to last, so it is the Spirit that keeps searching all these deep things, opening up new wonders in the precious truth of God, and establishing them with greater power and more vital reality in the soul.

Look then and see what you can find of this work in your heart and conscience, and what reason you have to believe that you are one of those who love God, and for whom he hath prepared these divine realities. Examine well what testimony you have in your own bosom that the Spirit of God has revealed or is revealing them to you, making them your meat and drink, and manifesting to you that personal interest in them which alone can satisfy you that they are eternally yours. The Lord in his infinite mercy apply what I have thus spoken to your heart; and to him we will willingly and cheerfully give all the praise.

## **The Thorn in the Flesh, or Strength Made Perfect in Weakness**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, March 17, 1861

"And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." 2 Cor. 12:9

The servants of God are often much tried by slanders being cast upon their character, or suspicions entertained of their sincerity, or doubts expressed of their call by grace or of their call to the ministry. But need we wonder that it should be so, when we see that one of the most eminent saints and servants of God that ever breathed was assailed by similar suspicions, and was the object of equally injurious doubts? The Corinthians, for instance, to whom Paul had been so abundantly blessed, the very persons to whom he could say, "In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel," misled by the crafty insinuations of designing preachers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ (2 Cor. 11:13), evidently entertained very strong suspicions whether he was not altogether a reprobate; for in allusion to what had reached his ears upon this point, he says, "I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates" (2 Cor. 13:6), language which he could not and would not have made use of unless some such opinion of him had been expressed by them. Yet these suspicions, unjust as they were, induced him, as if in necessary self-defence, to bring forward an experience which had lain hidden in his bosom for fourteen years. As some of his own spiritual children disclaimed him as their father, even at the risk of proclaiming thereby their own bastardy, he felt himself imperatively called upon to speak of the revelations of the Lord with which he had been favoured and blessed; and thus the very suspicions entertained against him by the Corinthians, the very doubts cast by them upon his call by grace, and his call to the ministry, were made the means of bringing out of his bosom an

experience of the Lord's grace and power, which might have lain for ever buried there, and which but for these suspicions the church of God would have utterly lost. To this, therefore, I shall now direct your attention, as being closely and intimately connected with our text. He tells us, then, in the beginning of this chapter (2 Cor. 12.), that he "knew a man in Christ"—doubtless himself—"above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body," he says, "I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell; God knoweth); such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." How unspeakably great, how divinely ravishing, must this manifestation of Christ have been to his soul, when it so overcame his bodily and mental faculties that he could not tell whether he was in the body or out of the body; in other words, whether, leaving his body here below, he was caught up in his spirit into the third heaven, there to behold unspeakable sights and there to hear unutterable words, or whether body and soul were both alike borne aloft into the paradise of God. This he leaves as matter of uncertainty; for it was not clear to his own mind, though the reality and blessedness of the revelation were as certain to him as his own existence.

But he stays not there; and as he had spoken of the blessedness of the manifestation he lets us see also what was its sequel, which is as important a part on the other side of the question—the dark and gloomy side—as the revelation itself on the happy, bright, and glorious side. He would not hold himself up before the Corinthian church as a saint so highly favoured without showing them the counterpoise which God gave him in the opposite scale. He therefore adds, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." He, like ourselves, was still in the flesh; his heart, like yours and mine, was "still deceitful above all things and desperately wicked;" and such being the case, his corrupt nature would have availed itself even of the grace of God

to lift him up with spiritual pride; for, as Hart truly says, that vile monster,

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

The Lord, therefore, saw it needful, as he had given him a high sail, to load his ship with proportionate ballast, that he might sail the more steadily, and not capsize under the first heavy gale. As then he had exalted him with his own hand to the heights of heaven, so he thought fit to depress him to the very gates of hell, that he might have in his bosom a daily counterpoise to those liftings up of spiritual pride which would otherwise have swelled his heart to his own injury, and the marring of his usefulness and acceptance among the saints of God, if there had been no such check to counteract its workings. But though most profitable, yet this dispensation was most painful; so that being scarcely able to live under the burden of this distressing temptation, thrice he besought the Lord, that is, upon three special occasions when the Lord favoured him with access to his throne of grace, that it might depart from him, the pressure of it being too great to bear. But instead of hearing his prayer in the way he desired and taking it away, the Lord gave him those words which form the first part of our text, and from which, in connection with what immediately follows, I shall hope, with God's blessing, to speak this morning:—"And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Now as we have not the abundance of Paul's revelations, so we may not have the abundance of Paul's temptations; for these two things for the most part stand in proportionate relation to each other. Still we may have a thorn in the flesh, if not so large and sharp as Paul's; still we may have a messenger of Satan to buffet us, if not armed with equal malice or if he do not assail us with equal fury. If, then, we have in our flesh this rankling thorn and this buffeting messenger of Satan, we shall need what Paul

needed; if not in equal measure, yet at least according to our degree. We shall need the grace of Christ and the strength of Christ; and not only so, but we shall have to prove each for himself that Christ's grace is sufficient for us whatever the thorn may be, and that Christ's strength is made perfect in our weakness whether that weakness be much or little. If, then, we have a thorn and find the grace; if we experience the weakness and realise the strength, we shall be able also with the apostle to glory even in our infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon us. It is in this experimental way that the word of truth is opened up with divine light and life to our souls, and that we understand the scriptures as realising in our own hearts both the pain and the pleasure, the sorrow and the joy, the temptation and the deliverance, the trial and the blessing, which are the invariable lot of those who are led by the blessed Spirit into the truth of God.

With God's blessing, therefore, in opening up our subject, I shall,  
I.—*First*, drop a few remarks upon *the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan* which was sent to buffet the apostle.

II.—*Secondly*, show how the Lord's *grace is sufficient* for every trial and temptation which may befall his family.

III.—*Thirdly*, that Christ's *strength is alone made perfect in our weakness*.

IV.—And *lastly*, that this gives occasion to every tried and tempted Christian to *glory in his infirmities*; not as glorying in them for their own sake, but in order that *the power of Christ may rest upon him*.

I.—There have been many conjectures, and some very foolish ones, as to the nature of this thorn in the flesh which was given to Paul. Men who know nothing of spiritual things, in their own experience, are as unable to understand and explain matters of this kind as I should be to write a treatise upon astronomy or to publish a grammar in Arabic. Thus some have said that it was the

colic, others the gout; some have thought that it was a pain in the ear; others the gravel or the stone; and others the headache; some have explained it that it was a fit of stammering that he was seized with when he went to preach; and others that it was an attack upon his nerves which distorted his face. I have named these ridiculous interpretations to show how wildly and foolishly men can write who have no experience to teach them better; for I am well assured that unless preachers and commentators know something of spiritual things in their own soul, they must needs be bad interpreters of the word of God, and can only betray to a discerning eye their ignorance and folly when they attempt to explain what can only be understood by personal experience. Guided by this light, let us now look at the words as they stand before us, and let us seek to penetrate into their hidden signification, when we have first laid bare the meaning of the figure as it stands in the letter.

i. Take, then, the simple idea, divested of all such explanations as I have given you a specimen of—"a thorn in the flesh!" What thoughts does that emblem present to your mind? It is an experience of which we all know something literally, for we can scarcely gather a rose-bud or put our hand into the hedge to pick a violet without knowing something of a thorn running into our hand. But what would be your *first* feeling if such a misfortune happened to you? Would it not be that of *pain*? For the moment that a thorn enters the flesh, pain is the first intimation of the presence of so unwelcome an intruder.

1. Paul's thorn then must have been something attended with *pain and suffering*.

2. But take another idea connected with the running of a thorn into the flesh. Would it not immediately *hamper* our movements? If a thorn run into our foot, it lames us, we cannot walk without feeling it; if a thorn run into our hand, we cannot grasp an object as before; and thus for a time both hand and foot are rendered useless. In gathering up then the meaning of the figure, as indicating the experience of Paul, you must take, beside that of

pain, the idea of something *crippling* and *hampering* every spiritual movement.

3. Take another thought, that naturally springs out of the same figure: we are *restless* until the thorn is extracted. The pain is so great, especially if the thorn be large and deep-seated, and every movement is so hampered thereby, that there is no rest to body or mind until it is got out. And I may here observe that the word translated "thorn" means in the original one of no common magnitude, and signifies rather a "stake" than a thorn.

4. But take a fourth idea: if the thorn be not extracted, the flesh *rankles and festers*. The entrance of the thorn does not merely cause momentary pain, like a cut with a knife, but the wound it makes gets worse and worse by the thorn continuing in it, and must do so until it be removed.

No painful feeling, then, no experience, however deep, can be called "a thorn in the flesh" unless it produce or be accompanied by those four circumstances it must be *painful*; it must *hamper* and cripple all spiritual movements; it must make the soul *restless* until extracted; and if left to rankle, it cannot but produce a *festering* wound.

ii. But let us not stop here. Let us look a little further still into the experience of the apostle, after he had been caught up into the third heaven. Something was given him, whatever it was, not merely as a thorn in the flesh to distress and pain him, but as a *messenger of Satan*, an emissary of the devil, to harass and *buffet him*. And what makes this dispensation more mysterious, it is spoken of as arising out of the express will of God. Looking, then, at the words of the apostle in all their naked strength, without seeking to diminish or explain away their force, it was evidently something that God permitted Satan violently to do, and which came, if I may use the expression, rushing upon him hot from hell. You may wonder, and that naturally, that so holy and godly a man as Paul could have been subject, and that by the express will of God, to these infernal buffetings. But consider his

case. Satan does not appear to have tempted our apostle in the ordinary way whereby he allures men to sin. He would have been proof against such common, what I may call such vulgar, temptations as covetousness, drunkenness, fleshly lust, love of the world, and peddling ambition—temptations whereby Satan now ensnares men as easily as a poacher ensnares a rabbit. There was no use therefore in Satan trying to entangle him with such temptations, as he would have broken through them, as Samson snapped asunder the green withes, or as Behemoth "pierceth through snares." (Job 40:24.) Satan knows well both how to allure and how to attack; for he can crawl like a serpent, and he can roar like a lion. He has snares whereby he entangles, and fiery darts whereby he transfixes. Most men are easily led by him captive at his will, ensnared without the least difficulty in the traps that he lays for their feet, for they are as ready to be caught as he is to catch them. Why need he then roar against them as a lion, if he can wind himself round and bite them as a serpent? But a man like Paul, or to go higher still, like our blessed Lord in the days of his flesh, was proof against all the serpentine wiles of Satan. Paul, therefore, says of himself that "he was not ignorant of Satan's devices" (2 Cor. 2:11). Though he might transform himself into an angel of light, Paul's penetrating eye, as touched by an unction from above, could see through his subtlety and be upon his guard against him. As Satan, then, despaired of success in attempting to entangle him, as he too often entangles us, he assailed him with all the power of hell, rushed upon him as a roaring lion, attacking his soul with all his blasphemies and all his rebellion, as though he would fill him with all his own infernal malice, and breathe into him all his own damnable spirit. As this was permitted by the Lord, for without his permission Satan could have had no power over him, the apostle speaks of this "messenger of Satan" as being "given" him. The Lord did not set Satan on, but did not hold him back. We see this in the case of Job. Satan could not touch Job at first, because God "had set a hedge about him." But, when, for Job's good, the hedge was removed, then Satan burst in upon him. In the same way, by removing the hedge, the Lord suffered "the messenger of Satan" to break in upon and "buffet" our apostle. But let us apply this a

little to our own experience, for it is there that we shall find the best and surest key to open the wards of this intricate lock.

If, then, you or I know anything of the temptations of Satan, and what he can do if allowed of God, we may be able in some faint measure to enter into the experience of our blessed apostle, as having a thorn in our flesh, and as having a messenger of Satan to buffet us. And even if our temptations do not amount to thorns, they may be prickles sharp enough and painful enough to give us a taste of what Paul felt. If, too, they are not driven very deep into our flesh, for the word in the original, as I have intimated, literally means "a stake," yet they may be of sufficient depth to cause much pain and much annoyance, to cripple and hamper our movements, to rankle and fester in our carnal mind, though the suffering may not be a tenth or a hundredth part of that experienced by him who had been in the third heaven; for indeed without his blessings we could not endure his trials, without his heaven we could not bear his hell.

iii. But you will observe that the apostle speaks of the thorn being "*in the flesh.*" It was not struck by the hand of Satan into the new man of grace; it did not fester and rankle in that new spirit born of the Spirit which is perfectly holy, as being created after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness. But it was in the flesh, the old man, the unrenewed part which is the seat of all sin; for there, and there only, Satan could plant it. He has no access to the new man of grace: that is wholly under God's guardianship, kept as the apple of his eye, and safe from all the attacks of sin and Satan. But the flesh is akin to Satan: it is sinful as he is; rebellious as he is; and blasphemous as he is. I mean not to the same extent, but in the same way. Through this avenue, then, Satan has access to us to drive a thorn into the flesh, as he, with God's permission, could smite the flesh of Job with boils. But he has no access to drive it into the spirit, for that is sacred ground, out of which the Holy Ghost keeps him, as God kept Job's life. If we had no flesh, there would be no place for Satan to plant the thorn. Angels above have no place for it; glorified spirits in heaven have no place for it; and if the saint of

God here below were perfectly free from a body of sin and death; if he had no carnal, corrupt nature, no flesh, Satan might go round and round about him, as the enemies of Zion went round about her, marking her towers and bulwarks, and seek in vain to plant a thorn, as they sought in vain to plant their scaling ladders against the walls of Zion. But we having flesh, I may indeed say such a mass of flesh in us, round us, and all about us, and this flesh being thoroughly, as it were, akin to Satan, as being tainted and infected with his sin through the fall, he has not far to go to find a spot in which to drive in the thorn. Let him hurl one of his fiery darts, it cannot well miss so broad a mark as our carnal mind. Have you not found sometimes a sudden thought spring up in your mind that your very soul abhorred, and which made your inmost conscience tremble? *Infidelity*, for instance, has that never pestered you—the very concentrated essence of "The Essays and Reviews" rushing through your mind as a shell against a bombarded town? Have you not sometimes had strange ideas working in your mind about the inspiration of the Scriptures; about the deity and eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus; about the personality and work of the Holy Ghost; and indeed I may say every truth revealed in the word and made known to the heart by the power of God? When you have read these truths in the Scripture and in the writings of good men, when you have heard them preached by ministers, or spoken of by the people of God, have you not had floating thoughts, painful suggestions, infidel objections, and grievous workings about their truths and reality, which have much tried and distressed your mind? These were thorns that Satan planted in your flesh, and, as he struck them in, you found they were just as I described a thorn to be; painful, crippling, robbing you of all rest and ease, and inflicting rankling, festering wounds. Have you not also at times had very *rebellious* thoughts against God such as you would not dare to breathe into the ear of your nearest friend, and which I am sure I will not utter or even more than hint at; for many things pass through our minds which we dare not speak with our lips? But if you have known anything of such rebellious feelings, you are not a stranger to my meaning, nor to my prudence in hesitating to give it utterance. That was a thorn in your flesh. And have you not been

tempted even to curse and swear, though not only contrary to your religious but even your moral feeling, and it may be that you have never actually sworn an oath in your life? I think I may say I have not sworn an oath for more than thirty years, and yet I feel at times as if the devil filled my wicked heart with all manner of them. I have heard of tender females who have been brought up with the greatest strictness and delicacy and whose inmost mind abhorred the very thought, and yet when called by grace have been so tempted that nothing but the power of God has been able to keep them from giving vent to the vile language that was boiling up in their heart. Was not this a grievous thorn, and what a rankling wound must it have made? And have you not had sometimes very *wicked* thoughts, to say no more, for on such points I dare only hint, about our blessed Lord? and have not those vile imaginations not only pained and distressed your mind, but made you fear that there was not a spark of grace in your soul? What are these trials and temptations but a thorn in the flesh?

iv. But the apostle speaks of his peculiar temptations as being also "*a messenger of Satan,*" as if Satan had sent an emissary from hell to represent himself, and to do, so to speak, his work. As we send a messenger as a kind of second self, to do what we wish done, to speak what we wish said, to execute what we wish executed; so Satan sent an emissary from the bottomless pit to do his foul work, to speak his base language, to carry his vile errands, and accomplish his infernal schemes against Paul. It is literally "an angel of Satan," an infernal spirit commissioned by his master, the devil, to haunt and waylay the apostle, and thus be "a serpent by the way, an adder in the path." (Gen.49:17.) As one of Satan's infernal train, this foul fiend was no doubt a faithful messenger, and much refreshed the soul of his master (Prov. 25:13) by executing his errand to the very letter; for from Paul's language he appears to have had no more bowels of compassion on him than Lucifer himself, for he says that he buffeted him. There is something so peculiar and yet so expressive in that word, that I feel I must explain it somewhat minutely. Corinth being a place celebrated for the public games,

which took place there every fourth year, the apostle often borrows the figure of these contests to illustrate the various conflicts of Christian experience. One of these games was a public boxing match between two trained pugilists. If, then, we just cast a glance at those celebrated games to which all Greece resorted, and bear in mind how in those days those trained pugilists used to fight, it may cast a light upon the expression "*buffet*." In our days it is bad and brutal enough for men to fight with their fists; but in ancient times, at least at these public games, it was not considered a sufficient trial of courage and endurance to fight merely with naked fists. The combatants used to bind round their fists what was called a "*caestus*;" that is, a glove, or rather leather gauntlet, made of thick bull's hide, and well loaded with strips of lead and iron. An ancient poet, Virgil, gives a description of one of these contests, and if I remember right a most horrible scene it must have been, for one of the combatants was nearly killed, and would have been so had the fight not have been stopped, for as it was, his face was almost beaten in. Thus, when we read of the messenger of Satan buffeting our apostle, we may represent to ourselves this agent of the devil striking him as with the loaded caestus, and by his repeated blows beating his face, if I may use the expression, to a mummy; stunning and confusing his mind, and crushing up the very features of God's work on his soul; so that like a vanquished pugilist in the ancient games, who after such a contest was often scarcely recognizable as a human being, our apostle was so stunned and beaten, and his experience so mauled and knocked about by this messenger of Satan, that it seemed scarcely capable of being recognised by himself as the work of grace upon his heart. It is true that the messenger of Satan no more *really* defaced the workmanship of God in his soul than he could plant a thorn in his new man of grace; but reality is one thing, and apprehension another. Thus, though Satan cannot really touch the work of grace upon the heart, yet he can so buffet the feelings, so harass the mind, so stun and stupify the judgment, that all experience becomes in our apprehension a shapeless mass, in which the distinct features of the image of God are well nigh lost. Have you not, when thus buffeted and stunned by the assaults of Satan, started back at times with

horror at yourself? (I know I have,) and said, "Can I be a Christian? Is there any mark of grace in my soul? Can ever God dwell here? Could I have such thoughts, temptations, and feelings if my body were indeed the temple of the Holy Ghost?" Now you who know something of those exercises,—and what living soul knows not something of them?—have a counterpart in your own bosom to Paul's thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him.

II.—But let us now approach our second point, and see what *help and relief* were afforded to our apostle under those distressing conflicts. He tells us that "he besought the Lord thrice that it," or rather that "he," that is, the messenger of Satan, "might depart from him;" or, as the word literally means, stand off or away from him. As we should beg the owner of a dog to call him off from worrying a sheep, so Paul begged of the Lord to call off the messenger of Satan from worrying his soul. But did the Lord hear and answer that prayer? No; not in its literal import. He would not, therefore, take it away; it came by his permission; it was intended for Paul's spiritual good. He would not, therefore, he could not consistently with his own wise purposes, remove the temptation; and therefore, instead of taking it away, he dropped that sweet promise into his soul which I have now to unfold: "*My grace is sufficient for thee.*" It is as if the Lord had said by it, "Paul, the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, are temptations very painful to bear, but they are sent for thy benefit. Thou hast been highly blessed, greatly favoured, by what thou hast seen and heard in the third heaven: so much sail will be too much for thee, if thou hast not proportionate ballast. Thou must have this thorn to humble thy pride; this messenger of Satan to buffet thee, lest thou be exalted above measure. All, therefore, that I can do for thee is to give thee my grace, that thou mayest bear it patiently, and I promise thee that it shall not be given in vain, for my grace is sufficient for thee."

1. What are we to understand by the word "*grace*" here? We may understand two things: first, grace as signifying the *favour* of Jesus; for the word "grace" in scripture means literally favour. In

that sense, it is as though the Lord said, "Nothing shall alter my love to thee. If thou art tempted to rebel, to disbelieve, to give way to injurious suspicions and base suggestions; if Satan buffet thee and fill thy mind with every vile thought, these upheavings of thy wretched heart under temptation do not alter my love toward thee, nor stop the current of my eternal and unchangeable favour. This favour of mine, as being in myself, independent of all creature circumstances, is sufficient for thee." The Lord knew that Paul hated himself, for his vile and rebellious feelings; that he grieved and groaned under, and was exceedingly distressed by them; he would not, therefore, impute it to him as sin when he hated the very thoughts that sprang up in his carnal mind against his better will. Let me seek to illustrate this point by a figure. A father may have two sons: one of them may be a reckless, careless, disobedient youth, full of health and strength, but who is ever grieving him by his misconduct. The other may be a poor cripple from his very birth, or afflicted with a pining sickness. Now surely, though the father of both, he will not treat these two sons in a similar way. He loves them both, because they are his sons; but the reckless, disobedient youth who grieves his heart will not experience at his hands the same kind treatment as his poor afflicted brother. Neither serves his father; the one from want of will, the other from want of power. If age admit he chastises the one; but does he chastise the poor cripple, the paralytic, the gasping, coughing boy lying upon a bed of consumption? Does he love him the less for these bodily sufferings which disable him from active employment? Surely he will not take away his love from his sick child because his afflictions render him incapable of working for him. Will he not rather feel as if they were his own? How we see this in the case of the father who brought his son to Jesus to be healed of a dumb spirit! "If thou canst do anything have compassion on *us* and help *us*." (Mark 9:22.) How he identifies himself with his afflicted son—"help *us*." Is not this true also as regards the Lord and his suffering people? "In all their afflictions he was afflicted." (Isai. 63:9.) When, then, from heaven his dwelling-place the gracious Lord looks down upon a child of his, and sees him mangled and torn by a thorn in the flesh, so that he cannot walk as he would

from a thorn in his foot, nor grasp a promise as he would from a thorn in his hand, nor see as he would from a thorn in his eye, nor pray as he would from a thorn in his knee, is his grace the less? "Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Does he forget to be gracious? does he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" (Psalms. 77:8, 9.) Or when he sees, according to his own permission, the messenger of Satan falling upon a child of God, and buffeting him by his powerful blows, does he look down upon his afflicted saint with anger because he reels and staggers under the assaults of his enemy? If you, a, parent, saw your child in the street and some stronger boy beating him, would you love him less for his torn clothes and bleeding face? So with the Lord when he sees his poor suffering children groaning and sighing under the thorn in their flesh, or bleeding in soul from Satan's powerful strokes, he does not take away his love and mercy from them because under these trials and temptations they cannot serve him as they would. In this sense, therefore, the Lord said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

2. But look at the word "grace" in another sense, which indeed seems to be the meaning intended here, *the manifested communication of this favour through the Spirit*. When our blessed Lord rose from the dead and ascended on high, he received gifts for the rebellious. "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." (Col. 1:19), "and out of this fulness we receive grace for grace." (John 1:16.) This grace, then, out of his own fulness he freely bestows upon the suffering members of his mystical body here below; for he has in himself an ocean fulness to supply their every need, which made Paul say, "My God will supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:19.) When, then, the Lord said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee," it is as if he would thereby assure him of divine support under the trial; that the temptation should not prove his destruction, as he should have strength given him to endure it. This exactly agrees with what we read elsewhere, "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Cor. 10:13.) This grace the

Lord puts forth in communicating secret supplies of strength, as David found when he said, "In the day when I cried unto thee thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul." (Psalm 138:3.) As, then, the grace of the Lord in the season of trial and temptation is found to be sufficient, it gives the soul a firm standing-place, a holy rest, an object, even the Lord himself, for faith to look unto, an all-sustaining prop for weakness to lean upon; and as the grace of the Lord is thus vouchsafed under trial and temptation it is found to be sufficient—but not more than sufficient.

3. Let us look, then, at this word "*sufficient*." It is not superfluous, but sufficient—enough but nothing to spare. In nature, there is enough, but not more than enough. Expenditure, but not waste; abundance, but not superfluity, is the grand law of creation stamped upon the inhabitants of sea, earth, and sky. The same law holds good in the new creation. No saint of God will ever have too much grace. He will have enough to supply his need; enough to save and sanctify him; enough to fit him for his place in the mystical body of Christ; enough to support him under his afflictions; enough to make him live honourably and die happily, but not more than enough. This was typically shown in the gathering of the manna in the wilderness, when "he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack." (Exod. 16:18.) "As thy days so shall thy strength be;" but not more than thy day or less than thy need. Have you not found this the rule of God's procedure hitherto? Take a review of the numerous trials through which you have passed since his fear was first planted in your heart. Has he not been faithful to every promise of strength and support? Has his grace ever proved insufficient in the hour of need? Can you remember any trial, temptation, or affliction in which when you really felt your need of help from the sanctuary it was withheld? "By the grace of God," said the apostle, "I am what I am;" no less, no more. Can you not say the same? Why are you now where and what you are? Who held you up in the trying hour? Who preserved you when your feet were almost gone, when your steps had well nigh slipped? What but his grace? When the enemy came in like a

flood, who by his Spirit lifted up a standard against him? Have you not thus far proved that his grace is sufficient? and so you will keep proving it to the end. But how are we to prove this? for we must realise it that we may truly know it. By ever looking unto the Lord, leaning upon him, and seeking supplies of this grace out of his fulness. How was it with Paul? The thorn made him pray; the messenger of Satan made him cry and groan. They were made instruments of bringing him to the footstool, there to wrestle with the Lord, and beg of him that those enemies of his soul's peace might depart from him. The Lord, it is true, did not answer those prayers just as Paul wished; they were not, however, rejected, but answered in a different shape. "I cannot take it away," said the Lord; "but I will give thee strength to bear it. It is given thee for thy good: it is better for thee that this thorn should still remain in thy flesh, but my grace shall be sufficient for thee. If tempted to rebel, thou shalt not be a rebel; if tempted to infidelity, thou shalt not be an infidel; if tempted to blasphemy, thou shalt not be a blasphemer; if tempted to doubt and fear, thou shalt not be given up wholly to unbelief."

III.—But, though much honey still remains in this honey-cup, let us not linger here, but, like the bee, seek to gather another store out of the second portion of the Lord's declaration to his suffering apostle: *"For my strength is made perfect in weakness."*

1. The blessed Lord is the strength of his people. This made David say, "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." (Psa. 18:2.) It is a humbling lesson to learn, but blessed when learnt, that all the strength we have to fight and gain the victory is wholly from the Lord. We have no strength to believe, to hope, or to love, to seek him or to serve him, to live holy, or to die happily, but as he is graciously pleased to work in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. This lesson every child of God has to learn in his own experience. And how does he, for the most part, learn it? In no way so effectually as by a thorn in the flesh; for this mars all creature strength by hampering every movement, and thus

teaches us inwardly and experimentally our weakness—the only real way of learning it. How weak is a man to walk if he has a thorn in his foot! How weak to handle if he has a thorn in his hand! And if this thorn be continually there, and if the flesh in consequence rankle and fester, how in time it will drain all his strength away, and turn an open wound into a running sore! Thus the Lord cannot take a more effectual way to teach us our weakness than by allowing Satan to plant a thorn in our flesh. How can we think, for instance, that faith is in our own power, if tempted every day with infidel thoughts? or that a good hope through grace is at our command, if tempted to despair? or that love is a fruit of our own exertions, when enmity and rebellion are working in our carnal mind under the influence of the thorn in the flesh? Or how can we dream of any one good thing dwelling in our flesh, when a festering wound is ever manifesting the corruption of our fallen nature? Can the Lord more effectually show us our weakness than by suffering Satan to plant a thorn in our flesh, that through this ever-running sore all our strength may drain away? If ever you learnt weakness, it was in the hour of temptation; if ever your strength was drained away, it was under the assaults of Satan. Thus, the Lord, so to speak, outshoots Satan with his own bow; defeats the tempter with his own arts; and as he makes the wrath of man to praise him, so the very assaults of hell he turns to his own glory. You may mourn and sigh under your daily thorn; but, it is indispensably necessary for every Christian to learn his weakness. It is a lesson most painful, yet most profitable; for nothing is so deceptive as to think we are strong when we are weak. Such fancied strength resembles the convulsive struggles of a fever patient, or of a raging lunatic in an asylum. It takes the united strength of four men to hold him; but it is the mere working of frenzy that gives strength to his muscles. Take away his disease, and the man is as weak as a child. There is no greater fallacy than to think ourselves strong when we have no strength at all. It is but the delirium of brain fever, the fitful strength of insanity. But how can we learn our weakness? How can we teach a madman in an asylum, that he has no strength when he can grapple with four or five keepers and they are unable to keep him in bed? Get the

disease out of him, and then he will learn his weakness. So was it with the man who had his dwelling among the tombs. Chains and fetters could not bind him. But when the devil was cast out he came and sat all weakness at Jesus's feet, clothed and in his right mind. Cruelly had Satan buffeted him, but he was thereby brought to Jesus. So our daily thorn is our daily teacher, and the lesson it teaches is, "O, soul; how weak thou art! How unable to do anything except the Lord is pleased to do it in thee and for thee!"

2. But how suitable to our experience of our helplessness are the Lord's words, "My strength is *made perfect in weakness.*" As, then, we learn our weakness, we begin to learn our strength. "When I am weak, then am I strong." We begin to look out of our miserable selves, and look up to the Lord that strength may come from him into our soul. Thus Jeremiah found it, "I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon; thou hast heard my voice; thou drewest near in the day that I called on thee; thou saidst fear not." (Lam. 3:55, 57.) Thus, the Lord, by the application of his word, by a sweet whisper of his love, or by the dropping in of a gracious promise, can in a moment communicate strength. Have you not found it so? In a season of temptation and trial, when it seemed as if you had scarcely a grain of grace in your soul, yet, if the Lord began but to appear in the opening up of some promise, or the application of some word, or the shining in of the light of his countenance, what strength was communicated to believe! Now as faith begins to hold up its head, hope follows in its train, and love brings up the rear. What a strength that is which the Lord gives! How supernatural, how peculiar, how outshining all other! But if we were strong in ourselves, we could not distinguish the Lord's strength from our own. If faith were at my command, how could I tell when I believed for myself and when the Lord was pleased to give me to believe, as well as to suffer for his sake? If I could pray or preach, or you could hear, as and when we pleased, how could we tell the difference between what the Lord does in and for us by his Spirit and grace, and what we do ourselves? But by learning experimentally our own weakness when the Lord is pleased to make his strength

known, the contrast is so great that we can see it shining as with a ray of light from heaven, and then we know what it is to have his strength made perfect in our weakness. Sometimes you cannot *pray*. You may see it desirable to pray, but not a breath of prayer moves upon your soul. You are like a sailor becalmed at sea: he longs to go on, and whistles for the wind, but the breeze does not come and the ship cannot move. There he is it may be for days or weeks without power to move upon the sluggish ocean; but at last, the wind begins to blow, he spreads the sail to the breeze, and now the ship bounds over the rolling waters. Does not that man know the difference between not being able to sail without the wind and sailing with it when the wind comes? Men may call us lazy Antinomians for not always moving on. But is the sailor a lazy sailor because he cannot sail without a wind? Does not his very impatience under the calm disprove the charge of laziness? So it is with us: we are sometimes becalmed, without a single breath of the Spirit moving upon the heart. Then, we can no more really pray, though we may use words, than the sailor can move without the wind though he spread the sail. But if the Lord is pleased to send a gale of his grace, then we can spread the sail to the wind, and ride with flowing sheet over the sea. So it is with the other graces of the Spirit. To *believe* to some persons seems easy enough, and indeed would be so were natural faith the only thing required to salvation; but natural faith being worthless in the things of God, and spiritual faith being a heavenly gift, we are experimentally convinced that we cannot produce it. We thus learn our weakness. But when the Lord is pleased to whisper a sweet promise, or drop in a gracious word, or break in upon your soul with some life and light, you can then believe without the least difficulty. Here, again, is strength made perfect in weakness. So also as regards any gracious *fruit* or the performance of any acts that are to God's praise, we have to learn by painful experience our thorough inability to do them as God would have them done. Nor are words less dependent upon his grace than actions, for you cannot speak a word in his name with unction or savour, except he open your mouth that you may show forth his praise. Nor can you feel any flowing forth of love and affection towards his saints, if it be not breathed into your

heart by a power from above. These lessons of our own weakness and helplessness we are daily learning, and as we are taught them we find also that as without Jesus we can do nothing, so with him we can do all things. Thus it becomes a part of our daily experience to be weak and yet be strong; to have nothing and yet possess all things; to be down in the mud and yet up in the sky; bankrupts in self, yet rich in the Lord; beggars at the door, yet fed by his alms. These are the lessons we learn or should be learning every day, and this is the sum and substance of all, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." You are often troubled and exercised because you are so weak. Would you have it otherwise, if in order to be strong in the Lord you must be weak in yourself? But you say that you should not mind feeling yourself so weak if you always had the Lord's strength made perfect in your weakness; but to be all weakness and yet to find that the Lord does not come in to strengthen,—this is such a trial. No doubt it is, for in this mainly lies the trial of faith. But if the Lord always strengthened you the moment you felt weak, you then would not properly learn the lesson of your weakness. Spiritual poverty in this point resembles natural poverty. If a man in good circumstances were reduced by some sudden and unexpected failure to perfect poverty but were only poor for a day or a week; if his friends came round him with a large subscription and replaced him in his original position, he would not have learnt his poverty by so short an experience of it. But let him be poor for a year or two, and be every day getting deeper and deeper into debt, with no prospect of recovering his position, he would learn the misery of poverty in the most effectual way, even if he were replaced in his former circumstances. So in grace: if we were to feel weak only for an hour or a day, we should not learn our weakness; but if month after month and year after year we have to groan under increasing helplessness, and only occasionally and perhaps at distant seasons get a supply out of the Lord's fulness, by this experience we learn our weakness, as a man sunk into want learns the experience of poverty by an increasing load of debt.

IV.—But is there no further fruit to be gathered from this tree?

Yes! The apostle tells us, as we proposed to consider in our last place, what the *effect* was of the Lord's words upon his heart—a holy acquiescence in the Lord's dealings, and, even beyond this, *a glorying in his very infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him*. I have thought sometimes that one of the greatest marks of grace in the soul, and one of the highest points to which a saint can rise in this life, is the experience which the apostle here describes as the fruit of Christ's strength being made perfect in his weakness. But, mark this, Paul does not glory in his sins. There is a race of men that glory in their iniquities, as if the more a man could sin in defiance of all laws, human and divine, the more manly were his actions. The apostle did not glory in his sins, but in his *infirmities*. The two things are widely different. What, then, are infirmities as distinguished from sins? Why, the weakness of which I have been speaking is an infirmity and yet not a sin; at least, not in the same way or to the same extent as actual transgression. If I cannot raise up in my soul any lively actings of faith in the Lord; if I cannot cast forth the anchor of hope, so as to enter manifestly within the veil; if I cannot love the Lord and his people as I would, these are my infirmities. Thus, when David feared that God's "mercy was clean gone for ever," he adds, "and I said this was my infirmity." (Psl. 77:10.) This infirmity of soul resembles that "spirit of infirmity" in body wherewith Satan had bound the poor woman in the gospel for eighteen years, so that "she could in no wise lift up herself." These are "the infirmities" which the Spirit helps in prayer (Rom. 8:26), and with the feeling of which our gracious High Priest is touched. These infirmities have indeed in them the nature of sin, as being the sad inheritance of the fall; but they are not wilful transgressions. Weakness is not wickedness; Jacob halting on his thigh is not Esau despising his birthright.

Nor did the apostle glory in his infirmities, as infirmities, but he gloried in them because the power of Christ rested upon him, and so endued him with strength to overcome them. He could not glory in a thorn in the flesh as a thorn, or in the pain caused thereby, or in the messenger of Satan as a messenger of Satan, or in the cruel blows which he gave him; he could not glory even

in his weakness as manifested in his helplessness to remove the thorn, or to drive away the messenger. But he could and did glory in his infirmities, as made a means of drawing strength out of Christ into his soul; for so precious was this strength, as experimentally realised, that he could glory in those very infirmities as a means whereby it was communicated. Whatever makes the Lord experimentally known is precious, come through what channel it may. Now, as we realise in this way our weakness, and find the Lord making his strength perfect in it, we gladly and heartily put the crown of glory upon his head.

But, besides this, a felt experience of our infirmities brings us into what I may perhaps call a continual *contact* with the Lord of life and glory; for our weakness, as inwardly felt, is ever bringing us to the throne of grace as needy suppliants that we may receive daily supplies. It is our weakness and the Lord's strength, our need and his supply, our trials and his support under them, that keep up communion with the Lord. If day by day I could pray, or preach, or write, or perform spiritual acts in my own strength without the Lord working by his power in my soul, what should I want the Lord for? I could do without him; he would be nothing to me. But if I cannot preach, or pray, or write, or believe, or hope, or love, or bring forth any gracious fruit, except the Lord is pleased to communicate of his grace to my heart, a sense of this brings my soul more or less day by day into contact with him that I may get supplies of strength and power out of him. If I can live independent of him, I shall do so. We all dearly love independence: it is the very blood that circulates in all our veins. It used to be my motto in days of old, for I was too proud to be dependent upon anybody for anything. But grace teaches us what we never should learn from nature. Grace has taught me to be dependent, to be nothing, to be full of infirmities; and as I feel these things, it leads me to the Lord that he would make his strength perfect in my weakness, that he would teach me in my ignorance, reveal his atoning blood and dying love to me in my guilt and shame, that privately and publicly, with my pen and with my tongue, in the pulpit and in my house, before the church and in the world, I may find his power resting upon me. Now as

these things work in our souls, they bring us into living contact with a living Lord, open up a way of communication between his strength and our weakness, his mercy and our misery, his power and our helplessness. I can tell you how you live day by day, though I may neither see you nor speak to you. If you have no thorn in the flesh; if you have no messenger of Satan to buffet you; if you have no trials or temptations, you have no communications of the Lord's love and mercy, grace and strength to your soul. You may read your Bible, and fall upon you knees with all regularity, but there is no communication out of the fulness of Christ to your heart. But if, on the other hand, you are tried and tempted, distressed and exercised, have a daily thorn, and a messenger of Satan, and by these means your creature strength is drained away, you want the Lord to come into your soul to give you his grace to strengthen and support you. Thus, these very infirmities and temptations are most blessedly over-ruled for your good and the Lord's glory, by opening up a door of communication between a full Christ and an empty sinner, a gracious and loving Jesus, and a poor, dependent wretch who has nothing and is nothing in himself but sin and misery.

Bless God, then, for your trials; they are the best things that could happen to you. Your very providential trials are so many weights tied round your neck, clogs fastened round your feet to keep you from running in the way of sin; the very temptations you experience are means of emptying and stripping you of Pharisaic pride; the thorn in the flesh and the messenger of Satan are means in God's hands of weakening your strength by the way and convincing you that without Christ you can do nothing They are indeed painful to bear; they are meant to be so; they would not have the right effect unless they were painful. God does not play with us and will not suffer us to play with him. We want sometimes powerful and painful dealings to bring us to our senses, and shake us out of that dream of false security in which thousands are wrapped up, and to shew us sin and self in their true light. When we are tried and exercised by the thorn and by the messenger, how worldly things fade out of sight! What an empty scene this vain world, with all its pleasures and

occupations, is then seen to be! How all here below seems blighted and withered—a vale of tears, a waste, howling wilderness! And as heaven opens with its glory and blessedness, its eternal rest and peace, what a solid reality is found and felt in the grace of Christ, the consolations of the gospel, and the love of God! But would the power and reality of these heavenly blessings be experienced unless there had been first a weakening thorn to drain away all creature strength—that enemy of the cross of Christ? Would Jesus be known in his blood, love, and grace, if there were neither trial nor temptation, infirmity or suffering to make us feel our deep and daily need of him? Thus the apostle could say, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me"—as the pillar and the cloud rested upon the tabernacle; as the divine glory rested upon the mercy seat.

It will be our mercy if we can use his language from any measure of his experience; for as he could glory in his infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him; so shall we just in proportion as we are taught by the same divine Teacher, and have the same faith wrought in our heart by the same power of God.

## THE THREEFOLD OVERTHROW OF SELF

A Sermon Delivered on Lord's Day Morning, June 13, 1841, at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street

"I will overturn, overturn, overturn it; and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." Ezekiel 21:27

Before we enter into the spiritual and experimental meaning of this passage of Holy Writ, it may be desirable to advert for a few minutes to its literal signification, and to the circumstances under which these words were spoken by the Lord through his prophet Ezekiel.

These words were uttered, then, with reference to King Zedekiah, who at that time sat upon the throne of Judah.

Nebuchadnezzar had elevated him to the position which he then occupied; he had made him king, and, in making him king, he had exacted of him a solemn oath in the name of Jehovah, that he would be faithful to him as his sovereign **2Ch 36:13**. Now, this solemn oath, which Zedekiah had taken, he perfidiously broke, and rebelled against his master the king of Babylon, and gave his allegiance to the king of Egypt. It was, then, the breaking of this solemn oath, which he had taken in the name of the Lord, that so provoked the righteous anger of Jehovah against him; and, therefore, in this chapter he says: "And thou profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, thus saith the Lord God, remove the diadem and take off the crown" **Eze 21:25,26**. The Lord here remonstrates with him, and reproaches him for the violation of that solemn oath which he had taken; he calls him a "**profane** wicked prince," because he abode not by the solemn covenant which he had made in his name, agreeably to those words **Eze 17:18,19**,—"Seeing he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, when, lo, he had given his hand, and hath done all

these things, he shall not escape. Therefore thus saith the Lord God, As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head." But the Lord was resolved, not merely to remove this "profane wicked prince" from the throne, but he was determined to overturn the throne itself; not only to pull down this perjured king from the position which he then occupied, but to overthrow the kingdom also of Judah, by a complete overturning of it from its very foundation. And, therefore, when he had said: "And thou profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, thus saith the Lord God, remove the diadem, and take off the crown," he then goes on in the words of the text: "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it; and it shall be no more" **that is, "it shall be no more" as a kingdom—it shall exist no more in its present state,** "until he come whose right it is" **that is the king of Zion, Jesus, the Lord of life and glory;** "and I will give it him;" in other words, there shall be no more a king in Judah—the kingdom shall no longer stand upon its present base; no temporal monarchy shall be there known, until he come whose right it is, and he shall set up his throne, not literally in Jerusalem,—but spiritually in Zion, that kingdom which is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost;" and I with my own hand, "I will give it him."

But having just adverted to the literal signification, we come now, with God's blessing, to the spiritual and experimental meaning of the words; and in so doing, we shall doubtless observe some analogy betwixt the two cases. If there were no analogy, there would be no foundation for the spiritual and experimental interpretation founded upon the passage. If I could trace no resemblance betwixt the cases, all such experimental and spiritual interpretation would be merely fanciful and uncertain; it would be upon a wrong basis, and would stand upon an insecure foundation. And, therefore, I shall endeavour to show, before I enter into the spiritual and experimental meaning of the passage, that there is an analogy betwixt the literal and spiritual interpretation.

The people of Israel were a people of God's own choice, and as such were typical of the elect of God, whom he has chosen in Christ before all worlds. But this people swerved from their allegiance; they rebelled against the statutes and ordinances of God, which he had given them by the mouth of his servant Moses; they said, "Give us a king to judge us, like all the nations," and in demanding a king, the Lord said, by the mouth of Samuel **1Samuel 8:7**, "That they had rejected him that he should not reign over them." This demanding, then, of a king that they might become like other nations was an act of daring rebellion on their parts, whereby they swerved from their allegiance to the "KING of kings and LORD of lords." The Lord, however, suffered them to continue under this kingly government until a certain time, until the reign of Zedekiah, when he overturned and utterly reduced this kingdom which they had set up to wreck and ruin. Is there not here an analogy and a resemblance betwixt the typical Israel and the spiritual Israel? As the typical Israel were chosen nationally that the Lord should be their king, so the spiritual Israel were chosen in Christ before all worlds, that he might reign in them. But as the literal Israel swerved from their allegiance by setting up another king than God, so the elect Israel swerved from their allegiance by falling in Adam; and by becoming subjects of sin and self, fell into a state of rebellion and alienation from God. There is an analogy, then, betwixt the literal kingdom of Israel, and the dominion of sin and self in the hearts of the elect before they are called by sovereign grace. The Lord then says, "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it; and it shall be no more until he come whose right it is," that is, I will make this kingdom of sin and self a heap of ruins; I will reduce it to a wreck; I will overturn it from its foundations, and upon the ruins of this kingdom, I will build up another. "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it; and it shall be no more a kingdom as it was before, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him."

Upon this resemblance, then, I hope, with God's blessing, this morning, to build up a spiritual and experimental interpretation of

the text, and to show, if the Lord enable me, how it applies to the work of grace upon the hearts of God's people.

Now, if we look at the text, without making any formal divisions, we shall find that it consists of two leading branches.

I. The work of overturning which is thrice repeated; and then

II. What takes place in the soul, when the overturning is complete.

"I will overturn, overturn, overturn it;" **that** is one branch of the Spirit's work. "Until he come whose right it is;" **there** is another branch of the Spirit's teaching in the soul, making Christ experimentally and spiritually known.

I. The most striking feature in these words is, that the Lord repeats three times the expression, "I will overturn it." It may indeed be said with respect to this repetition of the words three times, that it may signify the positiveness and certainty of God's determination.

Just in the same manner as, in the vision of Peter, we read, "This was done **thrice**, and the vessel was received up again into heaven," in order to show the certainty of the vision—to make more clear and manifest what was the will and purpose of God. And so, perhaps, the circumstance of the expression being repeated three times, "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it," may be intended to convey with greater authority the certainty of it—that God by solemnly declaring it three times over, expresses thereby the positiveness of it in his own mind. But still I believe, if we come to look at it in a closer point of view, and trace it out according to the teachings of God the Holy Ghost in the hearts of God's people, we shall find that it is literally true,—that the repetition of it three times does not merely intend to express the certainty of God's overthrow of self in the soul, but that there are three distinct occasions—three clear, positive, and direct overturnings of self, and bringing it into utter ruin, in order to the

setting up of Christ in his glory and beauty upon the wreck and ruins of the creature. And it is remarkable that there were three distinct overturnings of the kingdom of Judah, and a carrying of them into captivity three different times, as well as three distinct restorations; the **first** was the overthrow of Jehoiakim in the fourth year of his reign, the **second** that of Jehoiachin in the eighth year of his reign, and the **third** and last that of King Zedekiah, which the Lord here denounces by the mouth of his prophet, **2Ki 24:1,2 2Ki 24:12 2Ki 25:5,6**

Then what is the first overturning which takes place in the heart, when God the Holy Ghost begins the work of grace there? Where does the Spirit of God find us? He finds us, as the apostle speaks, "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us, because of the blindness of our hearts;" he finds us "dead in trespasses and sins," by nature the "children of wrath even as others;" he finds us under the dominion of sin in some of those various shapes which sin assumes. Then, in order to the setting up of the kingdom of God in the soul, there must be an overthrow of the rule and reign of sin. Just as in the vision which Daniel saw, the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, smote the image upon his feet, and brake in pieces, not only the feet of iron and of clay, but all the other component parts of that image, the gold and the silver and the brass, and was set up upon the wreck and ruins of that image; so the kingdom of God is founded upon the wreck and ruin of self. There is no alliance betwixt unhumiliated self and Christ, no more than there is concord between Christ and Belial. Christ never enters into confederacy so as to go halves with the creature, or takes self into partnership; he erects his blessed kingdom of righteousness and peace upon the wreck and ruin of self, and all the strength, wisdom, and righteousness of man must become, as it is said in Daniel, "like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors," before the kingdom of God is blessedly revealed in the heart, and there made experimentally known.

1. The first prominent feature of self is in some cases **profane** self; that is, many of God's elect, before they are called by the blessed Spirit, are living in open profanity, in drunkenness,

swearing, adultery, and the barefaced practice of notorious sins. But whenever the Spirit of God begins to work in the heart, he overturns profane self, that is, he brings such solemn convictions into the conscience—he shoots such arrows from the bow of God into the soul, that self in its profane shape is overcome and overthrown thereby. And there is every reason to doubt, whether God has begun a work of grace upon that man's heart, in whose conscience the arrows of conviction have not been lodged, so as to cut the sinews, and let out the life-blood of profane self. If a man, professing the doctrines of grace, can live in any known sin, and without pangs of conscience and anguish of spirit before God, there is every reason to believe that the Spirit of God has never set up his court of judgment in that man's breast. If profane self has never been arraigned at that bar—has never been condemned and imprisoned, there is no reason to believe, that the Spirit of God has come as the Spirit of judgment, and the Spirit of burning into that man's heart.

But there are others of God's elect, who, when he takes them in hand, are not wallowing in profane and open wickedness, and yet are living under the dominion of sin in other shapes—people who are what is called moral outwardly, but who are immoral inwardly; people who are not given up to the excesses of open riot, but are still living under the dominion of sin in other forms; who with a fair demeanour externally are still "alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance and blindness of their heart;" who are under the reign and rule of self; who have no fear of God before their eyes, no spiritual sense of his heart-searching presence, and no desire to know and believe in, worship or love him. Now, these people need just as much that self should be overturned in its moral shape in them, as that self should be overturned in its immoral shape in the others. So long as God is barred out of the heart, it matters little, as far as salvation is concerned, whether a man is living in profaneness or in what is called morality. There is no life in that man's soul, no spiritual work, nothing in him of a heavenly birth so as to bring him into any acquaintance with God. Self still reigns and rules, and all the stronger from its very morality. It must, therefore, be cast down

and overturned from its throne, and become a wreck and a ruin before God.

Well, but what is the instrument—the strong and powerful lever which the Holy Ghost applies to overthrow self in its profane shape, and self in its moral shape? The spirituality of the law in the conscience, the discovery of God's holiness in the soul, the manifestation of his strict justice, and the bringing into the heart a sense of his unblemished purity. Now, the bare letter of the law cannot overthrow self, either immoral self or moral self; but the spirituality of God's law, the coming of the commandment with power, the solemn revelation of the wrath of God against all sin and transgression—this, in the hands of the Spirit is an effectual lever, to overthrow self in its moral shape as well as in its immoral shape, and bring it in to wreck and ruin before God,—that is to say, it exists, but it exists in ruins. The word "overturn" is applicable to a building which is overthrown by some stroke of lightning, or by some violent concussion, as the shock of an earthquake. It is overturned, not removed; not one stone is taken away, but the building lies in ruins. So with respect to sinful self; it is overthrown from its lofty position, hurled down from its standing; the building is no longer a complete edifice as before; it does not retain its former proportions; it is no longer a temple with distinct apartments, shrines, and altars, an abode swept and garnished for Satan; but though no one stone is removed utterly away, yet there remaineth not one stone upon another which is not thrown down. The difference between the building now, and the building then, is that **that** is now a ruin—a heap of confused rubbish—which formerly was a complete edifice.

Here, then, is a soul which stands overturned before God; a wreck and ruin before "the eyes of him with whom we have to do." But what will a man do when he is reduced to these circumstances? Why, he will begin to build, and will endeavour to set up a temple in which he believes God will take pleasure, of which he may approve, and which shall, in some measure, recommend him to Jehovah's favour. That is the immediate feeling of every convinced sinner whose profaneness lies as a

load of guilt on his conscience, and which has fallen into a heap of ruins before God. His object is to do something to blunt the edge of convictions in his conscience, to gain the favour of Jehovah, and to escape "the wrath to come." Now, usually, I believe, men take different roads according to the measure of light in their judgment. Where a man has never sat under the truth—where he has never heard of Christ's righteousness and salvation through the propitiation of the Son of God, his immediate recourse is to the law of works, that he, by strict obedience to its demands, may work out a righteousness which shall satisfy and please God. But where a man has had his judgment in some measure enlightened; where,—for instance, he has sat under truth, and heard of the blood of Christ as the only propitiation for sin, and of Christ's righteousness as the only way whereby he can stand justified before God, he seems in a manner cut off from the law of works, as having this conviction in his mind, "I can never make up a righteousness by the law of works, and, therefore, to flee to it for refuge will be utterly ineffectual." He adopts another course, which is to set up what is called **holiness**. When I was convinced of sin, and "brought in guilty before God," I had too much light in my judgment to fly to the Mosaic covenant of works. My judgment being well informed, I knew very well that legal righteousness could not stand me in any stead before God as a way of acceptance. My recourse was rather to turn the Gospel into law, and procure what is called holiness; not to go to the law of Moses for righteousness, but to the Gospel for holiness; not to try to obey the commandments in the Old Testament, but to seek to fulfil the precepts of the New; and by making myself spiritually-minded, by reading the Scriptures and prayer, to clothe myself in the character given in the New Testament of a Christian. This is indeed the worst of legality, for it is perverting the Gospel into law; but still it seems a different path from running to the Mosaic law of works for salvation. The man, then, whose judgment is in some measure informed, will try hard, perhaps, to make himself holy, to be spiritually-minded, to fix his affections upon God, to renounce everything which is contrary to the Word of God as spoken by the mouth of Christ, and thus to seek in some way to make himself a Christian, and then to obtain

access to God by that Christianity. This is what Romaine calls somewhere, "self-righteousness new christened holiness." Here he is, then, embarked upon this course, to become holy and spiritually-minded, to serve God, to obey his precepts, to read his Word, to join his people, to come out from the world, and with the utmost power and strongest bent of his soul, to become a Christian indeed.

2. Now, there must be as much an overturning of this self-righteousness, whether in its strictly legal shape, or "new christened holiness," as there must be an overturning of a man's profanity. The object of the overturning is to overthrow self—self setting itself up in opposition to Christ. And, therefore, be it profane self, it must be overturned; or be it righteous self, it must be overturned; or be it holy self, it must be overturned. Self in all its shapes, forms, and guises, must be overturned and brought to a heap of ruins, that Christ may be exalted wholly and solely upon the ruins of self. A **second** overturning, then, is necessary, an overthrow of righteous or holy self. And what is the Lord's lever to overturn this second temple, built out of the ruins of the first, but not "the place of big rest," as being still the work of men's hands? A spiritual discovery of the deep pollution of our hearts and natures before him. Profanity is overturned by the application of the law with power to the conscience; but this false holiness, this mock spirituality, is overturned by the discovery to our consciences of the deep pollution that lurks in our carnal minds; this is more or less the breaking up of "the fountains of the deep," and discovering with power to the conscience the truth of those words: "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." As we try, then, to be holy, sin rises up from the depths of our carnal mind, and overturns that fabric which we are seeking to erect. Every thought now appears polluted with sin—every word in some way tainted with corruption—every action infected with evil, so that we fall down before God with self-abhorrence and self-loathing, and feel that there is not a word in our mouth, or an action in our hands, with which sin is not intermixed, which inward iniquity has not defiled, and for which, therefore, we do not feel condemned and self-abhorred

before God. Here, then, is a man who stands before God, not merely with profane self a heap of ruins, but also with righteous self and holy self a heap of ruins too. But when profane self, righteous self, and holy self, have been thus overthrown, the doctrines of grace as made known by the Spirit now become sweet and suitable. Having no holiness in self, Christ's sanctification becomes meditated upon finding nothing in self to please God with, the blood of the atonement becomes opened up as a doctrine which is sweet and suitable to our case; being destitute of creature-righteousness, Christ's glorious righteousness shines in the Scriptures as a truth which just fits in with our condition. The Spirit, then, brings home the doctrine of election with some power to the heart and some sweetness to the conscience; he shows the soul in some faint measure the blood of the atonement, and as he sprinkles it upon the conscience, a taste of his mercy is blessedly experienced. He brings Christ's righteousness near, and as the soul gets a sight of that righteousness by the eye of faith, it rests therein, and feels a sweet satisfaction in that righteousness, and utterly discards its own.

3. And now let us trace a little what course self will steer. Why, this restless wretch now runs in another channel, which is to slight the solemn inward teaching of God, and to take hold of the doctrines of grace by the hand of nature, without waiting to have these heavenly truths applied, from time to time, by the mouth of God to our hearts. And as some sweetness has been felt in them, there seems to be some warrant for so doing. But presumption creeps upon us in such imperceptible and subtle ways, that we scarcely know we are in that delusive path before we find a precipice at the end of the road. And what has led us there? Our pride and ambition, which are not satisfied with being nothing, with occupying the place where God puts us, and being in that posture where he himself sets us down. We must needs grasp at something beyond God's special teachings in the soul; we must needs exalt our stature beyond the height which God himself has given us, adding a cubit to our dwarfish proportions.

Here, then, is the **third** form of self which is to be overturned, as much as the two preceding forms, and that is **presumptuous** self, so that we have self in its three bearings: first, profane self; secondly, righteous self; and thirdly, presumptuous self. Profane self was self in ignorance of the doctrines of grace at all; righteous self was self in ignorance of these doctrines as spiritually made known to the heart; and presumptuous self is self which after the soul had tasted some measure of these doctrines, and had felt something of their sweetness and their power, secretly and imperceptibly thrust it beyond its real standing into a carnal resting upon them. Well, then, self in all its three forms—self in profanity, self in self-righteousness, and self in presumption—must be overturned in a man, that he may be a wreck before God and a heap of ruins, so that one stone shall not stand upon another; the former proportions and harmony of the building lost and gone; the proud columns which supported it fallen; and roof and walls mingled together undistinguished amidst heaps of rubbish, because the Lord "has stretched over it the line of confusion and the stones of emptiness."

II. But we come now to the second part of the text, which is, the setting up of the kingdom of God on the ruins of self. "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it; and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him."

There is one, then, to come, "whose right it is;" there is a king who has a right to the throne, and to the allegiance of his subjects; a right to all that they are and to all that they have. But whence has he gained this right? "Until he come whose **right** it is." It is his right then, first, by original **donation** and **gift**, the Father having given to the Son all the elect. "Here am I," says Jesus, "and the children that thou **hast given me**." "All that the **Father giveth** me shall come to me." Then, so far as we are his, Jesus has a right to our persons; and in having a right to our persons, he has, by the same original donation of God the Father, a right to our hearts and affections. But he has another right, and that is by **purchase** and **redemption**, he having redeemed his people with his own blood—having laid down his life for them,

and thus bought and purchased them, and so established a right to them by the full and complete price which he himself paid down upon the cross for them. This twofold right he exercises every time that he lays a solemn claim to any one of the people whom he has purchased. And this claim he lays when the blessed Spirit comes into the soul to arrest and apprehend a vessel of mercy, and bring it to his feet, that he may be enthroned as King and Lord in its affections. For be it remembered, that the possession of the heart, with all its affections, is his right; and "his glory he will not give to another," his property he will not allow to pass into other hands; he is not satisfied with merely having a right to the persons of his dear people, he must have their hearts; and in exercising his right to their affections, he will reign and rule supreme, allowing no rival, admitting no cooperation with self in any shape or form, but he himself to be established as King and Lord there. Then where is the soul before he comes into it in power, in sweetness, in beauty, in preciousness? What and where is it? A heap of ruins. And no man ever knew much of the preciousness of Christ, whose soul was not a heap of ruins, and in whom self had not been overturned and cast to the ground. Nay; no man ever ardently panted that the Lord of life and glory should visit his heart with his salvation, should come in the power of his resurrection, in the glory of his righteousness, in the preciousness of his presence—no man ever spiritually desired, sighed, cried, groaned, sued, and begged for the manifestation of Christ to his soul, who was not a ruined wretch before God, and in whom self had not been overturned so as to be a desolate heap, so overthrown that all the power of man could not put any one stone in its place, or rebuild the former edifice.

"Until **he come** whose right it is." Then there is a coming of Jesus into the souls of his people; not a coming into their judgments to inform their heads; not a coming into their minds merely to enable them to speak with their tongues concerning him; but there is a solemn coming of Christ, with power and glory and grace and majesty into the souls and consciences of his elect family, whereby he sets up his kingdom upon its basis, erects a

temple for himself, and builds up his own throne of mercy and truth upon the ruins of self. He does not take the stones of this fallen edifice, and set them up one upon another; nor does he allow profane self to stretch forth its hand, and set the pillars of the original temple in their places; nor does he suffer righteous self to reconstruct the ruined building; nor does he admit presumption to play the architect; but he comes himself into the soul and erects his own blessed kingdom of "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost," upon the wreck and ruin of self in all its forms, shapes, and bearings.

But this is not a work which is once done, and needs no more repetition. Though there are three solemn overturnings, more or less, in a man's heart and conscience, we are not to suppose, that when these three solemn overturnings have taken place, that there is no more overturning work to be done—that Christ comes into the heart in his beauty and glory, and then there is no more pickaxe or spade or lever to be employed. For we must bear in mind, that this wreck and ruin of self is not a heap of dead stones. Self is a **living** principle; not a slaughtered and buried rebel, but a breathing antagonist to the Lord of life and glory. Self will ever work, then, against his supreme authority, and will ever rebel against his sovereign dominion. And therefore, though on three special occasions, and though in three distinct senses, most of us, who know anything of the work of grace, have experienced these three overturnings, yet if we look into our hearts, we shall find that day by day we need this overturning work to be done afresh, and again and again repeated in us. For instance, sometimes profane and sinful self stretches forth its hand to put together these stones which the application of God's law cast down, seeking to erect that temple again, and to put into that temple those images of jealousy, which God looks upon with abhorrence. Who of us (**with shame be it spoken**), who of us has not secretly been indulging in trains of evil thoughts? Who has not been laying, in some manner, plans of sin? Who has not been feeding upon this vile garbage? Who has not felt the love of sin in the carnal mind manifesting it in the secret cravings after it? And if God's grace did not powerfully work in the conscience,

who of us would not have fallen headlong into some of those snares and gins and traps, by which we should have disgraced ourselves and the church to which we belong? But there is also righteous self and holy self, which are putting forth their hands again to erect this temple. Have we not endeavoured in some measure, to make ourselves spiritual and holy before God, and work ourselves up into a religious frame, which shall be acceptable in his sight, and so recommend ourselves to his favour; feeling as though now we were pleasing him, and putting ourselves into a fitting posture to receive tokens of mercy from him? Well, then, no sooner does our self-righteous heart put forth its hand to set up this false holiness, this meek spirituality, than the Lord has to take his lever, and overturn holy self in our hearts now, as he overthrew holy self in our hearts before. And who, again, of us, that knows anything of his own heart and the workings of his own fallen nature, does not know, that presumptuous self is continually putting forth its hand to touch the ark, and is often intruding itself into the presence of God, without the Lord himself calling us there by his Spirit, laying hold of things which God himself has not sweetly and powerfully revealed, trusting in doctrines and hanging upon truths of which the power is not, at that moment, sweetly and experimentally felt? Do we not continually trace the workings of that presumption which puts forth its hand again to set up that building which God's grace has cast down? Now, just in proportion as self, in its various forms, sets up its idols against the Lord of life and glory, just so does the Lord fulfil his own solemn denunciation: "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it." Does profane self work? The Lord overturns profane self by cutting us up with sharp convictions, by breaking the snares in which we were entangled, by opening to us the evil of the things in which we were indulging, or which withdrew us from our proper dependence on him. Thus he overthrows profane self. Again, when holy—mock holy self would, as it were, seek in some way to set up its own holiness and its own righteousness, against Christ's holiness and Christ's righteousness, is there not some deep discovery of our fallen nature, some sense of our pollution before God, some solemn feeling of the dreadful state of our

corrupt hearts before him, which, when experimentally felt our consciences, overthrows this mock holy self; and makes us "abhor ourselves in dust and ashes?" When, again, presumptuous self comes forth from its secret cave, pushing us beyond our real standing, and seeking to draw us away from an experimental knowledge of the truth, is there not some secret pang of conscience, some inward shrinking of soul, some painful conviction that we are treading upon forbidden ground, some awe and reverence of God's heart-searching presence, so that, with all the presumption that lurks in our carnal minds, there is a groaning prayer to him, that he would not allow this base corruption of our hearts to work up to offend him and to grieve us?

Well, then, as the Lord keeps overturning self in its various shapes and bearing, he builds up Christ upon the wreck and ruin of self. Does a man see all his worldly plans frustrated? Does he find that the world can give him no pleasure? Does he feel that he "cannot do the thing that he would," and that all his purposes and schemes and contrivances are broken, so that he "cannot find his hands?" When thus convinced, he falls down a guilty sinner before God, abhorring himself on account of the workings of his base heart, the Lord will sometimes drop into his soul some sense of reconciliation, some tokens of forgiving love, some drops of atoning blood, and thus draw forth his affections, and Christ becomes exceeding precious. And so again, when mock holy self and all creature righteousness is utterly disclaimed, there will be at times some sweet apprehension of Christ's glorious righteousness and sanctification, so that the soul is glad that self should be abased, and that Christ should be exalted upon its ruins. And so when cursed presumption is checked in the heart, and we are brought to confess it before God, and to abhor ourselves for it, does not the Lord bedew the soul sometimes with a sense of his mercy, in not cutting us off on account of those daring acts of rebellion against him, but meekens our spirits and leads us to the foot of the cross, desiring to feel the sweet manifestation of Christ's presence, the application of his atoning blood, and to rejoice in him and in him alone? But wherever self

rises up as a rebel against Christ, be it self in profaneness, self in mock holiness, or self in presumption, there is no sweet appearance of Christ, no humbling sense of mercy, no lying at his feet, no dew of the Spirit's favour in the heart. And thus, it is only when the soul is broken down and overturned and overthrown, that Christ, in a measure, to each according to his faith and the depth of manifestation, becomes sweetly and abidingly precious.

But again, the Lord will overturn everything which is against the kingdom and reign of Christ in the heart, as, for instance, whatever plan we undertake which would in any way set up self. There are many worldly plans that a man undertakes; and what is the real object of them? It is, in some measure, to be independent of God's providence; it is, in some way, to seek gratification and ease for the flesh; or to get out of a painful, self-denying, and distressing path. Well, whatever plan we endeavour to bring about which is contrary to God's purpose, and which is contrary to the exaltation of Christ in our hearts—that plan must be overturned. The Lord himself will bring it to nought; the Lord himself will make it a heap of ruins before our eyes; and the Lord himself, in his own time, will show us why he has reduced it to wreck and ruin. Because, had the plan succeeded, had the purpose of our hearts prospered, the glory of Christ in us would have been obscured, and we should not have been reduced to those circumstances to which Christ is adapted, and in which he is made experimentally known.

So again, if we chalk out a path in religion, wherein we shall attempt to walk, perhaps, to make ourselves wise in the letter, to stand upon the doctrines of grace without feeling their power, to rest upon the good opinion of ministers, to stand in other people's experience, to lean upon any vain delusive prop, or to rest upon any other foundation than "Christ in the heart, the hope of glory"—whatever plan or device it be that we are seeking to set up, it will be overthrown: "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it," saith the Lord; and overturned, overturned it shall be, if it be inconsistent with God's appointment, if it be not compatible with the manifestation of Christ to the heart. Yes, everything, take it a

worldly shape or a religious shape, everything of every kind and form that is contrary to the decrees of God, and contrary to the manifestation of Christ's glory in our hearts, shall be sooner or later made a heap of ruins before our eyes; that "the rich man may not glory in his riches, nor the wise man glory in his wisdom," but that "he that glorieth may glory in the Lord," that Christ may be all in all in us, and all in all for us, and that we may have nothing in self wherein to boast and whereon to rest, but that all our salvation and all we spiritually are and have, may come from, and centre in him.

"He shall come whose right it is." If we are his, he has a right to our hearts. Is a husband satisfied with merely possessing the person of his wife? It is her heart and affections that he wants. What is the wife's person without the wife's love? So the Lord of life and glory does not merely want the persons of his people. It is their hearts and affections that he claims; it is there that he sets up himself; it is to them that he establishes his right. Therefore every idol must go down, sooner or later, because the idol draws away the affections of the soul from Christ. Everything that is loved in opposition to God must sooner or later be taken away, that the Lord Jesus may be worshipped alone; everything which exacts the allegiance of the soul must be overthrown, so that he may come whose right it is.

"I will give it him." I will put him into full possession of it; for "he must reign until he shall put all enemies under his feet." "He shall sit upon his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both." "I will give it him." It is no matter of creature choice, it is not a thing which may be or may not be, but it rests upon God's eternal appointment. "I will **give** it him." He shall have the heart and affections, but in having the heart and affection, he shall have it wholly, solely, and undividedly—he shall have it entirely for himself, he shall reign and rule supreme. Now, here comes the conflict and the struggle. Self says, "I will have a part." Self wants to be honoured, admired, set up, bowed down to; self wants to indulge in and gratify its desires; self wants, in some way, to erect its throne in opposition to the Lord of life and

glory. But he says, "No—I most reign supreme." Whatever it be that stands up in opposition to him, down it must go. Just as Dagon fell down before the ark, so self must fall down before Christ. In every shape, in every form, whatever subtle guise self wears, down it must come to a wreck and ruin before the King of Zion. Then if we are continually building up self, there will be a continual overthrowing of self; if we are setting up images of jealousy, there shall be a casting of them down; if we are continually hewing out "cisterns that can hold no water," there will be a continual dashing to pieces of these cisterns. If we think highly of our knowledge, we must be reduced to perfect folly; if we are confident of our strength, we must be reduced to perfect weakness; if we highly esteem our attainments, we must be brought to doubt whether they are spiritual and Divine. If we, in any measure, rest upon the power of the creature, the power of the creature must be overthrown, so that we shall stand weak before God, unable to lift up a finger to deliver our souls from going down into the pit. In this way does the Lord teach his people the lesson, that Christ must be all in all. They learn, not in the way of speculation, nor in the way of dry doctrine,—not from the mouth of others, but they learn these lessons in painful soul-experience. And every living soul that is sighing and longing after a manifestation of Christ and desiring to have him enthroned in the heart, every such soul will know, sooner or later, an utter overthrow of self, a thorough prostration of this idol, a complete breaking to pieces of this beloved image, that the desire of the righteous may be granted, and that Christ may reign and rule as King and Lord in him and over him, setting up his blessed kingdom there, and winning to himself every affection of the renewed heart.

"Until he come whose **right** it is." Is it not his right? Has he not established it? Has he not in some measure won our hearts to submit to it? Are there not moments, friends, are there not some few and fleeting moments when the desire of our souls is, that Christ should be our Lord and God; when we are willing that he should have every affection, that every rebellious thought should be subdued and brought into obedience to the cross of Christ,

that every plan should be frustrated which is not for the glory of God and our soul's spiritual profit? Are there not seasons in our experience when we can lay down our souls before God, and say "Let Christ be precious to my soul, let him come with power to my heart, let him set up his throne as Lord and King, and let self be nothing before him?" Well, we utter these prayers in sincerity and simplicity, we desire these prayers to be fulfilled; but oh, the struggle! the conflict! when God answers these petitions. When our plans are frustrated, what a rebellion works up in the carnal mind! When self is cast down, what a rising up of the fretful, peevish impatience of the creature! When the Lord does answer our prayers, and strips off all false confidence; when he does remove our rotten props, and dash to pieces our broken cisterns, what a storm—what a conflict takes place in the soul! Angry with the Lord for doing the very work we have asked him to do, rebelling against him for being so kind as to answer those petitions that we have offered up, and ready to fume and fret against the very teaching, for which we have supplicated him with many desires. Be he is not to be moved; he will take his own way. "I will overturn," let the creature say what it will; "I will overturn," let the creature think what it will. Down it shall go to ruin, it shall come to a wreck, it shall be overthrown. My purpose shall be accomplished, and I will fulfill all my pleasure. But I will overturn, not to destroy, not to cast into eternal perdition, but I will overturn the whole building to erect a far more goodly edifice. Self is a rebel who has set up an idolatrous temple, and I will overturn and bring the temple to ruin, for the purpose of manifesting my glory and my salvation, that I may be your Lord and your God.

Then shall we not, with our hearts and minds thank the Lord for the many blessings, in disguise, that he has thus bestowed upon us? Shall we not bow down before his altar and worship at his footstool? If God has overturned our bright prospects, shall we say it was a cruel hand that laid them low? If he has overthrown our worldly plans, shall we say it was an unkind act? If the Lord has reduced our false righteousness to a heap of rubbish, in order that Christ may be embraced as our all in all, shall we say it was

a cruel deed? Is he an unkind father that takes away poison from his child and gives him food? Is she a cruel mother that snatches her boy from the precipice on which it was playing? No. The kindness was manifested in the act of snatching the child from destruction. So if the Lord has broken and overthrown our purposes, it was a kind act; for in so doing he brings us to nothing, that Christ may be embraced as our all in all, that our hearts may echo back, "The right is his, let him exercise it." O Lord, fulfil all thine own promises in our souls, and make us willing to be nothing, that upon the nothingness of self the glory and beauty and preciousness of Christ may be spiritually exalted!

## THE THREE WORKING GRACES

Preached on Lord's Day Morning, October 29th, 1854, at Oakham, Rutland

"Your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope." 1 Thess. 1:3

Ever since the fall, labour has been the appointed lot and necessary condition of man. Without labour, either his own or that of others for him, he cannot procure any one of the necessaries of life. Food, raiment, fuel, shelter, all that maintains life, or makes it endurable, are only procured by the great majority of mankind through incessant industry, manual or mental; nor can we name any one article of daily sustenance or use on which a certain amount of labour has not been expended. But though "to eat bread in the sweat of his face" was a part of the original sentence, yet has the wisdom of God turned that curse into a blessing; for without labour of body and mind, neither the one nor the other can be developed or healthy.

The analogy holds good in grace. Nothing really worth having is obtained in experience except through soul exercise, and especially by the acting of those graces which God implants in the heart. As therefore God has given us hands, that those hands may work; and as He has endowed us with minds, that those minds should be employed, so, in making us partakers of the graces of the Spirit, He assigns a certain work for those graces to perform; and, in proportion to the measure and strength of those graces, will be their spiritual activity.

But of these graces of the Spirit there are three which are pre-eminent in industry and exercise. These are Faith, Hope, and Love, which we may therefore call the three *working* graces; nay more, it is only as they are working graces, and produce fruit springing out of that work, that they can be considered the genuine graces of the Spirit, and wrought in the heart by His

divine power.

In this epistle the Apostle speaks very tenderly and affectionately to the church of God at Thessalonica. "We give thanks to God always for you all," he says, "making mention of you in our prayers." Now, what was it which seemed to kindle and keep alive in his bosom such affectionate feelings towards the church? It was because "he remembered without ceasing their work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and their Father; knowing," he adds, "brethren beloved, your election of God." It was not, then, the mere grace of faith, nor the mere enjoyment of love, nor the mere possession of hope by them, which, in the sweet recollection of days of intercourse gone by, inspired his bosom with such kind and affectionate feelings towards the church at Thessalonica; but it was because their faith made itself manifest in performing a work, their love showed itself in enduring a labour, and their hope displayed itself in bringing forth a patience. And thus, as these goodly fruits visibly and abundantly grew upon these goodly trees, the sweet flowings of love and affection gushed out toward them from the heart of the Apostle, because he knew by these evidences their election of God, the genuineness of their religion, and the certainty of their salvation.

Faith, hope, and love are the three capital graces of the Spirit. They are three sisters, differing from each other in features and complexion, but of the same parentage, age, growth, and stature; and being in the closest spiritual union, they embrace and twine round each other, as the ancient sculptors represented in statuary the three Graces of the heathen mythology. But as they are here represented not as mutually embracing, but separately acting, I shall, with God's blessing, endeavour to open up this morning,

I. *The work of faith.*

II. *The labour of love.*

### III. *The patience of hope.*

And the Lord enable me so to speak to your heart and conscience, that you who possess any measure of these heavenly graces may find in your bosom an internal testimony that you have a faith not destitute of work, a love not without labour, and a hope not devoid of patience.

I. *Faith* leads the van. She is the queen of graces; and is the first grace that God by His blessed Spirit implants in the soul. But you will perhaps say, "Is not godly fear the first grace planted in the soul? for does not the Scripture call it 'the beginning of wisdom?'" True; but answer me this question. Can you fear a God in whom you do not believe? And why do you fear Him, but because you believe in His dread perfections. Fear is the effect of faith; and as the cause precedes the effect, so faith precedes fear. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is." Till we believe that He is, we neither fear nor come to Him.

But faith is the first of graces, not only in precedence, but in pre-eminence, as containing in her bosom all the rest. Thus, where there is faith, there is the presence of every other grace; and similarly where faith is not, there is the absence of all. The soul, then, that has faith, with faith has everything; and the soul that has not faith, in the nonpossession of faith, has nothing. Faith, therefore, leads the van. She, as the queen, takes precedence; and when she enters, she comes in with all her train accompanying her.

But the Apostle here fixes his eye upon, and points his penetrating pen to, "the *work* of faith," to distinguish an active from an inactive, an operative from an inoperative, an industrious from an indolent, a working from an idling, in other words, a living from a dead faith.

i. As this is the grand point, we will now examine, as the Lord may enable, what this "*work* of faith is," that we may try by this searching test what sort of faith we possess; and, to make the

ground clear, we may as well define in what this work consists. "The work of faith," then, we may lay down in a few words, is, to believe the testimony of God. But this is not all; we must add, therefore, another element to our definition, that it is so to believe in it as to hold out and on to it in spite of all opposition that may arise from without or within. But from the strength of sin, the subtlety and power of Satan, and the allurements of the world, this work of faith cannot be carried on, and brought to full, final victory without a terrible conflict; and what is true of faith, is true also of hope and love. Each, then, of these three capital graces has not only its peculiar work to do, but its peculiar opposition to surmount. As we read of the twelve men who played before Abner and Joab, that they caught every one his fellow by the head, each champion selecting his respective adversary, so we may say that faith, hope and love, in the battle-field of the soul, each has its respective adversary. So deadly is the combat between them, that one or the other must fall; and, according to the triumph of the one champion or the other, is the soul saved or lost. If faith prevail, if love abide, if hope hold out, the soul is saved. If faith were to fail, love to die, and hope to perish, the soul would be lost. I speak, you will observe, in the language of supposition; for true faith can no more finally fail than its Author, love than its Creator, and hope than its Sustainer. The Giver must cease to live above before His graces can wither and die below. But though the victory is certain in the end, the conflict will be sharp and long. Thus in the battle-field of the soul, these three champions, faith, hope, and love, come forth clad in the armour of God, and each meets his foe in mortal combat.

ii. We will consider these three separately; and, *first, faith's adversary*. The antagonist of faith is *unbelief* in all its varied forms, sometimes as *infidelity* in the usual sense of the word, and sometimes as *unbelief* in the ordinary acceptance of the term. 1. The first, the grand work of faith is, to believe in God. As the Lord said to His disciples, "Ye believe in God: believe also in Me." And as the Apostle Peter speaks, "Who by Him do believe in God." To believe, then, in God is the first work which faith has to perform.

But you say, "Does not everyone believe in God?" In a certain sense a great many undoubtedly do; but not by a living faith, raised up in their souls by the power of the Holy Ghost. The faith which they possess merely dwells in their natural heart, in their carnal mind; and is not the faith that springs out of the operation of the Spirit of God upon the soul. The faith that springs out of a divine operation has first, then, to believe in God; and one of the first things faith realises is His very being and existence; for, whatever notions dead faith may have concerning the being of a God, it never acts as if He is. Did men really believe in His dread perfections and terrible majesty, they would tremble before Him. As the Lord speaks, "Fear ye not Me? saith the Lord. Will ye not tremble at My presence?" They lack also the mark which the Apostle assigns to true faith. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." As they neither come unto Him, nor diligently seek Him, they evidently lack that faith which does both.

2. But when faith first credits the *existence* of a God, with that credit is connected a belief in the *character* of God as revealed in the Scriptures. For faith does not believe without a divine warrant, and faith's warrant is God's revelation of Himself in the Scriptures of truth. Just as when Abraham believed he should have a son by Sarah, he believed it not from nature's intimations, which were all contrary to such an expectation, but from the special promise given him by God, so faith has for its warrant God's revelation of Himself in the Scriptures of truth, and that revelation being applied with a divine power to the conscience. Thus, in believing in the existence of God, faith does not merely believe the naked, abstract truth that there is a God, the great Creator and Upholder of all things, the Maker of this earth, and of all that is upon it; but faith believes in that Lord God, who has made Himself known in the Scriptures of truth, and speaks in and through them with authority to the soul. Thus faith believes in the justice of God as revealed in His holy law, to which such a terrible curse is appended, and which by its application to the conscience produces such guilt and bondage.

3. So also in believing in God, it believes in His intrinsic and eternal *purity* and *holiness*; and from this view of Him in the reflected light of His infinite majesty is made to see itself a polluted sinner before Him. Feeling that He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity," the sinner, truly convinced of sin, falls into the dust of self-abasement before Him.

4. In believing in God, faith also believes in His *omnipresence*, that His eye and hand extend to the bounds of all creation. "If I ascend up to heaven," it says with the inspired Psalmist, "Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there also." It is, therefore, deeply and inwardly convinced that none can escape out of His hand, and that "all things are naked and open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

5. So living faith has a persuasion of the intrinsic and unalterable *veracity* of God; that what He has said He will surely perform, and that heaven and earth will pass away, but that His word will not pass away. It is, therefore, firmly convinced that God's curses will be as surely executed by Him as His blessings, and that His threatenings are as valid as His promises.

Now, all these things faith credits as they are spiritually revealed unto it; and immediately that faith credits them, it works towards and upon them. This working toward and upon the truth of God distinguishes the active, operative faith of God's elect from that dead faith which never rises higher than a notion or conviction in the natural conscience, lives a gasping life in a vain attempt at amendment, and dies away in a feeble resolve. A man who really believes will act. It is so in nature, it is so in grace. If I firmly believe that a certain event will take place, I act with the expectation of its taking place. If I do not so act, it shows that I do not really believe it.

iii. But faith in performing its appointed work is opposed, as I hinted before, by an inveterate and deadly enemy. This deadly and implacable foe is *unbelief*. This subtle, ever-active principle of our carnal mind is, from its very nature, so opposed to faith, that

it will always work against it; and it would seem as if, whenever faith is drawn out into exercise, there comes forth, naturally and instinctively, this deadly foe to resist it, as being the main guardian of the citadel. Like the lion crouching in his den, or a snake coiled up in his hole, it lies still till trodden upon. Faith manifests the presence and power of unbelief, as the foot of the traveller wakes up the sleeping snake. Perhaps there are some here who never knew what infidelity was, nor that the principle of it was in their hearts, until they possessed faith. Doubts as to God's eternal being and existence, questionings concerning the truth of the Scriptures, the Deity of Christ, the Person of the Holy Ghost, the mystery of the Trinity, and other such sacred points, never crossed their minds till they began to believe. I am persuaded, from what I have felt myself, that many of God's people, in all their lifetime, never experienced one doubt on these points till they possessed the faith of God's elect. Infidelity, indeed, was there before, lying deep in the recesses of the carnal mind; but it was the coming forth of Christ's champion, faith, which provoked the coming forth of the devil's champion, infidelity. As, then, Jesus Christ sets forth faith, that heavenly grace, in the front of the battle, so does Satan summon up infidelity, that subtle spirit, as his champion, and sends him forth, as Goliath of old, to insult and defy the armies of the living God.

iv. But faith does not content itself with merely believing in God. This is only a small part of faith's work, the A B C of faith's alphabet. It has to believe in Jesus Christ. So spake the divine Redeemer: "Ye believe in God; believe also in Me." Some seem to content themselves with merely believing in God; but one quickened by divine power into spiritual life can never rest contented with this first acting of faith in the heart. What? If I have no more faith than that which lays hold of God's justice, majesty, greatness, power, purity, and holiness, will this bring peace to my troubled soul, or speak pardon to my guilty conscience? I must have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, His Person, blood, and righteousness, to bring these blessings into my soul. The work of faith, therefore, is not only to believe in God, so as to fear His great name, and to lay a solid foundation in

the heart for every other grace of the Spirit to rest upon, but to believe especially in Jesus. What was the declaration of the Lord when they said to Him, "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" "This is the work of God," He replied, "that ye believe in Him whom He hath sent."

But here again we find the enemy coming forth. Unbelief starts up to wage deadly war against the faith which believes in Jesus. This is faith's battle; and in overcoming this foe is faith's victory. O how many a living saint is there who wants to believe in Jesus, who longs to trust in His holy name; and yet he cannot, so plagued, so pestered is he by the risings of inward unbelief. He knows that he does not yet so believe in Him as to obtain deliverance, for he has an inward testimony in his conscience that if he believed in the Lord Jesus by the power of the Holy Ghost, it would bring the love of God into his heart, extract the sting of death, and fill him with joy and peace. But as long as he feels condemned by the law and his own guilty conscience, he has an inward testimony that he has not as yet that living faith in Christ which, he is persuaded, would save and deliver him from all his guilty fears and dismal apprehensions. Therefore he labours after this special, this peculiar faith in the Lord Jesus, that he may attain unto it, or rather that God would, of His infinite mercy, bestow it upon him. Here, then, is the main labour of faith, to believe in Jesus Christ so as to obtain pardon, peace, and deliverance. Many a poor soul is labouring hard at this work, yet with a deep and increasing conviction that it is a work which he cannot perform except by the immediate power of God. So powerful an antagonist is unbelief that, with all his attempts, he feels that he cannot subdue it, nor raise up one grain of that true faith whereby Christ is experimentally brought into the heart. But this very struggle plainly shows that there is life within—a work of God on his soul: for, from the movements of His grace, and the opposition of his carnal mind to them, all this conflict proceeds. When, then, in due time, the blessed Spirit brings Christ near to his eyes and heart, reveals Him within, takes of His atoning blood, and sprinkles it on his conscience, brings forth His righteousness, and puts it upon him, and sheds abroad the love

of God, then He raises up that special faith in the Lord Jesus whereby the soul hangs, and, if I may use the expression, hooks itself upon His Person as God-Man, upon His blood as cleansing from all sin, upon His righteousness as perfectly justifying, upon His grace as superabounding over all the aboundings of evil, and upon His dying love as a balmy cordial against all the woes and sorrows by which it is distressed. This is believing in the Son of God; believing in Jesus Christ to be salvation of the soul.

v. Thus far have I been showing what I may call (do not mistake me) a general faith (though in a certain sense special), as opposed to a particular faith. Let me show you, if I can, the difference between the two; and give me your ears for a few minutes, that you may not misunderstand or misconstrue my meaning. The faith that I have been speaking of is the faith that acts on the precious love and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, as raised up by God the blessed Spirit in the soul; and is so far a general faith, not in the usual sense of the word, but as opposed to a particular faith, given in a particular way at a particular season, and for a particular purpose. But the Lord is sometimes pleased to seal home upon the hearts of His people a promise, a special promise, as He did in the case of Abraham, when He promised him a son by Sarah. When this promise was given him, there was no prospect, according to nature, that it would or could be fulfilled. But as God gave to Abraham this particular promise, it was necessary that Abraham should have a particular faith in it, for his general faith was not sufficient—a special promise needing a special faith. Thus we read, when the Lord showed him the stars of heaven, and said to him, "So shall thy seed be," "he believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness." Here is the distinction which I am endeavouring to show—the distinction between the faith which embraces the Lord Jesus Christ, and a particular faith acting on a particular promise. For instance, there may be circumstances of an exceedingly trying nature to you in providence, or there may be some peculiar temptation or particular besetment, some painful trial or heavy affliction, that seems to penetrate into the very depths of your heart. Now, for this, so as to be supported under it, or to be

delivered out of it, you want a particular promise from God's own mouth, because, the trial being peculiar, the deliverance must be peculiar also. A general faith in the blood of Jesus, though living faith, is not directed to that peculiar trial, and therefore can give no deliverance from it.

Do you not now see the distinction between that general faith, which lays hold of Christ's blood, and that particular faith which lays hold of a particular promise? As, then, particular faith comes out to do its particular work, which is to believe that God will fulfil the promise, out rushes forth Satan's champion, *Unbelief*, that deadly foe, to work in a thousand subtle forms against faith in these divine actings. To illustrate this, though it is perhaps rather an analogy than an explanation, we may cast a glance at the way wherein Satan tempted our first parents. "Hath God said," was his subtle inquiry, "ye shall not eat of the fruit of the tree?" But had not God given them a special command that they should not eat of it? Satan, then, takes the solemn command of the Almighty, and seeks thus to overthrow their faith in it—"Hath God said, Thou shalt not do it? Believe me rather. I will show you that you both can and may eat of it, and by so doing you will be as gods." In a similar way does he act with regard to any promise that the Lord may speak to the soul. His language is, "Do not believe God; He will not perform it for you. Besides, the promise that you thought was from God did not come in the right way; and even if it did, the difficulties in the fulfilment of it are insurmountable. Believe me, it is only a delusion, and will prove to be such." Here, then, we want particular faith to meet these powerful suggestions, and in spite of them all to believe the particular promise. Do you not think that Abraham had many a tussle with Satan about the promise that he should have a son by Sarah? Would not Satan be often saying to him, "You and your wife are getting older and older every day. How can you expect Sarah to bear you a child at her time of life?" We see the effect of this temptation in his taking Hagar to wife. But would not the father of the faithful, when he was strong in faith, answer: "Instead of believing you, and giving way to your suggestions, I hang my faith on the firm promise of God, with whom nothing is

impossible?"

II. But though "the work of faith" is a sweet and blessed subject, and embraces a vast deal of experience, I must pass on to speak of "the labour of love." Faith I have described as the queen of graces, leading the van; and she is worthy of the place, well deserving all the dignity of precedence, for as she has the first place in peril, she deserves the first place in rank. But she has a tender, meek, and gentle attendant, following closely in her footsteps, not so forward in advance, because she has not the same work to perform, but more beautiful and comely, because she bears more of the image of God stamped upon her. As I have called faith, then, "the queen," so perhaps I may term "love" the Princess Royal.

Now, as faith is not idle or inoperative, so love is neither inert nor inactive; and just as faith has a work to perform, so love has "a labour" to sustain.

In nature, the very characteristic of love is to work and labour for the beloved object. How do wives show their love to their husbands? By doing all they can for their comfort and happiness. It is not by talking about it, "for the talk of the lips tendeth to penury;" and such love frequently begins and ends in mere talk. How does the mother show her love to her babe? Not by taking it on her knee, or straining it to her bosom, and kissing it as though she would almost devour it. Many a fine lady will do this who will do nothing else for it, but throw upon others the labour of attending to its wants. O how much, without any loud lip-profession, will even true earthly love do and suffer, and inflict upon itself, in order to secure the happiness of the beloved object! It is not otherwise in grace. Wherever there is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, there is, there must be, love to His dear name. The two are inseparable. When faith in Jesus leads the way, love immediately follows; for, directly that faith opens a door for the Lord Jesus Christ to come in, He enters with love in His hands and heart, and sheds it abroad in the soul.

But as faith, immediately it is produced, has a work to perform, so love directly it is shed abroad has "a labour" to execute. What this labour is I will now endeavour to show.

I hinted that each of these graces has its adversary. Faith has for its foe unbelief. What adversary has love to grapple with? O what a desperate antagonist! an antagonist, if possible, more desperate and deadly than unbelief itself. I need not tell you who he is. Yet, as I have to speak of his actions, I will name him. *Enmity* is the name wherewith God has named him. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." Enmity, then, the enmity of the carnal mind, is love's bitter and desperate antagonist. And just as unbelief, urged on by Satan, is his champion to assail and trip up the heels of faith, so enmity, egged on by the same prince of darkness, is the irreconcilable foe of love.

But you say, "I thought when the love of God was shed abroad in the heart it killed enmity." People tell you so; many talk of enmity being "slain," but I never found my enmity killed, dead, nor buried. Have you ever found any one member of your carnal mind destroyed or slain? If there were life and motion after death, our poor soldiers, after the battle of the Alma, need not have been divided into killed and wounded. There was no motion in the killed, after the bullet pierced the heart, and they lay stretched on the plain. So, if your carnal mind were killed, why, it would be entirely dead, and never would stir again. But are there no stirrings of it in your heart? People may talk about their enmity being slain; but if one member of the old man might be killed, so might another, until at last every member were dead, and we perfect in the flesh. It may be, it is, crucified, put off, and mortified. These are Scripture expressions concerning the body of sin and death. But show me a scripture which ever speaks of the old man being slain, utterly slain; or show me the experience of a living soul that ever could or would say it was so with him. Enmity, therefore, against God is no more slain than the carnal mind is slain; for it is the very breath of the carnal mind. But this so staggers God's people, that it is not slain; that after they have experienced the love of God shed abroad in their heart, there

could still be in them deadly enmity against His blessed Majesty, that there should be such horrible risings up of blasphemous, wicked, and rebellious thoughts against the God of all their mercies, against the Lord that died to save them from the wrath to come. That they should have enmity against Him, how it pierces and wounds them! Have you never found any enmity in your mind against God's people, truth, Word, ways, and ordinances? What is all this rising up of enmity against the people of God, His words and ways, holy will and ordinances, but the boiling and bubbling up of that enmity which is the very breath of the carnal mind?

Love, then, has to labour under and against this adversary, and against the coldness and deathliness produced by its workings in the heart. And it has sometimes to come forth into the field to labour for the Lord, weighted and pressed down by this enmity of the carnal mind, that seems at times as though it would almost strangle and suffocate it. There is not a single thing that love prompts us to do or suffer, which the carnal mind will not oppose. Not a sacrifice are you called upon to make, but the carnal mind will start up, and prompt you to indulge in some self-pity or self-indulgence, some movement of the flesh to resist it. All that you try to do to love the Lord, and to show that love to Him by words and actions, will be opposed by this subtle adversary. Against this continued opposition in the carnal mind to all it desires to do and suffer, love is called upon to labour. And here is manifested the strength of the love which dwelleth in the hearts of the saints, that though they have everything in them against which all their better feelings and all their spiritual graces are maintaining a continual struggle, they still hold on and cease not to labour. If you cannot see this plainly and clearly, just take an illustration from some of the varied relationships of life. You love your husband, your wife, your child, or your friend. Yet is there nothing in these tender relationships that very much at times tries your love? but is not the reality and truth of your love proved by your bearing all, and struggling through all, and love eventually proving victorious over all? Who is usually the greatest sufferer to be found? The person who has the tenderest feelings.

What heart suffers the deepest wounds? The heart that knows the deepest love. So it is in grace. The heart that knows most of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ is the one most deeply immersed in His baptism of sufferings. Love mourns over His absence; love shrinks from His frown; love trembles under apprehensions of having incurred His displeasure; love sighs over the daily, hourly backslidings that are continually committed against such rich superabounding love as the Lord has manifested in the garden and on the cross. Love hates the sins that crucified Jesus; love mourns over the waywardness, fretfulness, and rebellion that grieve the Spirit, and over the base returns it makes for all the mercies it has received. Thus the deeper the love of Christ is in your soul, the more you will be a living martyr; the more you will be grieved in your spirit, and the more pain and suffering will you experience from sinning as you do daily and hourly, against so gracious and long-suffering a Lord. But here is "the labour of love" to struggle through all this mud and mire and carnal opposition to the open fountain of His blood, which cleanseth from all sin.

Love, too, has its peculiar *trials*. If you have a dear friend, it may be from that dear friend will come your heaviest blow. If you have a beloved child, it may be from that beloved object your greatest affliction may arise. In a similar way in the things of God, if a man has any divine love shed abroad in his heart, the deeper that love is made known to his soul, the more will he suffer from those trials which are necessarily connected with it.

III. But we pass on to consider our third and last point, "the patience of hope." Has your mind ever been struck by the order in which the apostle puts these three graces? In reading the Scriptures we should deal with them as gold refiners with their gold-dust. They never suffer a single particle to be lost; the very sweepings of the bench and shop are treasured up because there is gold in them. So in reading God's Word, if you seek to be really and solidly edified by it, you must not pass by the least particle. There is "dust of gold" in every word. Just observe, then, the order in which the apostle arranges these three graces. Has it

never struck your mind as somewhat singular that the apostle should put love before hope? The order in which he places these three capital graces is faith first, love next, and hope last. According to most persons' preaching and speaking, hope should come first. Many who can scarcely give you any account of their faith, and a less account still of their love, will speak as though they had a good measure of hope. Scripture, as indited by the pen of the Apostle Paul, puts faith in the van, love in the centre, and hope in the rear. And does there not seem to be a reason for this? Faith leads the van, because her province is to receive the truth of God as the Spirit reveals it to the soul. Love, her meek and beautiful companion, gently follows, because what faith believes, she delights in and entertains with her warmest affections. Hope brings up the rear, as expecting and patiently waiting for the performance of those divine realities which it is given to faith to believe and to love to enjoy. Thus hope brings up the rear, because she is a waiting grace, and has to endure the attacks that may be made upon her and her companions.

Thus as faith has "a work" to perform, and love "a labour" to endure, so hope has "a patience" to manifest. The word "patience" here does not mean patience in the usual sense of the word, that is, contentment and resignation to the will of God. It means here "endurance," which is the usual Scriptural sense of the word. It is so used in Rom. 5: "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience" (that is, endurance of tribulation), "and patience experience, and experience hope." And also by James, where he speaks of "the patience of Job," by which he means Job's endurance under his trials, and coming out triumphantly of them all. And is not endurance a noble characteristic of the Christian warrior? Endurance, something that will last, is what we want in almost everything. If we build a house, we seek to build it of durable materials. If we choose a dress, we ask if it will wear; if we form an intimacy with a friend, we inwardly inquire, "Will it last? Will he prove firm and faithful?" And especially if we have a religion, we are led to search whether that religion will hold out and endure unto the end. Thus hope, as being the grace which lives in

expectation of what God has to bestow, needs, as its sustaining quality, endurance to the end.

But who is hope's adversary? I have shown you the adversary of faith. I have described to you the foe of love. Now, who is the desperate enemy of hope? It is DESPAIR. These are Satan's three leading champions. Unbelief, Enmity, and Despair. Against the last of these hope has to struggle; and how does it come off in this deadly combat? By patience, that is, endurance, by hanging on God's faithfulness, and never giving way or giving up, but clinging firm and fast even to the end. Look at a soldier. Take him into the field of battle. What quality is it which will enable him to gain the day? Is it mere strength or courage? No; another quality is wanted, endurance. Without adverting to carnal things further than to throw a light upon the subject, what quality was it in our soldiers which won the late victory at the Alma, which cost so much bloodshed? It was won by what, in common language, is called "pluck," that is, endurance. They would not let themselves be beaten; they would die on the field sooner than retreat or give way. The grand characteristic of the English soldier is—that he endures that iron storm under which most others shrink. This makes him what he is—his country's champion, and so dreaded by her enemies. So in the Christian soldier, the grand quality is endurance, and that he may possess this, the Holy Spirit inspires his breast with hope. We are therefore said to be "saved by hope." How can hope save us? It saves us as the rear-guard may be said to save an army, by never giving way, but enduring to the last. Faith in you is sometimes very low, and you almost fear whether you possess a grain; love too seems so sunk into the very bottom of your heart that its very presence there is scarcely felt. But is hope gone? Are you sunk into despair? Do you abandon your profession? Do you forsake a throne of grace? Do you neglect assembling with the saints in the house of God? Is there not that expectation in your soul which still struggles on, maintaining its foothold, and clinging on to the last? How David thus encourages his soul: "Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him." This, then, is the reason why the apostle puts hope last. He guards the rear. Look how well this valiant soldier fights,

and thus preserves the whole army from ruin. He is not active, like faith in the van; nor labouring, like love in the centre, but endures assault after assault in the rear. Have you not been tempted sometimes almost to despair? And what has held you up but hope?

One who was a greater and more deeply-experienced saint than you, once said of himself, "We despaired even of life." If, then, Paul was so brought down in his soul as at times to despair even of life, need you be surprised if you should at times sink as low? These despairing feelings arise from a variety of causes. Sometimes they are produced by the assaults of Satan; sometimes by the hidings of God's face; sometimes by guilt on the conscience through a sense of the backslidings of your heart, lip, and life. In one or other of these ways, despair sometimes gets great head in the soul; and choking work it is with a saint when this gigantic foe gets his arms round him. But hope, like the British soldier, is never conquered—never gives way. Here is called into action "the patience (or endurance) of hope." By this heaven-sent quality it endures, fights, struggles, never gives way, but hopes against hope, even to the end. It is this "patience," or "endurance" of hope, which God crowns with victory. Look at Abraham's case. It is said of him that "against hope he believed in hope." Why? Because he was "strong in faith, giving glory to God." His hope in the fulfilment of God's promise did not give way; and God crowned Abraham's faith with fulfilment, and rewarded Abraham's hope with enjoyment, when he held the infant Isaac in his arms, or viewed him smiling in Sarah's lap.

Now, if you have these three graces of the Spirit in your soul, you will have some measure of the experience which I have been endeavouring this morning to trace out. Your faith will have a work; your love will have a labour; and your hope will have a patience. It is by the fruit growing on their boughs that the trees are proved to be of God's right-hand planting. A faith without work, a love without labour, and a hope without patience—God does not own. It has no place in God's Word, and no place in the

hearts of God's people. It is a dead faith, a nominal love, and a fallacious hope, springing like the rush and the flag out of the mire and water.

If you have these three graces, with their conflicts and their victories, I may say to you what the apostle said to the Thessalonian church in the words following our text: "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." Here is a proof of your being the elect of God—a faith that works, a love that labours, and a hope that endures. These are graces of the blessed Spirit, and will certainly end in glory, for their happy possessors are the elect of God; and such will find their faith end in sight, their hope in enjoyment, and their love not end, but be crowned with everlasting bliss.

## **THE TILLAGE OF THE POOR**

Preached at Trinity Chapel, Trinity Street, Southwark, on Thursday Evening, July 26, 1849

"Much food is in the tillage of the poor; but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment." Proverbs 13:23

The Proverbs of Solomon contain an admirable code of moral instruction; and happy that man would be who could shape his life according to that divine code. But this we know no man can or will do, except so far as grace enables him. We can scarcely have a more vivid instance of this than the very author of the Proverbs himself. Where can we find a greater discrepancy between principles and practice than the case of Solomon affords? What! after all his warnings to beware of strange women, to be entangled in his old age, and through them to become an idolater!

But, besides this moral instruction, which I may call the upper stratum of the Proverbs, there is a deep mine of spiritual wisdom beneath. The top stratum, the surface soil, lies open to all; it requires no divine light, it needs no heavenly teaching to see what is above; but to see the deep wisdom which coucheth beneath, and to know experimentally the treasures of grace and truth that are stored below, this requires divine light to see, and divine life to feel. What is told of the fabled Midas is true of the child of God; whatever he touches by the hand of faith he turns into gold. The simplest moral instruction when touched by the hand of faith becomes a mine of spiritual wisdom.

"Much food is in the tillage of the poor; but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment."

It will be necessary, before I enter into the spiritual and experimental meaning of these words, to explain their literal import; for this forms as it were the setting to the diamond, the

ground-work on which the spiritual instruction is to be based. Only so far as we have a clear and definite view of the moral instruction enforced thereby, have we a clear and definite view of the spiritual instruction couched in it. I shall, therefore, with God's help and blessing, endeavour,

I.—To explain the **moral** and **literal** instruction contained in our text. And,

II.—To build upon that, as my ground-work, its **spiritual** interpretation.

I.—"Much food is in the tillage of the poor." Here we have the case of a man naturally poor described; his cultivation of the soil as to his main object and purpose. It is as though it ran thus: Here is a poor man, with a patch of ground allotted to him. What is his object in tilling that ground? It is that he may procure food. The rich man has his parks and pleasure-grounds; he may ornament his beds and borders with shrubs and flowers; food is not his object; he can purchase that in the market. But the poor labourer must till his patch of ground: for out of that patch food is to come for his wife and family. He cannot afford any place for flowers and ornamental shrubs; he must devote every inch of his ground to one sole purpose, that of food; and he must employ all his care and industry to obtain out of it as much food as he possibly can.

And yet with all his industry, all his care, and all his attention, "there is that which is destroyed for want of judgment." He may not possess agricultural skill; he may overcrop his ground; he may not use sufficient or proper manure; or "from want of judgment," his wife or family may waste the food which the ground produces. For "want of judgment," therefore in the cultivator, or in the cultivator's family, "there is that is destroyed;" and thus, with all the labour and industry expended on this patch of ground, the result is not what might have been expected from one who has food for his object; "there is that is destroyed for the want of judgment." This seems to me to be the

**literal** meaning of the passage; and this is the ground-work upon which I shall build, as the Lord may enable me, a **spiritual** and **experimental** interpretation.

II.—Looking, then, to the **spiritual** and **experimental** interpretation of these words, we may divide our subject into two heads, corresponding with the two clauses before us. "Much food is in the tillage of the poor; but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment."

By the "poor" we must understand the needy, naked, and destitute child of God; that character which is so often spoken of in God's word, and to which such promises are made as this, "Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." When John's disciples were sent to the Lord, and a testimony of his mission was required, this was given among the marks and proofs that he was sent of God: "To the poor the gospel is preached." "I am poor and needy" was the language of the Psalmist of old; and such will be the language of every truly God-taught soul.

But how comes a man into this state? What brings him into this condition? How is this character written on his soul? Was he always so? It is with him, as with many poor persons literally; he has known richer days; he was once in opulent circumstances. Like the Laodicean church, he could once say, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." But the work of grace coming into his soul, divine light shining into his heart, and divine life entering his conscience, have stripped him of all this fancied opulence, and reduced him to the very depth of poverty and necessity. But what flows from this? The same thing spiritually that follows naturally: he is now **in want of food**.

You will observe that **this** was the first characteristic of the returning prodigal; he "began to be in want." It was famine that sent him home. Whilst he had "a riotous living," the bread in his father's house never occurred to his mind; but when he had spent all that he had, and a mighty famine arose in the land, he "began

to be in want;" and when he began to be in want, the food which was in his father's house came to his mind; and by that he was driven and drawn home.

Thus, the grand object of the poor spiritually is **food**—food for the soul; and until we are reduced to a state of spiritual poverty, spiritual food we shall not want. I may compare a mere professor of religion, without the life of God or the power of the Spirit, to the opulent landlord to whom I was alluding. The rich nobleman had his parks and pleasure grounds, his greenhouses and his hothouses, and beautiful flowers in every direction; his object is ornamental, not food. And so, what the carnal professor of the truth, without the life of God and the power of the Spirit, seeks, is ornament. Nay, how many preachers there are who cultivate flowers, and make the pulpit an ornamental garden, instead of setting before the people food—the blood, obedience, and love of the Lord Jesus Christ. It may be all very beautiful and ornamental, but it is not what a hungry soul wants. It may do for those who have not been reduced to poverty; but the spiritually poor want food, not ornament; bread, not a stone; the finest of wheat, not a greenhouse or a grotto. But we read, "Much food is in the **tillage** of the poor;" and therefore, we pass on to consider.

What is implied by the expression, "**tillage?**" By "**tillage**" I understand two things; first, what! may call **passive** tillage; and **secondly, active** tillage.

**First.** Look at the child of God as **passive** in the work of grace; as we read, "Ye are God's husbandry" **1Co 3:9**; he is the field in which the Lord works; the ground which the Lord cultivates; the garden out of which the Lord causes food to grow. Thus, he is "God's husbandry;" and in this sense we consider him as tillage **passively**. God's work in the soul, in our text is likened unto the process of husbandry. "Much food is in the tillage of the poor;" the heart of the poor being the spot which God tills and cultivates. Now, until the heart be tilled and cultivated, there is no real food; but by tilling the heart, food is produced.

1. For instance, in the first dealings of God with the soul, there is a **breaking up** of the clods that are spread over the ground, a ploughing up of the hard soil. "Break up," we read, "your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns" **Jer 4:3**. This is needful to form a seed-bed for the word of God to take root in. When the Lord is thus pleased to plough up the heart with conviction: to break it up; to soften and moisten it with the showers and dews of his grace, he thus prepares, so to speak, a bed, a tilth, for his word to take root in, to bear a blade upwards, and eventually to ripen into food; for his object is, to bring forth food—that what may be done in the soul may become food for the soul. Thus as the Lord keeps tilling the soul, and cultivating it by his divine hand, he is bringing forth food in it and for it.

2. Thus, every **admonition** that God drops into the soul becomes food for it. It is not food for others. You may admonish and you may warn ungodly men, but they pay no attention to your admonition; they harden their neck against all advice. But when God tills the poor, he drops the word of admonition into his conscience; and it then becomes food for his soul; it is treasured up in his heart; it brings forth some solid profit there; it is not neglected, it is not rejected, not put aside; but it becomes an abiding word that guides and leads him. "Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom."

3. So, again, **reproof**. We read that "a reproof entereth more into a wise man than a hundred stripes into a fool" **Pr 17:10**. You may reprove a man who is walking in a wrong or forbidden path, but it will have no effect upon him, except God is pleased to bless that reproof to his conscience. But when the Lord is pleased to apply his reproofs to the heart, and speak them into the conscience, there is food produced. "To the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet:" and if the reproofs of God fall into a sinner's conscience, they produce food, afford matter for meditation, bring tears to the eye, and cause contrition and grief to be felt in the heart. Thus the very reproofs of God bring forth food that the soul finds to be profitable, and which it feeds upon when brought home by the power of the Spirit.

4. So with the **promises**. What is a promise to a man except he be in a state to receive it? Promises of a pardon only suit the guilty; promises of mercy only suit the criminal; promises of restoration only suit the backslider; promises of superabounding grace only suit him who knows that sin has abounded in him. The promise must have a seed-bed wherein to lie; and that is, the heart that God tills and cultivates by his own hand. And thus the promises, as received into a broken heart and contrite spirit, afford food; they are thought upon; they bring sweet and blessed peace into the soul; they melt the heart with a sense of God's unceasing goodness and mercy; make our affections spiritual; lift us up out of trouble; bring us away from the world; and subdue the power of sin.

Thus, there is food in all these divine things; aye, **much** food; for in the tillage of the poor, as the Lord keeps tilling the heart, no little food is brought forth. The soul really under God's tillage finds fruit in well-nigh every incident; in the leadings of providence, as well as in those passages of Scripture that God brings home to the heart; yea, every incident in life, more or less, brings forth food to him. And why? Because he is poor; and his object is food. He wants something whereby his hungry soul can be fed; his tried mind relieved; his cast-down soul encouraged; in a word, he wants something of God's own giving, that he may feed upon the bread of life.

5. And for such a person **the bread of life**, the Lord Jesus Christ, is adapted. We therefore read of "Christ in you the hope of glory" **Col 1:27**. This is our food. "My flesh," he says, "is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" **Joh 6:55**. But this food is not in the letter of truth; it is felt in the openings up and discovery of his love and mercy to the soul, as received into our heart spiritually, just as the bread whereby we celebrate him is received into our mouth naturally. "To the poor the gospel is preached" and Christ is only precious to such. He is suitable to them, and they are suitable to him; he loves them, and they love him: they hunger and thirst after his flesh and blood, and he

feeds them with the bread of life. And thus, there is "much food in the tillage of the poor"—this food being, in different ways, Christ.

But all the various ways, whereby God carries on his process of tillage are but for one purpose—the bringing forth of food. It is so literally. How many implements do we find devised by skilful men for the process of agriculture! But the ploughs, the scarifiers, and the clod crushers are all for one purpose, the cheaper and easier production of food. When the skilful mechanic is devising some instrument of agriculture, his object is to produce food cheaply and easily; he has no other view; this is his sole aim. And so it is with the various tillings of the poor by the hand of God. His dealings in providence, in family afflictions, in soul trouble—his admonitions, reproofs and promises are all so many instruments of divine husbandry whereby he tills the heart; and for this sole aim and object, to bring forth food for the "poor and needy."

Hitherto we have viewed the poor under divine cultivation as a **passive** object of God's tillage: but we may now view him, **secondly**, as an **active** instrument in carrying on the tillage. Let me explain my meaning. While we are passive in the hand of God, we are also working with God. Observe the distinction which the Apostle makes; speaking of himself as he takes an active position; "We are labourers together with God;" yet, he adds, "Ye are God's husbandry: ye are God's building" **1Co 3:9**; the objects and subjects of God's cultivating hand.

So we may say of this poor man; he is the object of God's operations; and thus far he is passive; but so far as he works with God, by God working in him, he is active. This is not establishing freewill; this is not giving glory to the creature; for if we "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," still "it is God who worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure." If we do anything, it is from God working in us. When he works in, then we work out.

The poor man in the text, then, tills as the Lord tills him. And as the Lord works in his soul to will and to do, so he also works out those things that God works in him. I will explain my meaning more clearly by mentioning definite instances.

1. A certain **providence** has happened to you; it may have been a very cross providence. You may have lost a large sum of money; you may be reduced in worldly circumstances; you may have had a very trying affliction in your family. Now, these must be viewed by the eye of a believer as the tillage of God; the Lord meaning by these providential circumstances to till and cultivate his heart for his spiritual good; to set before him food on which he may feed for many days. Now, as the Lord gives him faith to look at this providence, he tills it; that is, the deeper he digs into the providence the more he sees the hand of God in it.

When the providence first came; when the first heavy bill became due; when the sickness first seized the child or the beloved partner, the hand of God could not be seen. We could not till the providence; we wanted wisdom and strength to do so; but after a time, as the Lord begins to till us with this providential circumstance, to open our hearts to instruction, and to give us to see his hand therein—as the Lord works thus in our souls, we begin to till it too; we dig into it, turn it up, and ask, 'Why did this come? What is it to do? What purpose does it serve?' And, as faith works, we say, 'Here is the hand of God: I was getting into a very covetous, worldly spirit; but this providential circumstance has taken place, and brought me off from that speculative pursuit or that covetous spirit in which I was indulging. There was my partner, child, or substance, on which I was idolatrously fixing my affections. When the stroke came, I could not see the hand of God in it; it cut me very deeply; I could not see then that God was tilling my heart thereby, and bringing food to my soul out of the affliction; but now I can see it; I know it was for my profit, and it has done me good.' This is tilling the providence.

2. So again, with the **admonition** of God's word. You have been walking in some crooked path; but an admonition has dropped

into your conscience, perhaps from the pulpit, through some book, by some conversation, or some passage of Scripture applied to your heart. It has cut you deeply. You cannot see at first why and whence it is, but it works in you, and secretly stirs up the spirit of prayer in your soul; it takes you to the footstool of mercy, and causes much exercise of mind. Now you begin to till this, to dig into it, and to say, 'How thankful I am that the Lord did admonish me.' I might have gone I know not where; but he was pleased to admonish me through that conversation, through reading that book, or through that sermon; and through this admonition I have been brought off that path in which I was walking.

3. Or, there has been a **reproof**, and by that the Lord tilled your conscience. It was very trying; but you have put your spade into it, dug it up, and begun to till it; you now see that the reproof was from the hand of God; and you feel how good it was to be reproved. You now say, 'I might have hardened my neck, and perished without remedy; but now I have learnt instruction, am able to see and confess my sin and to forsake it; and by this reproof I have obtained good. It has been food to my soul.' This is tilling it.

4. So again, some **promise** the Lord may apply to our heart. At first, faith may be very weak; we can scarcely receive it; it does not come with that sweetness and power that we want; it is almost too great for us; but still it works. It is bringing forth food. God by it is tilling the heart. But now we begin to till it ourselves, to dig into this promise; and as it is tilled, food begins to spring out of it; and that food is sweet to our taste.

5. So the **Lord Jesus Christ as the bread of life**, is brought into the heart with a divine power. The Lord having tilled the soul by afflictions and convictions, brings into it the bread of life, and makes the Lord Jesus Christ very dear and precious. Now, as he is made thus precious to the soul, there is a tilling of him, a ploughing deeply into this rich soil of wisdom and truth, a digging as it were into the Person of Christ, an opening up of his glory

and beauty, an entering into the treasure of his atoning blood, into the suitability of his covenant offices, and into the perfection of his obedience and righteousness. And the more these things are dug into, tilled, and cultivated, and the more they are opened up, the more food is brought into the soul out of them.

"Much food is in the tillage of the poor." Others overlook these things; their hearts are not tilled by the hand of God; and thus they do not till the precious things of God which are brought forth in the heart of his children. All their religion is mere surface work; there is no breaking up of the fallow ground; it is all sowing among thorns, which spring up and choke the word; so that no fruit is brought forth to perfection.

Will you let me, with all affection and simplicity, attempt to try your state and condition by this test? It is good to have our state and condition brought to the test of God's word. What is your soul deeply intent upon, then, when you come to hear, or read the word of God, or take up any book written upon the things of God, or when you are upon your knees before God in secret? What is the great aim of your soul in these things, so far as you are led and taught spiritually? Is it **food**? Who has come here this evening, crying, 'Lord, let it be thy gracious pleasure to give me a smile; I want something, Lord, to feed my soul; let it please thee to cast a light upon my case; to bring some portion of thy precious word to my heart; to clear up my doubts and perplexities; to reveal Christ in me; to shed abroad thy love in my soul; and to feed me with the bread of life?'

This too is what all the servants of God should seek after—to bring forth food for the people of God. And this they will do just in proportion as God tills their hearts. As he tills their heart by afflictions, trials, and exercises, and by corresponding blessings and mercies, they will bring forth food; for recollect, "Much food is in the tillage of the poor." There is to be "seed to the sower," as well as "bread to the eater;" and the minister who is the sower must not only have bread for himself; he must have seed also put into his seed-basket for the benefit of others.

As he, then, is tilled in his own soul, he will till the souls of the people: he will sometimes bring out the plough, and instrumentally plough up the heart with convictions; he will sometimes take the hoe or the spade, and hoe up the weeds of pride, self-righteousness, and covetousness which overspread the soil. In various ways, as the Lord may enable him, will he be tilling the consciences of the people, and thus food will be produced: they will feel a divine power accompanying the word and applying it to their hearts; and thus it will become food to their souls.

But we pass on to consider our **second** point, which is, "There is much that is destroyed for want of judgment." We should hardly think that the poor would commit this waste. You that are in business do not like to see waste in your shop; you that are really industrious and frugal, and have an eye to your temporal concerns, will take care there should be as little waste as possible; waste there must be, but you make as little as you can. Should we not think, then, that the poor would take special care that there might not be waste in his department? Yes; he may take care. But we do not read, 'There is that is destroyed for want of **care**;' it is "the want of **judgment**" that occasions the loss. He may be very careful; but if he lack judgment, the waste will go on.

'How do you apply this spiritually?' it may be asked. I will endeavour to shew.

There are various ways in which waste is produced—in which food is "destroyed for want of judgment." But, bear in mind when the Lord speaks of food being "destroyed for want of judgment," he means it only so in a figurative sense. For instance; we read in **1Co 3:17**; "If any man defile" **or, as it is in the margin,** destroy "the temple of God, him shall God destroy." Again, "Destroy not with thy meat thy brother, for whom Christ died" **Ro 14:15** . It might be asked, 'Can the temple of God be destroyed? Can the brother for whom Christ died perish, and be destroyed by

my eating meat? Can the purchase of the blood of Christ perish because I touch unclean food?' No one who knows anything of divine truth can admit such a position for a moment. We must, therefore, explain the words in accordance with the analogy of faith. The food, then, is not really but seemingly destroyed. As to its present use, peace, and comfort it is destroyed; but there is no real destruction of it. Just as the temple of God is not destroyed, but defiled, tarnished, and its beauty marred; or, as the weak brother is not destroyed in body and soul, but though his person is not injured, his comfort and enjoyment are destroyed: so with the food in our text, "There is that is destroyed for want of judgment;" not eternally; but the comfort, the sweetness, and the enjoyment of it may be and often are "destroyed for want of judgment."

1. Now this "want of judgment" may be seen in a case of this kind. Here is a man who perhaps once has been a flourishing professor, who thought, as Hart speaks of himself, 'to make himself a Christian by doctrine;' and was so beguiled by his flesh-pleasing delusion, that he thought if he received the truth in his judgment it was the same thing as embracing truth with his heart. The Lord has a purpose of mercy and love to that man; he shall not perish in this delusion; therefore to bring about these purposes of mercy and love, he reduces him to spiritual poverty and ploughs up his conscience by the plough-share of his holy law. But "for want of judgment" he cannot take a spiritual view of his own case; he does not know what God is doing to him; he feels convictions, dismal apprehensions and heart-sinkings; but does not know that God by these things is tilling his heart to bring forth food; and therefore, it is destroyed "for want of judgment." The comfort that he might take, the blessedness in store, the real profit couched in these dealings of God with him, as to the faith and hope of his soul, are "destroyed for want of judgment" upon his own case.

2. Again, the Lord may be **admonishing** another. Some friend may have seen him walking in a perverse, inconsistent path, may have gone to him in brotherly love, and said, 'I think, my friend,

this is not a right step you are taking; this is not agreeable to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.' But this admonition may not be well received; though it may touch his conscience, it may stir up bitter feelings in his mind. Thus for "want of judgment," he not seeing what good this admonition is to bring about, is "destroyed," and the food that might have come out of it is put away; and, as far as regards the individual, seems for a time wasted and lost.

3. Or, there may be a laying of him upon a **bed of affliction**. Now when thus laid there, his mind perhaps is filled with rebellion. He may be a minister; he may have been, as he thought, useful to the church of God; he may have had an affectionate church, and a large congregation; and the Lord may have blessed the word from time to time in an especial manner from his lips to the people. But he is laid aside by sickness; he can preach no longer; his heart may now rise in rebellion against God, and say 'Why is it that I am laid aside? I see other ministers healthy and strong, who only preach confusion and error; why should I, who have been made a blessing, and endeavour to preach the truth, be laid aside?' I say, carnal reason and rebellion may work thus in his mind. And thus, much good that might have been done to his soul, and food administered by the affliction, may be "destroyed for want of judgment."

But during the illness, perhaps, the Lord may be teaching this minister, and leading him deeper into his vile self, and higher into the mystery of redeeming love; so that when he comes forth he may be more blessed in his work, and of greater usefulness than before? And yet, "for want of judgment" the food that might have been drawn from this affliction is, for a time "destroyed," nor does he receive the comfort and benefit of it, because he could not pass a right judgment upon his own case.

4. So it may be with a **promise** from God's word. We may be in a state to which a promise is very suitable; but because it does not come with all the power and sweetness we think it ought to come with, we put it away, and say, 'This cannot be from God.' And yet

the promise was from God; for it was suitable to our case; and though it might not take the burden wholly away, it brought a measure of sweet relief. Now here again food is "destroyed," and we lose the sweetness of it "for want of judgment."

5. So there may be a believer who has had **sweet views of the Lord Jesus Christ**, had blessed manifestations of his goodness and love, received him into his heart, and yet because his experience was not exactly the same with Huntington's, or Hart's, or something of a very extraordinary nature, doubts and fears rise up in his mind whether it was a real manifestation of Christ to his soul; so that he puts it away, and does not take out of it all the sweetness and blessedness belonging to it. Here again is another instance of food "destroyed for want of judgment."

6. So as regards the **convictions** that God implants in the conscience; the discoveries that he gives us of the evils of our heart; the acquaintance with the pride, the hypocrisy, the self-righteousness, the carnality, and wickedness of our fallen nature that he furnishes us with—there is real food in these things. And why? Because through them we are made to look out of ourselves unto the Lord Jesus Christ, as able to save us unto the uttermost from every corruption of our fallen nature. Yet it is put away "for want of judgment." We say, 'This cannot be the teaching of the Spirit; the Spirit exalts the Lord Jesus Christ; the Spirit makes him precious to the soul. If he were giving me sweet views of his blood and love, I might believe it was the Spirit's teaching; but to have such a daily conflict with the evils of my heart, and to see myself so internally vile, can this be the teaching of the Spirit?' Thus it is "destroyed," or put away, for "want of judgment."

With respect to the poor man literally, I intimated that the food to be produced from his patch of ground might be "destroyed" not only by his own want of skill, but after it is raised by his industry, it might be wasted by his wife or children; and in each case from "want of judgment." The wife may not be a good manager: or she may not keep a strict watch upon the children: and they may throw the food about, as we know children will do. And thus, "for

want of judgment" in the poor, either of the husband or wife, good food might be destroyed. So it is spiritually. It is not only a man's own want of judgment that destroys spiritual food; it is often the want of judgment **in others**. Let us apply this.

**i Ministers** for example, need a good sound judgment not to destroy food in the hearts of their hearers, whether publicly or privately. For instance, a child of God may come to a minister in private, and tell him his case; but he may not be able to enter into it. Perhaps this child of God may be tempted in a way that the minister himself was never tempted in; or he may be passing through an experience that the minister himself is unacquainted with; and "for want of judgment" he may be making the miserable man more miserable still; he may not pour that healing balm into his wounds which he requires. There may have been much food in the tillage of this poor man's heart; but the minister may cut at it publicly, or trample it under foot privately, and thus destroy food "for want of judgment."

**ii** But again, another man may **come before a church** with a real blessed work of grace upon his soul. But there may be a "want of judgment" in the deacons or members of the church; they may not be able to see the work of grace clearly in the man's soul; yet it shall be clear, and perhaps a deeper work than they themselves ever knew. But they may "for want of judgment" put him back, treat him even as a hypocrite, wound his conscience, grieve his spirit, and thus destroy food "for want of judgment."

**iii** It may be so also with **our professed friends**. We may have told them our temptations, and they themselves not having been exercised thereby, instead of affording us any comfort, they may turn our temptations into transgressions, and our conflicts into persecutions; and thus, where we hoped to find food, it is "destroyed for want of judgment."

**iv** Or, we may have consulted a spiritual friend about a **particular leading in providence**; and he "for want of

judgment" to see the leadings of God may, as far as in him lies, destroy the food which we might have received from this providential leading.

Thus whatever food there may be in the tillage of the poor **and the Lord says there is "much food in the tillage of the poor"**, too often there is that is "destroyed for want of judgment."

But is it really destroyed? May we not fancy such a case as this? A poor man, with great industry raises a crop of wheat; it is reaped; but in the reaping or carrying there is a part wasted. The wheat he has been carefully gathering to take to the miller to make bread of, is by negligence spilt upon the soil. But is it lost? No. It may spring up, and bear a crop—though, as far as man can see, it is utterly wasted and destroyed. Or take another view. There is nothing that is really destroyed. Science tells us there is not a single particle of matter destroyed, but that every particle is as perfect now as it was in the day of creation; it assumes various forms; but it is not destroyed, being incorporated into some other body. Thus, the very smoke that curls up out of our chimneys forms food for the leaves on the trees; the very manure cast out into the street serves to fertilize the fields, and become corn.

So spiritually. There is nothing really destroyed. If I have not received from the affliction, the admonition, the reproof, the promise, all the blessings which are in it, and might reasonably have flowed from it into my soul, is it therefore destroyed? No: it assumes another shape, it is turned into another channel, it becomes food in another way. I learn lessons thereby.

If any **convictions** are cutting me up, and I cannot see the hand of God in them, I may get this food from them—they may keep me from such things again. If I have not reaped from an **admonition** all the instruction that is contained therein, it may serve me this purpose, not to walk in that path from which the admonition warned me. If I have not got from the **promise** all

the sweetness that promise contained; if it be destroyed for want of judgment, that promise may come again, and the loss I may have thus sustained from unbelievably putting that promise away, may make me more careful not to put it away again. If I have **told** my friend my temptation, and my friend has betrayed my confidence, and thus destroyed that food for want of judgment, it may teach me not to commit my secrets into the ear of a friend too rashly again. If I have not derived from the **affliction** all the benefits that might have been derived from it, I have learnt this lesson from it, that only grace can make affliction profitable. Thus, there is no food absolutely destroyed; it may appear so for a time, but it comes out in another shape: it becomes food in another form.

Yet the "want of judgment," as far as man is concerned, remains the same. Though God overrules the evil and brings good out of it, the "want of judgment" in man is the same; the sin lies at his door. The murder of Abel only delivered his soul from the sins and miseries of the world; but the sin of Cain was the same. The stones that mangled the body of Stephen, the first martyr, fell from the hands of the wicked murderers; though they only sent his soul to soar more speedily upon the wings of love into the mansions of the blest. So, if food be "destroyed for want of judgment," let the guilt and shame fall upon the creature; for it is God's prerogative to bring good out of evil, and from all things get to himself glory.

## THE TILLAGE OF THE POOR

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham September 13th, 1846

"Much food is in the tillage of the poor: but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment." Proverbs 13:23

The Proverbs of Solomon contain literal instruction as well as spiritual; and the one is usually made the foundation and basis of the other. For instance, in the words before us there is literal truth as well as experimental; and the experimental truth strictly coincides with and is based upon the literal. Solomon is here speaking of the "tillage of the poor," and says there is "much food" in it; thus contrasting the tillage of the poor with that of the rich. His meaning literally is this: when the poor man tills his patch of ground it is chiefly to obtain food therefrom, for his pressing necessities compel him to cultivate the soil to obtain bread for himself and his family. But often "for want of judgment," as not knowing exactly how to till the land to the best advantage, much is destroyed. For instance, he may lack agricultural knowledge; he may try to raise crops that exhaust the land; he may not know what manures to employ suitable to the soil. In a word, there may be many reasons why, though a poor man till the ground for the very purpose of obtaining food for himself and family, "there is that is destroyed for want of judgment," and he does not reap the full benefit of his garden or allotment. This is the *literal* meaning, which all may understand without having the fear and grace of God in his heart.

But coinciding with and based upon the literal meaning, we shall find, if the Lord enable, a spiritual and experimental meaning and it is to this that I shall, with God's blessing, confine myself this morning, endeavouring to show the meaning of the Holy Ghost,

I. First, in the words, "*The tillage of the poor.*"

II. And, secondly, how "*There is that is destroyed for want of*

*judgment."*

I. By the "*poor*," we are to understand here God's needy family, those who are poor in spirit. These come under the Lord's blessing: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mat.5:3). This spiritual poverty no man possesses by nature. But like the Laodicean church, he thinks himself "rich and increased in goods," and has "need of nothing." But when God teaches him that he is "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev.3:17), then he is brought to feel himself really poor; that is, completely empty, perfectly destitute of all that deserves the name of riches. For he now learns that in God's account nothing deserves the name of riches but that which makes a soul rich for eternity, the treasures that are in Christ for the poor and needy; and that he who is not possessed of these riches, in God's sight is nothing, and has nothing but poverty and rags. As, then, the Lord the Spirit works upon a sinner's conscience, he opens up to him his evil heart, shows him his transgressions which have exceeded, lays bare the depths of iniquity that are in his corrupt nature, discovers to him what God requires in his holy law; and thus makes him feel how completely empty and destitute he is by nature of all good. Now, when a man is brought to see himself a poor, vile, lost, undone wretch, having nothing, and being nothing but a mass of filth and corruption, completely destitute of everything that God can look down upon with acceptance, he comes under the expression in the text, he is a poor man spiritually. He is now brought down; he is effectually laid low; he is made to feel real poverty of spirit before God.

We read in the text that there is "much food in the *tillage* of the poor." In other words, in the spiritual tillage of the poor man whom I have been describing, there is much food of a heavenly nature. Let us with God's blessing enter a little minutely into this spiritual tillage, and show the much food there is in it.

I. What is the first process? Is it not to rake up all those weeds that have so deformed man's nature? Just as the natural earth is covered with weeds after harvest, and these must be all rooted

up and put into heaps to be burnt, so it must be in "the tillage of the poor." I was walking in a field near Oakham yesterday, and I could but observe how they were with a light plough loosening and gathering the weeds and stubble together, and laying them into heaps to be burnt. How needful this same process seems to be with respect to the work of grace on a sinner's heart. How needful it seems that all the crops of sin which his corrupt nature has borne, should be gathered up and burnt. And not merely the rank weeds, but even the very flowers that we see in the cornfields, the great staring marigold as well as the pretty, blue-eyed forget-me-not, all are raked together with the thistles and couch grass, and put into one heap, and burnt together in one confused mass. So it is with respect to the weeds and flowers that grow in man's heart by nature. All the weeds of his bad deeds, and all the flowers of his good deeds, must be raked alike together, and set on fire, so as to reduce them to ashes.

Now, when this process is going on, and the blessed Spirit is thus raking up together the weeds and flowers that man's heart bears by nature, and burning them before his eyes, he does not see there is much food in this tillage. And yet it is a necessary, an indispensable preparation for the after crop. Is it not true that unless there be this raking together of our sins and iniquities, and rooting up with them of the pretty flowers of nature that some are so much pleased with, there can be no room for that seed to be sown out of which the only true spiritual harvest can come?

2. But after they have rooted up and raked together in some measure the weeds and flowers that covered the ground, there is another process to be gone through. The earth has not yet been pierced; the plough has not yet cut through the soil. So in this "tillage of the poor," it is necessary that the plough of God's holy law should pass through a sinner's conscience. The first work of the Spirit was to root up and gather together, and burn the outward sins that grew more barefacedly on the soil.

But there is another process necessary in order that the seed may have a bed to lie in. The plough must pierce the soil pretty

deeply. You know that in nature the mere scraping of the surface will not root up the couch grass that takes such a deep and firm hold. So spiritually. It is not the work of the Spirit merely to discover and cut up open sin, producing an outward reformation. There must be something deeper than this. The ploughshare of God's holy law must pass into a sinner's conscience, root up the sin that lies so deeply in man's heart, and bring to light (as the plough share does literally) the deep corruptions that lurk beneath the soil. And just as the natural ploughshare turns up that deep soil which before was hidden from view, and brings to light all that before was concealed beneath; so when God's holy law enters into and breaks up a man's conscience, it discovers the secret roots of sin which before lay hid, and upturns him so that he lies naked and open before the eyes of him with whom he has to do. And just as the natural eye, when the plough has done its work, can look upon the upturned soil which before was hidden from view; so man's heart now lies bare in all its hideousness and deformity. This work is absolutely necessary for bread to come out of the soil; and indeed a person cannot in any other way obtain it. No one approves of casting precious seed on the unploughed soil; no one thinks of casting pure grain on the land that has not yet been cleared of the weeds that deformed its face. So the Word of God never takes deep root downward until the furrow has been made for the seed effectually to lodge in. This comes when the heart has been ploughed up. Then comes the precious seed, the good Word of God's grace. The ears are now open to hear of salvation by free grace, pardon through the atoning blood of an incarnate God, a righteousness that justifies from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses, salvation without money and without price, a complete deliverance from all curse, wrath, condemnation, and bondage, into the glorious liberty of the children of God. This is the Word of grace that is sown by the hands of God's servants in the hearts of his people.

3. But, next, the seed must be harrowed in by trials and temptations and exercises, so that the corn may not be eaten up by the birds of the air, may not lie on the surface, and be burnt

and destroyed by the heat of the sun; but be so raked in that it may be covered, and thus have a deep firm bed to germinate and grow in.

4. But after this comes the pouring down of the rain from heaven upon it. The Spirit of God watering God's truth so as to make it take root downward, and bear fruit upward; visiting the heart with the sweet manifestations of his love, and making the soul soft with showers (cf. Psa.65:10).

Now this is "the tillage of the poor;" because none but the poor in spirit know anything experimentally of this tillage. And much food is in this tillage; which none but these poor desire. The very object of the Lord in thus tilling the heart is to convince us of our deep poverty by nature, and that we cannot (as man vainly thinks) produce a crop from nature's soil acceptable to God. Thus if we ever do produce anything that God is well pleased with, it must be given us; communicated by God's own hand, sealed by God's own power in the soul. We thus learn that our hearts stand as much in need of God's hand to till the soil, to sow the seed, and bestow the dew and sunshine of his favour upon it, as the natural soil stands in need of man's hand to plough it, to scatter the seed in its bosom, and wait for the rain of heaven to fall upon it, that it may bring forth a bountiful produce.

5. But again; after the crop has sprung up, it needs to be hoed; for though the plough and harrow have passed through the furrows and made some havoc with the weeds, there are many roots left behind; and were it not for this hoeing, all these weeds would soon spring up again, and choke the grain. And is it not in grace as in nature? Do you find yourselves one whit better than you were before the Lord quickened your soul? Nay, in many respects, do you not often feel yourself worse? It is, to my mind, in grace as in nature. Let a field be well ploughed, well manured, and every attention paid to it, and then neglected; it will be more full of weeds than one left without any cultivation whatsoever. So there seems to be in the heart of a child of God more sin at work, more weeds springing up, a filthier crop manifesting itself; and

these all growing with greater vigour than when it lay in nature's uncultivated soil. This is what so much tries the family of God, that they feel sin working in them more powerfully than in the days of old. They find stronger temptations, and often the workings of iniquities that before they were scarcely acquainted with, and more evil generally manifesting itself than they could believe ever dwelt in their hearts. Hence springs the necessity of the hoe, to cut up these weeds, that the pure grain may spring up unchoked. And what is this hoe but divine reproof? The Lord brings on his people outward and inward rebukes, cutting rebukes, with sinkings of soul under a sense of his anger against sin; as so many hoes that keep cutting up these weeds, that they may not spring up and overtop the good grain. We have reason, then, to bless God for the checks and admonitions of the blessed Spirit, for the reproofs he administers, for the pangs of guilty conscience, and the trouble and grief that sin in any way indulged in brings with it; for by these things sin is kept under. Though the root of sin is never destroyed, yet the outward growth of it is more or less checked; nor does it altogether overgrow and overtop the pure grain as it would otherwise do.

But to pass on. "*Much food* is in the tillage of the poor." The poor in spirit have much food, because they are brought to dig deep into the treasures of God's Word. For instance, look at the *promises* that God has filled the Scriptures with. Are they not stored with the sweetest and most suitable promises? But who need them? Is it not the poor? Are they not all addressed to the poor in spirit, to the self-condemned, to those who have nothing and are nothing in themselves but ruin and helplessness? "Much food," then, "is in the tillage of the poor;" because, as the soul is led into the knowledge of its own poverty, it digs deep into these promises; and when these promises are applied by the Spirit to the heart, there is much food that is lodged in them. So it is also with respect to the treasures that are in Christ Jesus. He "of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (I Cor.1:30). But who knows that he is made this? Who is supplied out of this fulness? Who drinks at this Fountain Head? Who feeds on this Bread of Life? Who can say, "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" (Song of Sol.2:3,4)? The poor, and the poor only; because the poor only feel their need of Christ. "The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet" (Prov.27:7). "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt.5:3).

Thus, there is "much food in the tillage of the poor;" because the poor alone know how to dig into the riches of Christ. In the *blood of Christ* what rich food is stored! But for what soul? Only for one that feels the pangs of guilt. In *Christ's righteousness* what food is there! But for whom? Only for those who are completely destitute of any righteousness of their own. *Christ's flesh*, we read, is meat indeed, and *Christ's blood* is drink indeed. But for whom? For those who have nothing in themselves but emptiness and helplessness. So that there is "much food " in "the tillage of the poor;" because the poor, and the poor only, have that tillage which brings good food unto their souls. The rich man may cultivate his fields for pleasure and ornament. The nobleman may have acres and acres of park scenery to drive his carriage through, and to please his eye with beautiful prospects. But the poor man who has only a small plot of ground must use that scanty strip entirely to obtain food from. His poverty obliges him; he must have all that he can get from it to supply the immediate wants of himself and his family. So it is spiritually. A man who is not poor may read God's Word, and admire its beauty and sublimity; as the wealthy nobleman may admire the prospects in his park. But the man who is poor in spirit reads God's Word to have some food brought into his heart out of the fulness of Christ; to obtain some relief from his distresses, some consolation in his sorrow, some manifestation of God's mercy to him, a poor, guilty sinner at the foot of the cross. The poor in spirit, then, is driven by actual necessity to dig deep into God's Word; and the blessed Spirit from time to time opens up the truth to his soul, so that he finds it to be food indeed. In proportion, therefore, as he is acquainted with the depths of spiritual poverty, will his tillage be chiefly to obtain food for his soul. When he is tempted, he will

want deliverance; when he is entangled in a snare, he will want to be brought out of his entanglement; and when he is troubled, he will want the sweet consolations of the Spirit in his soul. Just, then, as a poor man literally is obliged to till his soil, that he may obtain food therefrom; so a poor man spiritually will find his chief concern and main object is to get food for his soul. It is not doctrines as they stand in the letter of the Word, nor empty notions to float in his brain like the flowers in a garden, that he needs; but the solid food which can alone support his sinking soul.

Now, how different this is from what we should naturally have supposed to be the case. We should not think that poverty, helplessness, and a deep knowledge of the fall would all be the preparation for receiving the truth as it is in Jesus; and that the poor should be the persons whose mouths the Lord would fill, and that abundantly, with the food of the gospel. We should think rather that man ought to do something to obtain this good food. But it is not so. Poverty, helplessness, guilt, and ruin are the only requisites; for "much food is in the tillage of the poor."

But again; the poor literally, can enter with understanding into God's *providential dealings*. They can see the hand of God from time to time supplying their temporal wants; and they can bless God from time to time for relieving their necessities as regards the things of this life. Thus they can dig into the providential parts of God's Word, into the temporal promises as well as the spiritual and experimental. They thus get food for their souls as well as for their bodies: get food in grace as well as food in nature. Thus in every way there is "much food in the tillage of the poor."

II. But Solomon says, "*There is that is destroyed for want of judgment.*" I observed that this was true literally. A poor man sometimes lacks an acquaintance with agriculture; he does not always cultivate the land to the best advantage. Thus with all his care and attention, "there is that is destroyed for want of judgment." But if this be true literally, it is much more true in a

higher sense, spiritually and experimentally. The poor in spirit has not always, nor often, a good judgment of his own case. When a man, for instance, is sinking down into the depths of soul trouble, he can form no judgment of his own case; he does not know that the Lord is at this time bringing about a blessing for his soul, and thus "there is that is destroyed," or lost, as to the comfort of it, "for want of judgment." The hand of God is not, the operations of the Spirit in his heart are not, known by him to be the work of the Spirit. Therefore, "there is that is destroyed for want of judgment." When the Lord was beginning to work upon your conscience with power, and was raking up all your sins together, and burning them to ashes before your eyes, for want of seeing it was the work of God upon your soul, the support of this evidence was lost. You did not see it was the teaching of God; therefore you could not bless and praise God for it. It was not housed in your granary as the work of God, nor fed upon by your mouth as the teaching of God, nor received into your heart as the precious gift of God; but it was lost for want of judgment. So when the law enters into a man's conscience, making the offence to abound, he does not know this is the work of God going on in his soul. These convictions, these fears of eternal ruin, these feelings of guilt and shame before God, these apprehensions of the wrath to come, this trembling at death, hell, and judgment—he wants a clear judgment of his own case to see that all these spring from the work of God in his soul. He cannot see it is the work of God, and therefore cannot bless him for it.

Nay more. Even when the Lord is pleased to give him some glances and glimpses of his mercy and goodness, and sows the good seed of the Word of life in his heart, "there is that is destroyed for want of judgment." He has not arrived at a point to have a clear judgment of the dealings of God in his soul. The bright shining in, the foretastes, are so strange to him; he has had so little experience of them in his soul, that he cannot form a judgment that they are the work of the Spirit of God. "There is," therefore, "that is destroyed for want of judgment." He may have a hope sometimes that it was the work of God in his soul; that when the promise came, it was from God; that when he felt his

heart strangely melted within him, and mysterious sensations came over his soul, it was from God himself. Yet for want of judgment it was lost. He could not from thence firmly conclude he was a child of God, for want of clear judgment in his own case. So when the Lord was trying him with afflictions and trials in providence or in grace, administering sharp and keen reproofs, bringing into his conscience a sense of indwelling sin, there was that was destroyed for want of judgment. He could not see that this was the work of God, and that this sprang from the same gracious hand that afterwards brought a larger measure of joy and peace into his soul. So also afterwards, when the Lord has more abundantly blessed his soul with the dew and riches of his grace, he will often, perhaps, trifle with it, or Satan will try to persuade him it was a delusion, that it did not come with the right words, or was not attended by right effects. There will be something of this kind whispering out of man's unbelieving heart, or by that adversary who is always ready to plunder the soul; so that God is robbed of his glory, and the soul of its enjoyment.

So also, in the case of others, not merely in our own, "there is that is destroyed for want of judgment." We want a very clear judgment to see what the work of grace is in a sinner's conscience. We may receive some whom the Lord has never touched with his hand; and we may reject others in whom the work is really going on. And thus ministers may often err here; may, for want of judgment, distress the Lord's people, and often plaster over hypocrites.

"Much food is in the tillage of the poor: but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment." The poor man does not take into his cottage all the produce of his soil. There is some devoured by birds; some not worth taking; and there is some which he leaves between his plot and his house. So it is spiritually, though nothing can be really destroyed of the work of God in his soul.

The Spirit of God does not mean any portion of God's pure Word to get lost or destroyed; for not one jot or tittle of anything can fail that God has spoken. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but

God's Word cannot pass away. Yet so far as our feelings and experiences are concerned, there is that is destroyed. But afterwards the Lord may please to manifest it. As the corn that is shed in the farmer's field, and not carried into the granary, is not altogether lost, but springs up in its own time and way; so whatever God does for the soul is sooner or later manifested. The Spirit of God sooner or later brings all things to remembrance. As, then, God leads his people on, he gives them a clearer insight into the work of grace in the soul, takes them back to times that are past, revives in their memory his dealings with them in days of old, and gives them a clear light on them. Then they can cast out with their own hand much that they once prized and they can value much that they once lightly esteemed, when they come to pass a right judgment on it, being established in the truth, and having a deeper experience in the things of God. But as to learning wisdom effectually and perfectly, we shall never attain to that. If a man think he has attained to such a height of wisdom as to be able to pass a clear judgment on all men and all things, he manifests his folly. Fools we shall be all our days; all our days, therefore, we shall err for want of judgment. And this to convince us that Christ is to be our "wisdom" as well as our "righteousness;" and to make us feel the certainty of that truth, "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise" (I Cor.3:18). The really wise people you will find for the most part to be those who know most of their weakness and folly, and feel how ignorant they are, except so far as the Lord himself is pleased from time to time to manifest himself to their souls, and communicate light to their understandings.

But yet it stands as an eternal truth that "much food is in the tillage of the poor;" and thus only so far as we are really poor in spirit before God, do we know anything of sound, solid, substantial food. But what a dreary path it is for the Lord's people to walk in! That they have to get food for their souls through spiritual poverty; that they can never get a promise without a previous state of soul trouble; can never have a deliverance without passing through some trial; nor can ever know Christ in

his beauty, glory, and fulness, but as they are brought into the painful circumstances wherein he is needed. What a cutting reflection this is for the Lord's people! How it makes them at times sink low in their souls, that they can have no real peace or joy but that which comes through exercises, sorrows, and afflictions! But still it stands an eternal truth that "much food is in the tillage of the poor: but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment." And when the Lord is pleased to bless poor souls with this food, and to make it sweet and savoury, and gladden their hearts with this precious truth, they can bless him for their trials, and thank him for their troubles, and look up in affection to him in the midst of their afflictions. And thus they will go on until the Lord brings them at last where sighs and sorrows are no more, and where he, the God of all comfort, will wipe away tears from all faces.

## **TREASURES OF DARKNESS**

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road, London, on Tuesday Evening, August 2, 1853

"I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: and I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the Lord, which call thee by name, am the God of Israel." Isaiah 45:2, 3

To whom were these words spoken? To Cyrus. And who was Cyrus? King of Persia. But how came Cyrus to be introduced into the Word of God; and how did it happen that the Lord gave such promises to a heathen monarch? Cyrus, though a heathen prince, was an instrument chosen of God to do an appointed work, which was to overthrow the great Chaldean empire, take the city of Babylon, and restore the children of Israel to their own land; and therefore one hundred and seventy years before he executed the office thus assigned to him he was expressly pointed out and personally addressed by name in the record of inspired prophecy. What a proof is this of the inspiration of God's Word, and that all events are under His appointment and control!

Not only, however, was he thus called by name, but the very work which he had to do was expressly declared long before the necessity arose for its being accomplished. The work for which he was raised up and divinely appointed, was to rescue from captivity the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, which, as a punishment for their sins, were to be carried into captivity to Babylon, where they were to continue for a definite period, the space, namely, of seventy years. To rescue them, then, from this Babylonish captivity, when the seventy years were expired, and to enable them to return, was the work that Cyrus, in the appointment of God, had to perform. This was a very great work for him to execute, a work so great that he could not have performed it unless he had been specially aided by God. For he

had to take a city whose walls were fifty cubits thick and two hundred feet high, surrounded by a wide ditch full of water, and defended with one hundred gates of brass. The city was also well manned and well provisioned, and altogether so strong and powerful as to defy every mode of attack then known. If the Lord, therefore, in the words of the text, had not "gone before him;" if He had not "broken to pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron," Cyrus could never have taken that mighty city, but must have been utterly defeated in the attempt.

This, then, is the literal meaning of the text. But does it not admit of a more extensive application? The promise, it is true, was given to Cyrus, and we know was literally fulfilled; but are the words applicable only to Cyrus? Have we no fortress to take, no city of salvation to win? Do we not need the Lord to go before us, and make our crooked places straight? Have we no gates of brass, no bars of iron, which shut out approach and access, and which we need the Lord to break in pieces and cut in sunder for us? Does the road to heaven lie across a smooth, grassy meadow, over which we may quietly walk in the cool of a summer evening and leisurely amuse ourselves with gathering the flowers and listening to the warbling of the birds? No child of God ever found the way to heaven a flowery path. It is the wide gate and broad way which leads to perdition. It is the strait gate and narrow way, the uphill road, full of difficulties, trials, temptations, and enemies, which leads to heaven, and issues in eternal life. If, then, we be Zion's pilgrims, heavenward and homeward bound, we shall find the need of such promises, in their spiritual fulfilment, as God here gave to Cyrus. This idea may give us a clue to the spiritual meaning of our text. I shall, therefore, with God's blessing, this evening, endeavour to take this experimental view of it, and interpret it as applicable to God's family, omitting further reference to Cyrus, except as it may help to elucidate the spiritual meaning. Considering it, then, in this light, I think we may observe in it three special features:

I. What I may perhaps call God's **preliminary** work in "**going before His people, making for them crooked places**

**straight, breaking in pieces gates of brass, and cutting in sunder bars of iron."**

II. **The gifts** which the Lord bestows upon them, when He has broken to pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron, here called "**treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places.**"

III. The blessed **effects** produced by what the Lord thus does and thus gives—a **spiritual and experimental knowledge, that "He who has called them by their name is the God of Israel."**

I. Before, however, I enter into God's **preliminary work**, and show how it all stands on the firm footing of promise, I must drop a remark or two on the **characters** to whom these promises are made. To make this more clear as well as more personal, we will look at it in the singular number, as God has worded it: "I will go before **thee.**" It is evident from the very language of the text, that the promises contained in it are given to the exercised child of God, and to him alone. No one else, therefore, has any business with or any spiritual interest in it. Consider this point a moment for yourselves before I proceed further. Let this point be firmly impressed upon your mind, that if you have no spiritual exercises, trials, or temptations, you have, at present, no manifested interest in the promises made in the text; nor can you enter spiritually into their suitability and beauty, or know for yourself the divine and heavenly blessedness which is lodged in them. But if, on the other hand, you are a tried, exercised child of God, one who knows the plague of your heart, and the many difficulties and perplexities which beset the road to heaven, you have so far reason to believe that you are one of the characters to whom these promises are addressed.

i. The first promise, as it is the sweetest, so it lays a foundation for all the rest: "**I will go before thee.**" But look at the words. Have you ever considered what they imply? How great must those difficulties be which need the God of heaven and earth

Himself to go before us in order to overcome them! Surely they must be insuperable by any human strength, if they need nothing less than the immediate presence and power of the Almighty Himself. Go out some fine evening and look at the sky, spangled with thousands of stars, and then say to yourself, "What, do I need the same Almighty hand which created all these glittering orbs to go before **me?**" Now, suppose that at present, as regards religious matters, you have never encountered a single trial, temptation, or difficulty; but have found everything easy, smooth, and a matter of course, and have never met with one obstruction which you could not by some exertion of your own remove. If matters be so with you, how in the world can you want the Lord to go before you'? You could not, I should think, except by way of compliment, presume even to ask for such a favour. But if, on the other hand, you are contending with great inward perplexities of mind, feel to be in much soul peril and sorrow, and are surrounded by difficulties which you cannot surmount by any strength or wisdom of your own, and yet surmounted they must be, then you will feel a need for the Lord "to go before you." There is nothing that we are more averse to than trials and afflictions in providence or grace, and yet, if truth be spoken, we never come to know anything aright or receive any real blessing without them. Usually speaking, the Lord does not appear in providence or grace, or make Himself known in love and mercy to the soul, except in the path of trial. We must, therefore, go into trials and afflictions to learn not only the end, but the very beginning of religion—I may add, even to know that there is a God, so as to experience the power of His arm, the greatness of His Salvation and the light of his countenance.

If we, then, are rightly taught, we shall feel a need for the Lord to go before us, not only now and then, but every step of the way, for unless led and guided by Him, we are sure to go astray. How strikingly was this the case with the children of Israel. How the Lord went before them every step from Egypt to the promised land, marshalling their way night and day in the cloudy pillar! How, too, He went before them after they reached Canaan, and made the hearts and hands of their enemies as weak as water so

that they could offer no resistance to their victorious arms. How the very walls of Jericho fell, as it were, of their own accord, and how the promised land was almost conquered before the children of Israel set foot upon it! So must the Lord go before us step by step.

1. But you may apply this promise to a variety of things. It is applicable not only to spiritual but to **temporal trials and perplexities**—to His going before us both in providence and grace. If the Lord go before, preparing the way and opening a path for us to walk in, all is well; every difficulty at once disappears, every, mountain sinks into a plain. But if we cannot see nor feel Him going before us, then no ray of light streams upon the path, no friendly hand removes the barriers. Beset behind and before, we know not what to do. It seems as if we were thrown back upon ourselves—miserable refuge enough, and we know not what step to take.

2. But the words apply not merely to the Lord's going before us in afflictions and trials and removing them out of the way, or giving us strength to bear them, but also to the **manifestation of His holy and sacred will**. There are few things more trying or perplexing to a child of God than to desire to do what is right, yet not to know, in particular circumstances, what is right, or if known how to do it; to long to learn the will of God in some important matter, and yet be unable to discover plainly and clearly what that will is. In this case, when brought into some extremity, the Lord sometimes goes before in His kind providence by unexpectedly opening a door in one particular direction and shutting up all others, intimating thereby that this is the way in which He would have us walk; and sometimes in His grace by whispering a soft word of instruction to the soul which at once decides the matter.

3. But it is especially in the **removal of obstructions** that the Lord fulfils this part of the promise. This was especially the case with Cyrus, in whose path such formidable obstacles lay. What

these are we shall more clearly see by passing on to the next portion of the promise.

ii. "**And make crooked things straight.**" This promise springs out of the former, and is closely connected with it; for it is only by the Lord's going before that things really crooked can be straightened. But what if there be in our path no crooked places; what if the road we are treading be like an arrow for straightness, and a turfy lawn for smoothness? Why, then we have certainly no present interest in the promise. It wears to us no smiling face; it stretches to us no friendly hand. But on the other hand, if we find such crooked places in our path, that we cannot possibly straighten them, and such rough and rugged spots that we cannot smooth them, this so far affords ground for hope that we have an interest in the promise given that the Lord will go before us and straighten them for us.

But **what** is meant by crooked places, and **whence** come they? Viewing them generally, we may say that these crooked places are so in two ways.

1. Some are **inherently** crooked, that is, it is in their very nature to be so: and,

2. others are so not from any inherent necessity, but **from the Lord's appointment** that they should be so.

1. The things which are crooked **in themselves**, that is, inherently and necessarily bent and curved, are so through **sin**; for sin has bent crooked that which was originally straight. Thus crooked tempers, crooked dispositions, crooked desires, crooked wills, crooked lusts are **in themselves** inherently crooked, because being bent out of their original state by sin, they do not now lie level with God's holy will and Word; and these are felt to be crooked by a living soul through the implantation and possession of a holy principle which detects and groans under their crookedness and contrariety.

2. But there are crooked places in the path of God's family, which are not inherently crooked as being sinful in themselves, but are crooked as **made so by the hand of God to us**. Of this kind are afflictions in body and mind, poverty in circumstances, trials in the family, persecution from superiors or ungodly relatives, heavy losses in business, bereavement of children, and in short, a vast variety of circumstances curved into their shape by the hand of God, and so made "crooked things" to us.

Now, the Lord has promised to make "crooked things straight." Taken in its fullest extent, the promise positively declares that from whatever source they come, or of whatsoever nature they be, the Lord will surely straighten them. By this He manifests His power, wisdom, and faithfulness.

But **how** does He straighten them? In two ways, and this according to their nature. Sometimes He straightens them by **removing them out of the way**, and sometimes not by removing them, but by **reconciling our minds to them**. We have perhaps a crooked path in Providence. It may be poverty, persecution, oppression; it may be family trials or temporal difficulties; and these spring out of or are connected with circumstances over which we have no control. These crooked things we may frequently have tried to remove or straighten; but all our attempts to do so leave them as bad or even worse than before. Rebellion, peevishness, or self-pity may have worked besides in our minds, all which may have made them more crooked than ever, till at last we are obliged to have recourse to the Lord. Now then is the time for Him to appear and fulfil His own promise, which He does sometimes by removing them altogether, taking us out of those circumstances which make them crooked to us, or putting an end to the circumstances themselves. In this way the Lord sometimes makes crooked places straight. This He did to Jacob, when He delivered him from Laban's tyranny and Esau's threatened violence, and to David when He took Saul out of the way. So health given for sickness, a deliverance in providence, a removing of an enemy out of the

way, a bringing us from under the power of the oppressor, are all means whereby these crooked things are straightened.

But there is another way, and that is not by removing the trial, but by **bending our will** to submit to it. We must not think that the Lord will in answer to prayer remove all our temporal afflictions. So far from that, we may have more and more of them to our dying day. How then, it may be asked, can He fulfil His promise that He will make crooked places straight, if He leave some of our worst crooks as crooked as before? He does it by bending our will to submit to them; and this He accomplishes sometimes by favouring the soul with a sweet sense of His blessed presence; and sometimes by throwing a secret and sacred light upon the path that we are treading, convincing us thereby that it is the right road, though a rugged one, to a city of habitation. When the Lord thus appears, it brings submission: and directly that we can submit to God's will, and the rebellion, peevishness, and unbelief of our carnal mind are subdued, a sweet and blessed calmness is felt in the soul. The crooked place now at once vanishes as being melted into the will of God. It is in this way, for the most part, that those places which are **inherently** crooked are made straight. There is no change in the things themselves, but in our views of and feelings towards them. The carnal mind which was crooked is crooked still; our crooked tempers and dispositions, our crooked lusts and desires, are in themselves as much curved as ever, but they are so far straightened as not to irritate and vex as before. In a similar manner, the trial in providence which was crooked is crooked still; the persons we have to deal with; the circumstances we have to encounter; the cross we have to carry; the burdens we have to bear, all remain unchanged and unaltered; but the Lord gives strength to endure the pain and trouble caused by them: and while they are borne in submission to His holy will, their weight is taken off the shoulders, and their crookedness is not so keenly felt. See how this was the case with those three eminent saints, Job, David, Paul. Job's trials, David's bereavement, and Paul's thorn were all as before; but when the Lord appeared, Job

repented in dust and ashes, David arose from the earth and anointed himself, and Paul gloried in his infirmities.

iii. But the Lord also promised Cyrus in the text that He would, by going before him, "**break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron.**" Cyrus longed to enter into and take possession of the city of Babylon; but when he took a survey of the only possible mode of entrance, he saw it firmly closed against him with gates of brass and bars of iron. These effectually barring all progress, he could not achieve the object of his desire. They were continually before his eyes, too strong for all his weapons of warfare; and unless battered down or broken to pieces, he could not capture the city.

Now can we not find something in our own personal experience which corresponds to this feeling in Cyrus? There is a longing in the soul after the attainment of a certain object, say, such as an obtaining of everlasting salvation, or a winning of Christ and a blessed experience of revealed pardon and peace, or an inward personal enjoyment of the sweet manifestations of God's favour and love. This, we will say, is the object the soul is set upon to attain, the Lord Himself having kindled these desires after it in the breast. But when, in pursuance of this object, we press forward to obtain it, what do we find in the road? Gates of brass and bars of iron. And these insuperable obstructions so stand in the path that they completely block up the road and prevent all access to the enjoyment of the desired blessing. It is, then, by the removal of these obstacles that the Lord fulfils His promise—"I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron." Look for instance at our **very prayers**. Are not the heavens sometimes brass over our heads, so that, as Jeremiah complains, "they cannot pass through"? Nay, is not your very **heart** itself sometimes a gate of brass, as hard, as stubborn, and as inflexible? So the **justice, majesty, and holiness** of God, when we view these dread perfections of the living Jehovah with a trembling eye under the guilt of sin, stand before the soul as so many gates of brass. The various **enemies** too which beset the soul; the **hindrances** and **obstacles** without and within that

stand in the path; the **opposition** of sin, Satan, self, and the world against all that is good and Godlike—may not all these be considered "gates of brass," barring out the wished-for access into the city?

But there are also besides "bars of iron." These strengthen the gates of brass and prevent them from being broken down or burst open, the stronger and harder metal giving firmness and solidity to the softer and weaker one. An unbelieving heart; the secret infidelity of the carnal mind; guilt of conscience produced by a sense of our base and innumerable wanderings and backslidings from the Lord; doubts and fears often springing out of our own want of consistency and devotedness; apprehensions of being altogether deceived, from finding so few marks of grace and so much neglect of watchfulness and prayer—all these may be mentioned as bars of iron strengthening the gates of brass.

Now, can **you** break to pieces these gates of brass, or cut in sunder the bars of iron? That is the question. Could Cyrus do it literally? He had doubtless a large and valiant army, soldiers of the most approved valour, and possessed of all possible skill in the use of their weapons; but before them there stood the gates of brass and bars of iron. He might look at them in all their depth and width; but looking at them would not remove them. He might wish them broken asunder and cut to pieces; but wishing would go a very little way towards making them fall asunder. There they still were ever standing before his eyes, insuperable, impenetrable. So with the feelings and experience of the child of God. There, there, right in his very path, the insuperable obstacles stand. He can no more break down his hardness of heart, darkness of mind, unbelief or infidelity than Cyrus could break to pieces the gates of brass of ancient Babylon. He can no more subdue the workings of a deceitful and desperately wicked heart than the King of Persia could by drawing his sword cut asunder at a stroke the bars of iron which strengthened the gates of brass. Here then, when so deeply wanted, comes in the suitability and blessedness of the promise. **"I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of**

**iron.**" The words, spiritually taken, mean of course the removal of all hindrances that block up the road. Let us see, then, how these are removed, that is, so dealt with by the hand of God as to be hindrances no longer. Look, for instance, at the **holiness** and **justice** of God, which, as pure attributes, stand arrayed against the soul's entrance into heaven and glory. How, it may be asked, are these to be removed? Can God part with any one of His eternal and glorious attributes? Can they be, as it were, disannulled and cease to exist? No; that is clearly impossible; but as regards the heirs of salvation, they can be so dealt with as to be no longer gates of brass and bars of iron to shut them out of heaven. When Jesus, by His sufferings and death, by His meritorious obedience and divine sacrifice, satisfied God's justice, glorified the law and made it honourable, He opened an entrance for His people into the city of God. Thus the apostle speaks of His "blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, taking it out of the way, and nailing it to His cross." In this sense the law, which is the reflection of God's justice and holiness, may be said to be broken to pieces as a gate of brass, and cut in sunder as a bar of iron; in other words, it stands no longer in the way as an insuperable bar to the salvation of the soul.

But if we look at the gates of brass and bars of iron as shadowing forth other hindrances, we shall see them not figuratively in this way, but **actually** broken down and cut in sunder. Thus **ignorance**, unbelief, infidelity, hardness of heart, darkness of mind, guilt of conscience, with every other gate and bar, are at once broken asunder when the Lord dissolves the heart by the sweet application of love and blood. So the various **temptations** and besetments from without and within which seem arrayed against the soul, all disappear at once when touched by the finger of God; nor is there one, however strong, deep, or high, which does not fall to pieces before the word of His mouth.

II. But when, by the breaking down of the brazen gates, and cutting asunder the bars of iron, Cyrus got admission into the city of Babylon, what did he find there? Countless treasures. Of these he at once took full possession, as the Lord's own free gift; for

the promise ran, "**I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places.**" Cyrus did not get hold of "the treasures of darkness," nor did he lay his hand upon "the hidden riches of secret places," which were stored up in the cellars of the king's palace, till he got into the city of Babylon through the broken gates. Now look at this spiritually. Before your eyes in the dim distance is the city of salvation—the city which the Lord has blessed with every spiritual blessing. See how its towers rise in the horizon, and how the sun gilds its domes and palaces. But see how the same sun gleams upon the gates of brass thickly bound with bars of iron, and look how those shut out all entrance. But the Lord goes before, cuts in sunder the one, and breaks in pieces the other, and gives the soul a blessed entrance into the city.

i. Now what does He then and there manifest, and of what does He then put the believer in possession? First, "**Treasures of darkness!**" But is not this a strange expression? "Treasures of darkness!" How can there be darkness in the City of Salvation of which the Lord the Lamb is the eternal light? The expression does not mean that the treasures themselves are darkness, but that they were hidden in darkness till they were brought to light. The treasures of Belshazzar, like the bank bullion, were buried in darkness till they were broken up and given to Cyrus. It is so in a spiritual sense. Are there not treasures in the Lord Jesus? Oh! what treasures of grace in His glorious Person! What treasures of pardon in His precious blood! What treasures of righteousness in His perfect obedience! What treasures of salvation in all that He is and has as the great High Priest over the house of God! Yet all these treasures are "treasures of darkness," so far as they are hidden from our eyes and hearts, till we are brought by His special power into the city of Salvation. Then these treasures are not only brought to light, revealed, and made known, but the soul is at once put into possession of them. They are not only seen, as the Bank of England clerk sees notes and sovereigns, but are by a special deed of gift from the Court of Heaven made over to him who by faith in the Lord Jesus receives Him into his heart. No one has the least conception of the treasures of grace that are in the

Lord Jesus till he is brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light, and knows Him and the power of His resurrection by the sweet manifestations of His presence and love.

But the word "**treasures**" signifies not only something laid up and hidden from general view, but, being in the plural number, expresses an infinite, incalculable amount—an amount which can never be expended, but suffices, and suffices, and suffices again for all wants and for all believing comers. When we get a view by faith of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus, and see the everflowing and overflowing fulness of His grace, and how it superabounds over all the aboundings of sin, it may well fill our minds with holy wonder and admiration. When we get a glimpse of the virtue and efficacy of His atoning blood, that precious blood which "cleanseth from all sin," and that divine righteousness which is "unto all and upon all them that believe," what treasures of mercy, pardon, and peace are seen laid up in Him! To see this by the eye of faith, and enter into its beauty and blessedness, is indeed to comprehend with all saints the length, and breadth, and depth, and height, and to know something of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. The sun will cease to give his light, and the earth to yield her increase; but these treasures will still be inexhausted, for they are in themselves infinite and inexhaustible.

ii. But the Lord promised also to give to Cyrus "**the hidden riches of secret places**," that is literally, the riches of the city which were stored up in its secret places. But has not this also a spiritual and experimental meaning as well as the rest of the text with which it stands in connection? Yes. Many are "the hidden riches of secret places" with which the God of all grace enriches His believing family. Look for instance at the **word of God**. What hidden riches are stored up in its secret depths! How every promise is worth a thousand worlds! And could we see it, how every portion of inspired truth is filled to overflowing with the richest discoveries of the wisdom and goodness of God. But these riches are hidden from view. They lie concealed from the very vulture's eye in "the secret places" of revealed truth. But when the Lord is pleased to bring them forth to the eyes and heart of

any one of His believing children, it makes him say, "Oh, I could not have believed there was such fulness and depth in the Word of God, or such a sweetness and preciousness in the promises; nor, until thus brought to light and set before my eyes, could I have conceived there was such beauty in Jesus, such love in His heart, such virtue and efficacy in His atoning blood, nor such joy and peace to be felt in believing. I could not have believed there was such power in the Word of God to wound and to heal, to cast down and to lift up." Oh, how the Word of truth in the hand of the Spirit surpasses not only every conception, but every anticipation of the heart. Oh, how these riches of secret places surpass all earthly wealth, and exceed in value thousands and millions of gold and silver. But it is only as these hidden riches of secret places are thus opened up to the soul that we see, or feel, or know what the Lord Jesus Christ is to those that believe in and love His holy name. It is this bringing forth of the hidden riches of secret places which stamps a divine reality upon God's Word, and makes it to be spirit and life to the soul. To feel the power and blessedness of these things is a part of that "secret of the Lord which is with them that fear Him;" and it is by getting into these blessed secrets, handling these treasures, and obtaining possession of these riches, that we come experimentally to realise what a blessed power there is in a divine heartfelt religion. We may see the doctrines plainly enough in the Word of

God; but if that be all we know about them, it is like seeing money which is not our own, and casting up accounts of other people's property. The grand point is not only to see the riches, but to be put in possession of them. A religion without power, without savour, without a felt blessedness in the truth of God, by the application of the Spirit, is worthless both for time and eternity. Like a school-boy's sum, it is all upon paper—a vast amount in figures, without the possession of a penny.

But observe how the promises are connected with "crooked places," "brazen gates," and "iron bars," and the going before of the Lord to remove them out of the way. Without this previous work we should be ignorant to our dying day of "the treasures of

darkness;" we should never see with our eyes, nor handle with our hands, "the hidden riches of secret places." There are but few, comparatively speaking, who know anything of the sweetness and reality of a God-taught religion; of the power of grace upon the soul, or of the riches which are stored up in the fulness of the Son of God. Most even of those who profess the truth are satisfied with a name to live, a sound creed, a consistent profession, and admission to church membership, without knowing or desiring to know anything of the blessed reality of communion with God, of a revelation of the Lord Jesus, of the manifestation of His love and mercy to the soul, and the sealings of the blessed Spirit on the heart.

III. Now **what** springs out of having these treasures of darkness brought to light? **A spiritual experience and a knowledge of God**, and that He is the God of His people—"That thou mayest know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel." Observe the expression, "I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name." How special is this! What an individuality it stamps on the person thus addressed! How it makes religion a personal thing! When God singles out a man by name, it implies that he has special dealings with Him, and that he personally and individually knows Him. This stands good naturally. How many, for instance, are here this evening before me whose names I know not. Were I, therefore, to meet you in the street I could not address you by name. But there are some whose names I know. You I can call by your name when I meet you, from having so far a greater or less personal acquaintance with you. Is it not so in grace? The Lord may be said "to call His people by name," when, by a special work of grace upon their heart, He calls them out of the world to a knowledge of Himself. He does not indeed speak in an audible voice, but the effect is as distinct as if He should say, "John," or "Mary, I want thee." We are not indeed to expect to see the same light, or hear the same audible voice which shone upon and called Saul of Tarsus; but we must experience a measure of the same power, and feel something of the same divine influence. When, then, God thus calls a man, he will, he must come, for He puts forth a power which he cannot and will

not resist—at least, not to any purpose. It is certainly grace invincible, if not grace irresistible. Now just see the process. God calls the sinner by name; and though He calls us not vocally as the Lord Jesus Christ called His disciples when He said, "Follow Me," still the effect is the same.

But what is produced by this special, individual, and personal calling? **Knowledge.** But what knowledge? Spiritual, heartfelt, and experimental. Of what? "That the Lord who called them by name **is the God of Israel.**" They thus learn two things: **first**, that the Lord **has** called them by their name, in other words, that it is a real work of grace upon their souls. They have had their doubts and fears about it; they have been tried about the beginning, middle, and end; they have been exercised with unbelief and infidelity, and many anxious misgivings; but by the secret power of God put forth in their souls, they have felt their hard heart softened, their unbelief removed, their infidelity smitten to pieces, and treasures of darkness brought to light, which sensibly enrich them, and put them into possession of the love of God. Now they can see that God did really call them by their name, that the work is genuine; and looking back upon all the way in which they have been led, they can see that the Lord has "gone before them" in everything, and has made "every crooked thing straight." They have thus a testimony that He who called them by their name did so because He had first written their names in the book of life. To have this sealed upon the heart is to have a drop of heaven in the soul. But the chief and **second** thing which He thus gives them to know, is "**that He is the God of Israel.**" Much is contained in this expression; but the main point consists in this, that He thereby declares Himself to be their covenant God; and that every promise which He has made to Israel is virtually theirs. It is as "the God of Israel" that He manifests mercy and grace; it is as "the God of Israel" that He never leaves nor forsakes the objects of His choice; it is as "the God of Israel" that He fulfils every promise, defeats every enemy, appears in every difficulty, richly pardons every sin, graciously heals every backsliding, and eventually lands them in eternal bliss.

What a light does the whole text cast upon God's way of saving sinners, and the work of His grace upon the soul. Here we have set before our eyes a religion which will stand as being based upon the promises and sure testimonies of God. In this religion there is a divine reality, as that which comes down from heaven into the soul. It is not a mere change of views in doctrine or alteration in life; it is not an adopting of a certain set of tenets, and hearing a certain minister, or coming to a certain chapel, or attending to certain ordinances. It is something very different from this, exceeding and excelling it as much as heaven exceeds hell, or eternity time.

But perhaps you may say, "Must all persons that are to be saved pass through this experience?" To answer that question, let me ask you another. Do you think that Cyrus could have got into the city in any other way? The walls he could not get over, through, or under. The only passage was through the gates of brass and bars of iron, and all his own attempts to break them to pieces or cut them in sunder left them standing as before. God must do the work for him or the work could never be done. So must He work effectually for and in us; and, as in the case of Cyrus, so in ours it is these very, difficulties that make us feel our need of, and prize His grace and power.

If then we have no trials, difficulties, or perplexities, we certainly do not want God' we can do very well without Him. If I can soften my own heart, I most certainly do not want God to soften it. If I can believe in the Lord Jesus Christ whenever I please, I certainly do not want God to give me faith. When a rich man wants money, he goes to the bank, and draws a cheque for as much as he wants. He need ask nobody to give him money, nor sue **in formal pauperis; With the excuse of poverty.** so if I can raise up faith in my own soul, I surely need not go to God as a pauper or a beggar, to cry unto Him to bestow upon me faith. If I have hundreds of it in my bank, I can go and draw upon it for as much as I please. So I might run the parallel through every branch of a freewill religion. If my path in providence is but a crooked one,

and I can by a little exertion of my own strength sufficiently straighten it, what need have I that the Lord should do it'? Or if I could climb up to heaven by my own exertions, why do I need the Lord to help me?

But on the other hand, if I have a very crooked path, and can scarcely live unless it be straightened, to do which is utterly beyond my power, why, then I have an errand to the throne of grace. I have something really and truly for God to do for me: and when He does it in answer to prayer, I can thank and praise His holy name. This brings a revenue of praise and glory to God, exalts Him, and abases me. So it is with every difficulty, trial and perplexity. If I neither have them, or if I can of myself overcome them, I may with my lips pay God the compliment of asking Him to appear but I can in reality manage exceedingly well without Him.

Now perhaps we can see why God's people have so many gates of brass and bars of iron, so many trials and severe temptations. This is to bring them into personal acquaintance with God, the great God of heaven and earth, the covenant God of Israel; to make religion a reality. I am well convinced that a religion which has no trials or exercises, no temptations or perplexities, is but a mockery and a sham. If you think otherwise, just tell me what it is worth. Does it glorify God? Not a bit. Does it comfort man? How can it, when he wants it not? Does it bring a man out of the world. Not one whit. A man with a first-Adam religion is hand and glove with the world. Does it subdue sin? It never has subdued, nor can it ever truly subdue even the least. Nor, indeed, does he ever feel to need it, for his sins give him no disquietude; he and they are bosom friends, and why need they ever part company? Does it bring pardon'? Why should it, if there be no burden to remove, nor guilty conscience to cleanse? Does it bring heaven into his soul'? He is too well satisfied with earth to want that. Take away then, the trials, exercises, and perplexities with which religion is so mixed up, and with which it so largely deals, and you take away, at a stroke, all that in which the power of real religion consists.

Have you not seen sometimes ivy growing out of and over a wall? The ivy is not the wall, nor is the wall the ivy. But take away the wall, and the ivy falls. So trials and temptations, sins and sorrows, are not religion any more than the wall is the ivy, and yet religion grows up, out of, and up. on these things, and entwines itself into their very interstices, as the ivy penetrates into the chinks of the wall. Take away then the trials and temptations which are entwined with religion, and they both fall together. Let me appeal to the experience of any person here present who has any life or feeling in his soul. It is Tuesday evening. Now, let me ask you what sort of a day has this been with you? "Well," say you, "I have been a good deal engaged in business, I have had much to attend to in my calling, and my mind has been occupied all day long with worldly things." Now, what religion had you at work in your soul all this time when you were so taken up with the things of the world? You answer, "Why, to confess the truth, none at all. No one could have if he had all my business to attend to." But another might answer, "To tell you the truth, I have had a very trying day of it, and have been sighing and groaning nearly all the day long." Now, which of these two characters wants the preaching to be blessed to his soul this evening? which wants the sweet application of a promise or a manifestation of God's love? Need I say which of these two men is the best hearer? I should insult your common sense if I gave the answer.

If we have any insight into ourselves, and feel what our hearts are made of, we know, we cannot but know, that unless we are tried in our minds in some way or other, there is no meeting of the promise in our soul; for there is no suitability in the promise to us or in us to the promise. There is, so to speak, no door for the Lord Jesus to come in by and manifest Himself unto us. But let me have some severe trial or painful affliction: let me have many crooked things in my path, and everything seemingly against me, if the Lord work by it, it makes me desire a blessing from Himself, and that He would manifest to me His power,

presence, and grace. The thing is so plain, that I wonder people cannot see it. Well-nigh every page in the Bible testifies to it.

Now, if this be the case, will not a living soul cry, "Give me my trials, and God's mercy in them? Give me my burdens, and God's support under them? Give me my afflictions, and God's comfort in them? Give me my temptations, and God's grace to deliver me out of them? For I know when I am left to myself, without trial or blessing, I am a poor carnal, worldly wretch, and at such seasons, although I make a profession, it is but a name!" Blessed be God, then, for all our trials and temptations. As James says—"Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;" and blessed be God for every burden and every exercise; and above all things, blessed be God for His grace which supports the soul in, comforts it under, and eventually brings it out of all its trials, landing it eventually on the happy shore where tears are wiped from off all faces.

## **THE TREES OF THE FIELD, AND THEIR APPOINTED DESTINY**

Preached on Lord's Day Evening, June 13, 1841, at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street

"And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish; I the Lord have spoken, and have done it." Ezekiel 17:24

It seems impossible, as Hart justly speaks, to chalk out a path of Christian experience, and to say that all the children of God shall walk in some precise path, which shall be particularly laid down. The all-wise God has various ways of bringing his children to the knowledge of himself; and he will baffle all the wisdom of man, so that none shall be able to prescribe a path for God, or confine him within those narrow limits which our fallen mind is continually attempting to assign to the Almighty.

But though we can lay down no one path of Christian experience, nor set up one rigorous standard whereby to measure all the children of God, yet doubtless there are certain great outlines of Divine teaching which are to be traced out in the hearts and consciences of all the elect family. There is a vast difference betwixt setting up one rigorous standard, and cutting off every one that does not come up to these prescribed limits, and casting aside all standards altogether. There are certain great branches of truth which must be experimentally felt and known; there are certain leading outlines of Divine teaching which must be engraved by the Spirit upon every quickened heart; and he that is not personally and individually acquainted with these grand outlines, does not bear the stamp of being one of God's regenerated family. For instance, "Repent and believe the Gospel;" if there is no repentance, if there is no believing the Gospel, there must be the absence of Divine teaching. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus

Christ, whom thou hast sent:" if there is no internal, spiritual, experimental knowledge of the only true God, and of Jesus Christ the Mediator, there must be the absence of eternal life in the soul. If there are no convictions of sin, there must be an absence of the work of the Spirit, who "convinces of sin," and brings the soul in "guilty before God." If there is a want of faith in the Mediator, there is the absence of another decisive stamp, whereby God has marked his people. And so we might enlarge upon the various outlines of Christian truth and the grand branches of internal experience, and say that where these grand outlines are wanting, where these branches of Divine truth are not experimentally known, there we have decisive evidence that God the Holy Ghost has not quickened that soul into spiritual and eternal life.

Now the Lord, in his word, seems to have laid down certain grand rules of procedure by which he works. For instance: "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." That is a rule of the Divine procedure, according to which he works, which rule never can be violated in one instance. And in this verse **the last of the chapter**, from which I hope, with God's blessing, to deliver a few thoughts this evening, we have a rule of the Divine procedure, analogous to that which I have just quoted: "And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done it." Therefore, if our experience **think of it what we may** does not run in the channel which God himself has marked out,—if it is not in strict accord with the grand outlines which the Holy Ghost himself has drawn in the word of truth,—upon that experience we must write "Tekel, weighed in the balances, and found wanting." We will, then, with God's blessing, apply this rule, which the Lord himself has laid down, and according to which he works, to our experience, such as it is; and if our experience cannot stand the test of that rule, we must write "Ichabod" upon it; we must stamp "Tekel" in large letters upon its forehead. "All the trees of the field know that I the Lord have

brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish."

The Lord speaks here of four different trees, or rather of four trees in different states; and he tells us in this verse what his work is towards and upon these trees. And in the unfolding of this, I shall endeavour, with the Lord's blessing, to employ the time that we shall remain together this evening.

"All the trees of the field, then, shall know" a certain truth. What are these "trees of the field?" "The field" seems to set forth the visible Church of God; and "the trees of the field" seem to set forth all the professors of Divine truth, whether they are possessors or not. "The trees of the field" do not here seem to signify the quickened family of God, but those trees which openly stand in the field—those persons that have an outward standing in Christ's visible church here below. We find that the Scriptures often speak of people, not as they really are, but as they profess to be. For instance, the Lord says, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away." Now, he speaks of that "branch," not as it really is, but as it professes to be. The branch never was "in him;" but the branch professed to be in him, and therefore, in using those words he spoke of the branch as what it professed to be, and not what it really was. So with respect to the "trees of the field," the Lord takes them upon the broad basis of profession. They profess to be "trees of righteousness which the Lord hath planted;" they profess to stand forth in the wood of the Lord's own implantation. The Lord takes them according to their own profession; not now passing any decisive sentence as to what they really are in his sight, but assuming, upon the broad basis of their own profession, that they are "trees of the field," that is, members of his visible Church here below. The trees, then, of this field—all that stand in the visible Church of God, all whose eyes are in any measure open, naturally or spiritually, to see truth, all that have made any separation from a "world lying in wickedness," all that profess to receive "the truth as it is in Jesus," all that stand forth to contend for the Gospel in its purity and power—all these trees, whether they be trees of God's

planting, or whether they be planted by Satan—all these members of professing churches, all these branches of the vine, whether in it by reality, or in it only by profession—all these "trees of the field" shall know a certain truth.

Now, what is this certain truth? That the Lord will do a certain work towards, and a certain work in characters, which he himself has delineated; and that it shall be visible to the Church of God what he does to those characters, which his own hand has drawn as they really stand before his heart-searching eye.

1. Now, the first character of which the Lord speaks is the "high tree;" which "high tree" is to be "brought down." That expression—a "high tree"—seems to bear two significations. There is the "high tree"—that is, a nominal professor, who is destitute of the fear of God, who has nothing of the grace of God in his soul, but stands in the visible Church of Christ in a profession of godliness, whilst he is inwardly devoid of its power. With such the Church is overrun, and I believe that there is no Church **let us talk of the purity of a Church as much as we please** that is free from these trees, which are not "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that he may be glorified," but have been introduced by Satan into the Church with a profession of religion, when their hearts are utterly devoid of the power of vital godliness experienced therein. This "high tree," then, is a high, towering, lofty, soaring, presumptuous professor, whose head is thoroughly stored with the doctrines of grace, but who is destitute of the feeling power of vital godliness in his soul; one unburdened, unexercised, untempted, untried; who has never felt the powerful hand of God upon him to crush him into the dust; who has never fallen down before the throne of God's majesty and mercy as a ruined wretch without hope or help; who has never been brought in guilty before the Lord,—never been reduced to complete beggary, poverty, and insolvency in self; but is a natural man still in a profession of religion, and has experienced nothing of the sovereign teachings and Divine operations of God the Holy Ghost in his conscience. Now the Lord the Spirit has stamped him with a certain mark—that he is a

"high tree." He is not the creeping ivy; he is not the vine that cannot climb without a support; but he towers aloft in head-knowledge, soars upward in presumptuous confidence, rises up to the clouds in the lofty imaginations of his unhumbled heart, and looks down with haughty contempt and pride of heart upon those who are groaning, and sighing, and mourning, beneath a body of sin and death. In this wood of trees, the first object that catches the eye is "the high tree," that soars above them all. You will find this nominal professor in the Church of Christ always ready to come forward, he never hangs back through a sense of his weakness and ignorance; he is never plagued with doubts and fear as to his state before God; he never puts his mouth in the dust from a deep sense of his vileness and baseness before him; but let him be present in any company, or on any occasion, he is ready to speak, to exalt himself, and to tower high above the family of God, who are mourning and sighing over the burden of sin, guilt, and corruption, and are suing after the Lord's manifestations of favour to their souls.

Now the Lord says, "**All** the trees of the field shall **know** that I the Lord have brought down the high tree." Then this "high tree" must be "brought down;" and not merely brought down, but **visibly** brought down,—brought down in the sight of the trees of the field, laid low in the sight of all who have eyes to see, who have ears to hear, who have minds to understand what God's dealings are. Some of these "high trees" the Lord "brings down," by suffering them to fall into open sin. No man has sin subdued in him, except that man who has the fear of God in his heart, "as a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death;" all others are under the dominion of sin; they are, as the Lord declares, "the servants of sin;" they think themselves free, but sin secretly "reigns in their mortal body, and they obey it in the lusts thereof." Now the Lord, in order that all the trees of the wood may "**know** that he brings down the high tree," often suffers these high towering professors to fall into some notorious sin, whereby they stand disgraced before the eyes of Christ's Church, and are branded as mere professors of vital godliness, utterly destitute of the feeling power. But the Lord has another way of

"bringing down" this high tree; and that is, by smiting him with the stroke of vengeance in his conscience, so as to plunge him into all the horrors of despair. There is many a towering professor, who has soared high in false liberty, and reared his presumptuous head into the heaven of his high notions, that when he has come to die, has "howled upon his bed," as smitten with the rod of God's eternal vengeance, and breathed forth his guilty soul in all the horrors of despair in whose gnawing conscience the foretaste of eternal wrath and the flames of a devouring hell are kindled before he is precipitated by the avenging hand of God into it. And thus the Lord makes this man a manifest spectacle before others, by "bringing down the high tree," and casting him from his towering altitude into the depths of hell.

But the expression "high tree," bears another signification. Whence comes the presumption of self-confident professors? Does it not spring from an internal principle of pride in them? And are not all, without exception, possessed of the same "deceitful and desperately wicked" heart? Then if the towering confidence of a presumptuous professor springs from innate pride, is there not the same principle at work in the heart of a living child? Cases continually occur **nay, if the Lord did not mercifully prevent, every one of us would fall into the snare,**—cases continually occur, where a living soul, one whom God has taken in hand and taught by his Spirit, through the subtlety of Satan, the pride of his heart and the workings of a deceitful nature, is elevated into a false confidence, stands in false liberty, and towers high in notion beyond the work of grace upon his heart. Were "Jerusalem searched as with candles," we should find many such amongst the real people of God. And whence come they? What makes the tree spindle up in a forest? Is it not the company of other high towering trees? What draws them up into an unnatural altitude, and causes them to spindle high, without throwing out their branches horizontally, or spreading their roots in the soil? Why, it is the neighbourhood of other lofty trees, which draws them up to this unnatural height. Now, so it is in the churches. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." Three or four

presumptuous professors in a church of the living God will draw up into high notions and presumptuous confidence, if God permits it, even some of the living family. And there is another source of this presumption and vain confidence in the hearts of God's children; which is, sitting under ministers who stand themselves in a presumptuous confidence, who shoot their arrows against the exercises of God's tried family, who ridicule with sarcasm and bitter contempt the doubts and fears and guilt and trouble of the living family of Zion, and have their bolt to shoot at every one that stands not in the same presumptuous liberty with themselves. Under these tall upas trees, these lofty soaring ministers in the letter, are the family of God sometimes drawn up out of their real stature. They are drawn up into an ambitious aim to be like those, under whose ministry they continually sit; and they get fostered in presumption by constantly hearing a ministry which is full of it. Thus they become "high trees."

But the Lord will never suffer his dear children to walk in vain confidence; he will never allow them, for a long season together, to stand in false liberty; and therefore he will "bring them down." "All the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree." The Lord will "bring down the high tree" in a way of judgment to the reprobate, but in a way of mercy to the elect. And how does he "bring it down?" By letting the soul know a little of what it really is, by opening up some of the secrets of that deep fountain of internal corruption, which we carry about with us; by bringing perhaps heavy trials in providence, so as to strip us of every hope and of every help, but that which stands in God only; and by shooting his arrows of conviction into our conscience, whereby distress and anguish and guilt and misery and condemnation are internally felt. The Lord has but to touch us with his finger, and down comes all vain confidence. He has but to look upon us with one frown, and he will bruise into nothingness all our presumptuous liberty. He has but to take the veil for a moment off our hearts, and discover to us what we are, and discover to us what he is, and we shall fall down before him, as Isaiah fell when he saw the glory of the Lord in the temple. Our "comeliness will be turned into corruption," as it was when

Daniel saw the "great vision;" and we shall "abhor ourselves in dust and ashes," as did Job, when he had "heard of God by the hearing of the ear, but now saw him with his eye." Thus the "high tree" must be "brought down." The Lord sometimes suffers his people to go on for years in a kind of half confidence, they themselves all the time suspecting that there is something wrong, but still not brought to the light clearly,— "hoping against hope,"—endeavouring to bolster up themselves with rotten props; but the moment he puts his hand upon them, the moment he discovers his holy indignation and wrath against sin in them, he strips them of their vain confidence, and down they go into the deep billows of trouble and despair, "deep calling unto deep at the noise of God's waterspouts," and all the waves and billows of God's wrath seem to roll over their heads. Then they are "brought down." Their false liberty disappears; their vain confidence is destroyed; their hope is removed like a tree; their faith seems to vanish out of their hearts; and they stand as on the very brink of hell in the sight of God, fearing lest every moment should thrust them into eternal perdition. Here is the "high tree brought down." And depend upon it, friends, if you are never "brought down," you will never be lifted up; depend upon it, if the grace of God has never humbled you, and broken you into nothingness before God, you will never be sweetly exalted by the manifestations of Christ to lift you up into himself.

2. And now we come to the "exalting the low tree." Here we have a striking contrast. We have been looking at the "high tree," waving above every other tree in the forest, like the lofty poplar, towering so as to be visible above every other tree of the wood; and now we have "the low tree"—the vine that cannot sustain itself—the ivy that must creep and crawl upon the ground, with no power or ability to stand without a support. Now, "the low tree" represents a child of God, who is low in his own soul; all whose righteousness have been manifested unto him as "filthy rags;" whose heart is broken, whose spirit is contrite, whose conscience is tender, who has been laid low by a work of grace upon his heart, so as to have nothing and be nothing, but is a

poor, ruined, wretched, guilty, sinful, helpless, and hopeless creature, that "cannot lift up so much as his eye unto heaven."

"The low tree" is one who has always the lowest, meanest thoughts concerning himself; who can find in his heart nothing spiritually good; who is continually afraid of presumption; who starts back from every appearance of being more than he really is, or speaking more than he really feels; and is kept down day by day, thinking nothing of himself, and "esteeming others better than himself;" full of self-aborrence and self-loathing on account of a feeling sense of his vileness before the eyes of a heart-searching Jehovah. "The low tree" is one who can speak little, because he has little to speak of but his wretchedness and misery, his helplessness, his weakness, his vileness, and his baseness. "The low tree" is one who crouches and lies at the feet of God, until the Lord is pleased graciously to smile. "The low tree" is one who keeps back, and dares not come forward, lest by coming forward he should rush into presumption. There is no place low enough for the "low tree;" there is no posture humble enough for him to take; there are no words too strong to express the internal feelings of his broken heart; and there is no language which can adequately express all that he feels himself to be before the eyes of a heart-searching Jehovah. He is nothing—he has nothing—he can find nothing in his heart spiritually good, but he stands before God and he stands before the people of God a mass of disease, a leper, a bankrupt, a beggar, poor and needy—"from the crown of the head to the soul of the foot, full of wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores."

Now this "low tree" the Lord has promised to "exalt." But he will never "exalt the low tree" in **self**. The wise man shall not "glory in his wisdom," the strong man shall not "glory in his strength;" but "he that glorieth" shall "glory in this, that he knoweth the Lord." "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." When "the low tree," therefore, is "exalted," it is by some sweet manifestation of the blood and love of Jesus to his soul; it is by lifting him up out of the mire and out of the dunghill, and "setting

him among princes," and making him "inherit the throne of glory;" it is by Jesus sweetly coming into his heart and conscience, sprinkling it with his atoning blood, bedewing it with the drops of his favour, discovering his glorious righteousness, and binding up every bleeding wound.

**Then** the "low tree" is "exalted," when he is sweetly and blessedly lifted up by manifestations of Divine favour; when the showers of the "early and the latter rain" drop into his parched heart; and he is able to see his name cut upon Jesus' heart, and worn upon Jesus' shoulder, and has a sweet and blessed testimony in his conscience, that he is interested in that love which knoweth no bounds, which hath neither length nor breadth, nor height nor depth, but passeth knowledge. Then he is "exalted." But he is never exalted into presumptuous confidence; he is never exalted into fleshly liberty; he is never exalted into self-righteousness. The more he is exalted, the more is he humbled; the higher he rises, the lower he falls; and the clearer views he has of his interest in Jesus, the more is his soul melted within him, the more is his heart broken, the more is his conscience made tender; and he cannot find any place too low for him to sink into, the more the Lord sheds abroad and manifests his favour and his love to his soul. Oh! this is the only exaltation, friends, which is really worth coveting; not to soar high into the air, and to tower aloft into presumptuous notions, but to be exalted to lie at the feet of the Saviour, to lean the head upon the bosom of Jesus, to be exalted not in self, but in Christ, so as to have a sweet manifestation of Christ's eternal and dying love to our souls. This is the exaltation which a broken heart covets; and it covets, and can have, and desires to have none other.

3. But we pass on to consider another tree of which the Lord speaks, and another work which the Lord here promises to do. "I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree." Now, just in the same way as "the high tree" seems to shadow forth two characters **that is, the presumptuous professor, and a child of God drawn aside by Satan's subtlety into presumption,** so "the green

tree" seems to set forth both a professor of religion, and also a child of God in the warmth of youthful zeal. That the profession of religion, without the power of it, is set forth by "the green tree," is evident from what we read in the eighth chapter of the book of Job, where Bildad, speaking of a hypocrite, says—"He is green before the sun, and his branch shooteth forth in his garden; his roots are wrapped about the heap, and seeth the place of stones; if he destroy him from his place then it shall deny him, saying, I have not seen thee. Behold, this is the joy of his way, and out of the earth shall others grow." There he compares the hypocrite to "the rush and the flag," that grow in the mud and mire, which are "greener than any other herb." So that we have a scriptural warrant for explaining this "green tree" of a hypocrite in religion, a mere professor of vital godliness, destitute of the feeling power of it. He is "green;" that is, there is about him a kind of verdure. In prayer, he is always fluent—a gifted man. In conversation, his memory is wonderfully stored with texts of Scripture. In doctrines, he is so thoroughly versed that he is a master of all controversy. In zeal, he is so fervent, that he is continually, in every company, and on every occasion, setting forth religion; and he is often the plague of God's poor, tried, and exercised family, because he can always pray and always talk, and always seem to have religion uppermost in him, while they perhaps feel themselves as dry, and as stupid, and as hard, and as dead, and as barren, and as cold as the very seats which they sit upon. Here, then, is the "green tree," bloated with merely natural verdure, springing up out of the mud and mire of corrupt nature; not filled with a greenness of God's own giving, but a greenness that springs out of nature's operations. Now, the Lord says, "I will dry up the green tree." Have we not often seen professors, who seemed to stand forth with great gifts in prayer, or perhaps minister with great gifts in preaching, who drew large congregations to hear them, and seemed to stand forth as champions for "the truth as it is in Jesus?" And did not a blight come over them? Did not "their sun go down at noon?" Have they not been drawn aside into manifest errors? And are there not, in this metropolis, men who formerly stood forth as champions for the truth in the letter, who have been drawn aside into the worst

of errors, and the worst of delusions? Then the Lord had fulfilled his promise. He has "dried up the green tree." And is it not a matter of experience with respect to those in churches who once seemed full of zeal, and full of life, earnestness, and power in religion, that a sudden blast has come over them, and they have lost all their gifts, they have become dried up, they have now nothing to say, and their barrenness and their nakedness stand exposed before the eyes of all? Such are God's righteous dealings, who will never sanction any religion that did not come from himself, and will never cause that to prosper which his own right hand hath not planted. "Every tree which my Father hath not planted shall be rooted up."

But "the green tree" also sets forth what many of God's people are in their early days. What zeal, what warmth, what fervour, we seem to have in our souls in the springtide of life, after the Lord has been pleased to indulge us with some testimony, and to give us some earnest of his eternal favour! Now, the greater part of this zeal was in the flesh; most of this ardour sprang from the mere workings of nature. This sort of holy fervour arose much from the workings of an excited, heated imagination; it did not come from God. Though there was; "the root of the matter in us," yet this zeal, this fervour, this earnestness, this running here and running there, this carrying everything by storm,—all these things were not really of God, but they were nature dressed in and wearing the appearance of grace. Now, the Lord says of this "green tree," that he will "dry it up;" that is, he will bring this "green tree" into a state of felt destitution and barrenness. Have we not found it so? Where is our zeal gone? Has it not evaporated? Where is our youthful fervour? Has it not taken flight? Where are our ardent prayers and burning desires? Have they not sunk low, and burnt down well nigh to ashes within? Then "the green tree" has been "dried up;" and we are brought, by a work of God's hand upon our hearts **we trust**, to stand in the position which God has described the fourth tree to be in—a "dry tree."

4. Oh! what a state it is in which to stand before God—a "dry tree!" To feel as though there was not a single particle of spiritual sap or heavenly moisture in us; to feel as though we had no religion worth the name; to feel as though we had no real work of the Spirit upon our soul, and no real grace in our heart given by God himself! Oh! what a state it is to be in!—a state of dryness before God, and dryness before the people of God; to find, in our approaches unto God, our hearts dry; to find, in reading the Scriptures of truth, our hearts dry; to find, in conversation with the family of God, our hearts dry; dry to the promises, dry to the consolations, dry to the reproofs, dry to the instructions, dry to every blessing that God has promised to his elect, and as unable to revive our own souls, as unable to communicate greenness and fertility to our own hearts, as the blasted tree in the forest is unable to clothe itself again with verdure, and to put forth flowers and fruit! Here stands the "green tree," then, or rather, that which once was green, among the trees of the field; all its fruits fallen off, all its flowers withered; its leaves perhaps holding on; but, like the oak in winter, the dry and dead leaves, instead of the green and verdant foliage, with which it was once clothed. Oh! to fear that we are standing there, as "dry trees" for God to pluck up by the roots, and cast into everlasting flames. Oh! to have our religion dried up, and to feel in our hearts that there is nothing there like moisture, and sap, and dew, and unction, and verdure.

Now, to this "dry tree" the Lord has given a promise. He says, this dry tree shall be "made to flourish." Oh! what a wonder-working God it is! In what mysterious paths does he move! How he frustrates and disappoints all the expectations of nature. What! to "dry up a green tree," and to "make a dry; tree to flourish!" Would not nature say, "Oh! the 'green tree,' make it greener still; oh! the 'dry tree,' cut it down and cast it into the fire!" But the Lord's "ways are not our ways," neither are the Lord's "thoughts our thoughts;" but "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways and his thoughts than our thoughts." Cut it down! No; "make it to flourish!" Then the Lord's work is made manifest, as much in

"drying up the green tree," as in "making the dry tree to flourish." And how does he "make the dry tree to flourish?" Why, by dropping in his own blessed dew into it; by shedding his own divine favour into the barren and parched heart; by dropping in some testimony from his own blessed and gracious lips, so as to cause the soul to "revive as the vine," and to flourish as the herb; by causing "showers of blessing" to fall upon the wilderness, and turn it into a standing pool, and so make the rose of Sharon sweetly and blessedly to blossom and flourish therein. There are times, then, when the Lord condescends to "make the dry tree to flourish;" that is, drops in some testimony, gives some smile, affords some visit, applies some promise, brings in some part of his holy word with power, and by doing this makes the dry tree flourish again in all its former youth, put forth the green leaves of profession, the fragrant flowers of promise, and the ripe fruits of a godly life, conduct, and conversation.

Now the Lord concludes, "I the Lord have spoken it." It has passed from my lips; it is not the word of man, it is the word of the living God. Aye, and more than that; "I have done it;" not only spoken it, that it **shall** take place—but effected it, that it **does** take place.

"And all the trees of the field shall know" it. It shall be made manifest in the eyes of God's visible Church. And how? By these wonderful transformations taking place before their eyes; by their seeing these characters visibly made manifest by the sovereign operations and dealings of God.

Then you that are members of the visible Church of Christ you whose eyes are opened to see character—wait, watch, observe; and you will see how strikingly God will bring these things to pass.

Where are **you**? If you are a tree of the field, if you are a professor of religion, you are one of **these** trees. Are you a "**high** tree"—a lofty, towering, soaring presumptuous professor? Read your lot. God has written your destiny; he has stamped it in his

own word, by his own infallible hand; you shall be "brought down!" You cannot frustrate it; God has said it, and what God has said, must be accomplished. Then, if you have no grace in your heart, and are a towering, presumptuous, lofty, soaring professor, hear your doom from the mouth of God himself: you shall be "brought down" to the chambers of hell. But have you grace in your heart, and yet have been drawn aside by the presumptuous confidence of others, and have swerved from the simplicity of the Gospel and have outgrown your real stature, and have "intruded into things that you have not seen, vainly puffed up by your fleshly mind?" Hear what the Lord will do for you; hear it from God's mouth: "He will bring you down, he will lay you low, by pressing you down with his powerful hand; he will bring down the pride of your heart, and lay you a ruined wretch at his footstool." Are you a **green** tree? full of zeal, full of fervour, full of warmth, trying to convert everybody, as full of religion as ever you can hold? Hear what God has said: You shall be "dried up." If your zeal springs from nature, if your fervour comes only from the workings of your own heart, it will be dried up; it will be blasted, blighted, withered, extinguished, and you will give up sooner or later even the very profession of religion, and perhaps go back into the world whence you came. If you are a living soul, and have much of this "greenness" of youth about you, and this verdure which is not of God's giving, hear what the Lord will do for **you**. He will "dry you up." Perhaps in our early days some of us have been in this spot; we have looked at God's tried, doubting, exercised, fearing family, and said, "What have these professors been about? They are not like me; they are so dead and they are so carnal, and they are so lifeless, and they are so barren, and they are so constantly talking about their wicked hearts. I know nothing about this, I find nothing of this, I can read, and I can talk, and I can pray, and I can hear, and I can love; I know nothing of this." Now, you must come to this spot, if you are a living soul. The Lord has said he will "dry up the green tree."

You must come to learn your spiritual barrenness, poverty, destitution, bankruptcy, insolvency nothingness; you must come

to have every particle of spiritual sap and moisture dried up, and to stand before God without an atom of living power to infuse life and feeling into your own heart. But now I come to two other characters in God's Church "the low tree," and "the dry tree." Has the Lord taught us, sensibly and feelingly, what we are by nature? Has he really humbled and broken our hearts to lie at his blessed footstool? Are we low in a low place; low in our opinions of ourselves, low in our feelings, low in our frames, low in our experience, low in desponding thoughts of what our future state may be? O "low tree," the Lord will exalt thee; low tree, he has brought thee down, that he may lift thee up. O low tree, it is in order to be exalted in Christ, by sweet manifestations of his love to thy soul, that thou art brought low. Thou enviest the soaring cedar; thou enviest the towering oak; thou needest not envy them. The day of the Lord of Hosts is "upon all the cedars of Lebanon, and upon all the oaks of Bashan;" but the hand of the Lord is not upon "the low tree"—the creeping vine, whose feeble tendrils must cling round a support in order to prop it up. Low tree, the Lord will blessedly exalt thee in his own time and in his own way. But art thou a "dry tree?" Oh! wretched feeling—oh! miserable state in soul experience—to be a "dry tree;" to feel no spiritual sap nor heavenly moisture, but to stand a withered monument **as it were** of what we once were,—to stand like a lofty tree of the forest in its winter garb, without anything to which we can look with pleasure, and say, "This is the handiwork of the Lord himself." If thou art a "dry tree" **spiritually so**, thou wilt be at times mourning thy dryness; thy barrenness will be thy burden; thy poverty will be thy grief; thy emptiness will be thy sorrow: it will be a plague and a trouble to thee, that thou art so dry. Thou wantest to be otherwise, to be green and luxuriant and verdant, to bring forth flowers and fruit to the glory and praise of God. But, dry tree, the Lord will cause thee to flourish; aye, he will make thy bones rejoice, and make thee to flourish as the herb, by sweetly pouring into thy soul his own sap and moisture. Thou art connected with the head of all influence; thou art grafted into the living vine; thou hast a living union with the source of all spiritual sap and moisture, and out of his fulness they shall flow into thy barren heart and dried-up soul. O dry

tree, it is better to be as you and I often feel ourselves—without a spiritual thought, without a spiritual desire, and yet sometimes sighing and groaning unto God from the poverty and destitution of our heart,—it is better feelingly to stand a dry tree among the trees of the field, than to boast ourselves of false verdure, or adorn ourselves with fictitious fruit, and stand forth dressed in the livery of artificial leaves. It is better to feel ourselves wretched, and miserable, and blind, and poor, and naked, than to be like the Laodicean Church, which was all these things and knew it not, but thought she was "rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing."

Then try thy state by this.—If you are "low" by God's work upon your soul, it will be a mournful place to be in. If you are "dry" by God's having dried up your earthly moisture, it will be a grief and a plague to you. It is not catching up just the terms of humility; it is not talking about a broken heart and a contrite spirit; it is having the deep feeling of it within. It is easy enough to catch from the mouth of others—"I am so dead, and I am so carnal, and I am so cold,"—and learn that cuckoo-note, and keep repeating it all the year round. Where it is really felt, it is a burden; where it is, really felt, it is a grief; where it is really felt, it is a trouble; as the Spirit of God works the feeling, the soul is ardently longing to be brought out of dryness and barrenness and destitution, into the light, life, joy, peace, and liberty of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, and to have a sweet manifestation of his eternal love to our hearts. That man's religion is much to be suspected, who is "dry" and yet never feels his dryness, who is in language "low" and is never humbled before a heart-searching God. Where there is a real poverty, there will be a sighing after real riches; where there is a real emptiness, there will be a sighing after a reception out of Christ's fulness; and where there is a real barrenness and drought, there will be a sighing after the showers of God's favour to make the wilderness blossom as the rose.

"I the Lord have spoken, and have done it." It is not to be frustrated; "I the Lord will do it in my time."

I merely wish to add one word—for it is a subject I never like to enlarge upon; there is a collection this evening, and if the Lord has at all opened your heart to give anything to the cause of God and of truth, he will enable you to give him the glory.

## THE TRIAL BY FIRE OF EVERY MAN'S WORK

Preached on Lord's Day Evening, July 31st, 1853, at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road

"Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is."  
1 Cor. 3:12, 13

Paul preached a free-grace gospel. The sovereign, free, superabounding grace of God, as revealed in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, was the joy of his heart and the theme of his tongue; and against nothing did the holy zeal that burned in his bosom flame forth more vehemently than against any perversion or adulteration of this pure gospel. It was with this gospel in his heart, and with this gospel in his mouth, that he went forth into different places, as he was led by the blessed Spirit, preaching Jesus Christ and salvation through His blood and righteousness. God owned his testimony; the Holy Spirit accompanied the word with divine power; and many Gentile sinners, formerly worshippers of idols, and abandoned to every lust, were brought to repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

This was the "foundation" which he, as a wise masterbuilder, instrumentally and ministerially laid as he speaks, "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation" **1Co 3:10**. Paul is speaking here not so much of the foundation which God has laid in Zion, though that is included, as of his own ministry. Let me explain this point, for some persons seem to me to mistake Paul's meaning here. God has actually, truly, of His own sovereign good pleasure, laid a foundation on which the Church is built. This foundation is His own dear Son, "the Rock of Ages", and against the Church built on this foundation the gates of hell shall never

prevail. But when a minister preaches this free-grace gospel, when he sets forth the Lord Jesus Christ as the only foundation of the Church, then he lays this foundation ministerially. He is thus, as the apostle says, "a labourer together with God" **1Co 3:9** ; for the same foundation which God laid in Zion he lays instrumentally in a sinner's soul.

But this glorious work, whereby through Paul's preaching, sinners were saved, the churches edified, and God glorified, raised the spleen and enmity of Satan. He could not bear to see glory brought to God and salvation to man; and therefore he stirred up erroneous men to follow in Paul's track in order to adulterate this precious gospel by mingling with it sometimes the requirements or the spirit of the law, sometimes the tenets of heathen philosophy, sometimes will-worship and a voluntary humility. The first was the case with the churches of Galatia; the two latter with the church of Colosse.

It was the legal spirit thus introduced into the Galatian churches which drew forth from the breast of the apostle that Epistle to the Galatians, which will ever be a bulwark against a Galatian gospel while the world continues. Matters were not quite so bad at Corinth. The believers in that city were too well instructed to receive a Galatian gospel, for they were "enriched by Him in all utterance and in all knowledge", and "came behind in no gift" **1Co 1:5-7**. And it would appear that the preachers who followed Paul were, some of them at least, good men, for the apostle speaks of their ministerial work being burnt, but they themselves being "saved, yet so as by fire" **1Co 3:15**.

They therefore in their ministry did not seek to root up or intermeddle with Paul's foundation. There they and Paul were fully agreed. But where they differed was about the superstructure. "I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereupon." Then comes the solemn caution, "But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon." We are agreed, says Paul, as to the foundation. None of the builders who have come after me have dared to meddle with my foundation. He then adds the

words which are sometimes misunderstood, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ"—meaning, as I understand it, "Ye wise and well-instructed Corinthians would not tolerate it. If a man were to come to Corinth and lay any other foundation than that is laid among you by my hands, ye would not hear him for a single moment; and those who have come among you being, as I hope, good men, would not attempt it. There you and they and I are all agreed. There is no difference nor dispute between us and them about foundation work. The foundation is so far safe. But now comes the hardly less important question, What about the superstructure which these men have built on my foundation? Is that right or is it not? Here we may widely differ; for the superstructure must either agree with and be worthy of the foundation, or it must disagree with and be unworthy of it."

Now let us read our text in the connection as thus explained, and then let us see what is the apostle's meaning in it. "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is."

In looking at these words, then, and attempting, as the Lord may enable, to open up and lay before you their spiritual meaning, I shall, with God's blessing, and looking to Him for strength in body, soul, and spirit, endeavour to show

I. What is the foundation which God has actually and truly laid in Zion, and the foundation which every true servant of God lays ministerially in the Church.

II. The superstructure built upon this foundation, which may be either gold, silver, precious stones, or wood, hay, stubble.

III. The fire which is to try every man's work of what sort it is.

I. Our first main point is to show **the foundation** on which the Church of God stands. Here we are called upon to be very clear and plain, and not darken counsel by words without knowledge.

i. Let us hear, then, God's own word by the mouth of His prophet Isaiah. "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" **Isa 28:16** . This foundation is no other than the co-equal and co-eternal Son of God. Therefore when Peter made that noble confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God", the Lord Jesus answered, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" **Mt 16:17,18**.

Let us dwell for a moment on Peter's confession, for it is not on Peter that the Church of Christ is built, but on the Son of God; and it is not on the person of Peter or pope, but on the confession of Peter and the truth therein expressed, that Christ at the right hand of God ever builds the Church. In Peter's confession there are two points, which separate and together embrace the Lord Jesus. He is,

1. "the Son of the living God." There is His Deity and eternal Sonship. He is,

2. "the Christ", the Messiah, the anointed One. There is His humanity in union with Deity. For though it was His human nature which was anointed by the blessed Spirit, yet it was so, as in union with His Deity. This, then, is the foundation which God has laid in Zion—the Person of the Lord Jesus as God-Man Mediator, Immanuel, God with us.

ii. But the apostle speaks as if **he** had laid the foundation. "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder I have laid the foundation." Is there not an apparent inconsistency here? Does God lay one foundation and

man another? "No" says the apostle, "' we are labourers together with God. Ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.' **1Co 3:9**. God has laid the foundation actually, and we lay the foundation ministerially. I came to Corinth. The Lord Himself told me He had 'much people' there **Ac 18:10**. There I preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified, for I desired to know nothing else among you. God blessed the Word to your souls; 'for my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power' **1Co 2:4**. Thus ministerially, by preaching Christ and Him crucified, I laid the same foundation in the church at Corinth and in your hearts, which God has laid in Zion." There is, then, no contradiction, but a blessed harmony of purpose when the servant of Christ is a labourer together with God in laying by his mouth the same foundation which God has laid by His hands.

iii. But be it ever borne in mind that it is one thing to hear of this foundation and another to be built into and upon it. It is one thing to hear of a rock, it is another to stand upon it. It is one thing to assent to the truth that there is a foundation laid by God in Zion, but it is another for your soul to be taught and brought by a divine power to rest upon that foundation. The one is theory, the other is fact; the one is notion, the other is experience; the one is the teaching of man, the other the teaching of God; the one a religion that stands in the flesh, the other a religion that stands in divine power.

Now on what foundation do we stand naturally? **Self**. And what foundation is that? **Sand**. Thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, myriads, have no other foundation than sand! A quick-sand, a sand bank, a shoal of mud, poor miserable, fickle, false, and faithless self—on this they stand to meet the rushing waves of judgment. Now if our house be built upon the sand it must fall when the storm bursts forth; but if our house be built upon a rock it will stand unshaken amidst the storms that desolate the world. But as we all naturally from ignorance and self-righteousness build on the sand, we must be brought off one foundation before we can stand upon another.

And how is this to be done? What a description God has given of the way whereby a soul is brought off the sandy foundation self to stand upon the rock Christ! Read it, mark it, digest it, and see whether you have any personal acquaintance with it. "Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through it shall not come unto us"—here is carnal security here is empty profession, here is a religion that stands in the flesh—"for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves" **Isa 28:15**. How the Lord here lays bare the hypocrisy and deceitfulness of a religion which stands in creature righteousness, putting as it were into the mouths of its professors His own view of it. This then is their language, "We have made a covenant with death." Death and we have shaken hands, and are thorough good friends. Why need we fear it then as an enemy? We have a religion to die by. "And with hell are we at agreement." Why then need we fear hell? Our religion will surely deliver us from going down to the pit; and our own righteousness will surely give us an entrance into the gate of heaven. Yea, though God Himself declare it to be a lying refuge, yet having once taken shelter in it we are well satisfied with it, and do not want to be driven out of it; and though under falsehood we have hid ourselves, yet we would sooner take our chance and live and die in it than suffer the pain and annoyance to be beaten out of it. Such is man, such the wisdom of the flesh; such all creature religion, such the pride and obstinacy of the human heart; such the deadly enmity of the carnal mind against salvation by grace, that it would sooner die and be damned in its own way than live and be saved in God's way.

But will the Lord let His people live and die in these false refuges? He Himself shall answer the question. "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place" **Isa 28:17**. That is God's way of bringing the soul off the sandy foundation of self, preparatory to building it upon the Rock of Ages. The figure employed is that of a builder who

works by line and plummet, and by applying it to the wall at once detects the least deviation from the perpendicular.

What corresponds to this in grace? The application of the law to the conscience, that holy, unbending, condemning law which demands perfect love to God and man. This is laying judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet, for the law is as strict and as unerring in detecting the least deviation from its commands as the line and plummet in detecting the least deviation from the perpendicular. And what follows? The thunderstorm of God's indignation against the transgression of this holy law. "The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place." The idea is of a person taking shelter in vain from the storm and hail **which in those countries was often composed of large pieces of ice**, but the storm and hail battering the shelter down, and the flood drowning him out of his hiding-place.

This thunder-storm and its attendant flood breaks up carnal security. "Your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it" **Isa 28:18**. The covenant with death that it should have no sting, and the agreement with hell that it should have no victory, are broken up and disannulled; and the soul stands naked and guilty before God, as a consuming fire. Under these distressing sensations what sighs and cries go up out of the heart! "What shall I do? Whither shall I flee? How shall I escape the wrath to come? O eternity, eternity! How shall I grapple with eternity? How shall I endure everlasting burnings? O why was I ever born into this miserable world, to be an everlasting monument of God's displeasure? O that I were anything but what I am—a dog, a worm, a toad—any vile reptile that had not an immortal soul!"

As the fire of God's holy law thus burns and smoulders in a sinner's conscience, it scorches up his agreement with death, and it falls out of his hands a defaced and useless scroll. It seems at first sight, hard that such severe measures should be needful to

divorce the soul from self; but so close is the union, so grown together, interlocked, and interwoven are the two, that nothing but a divine power can rend them asunder.

Now when the Lord Jesus Christ is made known to the soul by the blessed Spirit as the Rock of Ages, the foundation which God has laid in Zion, and there is a view by faith of His glorious Person, atoning blood, and justifying righteousness, there is a coming unto Him as such, as the Apostle Peter speaks: "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" **1Pe 2:4,5**. Christ is the living stone, and believers are lively or living stones. Thus stone comes to stone, the sinner to the Saviour, and cleaving to Him becomes cemented into Him, by the Holy Spirit, and thus obtains a living union with Him. It is in this way that a guilty sinner, a desolate soul, is brought off the sand, and built on and into the rock which God has laid in Zion.

II. Having thus seen what the foundation is, and how the soul is brought to it, and built in and upon it, we may now look at the superstructure; for there is a building to be raised as well as a foundation to be laid; and this superstructure may either be worthy of the foundation or unworthy of it—in other words, according to the expression of the apostle, be either gold, silver, precious stones, or wood, hay, stubble.

When a minister spiritually and experimentally preaches the Lord Jesus Christ as the only object of a sinner's hope, he instrumentally lays Christ as the foundation. But he must go on to build up the Church on her most holy faith, and rear up a superstructure worthy of, and corresponding to the foundation. Is it not so in nature? It is a frequent circumstance that when a noble building is to be erected, the foundation stone is laid by some distinguished person with great ceremony. But is not this a pledge that the superstructure shall correspond to the foundation, and be in harmony with it? A foundation for a palace, and the

superstructure a hovel! What a contradiction! What an inconsistency! Thus the apostle assumes there may be built upon Christ the foundation, either a worthy, harmonious, consistent superstructure, as gold, silver, precious stones, or an inconsistent, unworthy, disgraceful one, as wood, hay, stubble.

We will examine them both separately.

i. What are we to understand by gold, silver, precious stones? Evidently something valuable, weighty, enduring, and above all incombustible. What in grace possesses these invaluable qualities? First, the grand **truths** and leading **doctrines** of the gospel may be said to bear these features. God's eternal choice of His people in the Son of His love, their personal and particular redemption by the blood of Christ, their justification by His imputed righteousness, and their full and perfect salvation in Him, are all weighty, valuable, precious realities which fire cannot destroy, nor water drown. So the promises of the gospel, which are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus to the glory of God, are gold, silver, and precious stones, weighty, valuable, and enduring. Nor are the precepts of the gospel, and the ordinances of God's house, to be omitted from the harmonious superstructure. All that the gospel reveals and proclaims, all that it promises and enjoins, all the holy obedience to which it calls, must be built up by Zion's true builders as a superstructure on Christ the foundation.

But I think we may apply the words more particularly to the work of the blessed Spirit in the soul, whereby He builds it up for a temple for Himself to dwell in, as the apostle speaks—"What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" **1Co 6:19**. If this be the case, then the three things here spoken of, gold, silver, precious stones, will have special reference to the teachings and operations of the blessed Spirit.

1. What may we then understand by **gold**? Evidently **faith**. The Lord Himself compares faith to gold in His address to the

Laodicean church, "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire:" **Re 3:18** and that this means faith is plain from the language of Peter, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" **1Pe 1:7**. Well may this tried, this precious faith, be compared to gold, for it enriches the soul by putting it into possession of all the riches of Christ. Therefore the apostle says, "All things are yours." Why? Because "ye are Christ's."

As gold is the grand medium of exchange, whereby, according to the amount which we possess of it, we obtain all we want, so faith is the believer's medium of exchange, whereby he receives out of Christ's fulness a supply for all his wants. Thus the Lord says, "Come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" **Isa 55:1**. This divine, this living faith, is not the exercise of any natural faculty of a man's mind; it is not the same thing as credence given to some historical event, as I believe there is an Australia, or that there was a Bonaparte; but it is a special fruit and grace of the Spirit, a new covenant blessing, the gift of God, and wrought in the heart by a divine power.

A minister builds this gold up into the superstructure when he points out and insists upon, describes and unfolds the origin and nature of this faith; and when the blessed Spirit owns his testimony and raises up faith in the hearer under his testimony, He inlays it into the soul and builds it up into Christ. Such was the faith of Abel, the first martyr; such the faith of Enoch, who walked with God; such the faith of Noah, whereby he built the ark; such the faith of Abraham, whereby he became the manifested friend of God; such was the faith of Jacob when he wrestled with the angel; of David, when he went out against Goliath, and such was the faith of that glorious band of whom the world was not worthy, whose sufferings and exploits the apostle records in **Heb 11**. This faith is worthy of the foundation, for it is

the work of the Holy Spirit alone which agrees and is in harmony with the person and work of God the Son.

2. But the apostle mentions "**silver**" as forming a second constituent of a worthy and suitable superstructure. We should not strain figurative expressions too far, lest we fall into wild and fanciful interpretations. A rein is here needed rather than a spur, lest we should be carried away into the trackless region of imagination instead of the green pastures of gospel truth. But I think, without being fanciful, we may explain silver as referring to the grace of hope. Is not this a part of the superstructure to be built upon Christ the foundation? As the hymn says

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

What is our hope worth if not built on the Person, work, and blood of the Son of God? But a good hope through grace is the work of the blessed Spirit, and therefore in harmony with the finished work of Jesus. But how does a minister build this silver as a constituent part of the superstructure? By preaching the gospel in its purity and fulness; by setting forth the freeness of grace; by tracing out the work of the Spirit on the heart; by holding up the Lord Jesus Christ as the sinner's Saviour and Friend; by describing the character of God's poor and needy family, and bringing forward the promises, invitations, and declarations of God on their behalf. This good hope through grace, being built on the Person, work, and blood of Christ, and being wrought in the heart by the blessed Spirit, is a part of the superstructure worthy of and suitable to the foundation.

3. But "**precious stones**" are also mentioned as a part of the spiritual building. These, it is evident, surpass in rarity, beauty, and value, gold and silver. But can anything surpass faith and hope? Yes. Precious manifestations of God's love, precious visits of Jesus, precious applications of His blood to the conscience, precious smiles from His face, and precious words from His lips. These are indeed rare. It is not often in a man's life that he has

special manifestations of the Lord Jesus. Faith and hope, like gold and silver, are more for every day, for by faith we live, stand and fight, and therefore need it continually; and by hope we are saved from despair, and therefore want it every hour. But precious stones glitter on but few fingers, and are only for high days and festivals. Yet, what worth is lodged in a small diamond! So one manifestation of Christ, one discovery of God's pardoning love, and one application of atoning blood to the conscience, though it may not be great in extent nor long in duration, yet how unspeakably valuable and precious it is! These precious stones a minister builds up as a part of the superstructure when he describes them, enforces them on the conscience, insists and contends for them.

Now take a glance at this building, foundation and superstructure. The glorious Person of the Son of God with His atoning blood, justifying righteousness, and finished work is the foundation. The work of the Spirit, the graces He produces, and the manifestations of Christ which He gives—that is the superstructure. As the Lord Jesus is the only foundation on which the soul can rest, so by the work of the Spirit is it alone built up. Thus we see the Trinity all here engaged. God the Father lays the foundation; God the Son is Himself the foundation; and God the blessed Spirit builds up the glorious superstructure. Those ministers, therefore, and those ministers alone, are "labourers together with God" who work according to the rule of this pattern, and whose ministry, as being in accordance with His word and will, He owns and blesses to the building up of His church.

ii. But there were those in Paul's day, as we find from his epistles, and such there are also in our day, who have no eyes to see nor hearts to value the gold, silver, and precious stones. And yet they would be master-builders, would put their hand to the work; though instead of a temple they build—what? A Babel. One brings "wood", a second brings "hay", and a third brings "stubble".

There is doubtless a spiritual meaning in these materials. The leading idea which pervades the whole is of course that they are

all highly combustible—dangerous materials in a thunder-storm. Their second character is, their utter worthlessness; the third, their unsuitability to such a foundation.

But let us examine them a little more closely.

1. **Wood.** This forms the main portion of the false superstructure. A well-compacted system of creature duties just meets the idea of a wooden steeple. There are the sawn timbers of various lengths, the posts, rafters, purlins, and all the apparatus so neatly fitted, joined, morticed, glued, nailed, and dovetailed—a duty here and a rule there; a prayer for Monday and a chapter for Tuesday; when to fast and when to feast; when to stand and when to kneel!—what can be neater and more compact than our nice wooden spire?

2. But haply, it is hardly rain-and-weather-tight. There are breaches now and then made in these duties and observances. Conscience becomes uneasy, as the light breaks in through the gaps. Well; what then? Bring some "**hay**" to stop up the holes. A bundle of resolutions, vows, determinations to do better the next time, mortification at the want of success, and a fixed struggle not again to be overcome by sin and temptation—this is the "hay" which the false builders thrust into the huge cracks of creature obedience.

3. But the building still gapes; the wooden frame, with its holes filled up with hay, begins to look somewhat ruinous. It is not water-tight. What must next be done? Thatch it with "**stubble**" to keep out the rain. Go into the field of human merit, collect the stalks, put them together, smooth them down, water them with a few tears, and lay them on as a covering for the wooden roof. Fleshly holiness, creature piety, a demure visage, a hollow voice, a soft walk, a solemn garb, and a choice selection of scriptural phrases—put all this feigned humility and mock religion well and neatly together, and lay the whole on as a covering to thatch in the wooden steeple.

By these striking figures does the apostle describe and expose all that legality and Pharisaism, which, in all ages, ignorant builders have heaped upon Christ, allowing indeed Him to be the foundation, yet rearing upon Him this miserable and worthless superstructure.

III. But will this superstructure stand? No. What is to overthrow and destroy it? Fire. This is God's appointed mode of proving the work, whether it is to perish or to abide. "Every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." What is the work here spoken of? It is mainly ministerial. "Every man" here signifies, generally, every minister, for it is of them the apostle is chiefly speaking. Now, the work of every minister is to be made manifest, whether it be the work of God, or whether it be the work of man. Every minister of truth who stands up before a people has a work to do; and this work is to be made manifest; it is to be revealed and brought to light of what sort it is. And how does God make it manifest? The apostle tells us, here in the clearest manner, so that he who runs may read. He says, "The day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." By this "work" here, we may understand not only the religion enforced by the minister, but the people also who receive his ministry, and are instrumentally built up by him, either in faith, hope, and love, or in legality and fleshly holiness.

By the "fire" sent of God to prove the work we may understand several things.

1. **Persecution** is a fire, and when it rages a sharp one too. Peter seems to allude to this as a part of the furnace, where he speaks of "the fiery trial"; for to be a Christian in those days was often a furnace which burnt off the body, and sent the soul to heaven in a chariot of fire.

2. But **temptation** also is a fire, and a hotter furnace for the soul than the bonfire is to the body. Peter speaks of "the elect

strangers" as being "in heaviness through manifold temptations, that the trial of their faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" **1Pe 1:7.**

Temptation is to our fallen nature what a match is to shavings, wood, and coal laid in the grate. Sin in our nature lies dead till temptation sets it all on fire. What overthrew David? Temptation. What cast down Peter? Temptation. What moved Moses to anger, Job to curse the day of his birth, and Jonah to turn his back upon doing God's work? Temptation. And what often makes us stagger and reel, and fear whither our wicked hearts may not carry us headlong? Temptation. Well might the Lord say, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation;" and again, "Lead us not into temptation," for if led into and left in it, who can bring us out unharmed?

3. But the **anger** of God against all sin is also a fire. The flashes of His holy indignation against the pride, hypocrisy, self-righteousness, and other abounding evils in our hearts, are a part of the furnace which the Lord has appointed in Zion.

4. **Fears of death,** stings of conscience, gloomy apprehensions of what a dying bed may be, painful views of our miserable shortcomings, distressing discoveries of the depth of sin and iniquity which dwell in us, a continual struggle with the risings and boilings of inward corruption—this, too, is part of the fire which is to try every man's work of what sort it is. For you will observe I chiefly confine myself to those fires and furnaces which burn up the wood, hay, and stubble of the false superstructure. Now observe the effect of the fire which is to try the work of what sort it is.

1. First, the gold, silver, and precious stones—faith of God's giving, hope of God's inspiring, love of God's shedding abroad—can or will these graces of the Spirit be burnt up? No. They are inconsumable in the hottest furnace. They may, indeed, seem at

times lost and buried in smoke and ashes, when the wood, hay, and stubble are set on fire; but they are absolutely indestructible, though the furnace be heated seven times more than it is wont {See **Da 3:19**}

**2. But how fare the wood, hay, and stubble? Where now is creature obedience, fleshly holiness, rounds of forms and duties? Where the well-compacted frame of wood, the bundles of hay, the thatch of stubble? Well might the roof have been put together; well the cracks filled up; well the thatch laid on. But will the fire of persecution, of temptation, of sin, of God's holy indignation, of guilty doubts and fears, spare this man-made superstructure? No. It burns, it flames forth in clouds of smoke, it sinks, it falls, however high it reared its lofty head, into black ashes and dismal ruin.**

**But what of the foundation? Is that burnt up too? No. That is Christ, therefore it abideth, the same yesterday, today, and for ever. For observe that the apostle is speaking here of those that are eventually saved. "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" 1Co 3:15.** His work is to be burned, and thus he suffers loss; but he himself is saved, yet so as by fire, that is, like a man pulled by force out of a house in flames, though all his property is consumed. Now this casts a mysterious light on some ministers and on some hearers. They are right as to the foundations, but wrong as to the superstructure. They rest really and truly on Christ, and yet, misled and beguiled by a legal, self-righteous spirit, they bring in the doings of the creature. In mercy to their souls, God sends a fire to burn all this up. In nature sometimes a fire is the best thing that can happen. The great fire of London was the greatest blessing London ever had. Till then it was from time to time desolated by the plague. But the fire burning old London down with its narrow, pestilential streets, burnt the plague out. And thus the best thing that can happen to some persons' religion is for it to be burnt up. There is then some hope that out of the

blackened ruins and smouldering ashes a new and better religion may spring.

Having thus pointed and feathered my arrow, let me now put it on the string that I may aim it at some of your consciences.

There are several distinct and marked steps laid down by the apostle here. Let us see how far we can place our foot upon them.

1. The first is, the being brought off the sandy foundation. As all by nature build on the sand, and as all before they are built on the rock are brought off the sand, this is an event not to be slurred over, as something done one knows not where, when, or how. To be quickened into spiritual life, to be convinced of sin, and brought out of carnal security into apprehensions of the holiness, justice, and majesty of God is the greatest event in all our lives.

2. The next step is to be built on Christ as the only foundation of a sinner's hope. But this cannot be without a spiritual discovery of the Person, blood, righteousness, and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the especial work of the Holy Spirit to glorify Jesus and exalt Him in the heart by taking of the things of Christ and revealing them to the soul. This, therefore, is a thing which cannot be done in the dark, when a man is asleep and knows nothing about it, the when or how. To be brought from the law to the gospel, from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion, from self to Christ, from unbelief to faith, despondency to hope, and fears to love, is an event in a man's spiritual life which can no more be forgotten than an escape from shipwreck.

3. Next comes the question of the superstructure. Here evidently sad mistakes are made by blundering workmen. To carry up the tower requires the main skill of the architect. Let him look well to his materials, and guard against one point particularly, the introduction of rubbish. Wood, hay, and stubble may do for a hovel or a stable, barn or outhouse, but not for a temple. "Ye are

the temple of the living God," in which He dwells and walks. Therefore let it be a mansion worthy of His abode, a temple of which God Himself is the builder, Christ the foundation, and the graces of the blessed Spirit the superstructure.

## The Triumphs of Mercy

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

"Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." Micah 7:18, 19

In Exodus 33 we have a remarkable prayer of Moses, and in chapter 34 a still more remarkable answer. What was the prayer of Moses? "And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory." (Exod. 33:18.) The man of God could not be satisfied without a sight of God's glory. Though elevated to one of the greatest heights which human foot ever trod; though the chosen leader of God's people out of Egypt; though invested with almost absolute power, so as to be called "a king in Jeshurun" (Deut. 33:5); though God spake unto him face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend; though occupying a position such as no other man ever occupied as the typical mediator between God and his people, yet these high and holy privileges fell short of giving him all that his soul longed to enjoy. If he looked to himself, as a fallen sinner of Adam's ruined race, he saw misery, wretchedness, and beggary there. If he looked down from Sinai's top upon the camp of Israel, he saw stubbornness, rebellion, and idolatry there. Wherever he turned his eye in this lower world, nothing met his view but what bore upon it the visible tokens of the fall, except the immediate presence of God as manifested in the pillar of the cloud resting upon the tabernacle. And though this was a glorious sight, and opened large views for faith and hope, yet after all it was but a typical representation of the presence of God. He fixed his eyes and heart therefore upon this one thing: a sight of the glory of God in some special, divine manifestation of it, as that which alone could fill his soul with sweet and sacred delight. This desire was kindled by the

operation of God's grace; this prayer was put into his heart by the power and influence of the sacred Spirit. And as if God creates any desire in the souls of his people, and that desire vents itself in prayer and supplication for a sight of his glory, he will blessedly answer it by the manifestation of himself, so was it with the man of God. But though God granted Moses the petition thus put up, yet it seems as if it was not exactly as Moses expected or hoped. Instead of showing him his glory in such a way as Moses probably had framed in his own mind, God said he would show him his goodness: "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee." And yet as if he knew what was in Moses' secret heart, he also added, "Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me and live." But though thus refusing that part of his prayer which could not be granted, the Lord devised a way to give Moses the utmost desire of his heart: "And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock; and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: and I will take away my hand, and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen." (Exod. 33:21, 22, 23.) He bade him also hew two tables of stone like unto the first; and to be ready in the morning and come up unto Mount Sinai, and present himself there before him on the top of the mount. All this we find Moses did, for we read, "Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up unto Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tables of stone." Now then it was that the Lord answered the prayer of Moses that he might see his glory: "And the Lord descended in the cloud" (for Moses could not bear the full effulgence of God's glory), "and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord;" that is, not only his essential character but the special relationship which he bears to man, and by which he will be known to the sons of men, for the sacred historian adds, "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." This was the

manifestation of God's glory to Moses. It was not perhaps exactly such a manifestation of his glory, at least not so special and personal as Moses might have longed to see; but it was that which God saw fit to grant. And how wise and gracious was the Lord in not confining a view of his glory to Moses as a matter of personal enjoyment and experience, but by proclaiming his own name, his own gracious attributes, his own goodness, mercy, and truth, and declaring that in the manifestation of them his glory shone forth, thus to reveal himself to the children of men to all generations. The personal manifestation of his glory to Moses would have been confined to him. He alone would have enjoyed it; but the proclamation of God's character as full of goodness and truth, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin, would be an eternal possession to the church. It also showed in what the real glory of God consists, and that what we need as poor fallen sinners is not a view of the effulgence of God's glory, under which we could not live, but a proclamation of his pardoning mercy to our hearts.

But as I am not preaching this evening from those words as a text I need not further dilate upon them, though they beautifully harmonise with that declaration from the mouth of the prophet, the rich contents of which I hope now to lay before you. I shall therefore merely point out that the glory of God as thus revealed to Moses mainly consisted in his being so "abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, and forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin." It is true that God made a reservation of his justice. He could not keep back or sacrifice that solemn attribute or merge it, according to modern divinity, altogether in mercy. He therefore added, "And that will by no means clear the guilty."

Similar to this then is the declaration in our text, where we have the prophet bursting forth as it were into a transport of holy joy, in contemplating the character of God as pardoning iniquity, and not retaining his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he

retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." As mercy forms the chief as well as the delightful theme of our text, I shall speak of it under these three points of view:—

I.—*First, Mercy in its delight.*

II.—*Secondly, Mercy in its manifestation.*

III.—*Thirdly, Mercy in its challenge.*

I.—Mercy in its *delight*: "Because he delighteth in mercy."

God is just, inflexibly, unspeakably just; nor can any one of his attributes suffer the least tarnish, be in any degree impaired, interfered with, or set aside by another. To our apprehension, they may seem at times to clash; but that is our dimness of sight; and indeed as our minds become more enlightened into the mysteries of divine truth, the more will every seeming contradiction disappear. The attributes of God are in fact himself. We speak of God's attributes because some such view of God's omniscience, omnipresence, holiness, justice, and mercy, seems necessary to lead our poor finite mind to gather up from various points a full view of his character. We speak therefore of the justice of God, of the grace of God, of the love of God, of the mercy of God, as being what are called attributes of the divine character. But God is all just; he is all merciful; he is all good; and he is all love; for these attributes, though we separate them for the sake of convenience and to help our finite minds, yet are not separate or separable from God; for God is all that his attributes, as we call them, represent him to be, and greater than they all.

Mercy then is one of these attributes; and as God speaks of it as in some way distinct from himself we may do the same, and view the attribute distinct from him who possesses it. This then is an

attribute of God in which he is said especially to delight: "He delighteth in mercy." And because he delights in mercy it suits us well, for we delight in mercy too as poor miserable sinners; and when we delight in mercy received, and God delights in mercy bestowed, the giving of mercy and the reception of mercy form a subject of delight to us as they form a subject of delight to God. His other attributes he ever keeps untarnished, unimpaired, uninterfered with; but according to the revelation which he has given us of his mind and will, he has not that supreme and sweet delight in executing justice which he has in manifesting mercy. We therefore read of "his work, his strange work," when justice is to be executed. It is work to be done, and yet is in some respects strange to the divine character. He therefore says, "For the Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act." To be wroth towards his enemies, as in the valley of Gibeon, is God's work; but it is his strange work. As an earthly monarch must sometimes execute justice to show that he bears not the sword in vain, so it is with the great Sovereign of heaven and earth; for justice is so essentially a part of the character of God that if he could cease to be just he would cease to be God. But he does not, according to the Scripture declaration, take the same delight in manifesting justice as he takes in manifesting mercy. He does not rejoice over the destruction of a sinner as he rejoices over the salvation of the righteous. The bowels of his compassion are moved towards the vessels of mercy, but they do not move towards those who are unbelieving, hardened, and impenitent. They come under the stroke of his terrible justice, but not under the bowels of his compassion and the mercy in which his heart delights.

But what is mercy? It is that attribute of God (it is needful to speak of God's attributes, I will again remark, to give us clear conceptions)—it is that attribute of God which is suitable to our case as sinners. None but a sinner can value mercy. How we see this displayed in that memorable parable of the publican and the Pharisee. How the Pharisee goes up to the temple lifting up his head in all the pride of pharisaism, ignorant of God, ignorant of

self, unacquainted with the purity, majesty, and justice of that God whom he pretends to worship, and fixes his self-complacent eye on his own paltry performances, his own petty doings, his own self-devised observances, as if they merited the favour of God, and gave him a claim upon his salvation. How different was the feeling and the language that sprang out of the bosom and lips of the poor dejected publican. Viewed by the eye of man, there stood on one side an upright, consistent character, a man without moral blemish, diligent in every observance of the law, humane, charitable, and pious; and if he did look askance at the publican, or if he did look condescendingly down from the height of his holiness upon men abandoned to every crime, such a self-complacent thought might surely be forgiven him. But farther down in the temple, yet not out of sight either of God or man, there stood one noted for his exactions, disgraced by his life, and an object of contempt and hatred to all. But grace, sovereign grace, had touched his heart. He knew that the temple was a representation of him who was to come, in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth bodily; at least he knew that in the temple God was to be worshipped and found. Crawling thither with his dejected mind, penetrated and deeply possessed with a sense of God's purity and holiness, smitten in his conscience, and deeply sunk with apprehensions of eternal woe, he ventures to come within the holy precincts, we may suppose, in almost the same spirit as that in which Jonah spoke: "Yet will I look again toward thy holy temple." But though he came there he durst not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven. There God dwelt in all his purity and majesty. He could not therefore lift up his eyes even to the place whence he knew mercy must come. All he could do was to smite upon his breast, and, in the agony of his soul, to breathe out that memorable prayer which has been the cry of thousands and tens of thousands, "God be merciful to me a sinner." But no sooner had that prayer come out of his heart and mouth than it entered the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, and the sentence of justification, pardon, and peace was sent down from above, and, under the application of the Holy Ghost, reached his conscience, and he went down to his house with the justification, approbation, and mercy of God in his soul. What an

encouragement to any poor, sensible sinner, who can only just vent forth his piteous cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." We all began there; it was the beginning of our cry to him who hears and answers prayer. We do not indeed usually receive justification as soon in answer to our cry as the publican did, though we know not how many cries and groans he had secretly put up before. But we all come in through conviction of sin. We are not drawn, as people talk, by love, but driven by compulsion. The law threatens, conscience accuses, hell opens, heaven closes; and by this driving we come as the publican, with the simple, earnest, sincere cry, "Mercy, mercy, mercy." "God be merciful to me a sinner."

Now God delighteth in mercy. It is not drawn from him unwillingly; it is not forced out of him even by importunity; it is not dragged out of his heart by the cries of his family; but he delights in it as being his darling attribute, the very pleasure of God being in showing mercy to the miserable. How hard it is for us to believe this until mercy visits the soul and a sweet sense of it is felt in the conscience. How we represent to ourselves God in his anger, in his justice, in his terrible displeasure against sin and sinners; how unable to believe that there is mercy for us, and that he delights in manifesting mercy to poor, miserable, penitent sinners. Who ever would have thought of mercy unless it had first been in the bosom of God? Who could have ventured to entertain or suggest such a thought that "there is forgiveness with God;" that he can "pardon iniquity, and transgression, and sin;" that he can cast all our sins behind his back, and blot them out as a cloud, yea, as a thick cloud? This is what God has revealed of himself in his word, but it is only as mercy visits the troubled breast, and God displays his goodness and love in the revelation of his dear Son, that we can rise up into any sweet apprehension of what his mercy really is, and rejoice in it not only as suitable, but as saving.

II.—But now look at mercy in its *manifestation*.

Our text enters very largely and blessedly into the manifestation

of that mercy in which God is said thus to delight. I shall, therefore, take up several points of our text, in which these manifestations of mercy are set forth.

i. The first manifestation of this mercy which I shall notice, is contained in the words, "*He retaineth not his anger for ever.*"

God is angry, and justly angry with the sins of his people. He hates sin with a perfect hatred. He cannot but entertain unceasing wrath against it. It is so contrary to the purity and perfection of his holy nature, that wherever he meets with sin, his indignation flashes out against it. Now as we are brought sensibly to feel that there is anger in God against our sins, we fear and tremble, especially in the first teaching of his Spirit and grace, that there is anger against our persons. We cannot separate the two. They are separate in the mind of God. As chosen in Christ, accepted in the Beloved, washed in his blood, and clothed in his righteousness, there is no anger in God against the persons of his people; but there is anger in him against their sins. Now till we have some discovery and manifestation of Christ to assure us of an interest in his precious blood and finished work, we cannot separate the anger of God against our sins from the anger of God against our persons. But when the Lord is pleased to reveal a sense of his goodness and mercy in the Person and work of his dear Son, then we can see by the eye of faith that though he is angry with our sins, he is not angry with our persons, but accepts us in the Beloved, having chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. Thus he retains not his anger for ever. And why? Because it is propitiated, put away, not retained so as to burn to the lowest hell. The blessed Lord has offered a sacrifice for sin; put away the punishment and penalty due to transgression, propitiated and appeased, and thus put away his indignation and fiery displeasure against the sins of his people; for all the anger of God due to their sins and to their persons was discharged upon the Person of Jesus as he stood our representative and hung upon the cross a bleeding sacrifice, putting away sin by the offering of himself. This is the reason why he retaineth not his

anger for ever, it being appeased and put away through the propitiation of our blessed Lord, that it should not burn against the persons of the people of God, nor consume them with the fiery indignation that shall burn up the wicked.

As a matter also of personal experience, God retains not his anger for ever. You may have slipped, fallen, backslidden, and brought great guilt upon your conscience, and have a sense of the anger of God and his displeasure against you for your sad transgressions; but you are enabled to confess them, to forsake them, to mourn and sigh over them, and to seek for the manifest forgiveness of them. Now as this comes, there is more or less of a sweet sense that God retains not his anger for ever, that his indignation is over-passed. It was this which made the Church so rejoice. "And in that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me." (Isai. 12:1.) And so God speaks in promise, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer." (Isai. 54:7, 8.) Now it seems necessary that the Lord should let down into our conscience a sense of his anger against our sins, not only that we may repent and confess them, but also learn by painful experience what an evil and a bitter thing it is to sin against God. But "he retaineth not his anger for ever." He makes us feel it, sometimes deeply feel it, sometimes long feel it, so as to mourn without the sun, and conclude that his mercy is clean gone for ever, and that he will be favourable no more. But he retaineth not his anger for ever, for "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound," and grace must reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

ii. We come now to another manifestation of his mercy: He *"passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage."*

The prophet here clearly points out whom the Lord forgives and whose transgression he graciously passes by; that is, he does not

visit it with his vindictive wrath, he does not treasure it up in the book of his memory, he does not write it down in his debt-book so as to bring it forth in the great day before men and angels; but he passes it by—not because he does not see it, not that he does not hate it, not that he is indifferent to it, not that he winks at it, but he passes it by for his dear Son's sake, having regard to the bloodshedding, sacrifice, and death of the Son of his love.

We may observe, also, from the words, how few they are, comparatively speaking, whose transgression the Lord passeth by. He calls them "the remnant of his heritage." They are but a small remnant compared with the mass. And this every day's observation makes more clearly manifest. How few seem even concerned about the salvation of their souls. How few manifest any godly fear in their hearts, lips, or lives. How few live separate from the world, and manifest by their life and conversation that the grace of God has taught them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. Where shall we find that "peculiar people zealous of good works," for whom the Lord gave himself that he might redeem them from all iniquity? Surely in our days, as in the days of old, it is only a remnant, a remnant according to the election of grace. But they are God's heritage, that is, inheritance, in whom he delights, and whose transgressions he passeth by. And may I not well ask, what personal evidences have we that we belong to this remnant, for unless we do, we have no proof that God passeth *our* transgression by?

iii. But we now come to another manifestation of this mercy. "He will *turn again*; he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities, and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

It is as if the Lord would unfold more and more what his mercy is in forgiving transgressions; as though he would overcome all our doubts and fears, by telling us over and over again what the thoughts of his heart are, what the purposes of his loving mind, and the displays of his sovereign grace. "He will turn again;" that

is, return to the heritage which he seemed for a time to have forsaken. He may leave us for a time to reap the fruit of our own devices, to feel that we have sinned against him, and, by so doing, have brought into our consciences a sense of his displeasure; but he will turn again, for he retaineth not his anger for ever. For a small moment he may hide his face from his people, as vexed and displeased with their sins and backslidings; but in the display of his infinite, sovereign, and superabounding grace, he will turn again to give them one more look of love, one more glimpse of the way of salvation through the blood of his dear Son, one more discovery of the freeness of his grace, one more breaking in of the light of his countenance, one more softening touch of his gracious hand, and one more whisper of his peace-speaking voice. This turning again implies that he has for a time turned away, turned his back upon us, and not his face, withdrawn himself on account of the cruel and unkind way in which we have neglected him, basely and shamefully treated him, wickedly and wantonly wandered from him, and, in the dreadful idolatry of our vile hearts, hewn out to ourselves cisterns which hold no water, and forsaken him, the fountain of living waters. O how sad and grievous it is thus to sin and backslide and provoke the Lord to his face, as if we were stronger than he. But he turns again; he delighteth in mercy; he cannot bear to see his people afflicted, grieving, groaning, sighing, and crying under their sins on account of his absence; and, therefore, moved and softened by his own mercy, influenced by the grace of his own heart, he turns again, as the Lord turned to Peter to give him a look to break, and melt, and soften his heart into repentance and love. It is these turnings again of the Lord which are so prized by his family. If he forsake them, it is but for a time; if he withdraw, it is but for a little moment; if he hide his face, it is not for ever; but there is a turning again, and a returning to the manifestations of his former goodness and love. If he did not thus turn again, our heart would grow harder and harder, colder and colder. Either sin would get stronger and stronger until it gained entire dominion, or despondency and despair would set in to leave us without hope. Of all these circumstances Satan would take great advantage, and the soul would either sit, as it were, in sackcloth

and ashes; fearing and doubting lest all its past experience were a delusion, that the Lord never had appeared, therefore never would appear again, or else be given up to a hard and reckless despair. But these gracious turnings again of the Lord, with the movings of his bowels of compassion toward his people, the meltings of his heart, and the visitations of his presence and grace to renew and revive their souls, are the gracious remedy against these dreadful evils. It is this turning again of his mercy and love, which keeps his own work alive in the heart, maintains his own grace in active exercise, strengthens faith, encourages hope, draws out love, fortifies patience, and gives the soul inward strength still to go on resisting even to blood, striving against sin. But if he always retained his anger, if he would never be entreated, if he ever shut up the bowels of his compassion, if no prayer reached his ear and no cry touched his heart, and he withdrew himself no more to return, what would be our sad case and melancholy state, but to sink into despondency and despair, pine away in our iniquities and die? But these gracious turnings and returnings so move and melt, soften, break, and dissolve the heart, so stir up every grace of the Spirit, and so draw forth faith and hope and love, and every other fruit, that in these things is our life, and by them is maintained the work of faith, the labour of love, and the patience of hope.

Our text adds, "He will have compassion upon us." We are in a very pitiable state. No language can describe the lamentable state to which we are reduced by sin, original and actual. No tongue can describe what we are as involved in the Adam-fall, and the condition we have brought ourselves into by actual transgression. The child spoken of in Ezekiel 16, well represents our pitiable state and case by nature—cast out in the open field to the loathing of its person in the day it was born. We sometimes see and feel in what a pitiable state we are, what havoc sin has made, what a wreck and ruin we are through sin in our carnal mind, and what sin has done in us and for us by actual commission, bringing us into a most lamentable state before the eyes of God, and before the eyes of our own consciences. Now the Lord pities the poor soul that feels itself brought into this

lamentable case, this pitiable spot; which, seeing and feeling its deplorable condition, having in self neither help nor hope, can only pour forth a cry, a sigh, a groan, or drop a silent tear; can only lie before God with its mouth in the dust as a poor miserable sinner, whom he must save by his grace, or there is no possibility of salvation for it. It is the Lord's grace that makes us feel thus. It is his stripping hand, which, by these secret dealings with our conscience, strips away our legality, pride, and self-righteousness. The Lord killeth as well as maketh alive; the Lord maketh poor as well as maketh rich; the Lord bringeth down as well as lifteth up; the Lord puts us into the dust and upon the dunghill as well as exalts us to sit with princes on the throne of glory. It is his hand in the soul which presses, lays low, and brings down; and as his hand is in your soul to bring you down, you learn thereby to see and feel in what a pitiable, lamentable state and case you are before the eyes of infinite Purity. Then he will have compassion upon you. As the Samaritan is represented to have had compassion upon the man who fell among thieves; as our gracious Lord in the days of his flesh had compassion on the fainting multitudes; as he had compassion upon Jairus; had compassion upon the Centurion, and had compassion on the sick, the diseased, the lame, the halt, the blind, and the lepers who came from various quarters to seek help; as he had compassion upon the poor woman with the issue of blood, so he has compassion in his heart for all those in this pitiable state, who feel it, mourn over it, lament it, and confess it. These things drew forth the compassion of his bowels toward poor miserable sinners in the days of his flesh; and so, now, every feeling of his sacred heart is touched with pity, as he looks from heaven, his dwelling place, on their pitiable case; and this moves him to stretch forth a kindly hand for their help and relief.

But how can we know a compassion which is infinite, and the multitude of his tender mercies? How can we enter, so to speak, into the very heart of God, and hear the sounding of his bowels toward us, unless we see and feel our miserable state and case, and view his compassion as drawn out by our trials and afflictions? Sympathy is the fruit of affection; and even where

there is not a sympathy from a distinct or peculiar feeling of love, as that of a husband to a suffering wife, or of a mother to an afflicted child, yet the mere sight of misery will often touch a compassionate heart. You visit the sick; you see them stretched upon their bed of languishing; you pity them, you compassionate their case, and you manifest some sympathy by your words and actions. So far as you believe they are partakers of grace, and are desirous of any spiritual help, you attempt to drop a word that may be suitable and encouraging; or even if not so fully persuaded, yet you are anxious to speak a word for eternity, if they are disposed to listen, for any such bendings of mind Godward are soon discovered; and if poor, you relieve them as far as lies in your power. Now this sympathy of yours, thus manifested in word and deed—not a mere heartless condolence in word, but a real affectionate sympathy with them in their sufferings, touches their heart and is a balm to their bleeding wounds. The widow, the orphan, the distressed in soul and circumstances, the poor afflicted outcasts for whom no man careth, all derive comfort and support from the sympathy of sympathising friends, when they know and feel that it is sincere and genuine, and made manifest by corresponding actions. So it is in things divine. The misery of man meets with the mercy of God and the mercy of God meets with the misery of man; and as man's misery draws out God's mercy, as the pitiable state of the sinner moves and melts the compassionate heart of a merciful Redeemer to manifest his power to save, God and man meet together in sweet accord. His sympathy meets your distress, his mercy meets your misery, his compassion suits your case, and God and man melt, as it were, into mutual love, and rejoice in and over one another. A hard, unfeeling, stubborn heart, insensible to its own wants and woes, to its lamentable condition by nature, and what must be the certain result unless saved by free and sovereign grace—what can it know of the compassions of God which are infinite? How can it enter into the sacred subject of the sounding of God's bowels towards poor lost sinners, and the moving of his tender pity to the helpless, the hopeless, the houseless, the refugeless, and all who despairing of salvation by the works of the law and the deeds of the flesh, cast themselves in all their misery at his

gracious feet, waiting for a word from his lips that shall bring salvation with it. It is only the heart that is broken, humbled, and softened by a sense of sin and sin's deserts, mingled at the same time with a sense of God's unmerited mercy to the vilest of the vile, which can and does enter into the compassion of God, whereby he remembereth that we are dust. These can understand the meaning of the words: "Many times did he deliver them; but they provoked him with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity. Nevertheless he regarded their affliction when he heard their cry: and he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies." (Psa. 106:43, 44, 45.)

iv. But I pass on to another fruit and manifestation of this mercy, which is, *casting all our transgressions into the depths of the sea*. Well sings the hymn,

"If sin be pardoned I'm secure;  
Death hath no sting beside."

This then is the grand point, to have some manifestation of the pardon of sin as a fruit of God's infinite mercy.

But as this is a point on which very many of the living family are deeply exercised, because they cannot trace as clearly as they could wish the manifestation to their soul of the forgiveness of all their sins, I feel that I must say a few words upon it. Judging then from what we see and hear of the experience generally of those who truly fear God, it is evident that many of the living family are much tried and exercised on this point who cannot deny that they have had from time to time encouraging testimonies of God's love and mercy, and that these were attended, whilst they were warm and fresh, with a sweet assurance of their interest in the blood and righteousness of the Son of God. But when these sweet testimonies are become dim, and darkness and unbelief seem to regain possession of their minds, they feel to lose sight of their standing, and sink down into the old spot of doubt and fear. What they want then is such a

blessed sealing home of pardoned sin upon their consciences that they may be able, as they think, ever to hold it fast, and stand firm in the assurance of faith, so as never to doubt and fear again. But however highly favoured and blessed they might be with a knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins, they would still, for the most part, have their doubts and fears, not perhaps of their interest or of perishing in their sins, but how it may be with them by the way, or at the end of the way; for when the Lord hides himself who can behold him? Fresh contracted guilt may again defile their conscience; storms of temptation may beset their soul; Satan may rage at a furious rate; all their evidences become dark and beclouded; and though they may not sink so low as before, yet they may find it hard work to maintain any good measure of their confidence, and may be reduced to very great extremity of exercise and fear.

Now God has filled his holy word with sweet promises of the full, complete, irreversible, and irrevocable pardon of sin to meet the case, satisfy the anxious desires, and fill up the pressing wants of his guilty family, his exercised, distressed children, who are mourning and sighing for one look of his love, for one gracious discovery of his pardoning mercy. Look at the promise contained in our text, "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." What a description this is of the way in which God takes all the iniquities of his people and casts them into the depths of the sea, deeper than the Atlantic Cable, so that they may be hidden for ever from the sight of his eyes as a just, pure, and holy God, and be for ever lost and buried in the depths of an unfathomable ocean. And what other sea, mystically viewed, can this be but the blood of Christ which cleanseth from all sin, which has washed away all iniquity, purged all transgression, cast all the sins of God's heritage behind his back, and drowned them in a sea unfathomable of grace, mercy, and love? Now those sins never can be recovered. They may fish up the remnant of the Atlantic Cable, but Satan with all his hosts can never drag up from the depths of the sea one of the sins of God's people which he has cast therein. It does not merely say the sea, but "the depths of the sea," the deepest place that can be found in the sea; so that

sins cast into the depths of the sea are absolutely irrecoverable; for they have been cast there by God himself, and what he has cast out by his hand his hand will never bring back. If you had taken your sins and cast them into the sea, they would have been found again. Like a floating corpse, they would have been thrown back upon the shore and been a witness against you, as the murdered body found upon the beach would testify against the murderer. The eye of justice would have seen your sins floating on the sea or stranded upon the beach, and the hand of justice would have laid hold of them, imputed them to you, and sent you headlong to hell with them, tied like a millstone round your neck. But when God takes all our iniquities with his own hand, and casts them with his own arm into the depths of the sea, they will never come out of those depths to witness against the family of God in the great and terrible day. Your sins now may seem to be all alive in your breast, and every one of them to bring accusation upon accusation against you. This sin is crying out for vengeance, and that for punishment. This slip, this fall, this backsliding, this foolish word, this wrong action are all testifying against you in the court of conscience. Do what you may, be where you may, live how you may, watch and pray how you may, keep silent and separate from the world or even from your own family how you may, sin still moves, lives, acts, works, and often brings you into guilt and bondage. But if our text be true, and most true it is, that if God has had mercy upon us he has cast all our sins with his own hands into the depths of the sea, those sins have no more eyes to look at us with angry indignation, have no more tongues to speak against us in voices of accusation, have no more life in them to rise up and testify that they have been committed by us, that God's law has been broken by them, and that therefore we are under its condemnation and curse.

But see the necessity for *all* our sins to be cast into the depths of the sea; for were one sin left between God and our soul, one thread of a sin, the smallest fibre, speck, spot, or wrinkle of evil, we could never stand before the God of heaven, or enter into his presence with eternal joy. We see this in the case of Joshua the high priest. "He was clothed with filthy garments and stood

before the angel." Now, as so clothed, he could not stand with acceptance before the eyes of infinite Purity. The commandment therefore came, "Take away the filthy garments from him;" and when this was done the gracious words followed, "Behold, I have caused thy iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." (Zech. 3:3, 4.) So with the saints of God. All their sins, with all their aggravations, these filthy garments, are taken off from them; they are clothed in change of raiment; and thus stand before God in the perfect righteousness of his dear Son, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. The removal of their filthy garments means the same thing as their sins being cast into the depths of the sea. It is as if the Lord the Spirit would use various figures to shew more clearly the truth and certainty of God's forgiving mercy. Thus sometimes he is said to "cast all their sins behind his back." (Isai. 38:17.) Sometimes that "in those days and in that time the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah and they shall not be found; for he will pardon them whom he reserves." (Jer. 50:20.) Sometimes he says, that "he has blotted out as a thick cloud their transgressions and as a cloud their sins." (Isai. 44:22.) Sometimes he declares that "as far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." (Psa. 103:12.) Sometimes he says, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isai. 1:18.) And sometimes he says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jer. 31:34.) Now if you look at all these passages and promises, you will see that in every one of them the full and complete forgiveness of sin is declared, and that all the iniquities of God's people are so completely put away, and that without priestly interposition or priestly absolution, that no speck or trace of them is left behind for God himself to see.

Some have feared lest in the great day their sins should be brought to light, and they put to shame by the exposure of their crimes to open view. But that will not be the case with the dear family of God. We read indeed that "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake;" and whilst some awake "to

everlasting life," others will awake "to shame and everlasting contempt," because their sins will be remembered and brought against them as evidences of their just condemnation. But the wise, who "shall shine as the brightness of the firmament," will rise to glory and honour and immortality, and not one of their sins will be remembered, charged, or brought against them. They will stand arrayed in Christ's perfect righteousness and washed in his blood, and will appear before the throne of God without spot or blemish. We could never lift up our heads with joy at the last day if any one of our sins were brought against us. If the debt book were opened and one charge read, or if the memory of God, so to speak, retained any one transgression in thought, word, or deed that we have ever committed, that one sin, were it only one evil thought, would sink us to rise no more. We can scarcely bear the recollection of our sins now. But what would become of us if the ghost of one unburied sin could flit before our eyes in the day when the Lord maketh up his jewels? If any one sin of the Lamb's wife could be remembered or brought against her, where would be the voice which John heard in Revelation, as "the voice of a great multitude, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth?" Now what was this voice? "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." (Rev. 19:7, 8.) But suppose that any of the past transgressions of the Lamb's wife could be brought against her on that marriage day, any one instance of unfaithfulness to her plighted troth, would it not be sufficient to prevent the marriage, mar the wedding supper, and drive the bride away for very shame? No, there is no truth in God's word more certain than the complete forgiveness of sins, and the presentation of the Church to Christ at the great day faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy.

v. One more manifestation and fruit of this mercy, as dear and as precious as those I have endeavoured to open up, remain to be considered: "*He shall subdue our iniquities.*"

Two things often perplex the inquiring child of God in the first communications of grace to his heart. 1. First, how his soul can be saved. 2. Secondly, how his soul can be sanctified; in other words, how his iniquities can be pardoned, and how his sins can be subdued. God has given an answer to both of these anxious inquiries, and the answer is in our text. He saves our soul by pardoning our sins; he sanctifies our soul by his regenerating grace; and as a part of this sanctification, he subdues by the operations of his Spirit the sins we still feel working in us. Sin subdued is the next greatest blessing to sin pardoned; and wherever God does pardon sin he subdues sin; for the same grace which saves sanctifies; the same grace which casts sin behind God's back, puts its foot upon the corruptions of the believer, and prevents iniquity from having dominion over him. The Scripture is very plain and express upon this point. "Sin shall not have dominion over you." Why? "Because ye are not under the law," which gives sin its strength and power, "but under grace," which is able to subdue its dominion. Nor do I believe that any child of God can ever rest satisfied except by the subduing of his sins as well as the pardoning of them. To have his unbelief, infidelity, worldly-mindedness, pride, and covetousness subdued by the grace of God, its power taken out of it, its dominion dethroned, its authority destroyed, and its strength weakened and diminished, that he may not be under the dominion of any lust, or carried away by the strength of any secret or open sin, but may walk before God in the light of his countenance, as desirous to know his will and do it,—this is the desire and breathing of every one that knows sin in its guilt, filth, and power.

But O what a struggle there is between the flesh and the spirit; what attempts, and, alas, too often successful ones, will sin make to establish his ancient dominion. How it will work by fraud or force; how it will seize every opportunity, avail itself of every opening, sometimes burst over the wall, sometimes slide in through the side gate. How it seems never to sleep, or if it sleep, it is, as a fox, with its eyes open, watching, if it can, to take the

soul by surprise, bind its hands, put grace into prison, thrust it anywhere out of sight, where neither its face may be seen or voice heard, that the flesh may again rule, and sin carry the day as before. None can tell but those who have been sorely tempted by sin what its power is; how it blinds the eyes, hardens the heart, deadens the conscience, dulls every spiritual affection, and hurries the soul along as if to destruction. How powerless are all our attempts to subdue the lusts of the flesh; how all our opposition melts before their seducing influence and almost irresistible strength. I am well satisfied from what I have known and felt in this matter, that a man can no more subdue his sins than pardon them; that none but the same voice which speaks salvation can say to those raging winds and waves, "Be still;" and that no hand but that which casts all our sins into the depths of the sea can either restrain or subdue them. How gracious, then, is the promise, how sweet the favour, that the Lord has promised to subdue our iniquities by the same grace as that whereby he pardons them; that, as we receive the blood of Christ to sprinkle the conscience, so we receive the grace of Christ to sanctify and renew the soul, and the strength of Christ to overcome all our inward and outward foes.

There is indeed no promise made that we shall be set free in this life from the in-being and the in-working of sin. Many think that they are to become progressively holier and holier, that sin after sin is to be removed gradually out of the heart, until at last they are almost made perfect in the flesh. But this is an idle dream, and one, which, sooner or later in the case of God's people, will be rudely and roughly broken to pieces. Nature will ever remain the same; and we shall ever find that the flesh will lust against the spirit. Our Adam nature is corrupt to the very core. It cannot be mended, it cannot be sanctified, it is at the last what it was at the first, inherently evil, and as such will never cease to be corrupt till we put off mortality, and with it the body of sin and death. All we can hope for, long after, expect and pray for, is, that this evil nature may be subdued, kept down, mortified, crucified, and held in subjection under the power of grace; but as to any such change passing upon it or taking place in it as to

make it holy, it is but a pharisaic delusion, which, promising a holiness in the flesh, leaves us still under the power of sin, whilst it opposes with deadly enmity that true sanctification of the man of grace, which is wrought by a divine power, and is utterly distinct from any fancied holiness in the flesh, or any vain dream of its progressive sanctification.

III.—But we come now to what I have called mercy's *challenge*: "Who is a God like unto thee?"

It seems as if the prophet was so deeply penetrated with a sense of the character of God, as pardoning iniquity and delighting in mercy that he gives a bold challenge to all the worshippers of false gods, daring them to come forward and hold up to view or worship a god who was able to pardon iniquity, or one who could cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. Their dunghill gods were for the most part patrons of sin, such as she whom they called "the Queen of heaven" (Jer. 44:17), and "Tammuz," for whom the women wept at the door of the gate of the Lord's house (Ezek. 8:14), and in honour of whom was practised all manner of licentiousness; or such cruel deities as Moloch, to whom they burned their children, or Baal, the beloved idol of bloodthirsty Jezebel. But who of these idol gods was like unto the God of Israel? And amidst all the false deities now worshipped, is there one who can give any proof or evidence that he can pardon sin? For this is the grand point. A god that cannot pardon sin cannot come into competition with the God who can. Well therefore may the prophet utter the bold challenge, "Who is a God like unto thee?" Is there any other God that can pardon sin? any other God that can cast our iniquities into the depths of the sea? any other God who delights in mercy? any other God who retains not his anger for ever? any other God who can subdue iniquity as well as forgive it? Take the whole range of gods which men worship—money, power, reputation, all the false gods that men idolise (for though men have abandoned idols in stone and wood they set up idols in the chambers of imagery and bow down to them in the devotedness of their hearts)—do any of these profess to be able to pardon sin? You may find a false god to

idolise; you may offer him the daily incense of your devotions; but will this god pardon your sins when you are stretched upon a bed of death? Will money do it? Will fashion do it? Will respectability do it? Will the praise of men do it? Will your own legal, pharisaical, self-righteous heart do it? Turn to all these gods and see what they can do for you on a bed of sickness, in the hour of death, in nature's last extremity, against Satan's accusations, a guilty conscience, and the wrath of the Almighty. What can these idols do for you in that hour when flesh and heart fail? All they can do is to abandon you at the last to reap what you have sowed, and leave you in the hands of him who is a consuming fire.

But if we have been brought to know the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and especially to know him as pardoning iniquity, well may we say, "Who is a God like unto thee?" And will not every believing heart who has found this God reply, "Let this ever be our God—the God whom we believe in, the God whom we know, the God whom we worship, the God whom we adore, and the God whom we love."

I say with all my heart, "Let this God be my God; I want no other." Your heart responds to mine; there is an echo in your bosom, "Be this God my God—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; the God who delights in mercy; the God who pardons sin; the God who cast all my transgressions into the depths of the sea; the God that subdues my iniquities as well as forgives them. Let this God be my God even unto the end; this God my God in life, in death, in time, and in eternity."

## **True Discipleship, or the Liberty of Truth**

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Wednesday Evening, July 7, 1869

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:31, 32

It is very instructive, in reading the gospels, to trace the different ways in which the miracles wrought by our gracious Lord, and the words which he spake, were received by the people. In some instances, the miracles which he wrought and the words which he spake raised up the greatest enmity and opposition. So far from falling beneath the power of God as manifested in the miracles, and so far from acknowledging the truth of the words which fell from his gracious lips, it stung many into the bitterest enmity and opposition. Such were the Scribes and Pharisees. Because our blessed Lord did not come, as they expected, as a triumphant Messiah; because they feared lest the power of his word might displace theirs in the affections of the people; filled with apprehension lest the building of self-righteousness which they had erected should come tumbling to pieces, under his righteous denunciations, they opposed him and all that he said and did with all the malice of desperate enmity. There were others, again, who heard his word carelessly, and listened to the gracious declarations which fell upon his lips either with the greatest indifference, or with no other effect but to find fault and cavil with them because they did not suit their ideas or fall in with their prejudices and prepossessions. Others, again, witnessed the miracles, and were sometimes partakers of their beneficent operations; but they do not seem to have had a spark of gratitude. It was so with the lepers, of whom we read, that though there were ten cleansed, only one returned to give thanks, and he a Samaritan. The others received their healing, one might almost say, as a matter of course, like any natural care. The leprosy was gone with all its painful and defiling

consequences. They were restored to their families, to their civil and religious privileges, and to society, from all which they had been banished; but no tribute of praise was given to the gracious Lord who had removed their disease and defilement. So with the multitude who ate of the loaves and fishes: they enjoyed the food which the wonder working fingers of the Lord produced for them; but we read of no gratitude manifested by them, no acknowledgment of his Almighty power in miraculously relieving their hunger, no falling down before him as the Son of God. And even those who would have made him a king for the mere sake of earthly benefits, that they might eat without working and have daily bread without daily labour, only murmured at him when he said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." But others were in some degree impressed by what they saw and heard. They saw the power of God made manifest in the miracles that Jesus wrought, as in the case of Lazarus, when he raised him from the dead. Thus we read: "Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him." (John 11:45.) These seem to differ from those obstinate unbelievers who witnessed the same miracle, and yet "went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done." But even amongst these, most appear to have believed only for a time. Their minds were impressed, for the moment, by what they saw; the extraordinary nature of the miracle carried with it a certain degree of conviction to their conscience that Jesus was the Christ; and there might have been in them a temporary turning away from their sins or their self-righteousness; but there was no permanent endurance. They only believed for a time, and then through temptation fell away. But there was a little flock, a remnant according to the election of grace, in whom the Lord the Spirit began a gracious work, whose heart he touched with his own hand, into whose understanding he shone with a divine light, and in whose conscience he wrought by a heavenly operation; and these believed to the saving of their souls.

If you look at the chapter before us, you will find a very clear and graphic account of those professing characters of whom I have

spoken who for a time believed, but did not endure to the end, and so were not saved. I shall not go through the whole of our Lord's conversation with them, though very instructive, but only quote that part which is immediately introductory to my text. "Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him." (John 8:28, 29.) There was in him who spake these words a majesty, an authority, a dignity, a weight, a power, which, as he uttered them, carried conviction to the minds of many that he was the Messiah. We therefore read, "As he spake these words, many believed on him." But were these all of them, or any of them, true believers? Was the faith which was produced by this conviction a faith which saved their souls? If we go on to the end of the chapter, we find matters very different from what we should have expected. Our Lord, who knew all hearts and foresaw the end from the beginning, was not deceived by the faith which they thus manifested; for we find, toward the end of the chapter, that he says to them in the severest language: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44.) But were not these the very persons of whom we read that they believed on him? But if they were possessed of a living faith, how could they be children of the devil? It is plain, therefore, that there is a faith of which the end is not the salvation of the soul; that there is a belief which falls short of inheriting the blessing given to faithful Abraham; and, though it may seem shocking to say it, a man may believe the word of God, and that Jesus is the Christ, and yet the end prove that he is but a child of the devil.

Now, by taking these scriptural distinctions with us into our text, we may perhaps see more clearly why the Lord lays down continuance in his word as a certain test of that faith which saves, as distinguished from that faith which is but for a time,

and neither saves nor sanctifies. And this will explain why the Lord speaks here as if conditionally. It is not really conditionally, for in salvation there are no conditions; but his words assume that form because uttered by way of test. When he says, therefore, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed," he does not mean to say that a continuance in his word would make them his disciples, but that a continuance in his word would manifest them to be his disciples; in other words, that a continuance in the word was a *sine qua non*, an indispensable requisite of true discipleship; nay, so much so that with all their seemingly good beginning, unless they held out to the end and continued in his word so as to believe it, experience it, and act upon it all through their lives, all these fair expectations would be blighted, and the end would prove that the beginning was not from the Lord, and that he was not the author (or beginner, margin) so he was not the finisher of their faith. (Heb. 12:2.) But this will be more evident, I hope, as I proceed to open up the subject before you this evening. I shall draw your attention, therefore, to these four points:

I.—*First, continuance* in the word of Christ.

II.—*Secondly, the fruit of that continuance: genuine discipleship.*

III.—*Thirdly, the fruit of genuine discipleship: a knowledge of the truth.*

IV.—*And lastly, the fruit of a knowledge of the truth: freedom and liberty.*

I.—You must not suppose, as I have already hinted, because we read that those Jews believed on Christ, that their faith was of a divine, spiritual, or gracious nature. There is a faith in the natural mind, as well as that faith in the renewed heart which is raised up by the power of God. We believe, for instance, many things in which religion has neither place nor standing. Most of us have, at some period of our lives, read or heard a little, if not much, of English history, and we believe there were such persons as

Cromwell and Charles the First, and such events as the battle of Naseby, Worcester, and other battles fought in those days, on the testimony of historians. The credit which we thus give to their accounts is a species of faith. And not only as regards past historical events, but very many, if not most of our daily transactions in business and the affairs of this life depend upon crediting the testimony of others. Indeed without trust and credit how could business be carried on? Sometimes great panics occur in trade and business; and what is chiefly their cause? Want of credit, want of trust; but as soon as credit and trust are re-established the panic ceases. And yet these things have nothing to do with religion, with anything saving, or anything that affects the destiny of the immortal soul. Nor should I have named them except to shew that there is a trust, a faith, a crediting human testimony, which is purely and simply natural. When, then, we come to religion, when we leave the simple domain of nature and come to the word of God and the things of eternal life, why should there not be the same credit given to the word of God naturally, as we give to the records of historians? Thus, as we believe naturally and notionally that there was once a person named Caesar or Cromwell, so we may believe naturally and notionally there was such an one as Jesus Christ; and yet that faith may have no more effect as regards salvation or even as regards religion, taking it in its broadest view, that is, may have no more temporal or spiritual effect upon our heart or life, than merely crediting the simple facts that Caesar once landed on the shores of Britain, Cromwell fought at Naseby field, or Charles the First was beheaded at Whitehall. So with these Jews of whom we read that they believed on Christ, it was not, as the event clearly proved, by a spiritual and saving faith, but was the effect of a natural light that made its way into their understanding, or the result of some natural convictions, which laid hold of their conscience; and thus by the light that shone into their natural mind—not the light of life, but the light which streamed from the word of the Lord, as spoken by one greater than man, and as carrying with it a peculiar power of conviction, though, not necessarily, or in all cases of saving conversion, they believed that he was the promised Messiah, the sent of God. This at first

sight may seem strange; but there is that in the mind of man, from its very natural constitution, which makes it fall under the power of truth. We see it again and again even in persons who, so far from professing religion, rather scorn and despise it, that there is a power in truth which bears down all before it, and that it carries with it a self-sustaining evidence which forces its own way. But when this voice of truth is blended with those solemn realities of an eternal world, which have a power with them of fastening upon and arresting the conscience, we clearly see that there may be much light in the mind, and much conviction in the heart, which is purely natural, and as such is wholly distinct from that work of grace by which divine light shines into the understanding, and divine life, acting through the conscience, quickens and regenerates the soul.

Now there may be, and no doubt often is, such a resemblance between what is thus of nature and what is thus of grace, that we cannot well determine which is the false and which is the true. The Lord, who knew all things from the beginning, and who could read the secrets of every heart at a glance, did not tell these Jews at once that they believed in him only notionally and naturally; but he put a test before them which should prove sooner or later of what nature their faith and profession really were. He takes—if I may use the expression a broad, simple view of the case. It is as if he said to them, "Ye believe in me. As far as appearances go, ye begin well; but the end must prove whether the beginning be good." What, then, was the test which he gives to prove that there is in those who believe a good beginning; that the convictions which they feel are produced by the operations of God's grace; that the light they have is the light of life, and the zeal and fervour which they seem to manifest by a corresponding profession, spring out of the work of the Spirit? What is the test? "If ye *continue* in my word." If you depart from my word; if you turn your back upon me and upon it; if you give the lie to this good beginning, then the issue will prove that the light which you have is not the light of life, the conviction which you have is not the work of the Spirit, the faith you profess is not wrought by divine power, but is of the flesh, and as it is of the

flesh, will perish with the flesh. Thus there is nothing in the words of our gracious Lord in the text to imply that continuance in the word will give us, as of itself, a place in the bosom of God, which we should not otherwise have, or write our name in the book of life, which would not otherwise be written there, or grant to us an interest in the blood of Christ, which otherwise would not have been granted. It is plain even upon common principles of sense and reason that continuance in a thing was not the original cause of our being in it. We find, for instance, a daily continuance of our bodies in life; but this continuance did not at first call us into being. We see the sun continue its daily round, the seasons continue their annual course, night and day, continue to succeed each other in regular order; but we well know that there must have been a beginning to all these movements, and that this beginning was quite distinct from their continuance. Continuance, therefore, in what is good, merely shows that the beginning was good. If the sun did not continue to rise and set, if the seasons did not continue to maintain their annual course, if day and night did not continue to succeed each other in due regularity, we should conclude that there was something faulty in their original creation and constitution. Thus we see that right continuance is a test of a right beginning, but not its first cause; and it is in this way that the Lord uses it in our text as the test of a living faith, but not as making a beginning to be right by gradually changing nature into grace.

i. Now let us apply these thoughts to the subject before us. Why is it that, say of two persons who seem to begin much in the same way, with some light in the understanding, some convictions of conscience, some coming out of the world, and some reception of divine truth, one continues and is saved, and the other falls away and is lost? This is not a matter of mere theory or speculation, but one of constant observation. We must have seen it again and again in very many instances. How many whom we have personally known, seemed for a time to run well. Like blossoms on a tree, they promised fruit; like young recruits in an army, they seemed likely to make good soldiers; and we gladly hailed them as fellow-travellers and fellow-pilgrims to the

heavenly Zion. But where are some of them now? Gone back into the world, fallen into error, given up to the power of sin, and even abandoning the very profession of truth. Now why is this, and how are we to explain why some fall away and perish, and others continue and are saved? If once we admit the fall of man and how ruined and hopeless is the creature; if once we allow the sovereignty of God and that none can be saved but by his distinguishing grace, the reason is plain at once to an enlightened mind and a believing heart, and I have no hesitation in plainly and boldly declaring it to be my firm and fixed conviction. The only reason, then, why some continue and are saved, whilst others fall away and are lost, is because the Lord the Spirit begins a work of grace upon their hearts in consonance with the eternal will of God, and his purposes of mercy toward them. Nay, I will go a step further, and say that because life was given to them in Christ their covenant Head before the foundation of the world, life is given them in time by the operation of the Spirit, that they may have a spiritual capacity to inherit, and a meetness to enjoy that eternal life to which they were thus predestinated. This seems hard doctrine to the world, and is often bitterly assailed as exclusive and unjust; but nothing can be more plain from the Scriptures. Take, for instance, that remarkable passage in Romans 8: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 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. 8:29, 30.) Now what conclusion must we draw from this chain of blessings which seems to link together eternity past and eternity to come? What says the apostle as his comment upon it? "What shall we then say to these things?" Shall we deny them, contradict them, disbelieve them, rebel against them? Is it not better for us to say with him, if we have any testimony to our own calling and justification: "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

But if this doctrine be true, then there is a conclusion to be drawn from it which brings us to this point. Where there are not any

such purposes of grace, there, whatever men may profess, there is no work of grace upon the heart, no heavenly light in the understanding, no divine life in the soul, and therefore no root to their religion; and there being no root, it is with it as with a plant or tree put into the ground without a root which soon withers away and dies. You may take a branch of a tree and put it into the ground and well water it: it will look well for a day or two; but unless the shoot strikes root into the soil, its life and freshness is only a matter of a few days. Having no root, it can draw no nutriment into itself from earth or air, and therefore withers away and dies. So it is with a religion of which God is not the author. Wanting a divine origin, there is no root to it. "The root of the matter is found in me," says Job. But where this root is wanting, there can be no endurance, and therefore no salvation, for only he who endureth to the end shall be saved.

ii. But apart from this point, *why* is it that men do not continue in the word? Are there not reasons why some believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away?

1. I have shown that the main reason is because they *have no root*. But, as distinct from the work of grace, we may still ask the question: Why is there no root to their faith? It is on account of the rocky, shallow nature of the soil, being what is called in Matthew, "stony places," and in Luke, "a rock," that is, rocky ground with a thin sprinkling of earth upon it. Their heart was not ploughed up with convictions so that the seed of the word might fall into a deep and fitting soil. There was in them a lack of that "honest and good heart," of which our Lord speaks; that is, a heart made "honest" before God by the implantation of his fear, and good as being the gift and work of him from whom every good gift and every perfect gift cometh. He had not "begotten them of his own will with the word of truth," and, therefore, they could not and did not "endure temptation so as to receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." This was their radical fault, and one which nothing could repair or make amends for.

2. Another reason of their not enduring unto the end, was the *love of the world* and the *spirit* of it, which is too powerful for nature to withstand and overcome. No mere natural light in the understanding, however clear; no mere convictions of guilt in the conscience, however deep; no zeal, however fervent; no profession, however bright; no sacrifices, however great, will ever in the end overcome the love of the world and the spirit of it. For a time there may be a coming out of the world in outward profession; for a time it may seem as though the spirit of the world were mortified as well as its pleasures given up, and its company forsaken. But sooner or later, the love and spirit of the world gain fresh ground, gather up fresh strength, overpower, slowly perhaps and gradually, all mere natural light and conviction, and establish themselves more firmly in the affections than ever. The carnal mind bides its time; it know what it is about; it hides itself for a while in the deep recesses of the heart, and there works unseen, unknown. It is, however, all the time in close and intimate union with the world in the love and spirit of it; and though for a season this union and intimacy may be unobserved, yet there is a secret attraction between the two which eventually brings them again together; and thus as convictions gradually decline, and eternal things rest upon the mind with less weight and power, the world in the love and spirit of it reasserts its former dominion; and as opposition becomes by degrees weaker and weaker, it establishes itself again in full strength and force.

3. *Sin*, again, may for a time receive a stunning blow through the power of the word and the strength of conviction. A man may see the evil of sin, and have very powerful and cutting convictions of his own sinfulness, which may for a time seem to beat back its strength and power. But sin is so subtle a foe; it has such a hold upon our natural mind; it insinuates itself so into every crevice of our very being; it so twines its fibres round every faculty of body and soul, that, sooner or later, by fraud or force, secretly or openly, it will master every one in whom the grace of God is not found. It runs so completely parallel with our nature; it is so the very breath of the carnal mind; it is so deeply and thoroughly

embedded in our very constitution; it is so our very selves and all that we are or can be short of divine grace; that where there is not the powerful opposition made to it which the Spirit of God can alone communicate, sooner or later it will be sure to prevail; and where sin prevails and lastingly prevails, for a man may go very far from God and be recovered, there is no continuance in the word.

4. Nor let us forget what a subtle, unwearied, implacable, and crafty foe Satan is. He knows all our weak points; he sees exactly where to plant his battery; every avenue to the human heart is open to his observation; he has had an experience of nearly six thousand years thoroughly to examine and obtain an intimate knowledge of the heart of man, besides his own wondrous subtlety as a fallen angel of the highest order. Can we wonder, then, that by force or guile, openly or secretly, slowly or rapidly, he will overpower every one who is not delivered from his hand by the grace of God? He is indeed a merciless and implacable foe. It is said of our gracious Lord, that "he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil." It is literally "overpowered," or "tyrannised over" by him. It is also said, that "the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil." We thus see, that all those whom the Lord does not deliver from his power, are overcome by it.

5. But again, the *natural tendency* of the human mind to be satisfied with the things of time and sense; the engrossing cares of the business of the day; the anxieties that attend a growing family—these things, though not in themselves absolutely sinful, yet have a great tendency to overcome and overpower all such convictions as are found merely in the natural conscience. In such convictions there is not a sufficient resisting power against what opposes them. Whilst they last, and usually they merely come and go and sometimes at long intervals between, they may seem to form some kind of rampart against the overwhelming tide of the cares and anxieties of life. But, as with a rampart of sand, this ever swelling sea of daily cares soon breaks it up and carries it away, and again overflows all the shore.

6. But I may also observe, that our *filth and folly*, vanity and emptiness, levity and carelessness, intermingled as they always are with pride, conceit, obstinacy, impenitency, and a hard determined spirit of unbelief and rebellion against everything which would pull us down, lay us low, and bring us with penitential grief and sorrow to the Redeemer's feet, are all so many powerful obstacles to continuing in the word. For in the word of grace and truth there is everything against nature, against sin, against Satan, against the world, against self; and therefore when nature, when sin, when Satan, when self, all form what I may call a black confederacy against the power of God's word, and that word is not in the hands of the Spirit, a living word clothed with divine authority so as to break up this black confederacy by giving us divine light to see it and divine life to resist it,—sooner or later, man, poor, helpless man, falls into the hands of his inveterate foes and perishes in impenitency and unbelief.

I may seem to speak strongly here, but not too strongly for you who know something of the depths of the fall, and what a hard, impenitent, unbelieving, rebellious, wicked and worldly spirit you often feel struggling in your breast against all that is spiritual and heavenly. What a wretch is man viewed in himself; and how deceiving and deceived are those who vaunt of the power of the creature, and ascribe to man any strength to begin or carry on any saving work upon his own heart. To those who know themselves, the wonder is that any are saved, and the greatest wonder of all is that they should be amongst that favoured number. To grace, and grace alone, in its sovereignty and in its superaboundings, will they ever say, be all the praise and glory.

iii. But now I shall attempt to show you, taking the opposite side of the question, *how and why* the saints of God continue in the word while the others fall away. Both classes of believers receive the word, for you will remember in the parable of the sower, that the Lord says: "He that *received* the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon (that is,

immediately) with joy receiveth it." And in a similar way he speaks of another character as "receiving seed among thorns." (Matt. 13:20, 22.) But though they receive the word, and by receiving it manifest some faith in it, yet, if I may use the expression, they do not receive it into the same place, and certainly not in the same way. Thus the Lord speaks of those who receive the seed into the good ground, that they "hear the word and understand it." This understanding heart was not given to the other hearers. John, therefore, says: "He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." (John 12:40.) They were thus destitute of spiritual light, for the eyes of their understanding were not enlightened (Eph. 1:17); and for want of this divine light, though in a certain way and to a certain extent they believed in Christ, they did not "behold his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the rather full of grace and truth;" and the reason was because they were born of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but not of God. (John 1:13.) There is in the word in the hands of the Spirit an enlightening and quickening power; and, therefore, called by our blessed Lord "the light of life," because there is not merely light but life in it. Thus, besides this divine light shining into the renewed mind, the word of truth in the hands of the Spirit has a quickening influence; there is in it, in his blessed hands, a penetrating energy, a divine force, an invincible power which carries it into the inmost depths of the soul. This peculiar and invincible power distinguishes the work of the Spirit from all and every work of the flesh. The work in those who merely believe for a time is superficial, shallow, outside; there is no penetration such as the Scripture declares, when it describes the word of God as "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword;" there is no entrance of it such as David speaks of, "The entrance of thy words giveth light," with divine power, so as to change the man in the depths of his heart, to renew him in the spirit of his mind, and make him a new creature in Christ.

But besides this divine application of the word of truth, I have

observed that the roots of the word of God, in the hands of the Spirit, strike down into a different place from the roots of the word in the hands of nature. God the Holy Spirit, by his sacred work upon the soul, raises up a new nature within us, and in that new nature the word of God strikes root. Here it meets with suitable soil; here it can establish itself, because in the new man of grace there is an affinity to the word of truth. It is the very soil which God has prepared for it, and being "a new creature" is congenial to his word, each having the same origin, for as the word was made for the renewed heart, so the renewed heart was made for the word; and, therefore, the word of God, in the hands of the Spirit, strikes a root into this deep, suitable, and congenial soil. But from this arise these two circumstances, that this root gives it not only firmness, but the means whereby it draws nutriment. You see a tree: you admire the strength of the stem, the spread of the boughs, the beauty of the foliage; you see how that tree stands up, year after year, against storm after storm, and maintains its standing firm. Why is this? Because that tree has a root, and this root not only gives it stability, so as not to be blown down by the storm, but by the innumerable fibres which spring from it in every direction gives it the means of drawing nutriment into itself, which, being diffused through every branch and leaf, clothes the tree with beauty and verdure. The righteous, therefore, are compared to "a palm-tree" and to "a cedar;" and the reason of their flourishing growth is given also: "The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God." (Psalm 92:12, 13.) And all "to show that the Lord is upright." Jeremiah also speaks of the blessedness of "the man who trusteth in the Lord and whose hope the Lord is," comparing him to "a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river." (Jer. 17:8.) Thus the word of God, in the hands of the Spirit, strikes a deep root in the soul, and being received into an honest and believing heart, obtains a firm position there from which it cannot be dislodged. And the power of the same grace which gives the word a lodging-place in the heart, and a root with it, gives it also those spiritual fibres and rootlets whereby it drinks out of the word of God

suitable nutriment.

iv. Now, wherever there is this rooting of the word in the heart, there will be a continuance in it. But I will here make one observation lest my language discourage any of you. It does not follow from this description that you may not have very many sinkings, fears, exercises, doubts, misgivings, and questionings about your state and standing. It does not follow from your having a root to your religion, that you always find the root good or find it always, or often, drawing up nutriment into your soul. Not only is the root itself hidden, but growth from it is usually imperceptible. Who has ever seen a tree grow? We see it when we come back to an old spot after a long absence from it, and we say almost immediately and involuntarily: "Dear me, how the trees have grown since I was here!" But those upon the spot did not see those trees grow; and yet they were growing all the time. So it is with the growth of grace in the soul; we cannot see our own growth, if growth we have; nor see firmness in the root, nor how our soul draws nutriment out of Christ through his word; because it is by the invisible and almost insensible operations of God's grace that the work of faith is carried on. And yet there is a growth in grace, and this growth springs from a continuance in the word. For the word of God is made very precious to God's people. All the faith which they have in the Son of God springs from the word which testifies of, and reveals him; all the hope they have, which is a good hope through grace, comes from the power of God's word applied to their souls; and all the love and affection which they have to the Lord of life and glory is conveyed into, and shed abroad in the soul by the Spirit opening him up in his Person, work, blood and righteousness, grace and glory as revealed in the word. Religion is not an airy, imaginary, enthusiastic something, which stands independent of the word of God. It is not something mystical and visionary, the creation of the human brain, like some poetical dream, or the mere ebbing and flowing of natural feelings, however deep, various, or refined. This is mysticism, not religion; delusion, not salvation; enthusiasm, not the work of faith with power. True and saving religion is the work of the Holy Spirit operating upon the heart

through the word; giving us faith by the application of the word, raising up hope by the power of the word, shedding abroad love by bringing the truth of the word with power into the soul. Does not our Lord, in our text, speak of "continuing in the word," or rather "my word," that being the means whereby we "receive of his fulness grace for grace," and thus by abiding in the word abide in him, as he speaks so plainly and beautifully in the parable of the vine? "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." (John 15:4.) We forget sometimes these things, expecting religion to be wrought in our heart almost independent of the word of truth. But how striking are those words of our gracious Lord: "For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me." (John 17:8.)

But bear in mind, also, that the Lord is very tender over his own work upon the soul. He is exceedingly gracious unto those that fear his name; has purposes of eternal mercy and love toward them; has sworn never to leave or forsake them; is pledged to bring them home to himself; and therefore, having begun the work, for his own name's sake, he will surely carry that work on. It is the Father's will that every one who seeth the Son and believeth on him should have eternal life. He has promised that not one of his sheep shall perish, and that none shall pluck them out of his hand; their continuance, therefore, in the word does not depend upon creature exertion, creature ability, creature faith, or creature strength; but depends upon the good will and everlasting purposes of God the Father, the eternal love of the Lord the Lamb, and the gracious operations of the Spirit in unison with the choice of the Father and the love and blood of his dear Son. Therefore, they continue in the word, not because they have any strength, or goodness, or wisdom, or righteousness of their own, enabling them to do so; but because the eternal thoughts of God were towards them, because they are interested in a covenant ordered in all things and sure, and because he who understood their cause is able, and not only willing, but firmly

resolved to bring them through every trouble, and plant them before his blissful presence for evermore.

II.—But I pass on to show the fruit of continuance: "Then are ye *my disciples indeed*."

The Lord here intimates that those to whom he is speaking were not his disciples indeed. They were his disciples professedly so; but not his disciples really so. There is a distinction between being a disciple, and being a disciple indeed. He would, therefore, thus say to them, "Ye listen to my words; ye receive them as the words of God; they have some influence and effect upon you; ye believe on me through that word: now if ye continue in this word, it will make it manifest that ye are disciples, not merely who receive my word just for a time and then fall away, but that there is that reality in you which will manifest you to be more than mere disciples in name. There will be a reality stamped upon your discipleship, and you will be disciples indeed, and not disciples in name."

What, then, is "a disciple indeed?" for that is the point which we now have to consider. Though I might mention others, yet I will briefly name three as the most conspicuous.

1. First, then, he is one who *turns away from every other instruction* and every other Master, and takes all his lessons from his heavenly Lord and Master. Not that he despises means; not that he thinks little of books written by godly men, of sermons heard from the servants of God, of the spiritual conversation of the people of God, and various helps that the Lord is pleased to furnish his people with, in their search after truth. But this is a special characteristic of "the disciple indeed," that he receives his instruction immediately from the Lord, even though it may come through some of the channels that I have named. He sees by faith, as the Lord is pleased to enlighten his mind, such a beauty, such a blessedness, such a heavenly sweetness, such a divine loveliness, and such a fulness of surpassing grace, such tender condescension, such unwearied patience, such infinite compassion in the Lord of life and glory, that he is as if invincibly

and irresistibly drawn by these attractive influences to come to his feet to learn of him. It is not merely that he is driven by convictions from all other teachers; it is not merely that he is hunted out of all false refuges by the wintry storm to make him cleave to the Rock for want of a shelter. But so far as the Lord is pleased to reveal himself in some measure to his soul, by the sweet glimpses and glances which he thus obtains of his Person and countenance, he is drawn to his blessed Majesty by the cords of a man and the bands of love to look up unto him and beg of him that he would drop his word with life and power into his heart. He knows that "with the word of a king there is power," and this power he longs again and again to feel. If ever he has received instruction from his sacred lips, there was a sweetness attending it, a power resting upon it, a strength given to believe, to hope, and to love, which manifested itself in the light of its own testimony. To hear this voice of instruction, is to hear that voice of which the Lord himself said: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Having once, then, got a view of the glorious Shepherd of Israel, once heard his blessed voice, and once felt the power of his word in the heart, the disciple indeed longs again and again to receive the words of grace and truth which fall from his lips. This cuts him off from all other teachers and all other saviours; for he feels as Peter felt when he said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure, that thou art that (or the) Christ the Son of the living God." Jesus has the words of eternal life; and having the words of eternal life, to Jesus he must ever go for instruction.

2. But "the disciple indeed" *catches the spirit* of his Master. This is his second mark. Go into a school: you will soon learn what the master is by the scholars. If you see a disorderly school, the master has no order. If you see a well ordered school, the master is the spring of the order which pervades it; for the scholars drink into his spirit, and a quiet air of order runs through the whole school. Thus the disciple not only receives the teaching but catches the spirit of the master. So disciples indeed drink into the Spirit of their Lord; because they are ever looking to him, and to

him alone, to receive of his fulness. They know there is no life or efficacy in the word except attended with power from him. There must be the Spirit of their divine Master attending the word of his grace, to animate it, to make it spirit and life to them; and thus, by receiving his word into their hearts, they drink into his spirit, which is meek and lowly, gentle and tender, holy, humble, and amiable. He never teaches his people to quarrel. He never sets members of churches to fight with one another. He never puts cutting words into their lips, cruel thoughts into their minds, and dark suspicions into their breasts. This is not the spirit of the Master nor the spirit "of the disciple indeed."

3. And as he drinks into his Master's spirit, he desires to *follow his Master's example*; to walk in his footsteps as well as hear his word and believe. This is the third mark of "a disciple indeed." Such an one will endeavour not to do those things which displease his heavenly Friend, because he knows the consequences; guilt in the conscience, the hiding of his face, the chastisements of his hand, and the withdrawing of his manifested love. Influenced too by gratitude and constrained by love, disciples indeed of Jesus desire to walk in his footsteps, that they may have clear evidences their faith is a faith of the operation of God, as producing the fruits of faith, that they may adorn the doctrine by their words and works, and live to his praise who has done so much for them.

Being, thus, disciples indeed, what they learn is to good purpose, for they are taught of him of whom it is said that he teaches to profit. (Isaiah 48:17.) Thus they are manifested to be among those of whom we read: "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord." and as taught of him, are ever learning profitable lessons, as the Lord is pleased to open up his word to their hearts. They get also various kinds of instruction from the word of God as the Spirit is pleased to open it to them. Sometimes, for instance, it is in his hands a word of reproof, sometimes a word of admonition, sometimes a word of conviction, sometimes a word of encouragement. Now and then a promise drops in to cheer; or a truth on which to stay the mind; or a blessing that delivers from

temptation, or supports in trial, or comforts in sorrow. As a master in a school does not teach all exactly the same lesson, but teaches each according to his capacity, his age, his circumstances, and according to that which shall be for his welfare, so our gracious Lord, who gathers round his feet his disciples indeed, deals out to each such instructions as he knows will edify his soul, be for his good, and redound to his own glory.

III.—But as time is running on, I must pass on to our third point:—the *fruit* of genuine discipleship. "*Ye shall know the truth.*" There are links in this chain. The truth is not known at first in all its sweetness, liberty, and power. We have "to continue in the word;" it may be at times in very great darkness, distress, exercise, temptation, and trouble; and yet, such has been the power of the word upon the heart, it cannot, will not let us go. We see and feel the misery of departing from the truth, the wretchedness of getting back into the world, and being entangled in the spirit of it; and what must be the consequence if we leave those things we profess to know and believe, and embrace error or fall into the arms of sin. There is, therefore, a continuance in the word,—it may be often, as I have said, in much darkness, much exercise, many trials, many temptations: but still we are brought to this point, never to give up the word which has been made life and spirit to the soul. And though the Lord sometimes may very much hide his face, and we seem to be very poor, dull scholars, and to be much condemned for our unfruitfulness, to know so little of the spirit of the Master, and walk so little in his blessed ways; yet there is a looking unto him, a longing after him, a cleaving to him; and this manifests genuine discipleship. Now, as we still cling, and cleave, and hang, and trust, and hope, we begin to know the truth: it is opened up to the mind; it falls with weight and power upon the heart; it is made exactly suitable to our state and case; we seem to enter more feelingly, and believingly, and thoroughly into it; and the wonderful way in which it addresses and adapts itself to our various and pressing wants and necessities becomes more and more manifest. Take, for instance, the grand and glorious truths which concern the Person of the Son of God; the precious blood which he shed upon

the cross to put away sin; the glorious righteousness which he wrought out and brought in for our justification; his resurrection from the dead; his sitting at the right hand of God in glory; and his ability to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him. These truths, as we journey onward, become increasingly precious; we feel that we cannot do without them. Take away Jesus, and that he is the Son of the Father in truth and love, where are we and what are we? Of all men most miserable. Take away his precious blood, where is any atonement made for transgression? What hope have we of eternal life? How can we get our sins put away and pardoned? Take away his righteousness, where is our justification? Take away his resurrection, where are our risen hopes? As the apostle says, "We are yet in our sins." Take away his intercession, whom have we as Mediator between God and our soul? Take away the teaching and testimony, work and witness of the Holy Spirit, what do we know and feel aright? Take away the power and blessedness of the word of God, what comfort have we in trouble, what support under the various trials of life, and how shall we find our mind supported on a bed of sickness, languishing, and death? Thus we are obliged, sometimes from sheer necessity, from the desperate state of the case as having no hope nor help anywhere else, to cleave to God's word. That seems at times to afford sweet relief, open a door whereby we can enter into the presence of God, to throw back, as it were, the windows of heaven that we may see something of the blessedness and glory of Jesus at the right hand of the Father, and thus to bring down blessed inlets of life and feeling into the heart. Thus we know the truth, not only by the necessity of our case, which is often very deep and pressing, but by the power of the truth adapted to that necessity. There is something in truth unspeakably sweet and precious to a believing heart, and to know it in its purity and power is liberty indeed.

IV.—And this leads us to our last point, which is the *fruit* of the knowledge of the truth: "*The truth shall make you free.*"

This liberty embraces various particulars.

1. We are by nature in *bondage to the law*. It is a yoke tied round our neck, followed by an awful curse; and we must be set free from that galling yoke and dreadful curse, or have it like a millstone tied round our neck to whelm us in the depths of an eternal sea. Now nothing but an experimental knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus can give us freedom from the galling yoke of a condemning law; nothing can remove that curse from our neck, or take the guilt from our conscience produced by it, but a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, of his blood and righteousness and dying love, what he is in himself as the Christ and Lamb of God, and what he is of God made unto us. All experimental knowledge of the truth in its purity and power brings blessed freedom with it, so as to deliver the soul from the galling yoke of the law, its curse and bondage, into the sweet liberty of gospel truth.

2. This freedom is also a freedom from the *world* and all its alluring charms, its vain attractions, its sensual pleasures, its carking cares, its toils and anxieties; it sets the soul free from being entangled in, overcome and burdened by these things as if they were our all. We still have to do with the world. Many of you are in business and must needs be daily occupied with it. But then the truth will give you sweet liberty from it; you will not walk with the men of the world, nor love the company of the world, nor be entangled in the love of the world; because the truth in its purity and power applied to your heart will make you free from its power and influence.

3. So also it will free you from the *dominion* of sin. No man ever was delivered from the power and rule of sin except by the truth of God entering into his soul. We may strive against sin in our own strength and only fall more foully than before. We may wet our couch with tears and cry out mightily against sin, and yet only be the more entangled in it. But the truth of God—especially those truths which concern the Person and work of Christ—coming into the heart with liberating power, break to pieces the dominion of sin; and as the power of sin is broken, the love of sin is mortified.

4. The many *fears* also, distracting *doubts*, and cutting anxieties that many of God's dear people feel, and some even to the very last,—there is no getting free from these things except by a sweet experimental knowledge of the truth applied to the heart with divine power.

The gospel is "the law of liberty," for our blessed Lord came "to preach deliverance to the captives and the opening of the prison to them which are bound." The only freedom we have, or can have, is by believing the truth. All other freedom is licentiousness. There is no holy liberty but the freedom which springs from the blessed influence and operations of the Holy Spirit on the heart, applying the word of God with power to the soul. This gives true freedom, brings into the soul real liberty, and relieves it from that bondage in which we have so often to walk. And what is the cause of much of this bondage? Is it not looking to our miserable selves, pondering over the evils of our heart, thinking of our sins and backslidings, and many things that conscience testifies against? It is this which brings in bondage, clouds the mind with doubt and fear, and darkens our evidences. The only way, then, whereby we can get freedom from these things is by believing the truth. But we can only believe the truth by its coming home with divine power to the heart, so as to raise up a living faith in that truth and our interest in it.

Thus, the whole of our text forms a beautiful chain, of which every link is harmoniously connected. We begin by receiving the word. If that reception is of God, there is a continuance in it. By continuance in it we manifest ourselves to be disciples indeed. If disciples indeed, we learn the truth from the lips of him who is truth itself. And as he speaks a word to the heart with his gracious lips, liberty comes with it, and by this liberty we are set free from a thousand things that bring bondage. We cannot displace God's order. He is a God of order in nature, in providence, and in grace. We cannot leap at once from earth to heaven, carry salvation by storm, and get hold of the choice blessings of the gospel in a few days or weeks. Did we become

men and women in a day, a week, a month, or a year? What little we may know in natural things, in business, trade, or information,—was all that gathered in a week or month? It was a process of years. So it usually is in the things of God. It is years sometimes before we know God's truth in its liberating power and glorious freedom. But we have to continue in the word; get a little here and a little there; learn line upon line; still hoping, still believing; still hearing the word, and still hanging upon a faithful Lord, determined never to let him go, until he bless; but ever desirous to hear what he has to say to us; and determined to hang our eternal all upon his faithful word of promise. Thus to continue in the word, will manifest us, sooner or later, to be disciples indeed; it will be proved we know the truth by the teaching and operation of the Holy Spirit; and we shall find holy freedom and blessed liberty in the things of God.

I lay these things before you. Think over them; compare them with the word of God and your experience, and then judge for yourself how far my words this evening are the words of soberness and truth.

## The True God, and the Attesting Witness

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Lord's Day Afternoon, April 2, 1854

"He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true." John 3:33

There are two ways, speaking generally, whereby we come to the knowledge of human events and circumstances. One is by what is called *ocular* evidence; that is, seeing a thing with our own eyes. For instance I know that there is a country called England and a town called Oakham, because I live in the one and often visit the other. This is an ocular evidence—the testimony of my eyes which I cannot disbelieve. But how do I know that there is a country called America, or a city named New York? I have never crossed the Atlantic. I know it therefore only by the testimony of others. Now ocular evidence is limited, there being comparatively few things which we can see with our eyes. The greater part of our knowledge is therefore based upon the testimony of others. It is in this way that the greater part of human knowledge is acquired. But when we pass from human to divine truth, we come into another atmosphere; we then require a different mode of instruction. Both ocular evidence and the testimony of others are here insufficient, for the things of God are what the eye hath not seen, nor ear heard; we can, therefore, have neither ocular evidence of the kingdom of God, nor can we learn it from report and tradition. Even if we could learn it so, it would not profit us. How many saw Christ expiring on the cross with their bodily eyes! But did that save them, or even soften their hearts? On the contrary, they only mocked his sufferings and agonies. And when he comes again a second time "every eye," we read, "shall see him, and they also which pierced him." But will that save them? No! For "they will call upon the mountains and rocks to fall upon them, and hide them from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." The only way, therefore, whereby wrath can attain to the knowledge of divine

things is by the testimony of God. This is divine revelation, for in the Scripture God makes known divine truth; and when this is received by a spiritual faith, it is a receiving of God's testimony. The words before us were spoken by John the Baptist of the Lord Jesus. The blessed Jesus, we must bear in mind, was not only the great High Priest who offered himself as a sacrifice for sin, not only the King who reigns and rules in the hearts of his willing people, but a Prophet also, according to that ancient prediction, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken." (Deut. 18:15.) The word "prophet" does not mean in its first sense a foreteller of future events, but one who speaks for God—God's mouthpiece. Thus the Lord Jesus Christ was a prophet, not merely as predicting future events, but primarily and chiefly proclaiming, as God's mouthpiece, the mind of God. What he thus spoke is called in Scripture his testimony; that is, the witness which he bare of God. This he did in the highest manner from personal knowledge. What the prophets spoke of they had not seen, except by the eye of faith. What Jesus testified of he had seen, because he was with the Father before the foundation of the world. Therefore "What he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth, and no man receiveth his testimony." This is true of men generally, but there are exceptions; for in the language of the text "He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true."

In looking at these words I shall, with God's blessing, speak chiefly on three points.

I.—*First, Christ's testimony.*

II.—*Secondly, the receiving of Christ's testimony. And*

III.—*Thirdly, the setting to our seal that God is true.*

I.—But what is the meaning of "*testimony*?" The word means witness. But what is a witness? It is a person who, being well informed of certain circumstances by having seen them, comes

forward and publicly declares he has seen the thing that he bears testimony to. This is of daily occurrence in courts of justice. Oral witness is the foundation of the whole proceedings. Without a witness, no man is condemned; without a witness, no man is acquitted. Testimony, then, is a declaration of one who is informed upon the point whereto he bears witness. In this sense the Lord Jesus is called in Scripture "the true and faithful witness," because he testifies of what he hath seen with the Father before the foundation of the world. His witness, therefore, is and must be of the highest kind; it is and must be infallible. Now God in Scripture is declared to bear testimony to Jesus. In three ways chiefly did God the Father bear testimony to his dear Son.

1. First, he bore testimony by the miracles which the Lord Jesus Christ wrought when he was here below. These were standing evidences that God sent his dear Son. And this Nicodemus felt when he said, "We know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles which thou doest except God be with him."

2. But, secondly, God, in order to make it more certain, spoke on three separate occasions with a voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Peter speaking of this says, "For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount." (2 Peter 1:17, 18.)

3. But, thirdly, the most glorious testimony that God bore that the Lord Jesus was his only begotten Son was when he raised him from the dead; as the apostle speaks, "and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." (Romans 1:4.)

Now, it is a remarkable circumstance, and you can verify it if you like for yourselves, that there is not a single sermon in the Acts,

recorded as preached by any one of the apostles, in which the resurrection of Christ is not specially named and mainly dwelt upon. The reason of this is, that it was the grand standing testimony which God gave to the divinity of his dear Son.

But not only did God the Father testify in this threefold manner of the Son of his love, but the blessed Spirit also testified of Jesus. And this he did, not only when he sojourned here below, but now also wherever he makes Christ known to the soul he bears his testimony to the Son of God and his finished work. "But when the Comforter is come whom will I send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me." (John 15:26.)

But not only do God the Father and the blessed Spirit bear testimony to the Lord Jesus, but he testifies also of himself. This testimony is here spoken of.

Let us, then, with God's blessing, examine a little more closely the testimony that the Lord Jesus Christ bore, because this forms the foundation of the whole text.

i. The Lord Jesus bore testimony first to the very *being* and *existence* of God. He himself is God's representative, for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. We therefore read of "the glory of God in the face (or person) of Jesus Christ." When Christ was upon earth, God, so to speak, walked upon earth in the likeness of Jesus. We find, therefore, the Lord thus speaking to Philip in the language of tender reproach, "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 14:9.) Thus Jesus bore testimony to God by his presence upon earth, and by the majesty and glory that shone forth in him; as we read, "and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14.) Those who had eyes of faith given them saw Deity shining forth in the Person of the God-Man, and thus received him as the Christ of God.

ii. But Jesus testified, secondly, to the *character* of God. Thus he testified that God is a *Spirit*, and as such, seeks spiritual worshippers and requires spiritual worship; that he is not to be satisfied with mere form and ceremony, but demands the regenerate heart. He testifies also to the holiness of God. How solemnly and touchingly does he address him as "Holy Father" and "Righteous Father" in that wondrous prayer recorded in John 17.

iii. But, again, how the Lord Jesus testified to the spirituality, extent, and requisitions of God's *holy law*. Read the Sermon upon the Mount, and see what an exposition it is of the law given by Moses, and how it applies its threatening condemnation to the very thought and intents of the heart. He declares that an unclean look is adultery; and "he that calleth his brother a fool is in danger of hell fire." How too, he declares that "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled."

iv. But Jesus testified also to the *unspeakable worth of the immortal soul*. O! what words are those, where he says, "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.)

v. But not to enlarge, for I must be brief in this part of my discourse, the Lord Jesus testified also to the nature and the necessity of *the new birth*. In that remarkable conversation with Nicodemus how emphatically he declares, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3.) And how, in setting this forth in the Sermon on the Mount, he says, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." The Lord sets the gate of regeneration at the head of the way, and shows that none can enter into the kingdom of heaven unless they be partakers of the new birth, and pass through the strait and narrow gate of regenerating grace.

vi. But again the Lord sets forth especially his *mission*, and the

work which he came to do. How he speaks of the Son of man coming "to seek and to save that which was lost," that "he came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance;" and that it was not "the whole who needed a physician, but they that were sick."

vii. How also the Lord pointed out the *character* of those for whom he came to die, as "poor and needy," as "mourners," as "hungering and thirsting" after Jesus, as "weary and heavy laden," as "bruised reeds and smoking flax."

viii. What a testimony also did the Lord Jesus bear to his own *intrinsic Deity and Godhead*, when he said of himself, "I and my Father are one."

ix. How continually also he appealed to the *miracles* he wrought as so many proofs that he was the Son of God.

x. How he speaks also of his *blood* and of his *flesh* as "drink indeed" and as "meat indeed." What a testimony too did Jesus give to the solemn truths of the holy gospel. What promises, what invitations, what consolations fell from his gracious lips. All these are parts of the testimony that Christ gave in the days of his flesh.

And when we pass on to consider what Jesus is now at the right hand of the Father, we see him bearing testimony still, but in a larger manner. His testimony on earth was to a certain extent limited. He speaks but scantily of his death and resurrection, because they were things to come. Now, however, that he is at God's right hand, what a testimony does he still bear to the grand truths of the gospel, as they are revealed in Scripture and applied to the souls of those who fear God, by continually blessing those truths with a divine and saving power. We see, then, how extensive is the testimony of Christ.

II.—But we pass on to consider our second and main point, the *receiving* of this testimony. There were those who would not and

did not receive this testimony, and they paid the penalty of it; for they died in their sins, and "the wrath of God abideth on them." There were those, however, who did receive the testimony: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." And they received Christ when they received the testimony of Christ.

Now was there not a broad line of distinction between those who received his testimony and those who received it not? And what made the distinction? We read of some that "they could not believe." Now why could they not believe? God had hardened their hearts; as we find John speaking, "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 12:39, 40.) Now this is the most fearful of all cases. This is what is called *judicial blindness*. When God, according to his own divine purpose, because of man's wickedness gives him up to judicial blindness, and sends him awful delusions to believe a lie, it is the most fearful judgment which he can inflict.

But the main reason why man did not then and will not now receive Christ's testimony, is because there is a "*veil upon the heart*." This veil consists mainly of three folds; that is, a three-fold veil. The first fold is *ignorance and darkness*; according to those words, "Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." Another fold of this veil is *unbelief*. The third fold is *enmity*. Thus, when we look at man's case and see some given up to judicial blindness, and others, comprehending the great mass of mankind, with a threefold veil over their heart, we see why no man receiveth Christ's testimony except those in whom the Spirit of God works, and from whose eyes he removes the veil. Now, we may preach the plainest truths of the gospel (and who could preach like the Lord Jesus?), but mere preaching will not convert souls. Except God is pleased to own the word by the application of his own Spirit, it falls powerless to the ground. We may admonish and warn men, as indeed we should do, and

may speak the plainest things in their ears, but it will be all unfruitful and useless as long as there is a veil over their hearts. Go up, on this beautiful day, to the summit of some lofty hill, say Burley for instance, and put a blanket over your face, what can you then see of the prospect? So of what avail are all the glorious prospects of eternal realities revealed in the Scripture, as long as there is a blanket over a man's heart? I use the word "blanket" because the veil spoken of in Scripture is not such a veil as ladies now wear, of a light, thin material, but more resembling a thick cloak or coverlet. How evident, then, it is that unless the Lord take away the folds of darkness which a man has over his heart, there is no seeing truth; till he take away the fold of unbelief, there is no believing truth; and till he take away the fold of enmity, there is no loving truth. If a man, then, neither see, believe, or love it, how can he receive Christ's testimony? Here, then, we come to the grand distinguishing line between "the living and the dead," "the sheep and the goats," "the chaff and the wheat," and "the saved and the lost." Those that are lost receive not the testimony; those who are saved do receive the testimony. Now is not this enough, if you have any life in your soul, to make you examine yourself on which side of the line you stand?

But let me see if I can point out some features by which you may be able to tell whether you have received Christ's testimony.

1. First, we cannot receive Christ's testimony until *light* has shone into our souls; for we only see light in God's light. This is, as the Scripture speaks, having "the eyes of our understanding enlightened." Now when the light of God shines into the soul, it takes away the first fold of the dark veil; it shines through and, as it were, dissolves ignorance. You then begin to see, though it may be at first faintly and dimly, like him of old, who saw men as trees walking. This is as the prophet speaks, "seeing out of obscurity and darkness." Such have but feeble and dim views of the Lord Jesus. The disciples in the days of Christ had very dim views of their divine master; yet they beheld his glory and saw enough of it to transform them unto the same likeness.

So it is, for the most part with us when the Lord is first pleased to open our eyes and cause a beam of sacred light to shine into the soul. We see truth, and in those days often wonder that other people cannot see it too. It all seems so clear to us, and carries with it such an evidence of the Spirit and power, that we are almost angry with people because they cannot see it. We try perhaps to explain it to them, and lay it down with the utmost possible clearness, but we can never get through the dark fold of ignorance so as to make them see it with the same light and power which have come into our own soul. In these attempts we almost seem to forget that it is the express work of God to enlighten the understanding. The light which thus shines into the soul is not a dry nor a dead light. It is not twilight nor a glow-worm twinkling, or a phosphoric gleam from rotten evidences. But it is sun light; and yet only like the sun in its first dawning beams.

2. But with this light there will always be *life*; therefore called "the light of life." When, then, light comes into a man's understanding and life comes into his conscience, it removes the second fold of the dark veil which I said was *unbelief*. The quickening power of God's Spirit, giving life and authority to God's word, not only dissolves and takes away the fold of unbelief, but raises up the spiritual faith whereby he credits God's testimony. Then he truly, savingly, and eternally believes. How was it with the eunuch when Philip said to him "If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest?" He answered "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." How faith was raised up at that moment in his soul to believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God! It was thus that he received the testimony of Christ.

The Scripture employs two very beautiful figures to illustrate the reception of the divine testimony. One is the committing of the seed to the ground, as in the parable of the sower. The husbandman scatters the seed in the bosom of the earth, and the ground having been previously ploughed and reduced to a beautiful tilth opens its bosom to receive the grain. After a little

time the seed begins to germinate, to strike a root downward, and shoot a germ upward; as the Lord speaks, "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." This emblem beautifully represents how the testimony of Jesus Christ finds an entrance to the soul, takes root downward and carries a shoot upward. The root downward is into the depths of a tender conscience, and the shoot upward is the aspiration, breathing, and longing of the soul for the living God. The other scriptural figure is that of grafting. "Receive," says James, "with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls." Now when a scion is first put into the stock, after a little time sap begins to flow out of the stock into the scion, and this sap unites the two together. So it is spiritually when the soul receives the testimony of Christ. The testimony of Christ is received into a broken heart, as the scion is inserted into and received by the stock. As, then, life flows out of the stock into the scion, it creates and cements a sweet and blessed union with God's word and him of whom the word testifies. Thus it grows up into a living bough, which brings forth blossoms of hope, leaves of a consistent profession, and fruit of a godly life.

3. But there is a third way still in which this testimony is received, and that is in *love and affection*. We read of some that "they received not the love of the truth." Now love is the grand distinguishing feature of a child of God; and by its being shed abroad in the heart takes away the third fold, which is *enmity*.

If you recollect, I shewed you that the veil had three folds: darkness, unbelief, and enmity. Now the coming of light takes away the fold of darkness; the coming of living faith takes away the fold of unbelief; and the coming in of love takes away the last fold, that of enmity. When, then, the truth is commended to the soul by the power of God, and watered by the sweet dew of the Spirit, it is embraced in love and is felt to be truly precious. The heart therefore closes round it and holds it fast. We know what a firm grasp earthly love can take of earthly objects.

In this three-fold way, then, do we receive Christ's testimony;

first, into our understanding, so as to see light in God's light; secondly, into our consciences, so as to believe it with the faith of God's operation; and thirdly, into the heart and affections, whereby we love it, enjoy it, feed upon it, and find it sweet and precious.

Now if you have never received the testimony of Christ thus into your soul, you cannot have accomplished the third thing spoken of in our text, which I shall now attempt to unfold, and that is

III.—The *setting to our seal that God is true*. The Apostle says, "Let God be true, but every man a liar." God is and ever must be true. Every word, therefore, which he spoke must be fulfilled. But there is a setting to our seal that God is true; that is, there is an experiencing an inward witness and confirming testimony whereby we can seal it with the stamp of our own witness and approbation. The figure is taken from human custom. A deed, we know, until sealed is of no value. In order to pass current and to be valid, a seal is attached on which a person puts his finger, saying at the same time, I deliver this as my act and deed. This, indeed, is an innovation upon the old custom, which was for the person himself to have fixed the seal. So in the things of God. There is a setting to our seal that God is true; that is, a personal, individual ratifying it. When a person has thoroughly read over and well examined a deed or legal document, he puts to it his seal, which in fact says, 'I hereby give my full assent and consent to what I have just read, and in testimony thereof I here affix my seal.'

So in the things of God. The "testimony" of Christ is that which the Lord Jesus Christ spoke in the days of his flesh; and not only so, but what he, as the great Prophet of the church, has in the word of God spoken by his prophets and apostles. When, then, this testimony comes from heaven into the soul with light, life, and demonstration of the Spirit and power, and is thus accompanied with a divine unction, the willing heart of the believer puts his own solemn approbation upon it, and he, so to speak, comes forward with all the power of his soul, and says, 'I

believe it from my very heart to be true; and not only so, but I give it the full approbation of my soul, for I feel an inward certainty that it is the very truth of God. I can therefore set my seal to this point, that God in declaring these things has spoken them by his own Spirit as "words of eternal truth."

Observe, now, how positively and plainly the Apostle speaks in reference to such a reception of God's word. "He" (that is every one) "that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true."

Now let us run over a few particulars, that you may see how far you have been enabled to do this so as to bring out your seal and set it to one gospel truth after another.

i. First, have you received into your soul the grand doctrine of regeneration? in other words, that a man must be born again before he can see or enter into the kingdom of heaven. Do you know this by an inward realization of it, so that you can say, 'I am sure we must be born again, for I have felt in my soul the efficacious power of regenerating grace?' This is putting your seal to this truth, that God is true.

ii. So with the spirituality of God's law. Unless you have experienced the spirituality of that commandment, and fallen under its curse and condemnation, you cannot set to your seal that God is true, where he says, "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

iii. So with respect to the Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ. How can we set to our seal that God is true, in receiving Christ's testimony, if we have not seen by the eye of faith the glorious person of the Son of God? But if we have seen by the eye of faith the Person of the Son of God, and beheld his glory, then we can set to our seal that he spoke true when he said he was the Son of God. No one can say the sun does not shine when he sees it brightly beaming in the sky. So when the Sun of Righteousness

shines into his soul, he by seeing the light, feeling the heat, and basking in the genial warmth of his beams, can set to his seal that God is true in declaring that Jesus is the Sun of Righteousness.

iv. So, again, when he feels the evils of his heart, and mourns and sighs beneath a body of sin and death, he can set to his seal that God spoke true when he declared that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked."

v. Again, when the Lord said "My flesh is meat indeed and my blood is drink indeed," you can set to your seal that his testimony is true when you eat his flesh and drink his blood by faith. So with the promises.

vi. How can you set to your seal that God spoke truly when he said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?" Why, by coming to him labouring and heavy laden, and finding rest. Then you can set to your seal that Christ was true when he uttered that encouraging word of promise.

vii. So, how can you set to your seal that those are blessed who hunger and thirst after righteousness, unless you so hunger and thirst?

viii. Or how can you know that "all things work together for good to those that love God," or that the way to heaven is through tribulation, unless by a personal experience of it?

We can only, therefore, set to our seal that God is true in any one point of doctrine, experience, or precept when we receive that testimony, and feel an inward witness that God indeed has declared it. Thus, upon every manifestation of God's goodness to the soul, every application of Christ's blood to the conscience, and every revelation of God's distinguishing grace, it is only as we receive Christ's testimony, experience the inward approbation of it, and feel its sweetness and blessedness that we can set to our seal that God is true. This we may be well assured, is the

only way to know the power and reality of true religion, to understand the Scriptures, and enjoy a convincing testimony that God is your God, Christ your Saviour, the Holy Ghost your Teacher, heaven your eternal home, and that your soul is saved in the Lord Jesus Christ with an everlasting salvation.

And with what divine certainty can such a soul sometimes speak. Sometimes, indeed, we cannot believe anything; it seems as if there were nothing in God's word that we could set our seal to. All seems a mass of confusion, and our ignorance appears so great that we cannot set our seal to any vital truth. But, on the other hand, when the blessed Spirit is pleased to testify of the things of God, and we, receiving the testimony of Jesus Christ, walk in the light of that testimony, then there is a holy certainty of and heavenly acquiescence with God's truth. This divine faith will bring you through all your trials and sorrows, and though you may be dragged through a very hell of temptation, yet will you know God is true.

Here, then, is the grand trial of faith; first to receive Christ's testimony, and then to hang upon that testimony in spite of all opposition from within and without, from feeling its weight, power, and sweetness. Bunyan has one expression on this point which I think is very sweet, though he was one who knew more than most men what the infidelity of the human heart was. He says, in his "Grace Abounding," that the doctrine of life by Christ without works was sealed with such power and divine evidence upon his own soul, that he could not be contented with saying he was sure, but that he was more than sure, that those things were true.

Now, without our setting to our seal in this way, what is the truth to us? You come here to hear me and give me your attention. And I speak unto you, as the Lord enables me, words of truth and soberness. You listen to those words; but how many of you can set to your seal from real heart-felt experience to their truth so as to be able to say, "God is true; I feel its weight and power in my soul, and have an inward testimony in my own conscience

that these things are true?"

Amen.

## Trying the Spirits

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening, June 18, 1865

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God." 1 John 4:1

Has it never struck you as a remarkable circumstance that in what are called primitive times, nay, in the very days of the apostles themselves, there should spring up in the professing church a crop of men, some of whom were abandoned to the vilest sins, and others given up to believe and propagate the grossest errors and heresies? We should naturally have thought that when such manifest dangers awaited every one who professed to believe in Jesus Christ; when Christians were objects on every side of the deepest enmity and hottest persecution; when every convert carried his life as if in his hand; above all, when there was such a large outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the churches, that there would have been generally, as well as individually, both purity of doctrine and purity of life. But that such was far from the case is evident from the testimony of the New Testament Scriptures. With what burning words, for instance, does holy Jude stamp some of the professors of his day: "These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." What! were there such men as are thus described in the primitive church? and not merely here and there, timidly and cautiously concealing themselves and their real sentiments, but avowing themselves without shame? "Ungodly men," that is, openly so, "turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness" by their base and licentious conduct, and "denying by their works as well as their words the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ;" as ignorant as they were impudent, "speaking evil of those things

which they know not;" not merely falling through the power of temptation and mercifully restored, but "walking," that is, habitually living "after their own lusts," and debasing themselves to the lowest level "as brute beasts, in what they know naturally corrupting themselves." Now how gross must have been their errors, how abandoned, their conduct, that an inspired apostle of God should denounce them in language which, for a parallel, has scarcely an equal in the word of truth, except such as Peter, in his second Epistle, has made use of to describe the character and end of the same or similar ungodly professors. You will have observed that those against whom Peter and Jude drew their flaming pens were chiefly men of ungodly, abandoned life—whom we should call in our day "vile Antinomians." But besides this crop of openly ungodly professors, there were in those days very many erroneous men, I mean such as held great doctrinal errors. Some, for instance, denied the resurrection altogether, as was the case at Corinth (1 Cor. 15:12); others, as Hymeneus and Philetus, said that it was past already. (2 Tim. 2:18.) John tells us in the verse from which my text is taken that "many," not a scattered few, but "many false prophets are gone out into the world." Of these, some denied both the Father and the Son; others that Jesus was the Christ; others that he was come in the flesh, that is, had only come in a kind of mystical way, and that his human nature was not real flesh and blood, but only so in appearance—the effect being to deny altogether the reality of the atonement. Into these various errors I cannot now enter, contenting myself with this observation, that there is scarcely an error, a false doctrine, or a heresy that has ever come abroad in the professing church, of which we have not some indication or intimation in the New Testament, either in a way of positive denunciation, or of solemn, affectionate warning, or of prophetic anticipation. Of this last we have a remarkable instance in both the Epistles to Timothy, where the apostle declares in the spirit of prophecy the corrupt doctrines and no less corrupt practices which would be manifested in the last days (1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-5); describing errors which had not then made their appearance in the professing church, or, at least, only in their first buddings.

But if it excite our wonder that such fearful errors and such gross evils should have manifested themselves at so early a period, yet it may also raise our admiration at God's providence, if they were to appear at all, in suffering them at that time to appear. It certainly was a very remarkable provision of the wisdom of the all-wise God, that, if error and sin were to spring up in the church, as tares among the wheat, they should first raise their head in the apostolic times, when inspired men of God could denounce it with their pen, and leave upon record, for our instruction in all ages, a clear description of who the men were that gave them birth, both in their character and in their end. The church was thus forewarned, forearmed. Spiritual weapons were laid up as in an armoury, which every Christian warrior might take down as fresh enemies of truth in its purity or in its practice might arise, and hew them down, as Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal. Those who contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, are generally accused of a bad and bitter spirit. Such accusations have often been launched at my unworthy head. But that there may be an union of the tenderest spirit of love with the sternest denunciation of error and evil, is very plain from the character and writings of John; for which, of all the inspired epistles, breathes a more tender spirit of love, and yet contains stronger denunciations of error and evil?

But let us now approach the words of our text.

John gives us in it a very solemn warning: "Beloved"—addressing himself in most tender and affectionate language to the church of God—"Beloved, believe not every spirit." Do not receive everything which comes abroad under the name and guise of religion. "Try the spirits." Weigh the matter well; examine for yourselves whether these spirits are of God. And why? "Because many false prophets are gone out into the world."

Believing that John's words and John's warnings are as applicable now as they were then or ever have been, I shall endeavour, with God's help and blessing, to lay open the mind of the Spirit in the

words before us, and, in doing so, to bring these three things before you:

I.—*First*, the *false* spirit: what holy John calls in a succeeding verse "the spirit of error."

II.—*Secondly*, the *true* spirit, or what he calls "the spirit of truth."

III.—*Thirdly*, the *trying* of the spirits, "whether they are of God."

I.—But before I show you the marks and features of the false spirit, I must explain a little what is intended by the word "spirit," or, rather, what meaning it bears generally in the New Testament, and especially in the words before us; for you will observe that John does not bid us try men or the words of men, but try the spirits, that is, as I understand, the minds, breathings, and influences of men.

i. There is something in "spirit," in its New Testament sense, which goes far beyond words. In spirit; taking a broad view of the subject, there is something eminently subtle. We see it in the very wind, of which the word "spirit" is merely another name. There is something keen and penetrating in the wind, especially in our present quarter.\* Some of us feel how it can search the very bones, especially where there is not much flesh upon them to keep it out. By this subtlety it can, so to speak, propagate itself as well as penetrate into every corner. Like the air, it cannot be kept out, but will enter through the least opening, and make itself felt wherever it penetrates. Words come and go: they are mere sounds, which have often no more real power or effect than the beating of a drum or a shrill blast from a trumpet. Thousands and tens of thousands of words have been spoken, aye, and sermons preached, which have had no more influence on the minds of men than the tunes of a barrel organ in the street. But in spirit there is something eminently penetrating, diffusive, suggestive, influential. Have you caught my idea? Do you see the distinction between the words of a man and the spirit of a man, whether for good or evil? And do you not see that it is not what a man says, nor even what a man does, but the spirit which a man

breathes which carries with it the influence which acts upon the minds of others? In nothing is this more true than in religion. Observe this especially in the ministry of the word. It is not a man's speech which has an influence, that is, a vital, permanent influence upon the church and congregation. It is the spirit which proceeds from him; the spirit which he breathes, whether it be a spirit of error or a spirit of truth, the Spirit of God or the spirit of Satan, which stamps his ministry with its peculiar effect. I have watched and observed this for years, and have seen how a hard spirit in the pulpit communicates a hard spirit to the pew; and, on the contrary, that a tender, Christian spirit in the minister, a humble, solemn, reverent, God-fearing spirit in the ministry of the word carries with it a similar influence, and moulds according to the same pattern the minds of the people who habitually listen to it. We almost insensibly catch and drink into the tone and spirit of those with whom we associate; and though we scarcely understand the process, or mark its growth and progress, we gradually drop into it, become, as it were, imbued with it, and in our turn propagate it to others. It is quite right that we should try men's words; for, as Elihu speaks, "the ear trieth words as the mouth tasteth meat" (Job 34:3); and we should also narrowly watch men's actions, for our Lord has said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." (Matt. 7:16.) But neither words nor works so much discover the real minds of men as their spirit. Is it not the possession of a tender, gracious, humble, and godly spirit which so particularly distinguishes the living family of God, which indeed we can hardly describe, yet sensibly feel when we are in their company? that meek and lowly spirit of Christ in them which draws our heart towards them in admiration and affection, creating and cementing a love and union which cannot be explained, and yet is one of the firmest, strongest ties which can knit soul to soul? And do we not see also in most that we casually meet with a worldly, carnal, selfish, proud, unhumiliated spirit, which sets us as far from them as the broken spirit of which I have spoken brings us near to the others?

\* The Easterly winds were blowing at that time.

ii. Having thus taken this slight view of the meaning of the word "spirit," as bearing upon the words of our text in which we are bidden to try the spirits, I will now bring forward, as the Lord may enable, a few marks of this false spirit, the spirit of error, against which we are to be upon our guard. And do you try the spirits as I go on, and see whether you can trace anything in your bosom of the false spirit; for bear this in mind, that we should not be interested in such an admonition as John has given us, unless there was in our nature a corrupt principle, which could drink into a wrong spirit. If we could stand separate and isolated from the influence of a spirit, whether good or bad, it would little affect us what spirit we inhaled from others, or breathed in turn ourselves. But our soul, in one sense, resembles our body, to which it makes a great difference whether we breathe pure or impure air, whether we inhale the breeze which brings health in its wings, or that which comes loaded with the vapours of the pestilential marsh. The pure air can purify the blood, as well as the impure can taint and defile it; the one can be the source of health, the other of disease. Let us not think that our soul is so fortified as to be able to neglect all precaution. Our blood may be tainted before we are aware, and poison may even now be circulating in our veins, which may not indeed and will not kill us if we are the Lord's, and yet may have a very pernicious influence upon our spiritual health. It is because we have deeply imbedded in our very nature a corrupt principle, which is akin to, and but for God's gracious help and interference, would greedily drink into a wrong and false, a corrupt and erroneous spirit, that we need some close self-examination to ascertain whether we have drunk into that spirit or not. Let no man think himself beyond the necessity of self-examination. How strongly does the apostle urge this Christian duty: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." (2 Cor. 13:5.) It marks an honest spirit when we can say, "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." (Psa. 139:23, 24.) The Lord give us grace and wisdom to "prove all things; and hold fast that which is good." (1 Thess. 5:21.) "That we may approve things that are excellent; that we may be sincere and without

offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." (Phil. 1:10, 11.)

1. There is first, then, an *Antinomian* spirit, and that spirit has been, if not now is, very prevalent in the Calvinistic churches. In avoiding one rock men have fallen upon the other. Disclaiming, justly disclaiming, and disavowing all good works as matters of justification, many professors of the doctrines of grace seem utterly regardless whether there should be in heart, lip, or life any good works at all; setting aside, justly and properly, human merit upon which to stand before God, and making salvation to be, as indeed it is, wholly of grace; men, many men, both ministers and people, have, I am sorry to say, perverted and abused these glorious doctrines of grace to bad ends. I am well convinced from long observation, that amongst many professors of the glorious truths of the gospel, there is sadly and widely rife an Antinomian spirit—that is, an ungodly spirit, a spirit of carelessness, if not practical licentiousness, a spirit of worldliness and self indulgence, of levity and looseness in their general conduct and conversation, a spirit of hardness, negligence, and allowed indulgence in things which are altogether opposed to the fear of God in a tender conscience. We may almost wonder that there should be such characters amongst those who profess "the doctrine which is according to godliness." A little examination however will clearly show us the reason why this Antinomian spirit manifests itself in the way that I have described. The word of God has very clearly pointed it out in various places. The way in which this subtle spirit works and acts seems to be much in this way. Convictions of sin lay hold upon men's natural conscience, the effect of which is to compel them to relinquish their sins, that is, the open practice of them. This change in them taking place under a minister of truth attaches them to his ministry; and therefore the next step is to receive from his lips and the example and conversation of the people who meet at the same place, a scheme of sound doctrinal truth into their natural mind, without any real change of heart or any work of grace upon the soul. Thus by a conjunction of convictions in the natural

conscience with a knowledge of the truth in the judgment, they, as Peter speaks, for a time "escape [literally, fly from] the pollutions of the world," make a profession of religion, consider themselves, and are often considered by others, true and undoubted children of God. But not having the right spirit, the fear of God in a tender conscience; not having the teaching and operation, work and witness of the Holy Ghost in their bosom, it happens to them, as Peter speaks, "according to the true proverb; The dog is turns to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." (2 Pet. 2:22.) The reason of this is because they never were really divorced from sin by the separating power of the Holy Spirit, piercing by the word of God even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow." (Heb. 4:12.) Thus, the tie that united them to the works of darkness was really never broken. The Spirit of God never really broke up the love and power of sin in their breast, either by a series of spiritual convictions, or by planting the fear of God in their heart, or by a gracious discovery of the Person and work, love and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their old corrupt nature was covered over by a gilded profession; but after all it was only the original, rotten, worm-eaten wooden casket. When, then, their convictions had become lulled asleep by a reception of the truth into their judgment, without any real work of grace upon their heart, the natural bent of their mind towards sin began to manifest itself; and as they could not decently throw away their profession; and as this was their grand salve if conscience felt uneasy, they became in spirit if not in practice Antinomians.

But we should greatly err if we thought that none had this spirit except such characters as I have just described. For a time and to a certain extent, through the power of temptation; the influence of a loose and careless ministry, or the example of ill-chosen associates, even one who fears God may be entangled in this Antinomian spirit; and as this spirit is very subtle, he may hardly see how far he is possessed of it till the Lord is pleased to break the snare, and by his chastening rod convince him what secret poison he has drunk of, and how it has enervated his strength,

hidden from him the face of God, and brought leanness and death into his soul. There are few of us of any long standing in a profession who have not at some period or other of it been tempted by this spirit, or been entangled in it, like Bunyan's pilgrim, falling asleep in the arbour, or turning into By-path meadow.

2. But there is a spirit the exact opposite to this. I mean a *self-righteous* spirit. You may divide men, generally speaking, who have a wrong spirit, into two grand classes: there are those who have drunk more or less deeply into an Antinomian spirit, who think little of sin, and indulge it secretly or openly; and there are those, who, from natural temperament, general strictness of life and conduct, absence of powerful temptations, and having been shielded by various restraints from the commission of open evil, are secretly imbued with strong spirit of self-righteousness. These having been preserved from the corruptions of the world and the open sins of the flesh, frequently manifest in their religious profession a Pharisaical, self-righteous spirit, which, though not so gross or so palpable as an Antinomian spirit, is hardly less dangerous, and casts almost as much contempt upon salvation by grace as that which abuses it to licentiousness. Hart justly observes, that the space between Pharisaic zeal and Antinomian security is much narrower and harder to find than most men imagine. It is a path which the vulture's eye hath not seen; and none can show it us but the Holy Ghost. This witness is true; and the longer we live and the further we walk in the ways of God, the more do we find it so. As the same vessel in the same voyage may have to encounter opposite winds, and be exposed to the same peril from both, though in opposite directions, so the very same believer may sometimes be caught by an Antinomian spirit, and be driven out of his course in one direction, and sometimes by a self-righteous spirit, and driven out of his course in the other.

3. A *worldly* spirit is another spirit of error, against which we have to be upon our guard, and to try ourselves whether this spirit be in us or not.

The first effect of sovereign grace in its divine operation upon the heart of a child of God is to separate him from the world by infusing into him a new spirit, which is not of the world, but of God. We see this in the case of Abraham. When God called him by his grace, he was bidden to "get out of his country, and from his kindred, and from his father's house." (Gen. 12:1.) The words of the Lord to his chosen Bride are: "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty, for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him." (Psa. 45:10, 11.) When our gracious Lord called his disciples, they forsook all and followed him. The apostle expressly tells us that Jesus "gave himself for our sins that he might deliver us from this present evil world" (Gal. 1:4); and God's call to his people is, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate." (2 Cor. 6:17.) Indeed there is little evidence that grace ever touched our hearts if it did not separate us from this ungodly world. But where there is not this divine work upon a sinner's conscience; where there is no communication of this new heart and this new spirit, no infusion of this holy life, no animating, quickening influence of the Spirit of God upon the soul, whatever a man's outward profession may be, he will ever be of a worldly spirit. A set of doctrines, however sound, merely received into the natural understanding, cannot divorce a man from that innate love of the world which is so deeply rooted in our very present being. No mighty power has come upon his soul to revolutionise his every thought, cast his soul as if into a new mould, and by stamping upon it the mind and likeness of Christ to change him altogether. It may be checked by circumstances, controlled by natural conscience, or influenced by the example of others; but a worldly spirit will ever peep out from the thickest disguise, and manifest itself, as occasion draws it forth, in every unregenerate man.

4. A *proud* spirit, an unhumbled, self-exalting, self-esteeming spirit, is a spirit of error. It is not the spirit of the meek and lowly Jesus. It savours not, it breathes not of the spirit of Christ, who said of himself, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart."

The foundation of this proud spirit lies deeply imbedded in the human heart, and is one of the most marked features of the fall. Wherever, then, you see pride, whatever form it assume, worldly or religious, pride indulged, pride not confessed, mourned over, and fought against—for we all have pride working in us—there is the very spirit of anti-Christ; there is the false spirit, the spirit of error.

6. Again, a *careless* spirit, a *reckless*, thoughtless, light, and trifling spirit, is a spirit of falsehood and a spirit of error. To trifle with God in a light, frivolous manner; to profess the solemn verities and heavenly realities of our most holy faith, and yet to carry into the house of God or into the things of God that light, trifling spirit which we see manifested in the world,—all with eyes to see and heart to feel must see and feel that this is opposed root and branch to the Spirit of Christ. And yet how rife it is in the professing church. How we seem surrounded on every hand with a company of light, trifling, carnal professors, who not only in their habitual life and demeanour, but even at those very moments when we think their minds should be solemnised and their levity subdued, seem more given up to it than at almost any other time. Mark them as they come tumbling out of the house of prayer; hear their light conversation with each other; watch their smiling countenances, and the loud familiar greetings with which they hail those of the same spirit as themselves; and see how all those solemn impressions, and that grave, reverential demeanour which become the saints of God after hearing the word of life are swallowed up and buried in an overflowing tide of almost rude merriment. Surely there is enough of what we see and feel of evil within us and evil about us, and of what the Lord suffered to deliver us from it, to solemnise if not sadden our spirit. But instead of this chastened spirit of grave and solemn recollectedness, which is a very different thing from a mere sanctimonious assumption, in how many places are rather seen almost the exuberant spirits of a worldly holiday.

6. An *unforgiving* spirit, a *bitter*, harsh spirit, a dividing spirit, a spirit that, like the petrel, is most at home in a storm; that loves

contention for its own sake, and is never so pleased as when it is in the midst of it, has marks upon it of being the very spirit of falsehood, the very spirit of error; for it is directly opposed to the gentle, kind, loving, affectionate, tender spirit of Christ. How this bitter, contentious spirit has again and again ruined the peace of churches, rent asunder the dearest friends, sown the seeds of prejudice and ill-will in fellow-worshippers and fellow-members never to be eradicated, broken the heart of godly ministers, grieved and troubled tender consciences, scattered causes of truth to the winds, made truth contemptible, and put into the hands of its enemies one of their strongest weapons against it.

II.—But I pass on now to show you by way of contrast some of the marks of the *true* spirit.

But here, at the very outset, lies a great difficulty, because as we possess a corrupt nature, as well as a nature born of God, both of these two spirits will be in our own bosom. It is as the apostle speaks, "the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other." Now the effect of this is, that a man who truly fears the Lord, finds in his bosom two different spirits, two adverse winds blowing opposite ways, and driving him, or threatening to drive him into two contrary directions. But in this as in so many other instances, God has given us a gracious provision to meet with and overcome this difficulty. First, he has given us his holy word to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, which is full of instruction to show us the difference between these two spirits; and secondly, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, he gives his people a measure of spiritual discernment to guide them aright in this important matter. He therefore enlightens the eyes of their understanding to see, and renews them in the spirit of their mind to feel, what the true spirit is as distinct from the false. He plants his fear in their heart as a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death, of which this false spirit is one of the most subtle and seducing. He makes them of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord, for his fear is their treasure. He gives them the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:16.) And as he thus breathes the Spirit of Christ into their soul, that Spirit of Christ in their bosom becomes a

guiding light, which sheds its rays and beams through all the secret recesses of their breast. It searches out, brings to light, and passes sentence upon everything which is evil, for it is "the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly," or the heart, as the word means. (Prov. 20:27.) And thus, with all the sagacity of a detective hunting out the perpetrator of some crime, or of a policeman turning the bull's eye of his lantern to bear upon a suspected man in the dark (excuse these homely figures), so the spirit of Christ in a believer's bosom hunts up each track of evil, and casts a clear broad light on everything which would hide itself in the dark chambers of imagery. In fact, so needful is the possession of this inward light, that if a man has not in his bosom a measure of the Spirit of Christ, of the grace of Christ, of the presence of Christ, and of the power of Christ, he is not in a position to see the spirit of error or of sin in himself or others. He follows blindly on where Satan leads him. Traps and snares are spread for his feet, and into them he recklessly falls. There is nothing in him to keep him back from evil or to hold him up from error. He has not the guiding light of the Spirit of God in his breast, nor any warm, tender life breathed into his soul out of the fulness of Christ. Therefore, wanting light to see and life to feel, and destitute of the spirit of gracious discernment, he is almost sure to slip into some evil, or be entangled in some error.

This point, however, I shall have occasion to enter more fully into when we come to the last head of my discourse. Bearing then in mind these remarks which I have thrown out by way of anticipation to guide your judgment for the present, now look at a few marks of the *true* spirit—the Spirit of Christ in a believer's bosom.

1. The first mark of that spirit, due to its birth and origin, and as being a copy of the Spirit of Jesus, is that it is a *tender* spirit. I pointed out as one of the marks of a false spirit, a spirit of error, that it was a hard, harsh spirit, what the Scripture calls "a heart of stone." Now the opposite to this, as the Spirit of Christ in the believer's bosom, is a spirit of tenderness. We see this eminently in young Josiah, and it was that special mark on which God put

the broad seal of his approbation, "Because thine heart was tender." (2 Chron. 34:37.) But what makes the heart tender? When God begins his work of grace upon a sinner's soul, he puts his finger upon his heart, thus doing to it what he did to that band of men who went home with Saul, of whom we read, "whose hearts God had touched." (1 Sam. 10:26.) The touch of God in a man's soul makes it soft and tender. It is with the soul as with the earth and the hills: "He uttered his voice, the earth melted:" "The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord." (Psa. 46:6; 97:5.) This tenderness of spirit thus produced manifests itself in its actings, movements, and dealings towards God and man. First, it is tender toward God; for it is often very sore under divine pressure. The hand of God is very weighty and powerful wherever strongly laid on. This made the Psalmist cry, "Day and night thy hand was heavy upon me." (Psa. 32:4.) "Thy hand presseth me sore." (Psa. 38:2.) So also, "Remove thy stroke away from me; I am consumed by the blow of thine hand." (Psa. 39:10.) Under the pressure, then, of this hand, sin is felt as a heavy burden, and very many keen sensations agitate the breast, making the conscience sore, and causing it to smart under painful apprehensions of the anger of God, and of his displeasure against the sins we have committed and the evils that work in us. This tenderness of spirit God notices and approves of, for there is in it that brokenness of which we read: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit" (Psa. 51:17), rising up as it were before him like the smoke of an acceptable sacrifice. Now it is by the keen sensations which are thus produced by the Spirit of God in the soul, that the gracious convictions of a child of God are distinguished from the natural convictions of a reprobate. A man may have the deepest convictions, may be, to use a common expression, shaken over the mouth of hell, and yet never have the fear of God in his soul, never possess any one feature or mark of that tenderness of spirit of which I have spoken, of that contrite and humble spirit with which God dwells (Isa. 57:15), or of that poor and contrite spirit that trembles at God's word, to which he especially looks. (Isa. 66:2.) Natural convictions, however severe, if they are but natural, may drive a man to desperation, but they will never produce real tenderness of spirit

Godward. After a time they will wear off, and his heart will become as hard toward God as a piece of the nether millstone; hardened, one may say, as the blacksmith's anvil, by the very blows which have fallen upon it. But the grace, the Spirit, and the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is tenderness itself, will ever manifest themselves by producing in the soul a tender spirit Godward. This is especially shown in the tender sensations of a living conscience under a sight and sense of sin, not only in its guilt but in the discovery of the dreadful evils of the heart as they rise up to view, and as their exceeding sinfulness is more and more opened up as being hateful and detestable to God.

But as this tender spirit is thus manifested toward God and the things of God generally, so it is also to the *people* of God. The soul under divine teaching is led to see and feel that he who touches God's people touches the apple of God's eye. This makes him tender of wounding the feelings of God's saints, of speaking anything to their injury, even thinking anything to their detriment; for having a tender feeling toward the Lord, he has a tender feeling toward those who are the Lord's. This tender spirit manifests itself as one of the first evidences of divine life in the warm love and gentle affection which spring up in the believing heart toward the people of God. The grace of God making the heart and conscience tender, kindles, produces, and keeps alive a tender affection toward God's saints as a conspicuous part of this tenderness; and it thus becomes the first sensible evidence of its divine origin; as John speaks: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." (1 John 3:14.) And again: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." (1 John 4:7.)

2. But this spirit, this new spirit, this true spirit, this Spirit of Christ in a believer's bosom, is a *prayerful* spirit. I have no opinion of any man's religion which did not begin with a spirit of prayer. I know that mine began so, and that it came upon me without my seeking to produce it, and has more or less abode with me to this day. This spirit of prayer indeed is one of the chief

marks which distinguish gracious convictions from those which are merely natural. Do you find that Saul, or Ahithophel, or Judas ever prayed? "They have not cried unto me with their hearts," says the prophet, "when they howled upon their beds." (Hosea 7:14.) Is not this spirit of prayer a special gift of God? Has not he declared that he will pour upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplications? (Zech. 12:10.) And what is the effect of this heavenly shower? "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son." Here we have the union of three gracious marks: a spirit of prayer to cry for mercy, a looking unto and upon Jesus whom they have pierced, and repentance and godly sorrow over their sins and over him. None of these things are found except in those on whom God shows mercy. The same mark is given by another of the prophets: "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them." (Jer. 31:9.) We see this mark eminently in the case of Saul. "Behold, he prayeth," was God's word to Ananias to assure him that this bloodthirsty persecutor was a new-born soul; and that he who had no mercy upon Stephen was crying to God for mercy to himself. (Acts 9:11.) Wherever then there is a prayerful spirit, it is a blessed mark, and that it is the Lord's purpose to grant him every desire of his heart. Indeed, until God is pleased to pour out upon us the spirit of grace and of supplications, we cannot worship him aright; for God is a Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24); nor can we, without this Spirit, offer up that spiritual sacrifice which is acceptable to him through Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 2:5.) When this spirit has been once given and kindled in a believer's breast, it never dies out. It is like the fire upon the brazen altar, which was first given by the Lord himself from heaven, and concerning which God gave this command: "The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out." (Lev. 6:13.) This fire might sink low; it might be covered with the ashes of sacrifice, but it never was suffered to go out for want of supply of fuel. So at times it may seem to you as if there were scarcely any spirit of prayer alive in your bosom; and you may feel as destitute of a spirit of grace and of supplications as if you

had never known its lively movements and actings. But you will find it drawn out from time to time by circumstances. You will be placed under peculiar trials, under which you will find no relief but at a throne of grace; or God will in tender mercy breathe again upon your soul with his own gracious Spirit, and by his quickening breath will revive, I will not say kindle, for it is not gone out, that holy fire which seemed to be buried under the ashes of corruption, that inward spirit of prayer which he gave you at regeneration, and which will never cease till it issue in everlasting praise.

3. This new and true spirit is also a *careful* spirit: by which I mean, it is utterly opposed to, and distinct from that careless spirit which I have denounced as eminently a spirit of falsehood and error. There is nothing of this recklessness and thoughtlessness in the new spirit, the spirit of truth. On the contrary, it is jealous over itself with a godly jealousy. It fears to be wrong, it desires to be right. Whatever the consequences or the sacrifices which to walk in the right way of the Lord may entail, the soul born of God desires to be right. "Lord, lead me right;" "Lord, keep me right," is the constant, the earnest desire of every new-born soul. And by this spirit of godly jealousy over self, by this earnest and unceasing desire to be made right and kept right, it is preserved from many of those snares into which others heedlessly fall, and by which they bring either destruction or misery upon themselves.

4. Again, it is a spirit of *faith*. There is a distinction to be made between faith and the spirit of faith. "We having," says the apostle, "the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believe, and therefore have I spoken, we also believe, and therefore speak." (2 Cor. 4:13.) The spirit of faith is faith in exercise. Faith sometimes is like a day in which there is no wind blowing. It is so calm, that there scarcely appears to be any air stirring to move a leaf. But after a time a gentle breeze comes and blows over the earth. Thus it is with faith and the spirit of faith. Faith in repose is like the calm air of a summer's day, when there is nothing moving or stirring; faith acting, faith in exercise,

is like the same air in the gentle breeze which makes itself sensibly felt. If God has given me faith, that faith is never lost out of my breast. If once a believer, I always am a believer; for if I could cease to believe, I should cease to be a child of God; I should lose salvation out of my heart, for I am saved by grace through faith. And yet there may be many times and seasons when I may not have much of the spirit of faith. Faith may be very inactive, I will not say stagnant, for that would almost imply death, but still, quiet, calm, sleeping like a bird with its head under its wing. But in due time there is a stirring, a movement; a gracious blowing of the Spirit: "Awake, O north wind, and come O south; blow upon my garden." (Song 4:16.) "Come from the four winds, O breath." (Ezek. 37:9.) This heavenly breath of the Holy Spirit acts upon faith, awakens it, revives and reanimates it, and draws it forth into lively operation. It thus becomes a spirit of faith, acting spiritually and energetically according to its measure. John was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day." (Rev. 1:10.) He was not always in the Spirit by lively action, though he was never out of the Spirit by his extinction. So faith is sometimes, so to speak, in the Spirit; and then its eyes are open, like the eyes of John, to see spiritually what he saw visibly, the Person of Christ, and its ear open to hear inwardly what he heard outwardly, the words of Christ.

5. But the *spirit of love* is one of the grand characteristics of this new and true spirit; for "love is of God, and he that loveth knoweth God and is born of God." I can have no satisfaction, real satisfaction, that I am a partaker of the Spirit and grace of Christ except I feel some measure of the love of God shed abroad in my heart. I may have hopes, expectations, and evidences, fainter or brighter; but I have no sure, clear evidence in my own soul that I have the Spirit and grace of Christ there, except I am blessed with the love of God; for until love comes, there is fear which hath torment. And whilst we have fear which hath torment, there is no being made perfect in love. You have no clear assurance in your own breast that God has loved you with an everlasting love; nor have you any bright testimony that the Spirit of God makes your body his temple until this love comes into your soul. But

when the crowning blessing comes of the love of God experimentally felt and enjoyed by his own shedding of it abroad in the heart, with the communication of the spirit of adoption to cry "Abba, Father," *that* is the sealing testimony of your possession of the true spirit; for it is "a spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind;" and where there is this there is also a spirit of love and affection to all the family of God.

I am obliged to pass by various other marks of this true spirit, for I must not omit to bring before you the trying of the spirits as one prominent feature of my present discourse. By this command, then, we are brought to our third and last point, the trying of the spirits.

III.—Observe the strong and striking language of John: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."

i. John here addresses himself to the family of God. "Beloved." It is these beloved ones, beloved of God and of himself, whom he warns, and upon whom he urges the necessity and the importance of this trial. He would not encourage that foolish, childish credulity which receives everything and everybody that makes a profession of religion. And this warning cry is addressed to us as well as to them, if we are amongst the "beloved;" and indeed was never more needed than now. There is much delusion abroad, many errors, many abounding evils. There is then with us a kind of spiritual necessity not to believe every spirit, not to receive with superstitious credulity whatever any man or minister, however high in a profession, may tell us. We are to be upon our guard not to be imposed upon by erroneous men, however plausible or however popular, not to be beguiled by any false spirit, from whatever quarter it blows or from whosoever mouth it comes, but in the calm, quiet depths of our own bosom, in all simplicity and godly sincerity, with meekness and humility, to try the spirits, to weigh them, to examine them well, and come to some decision in our own conscience what manner of spirit that is which calls upon us for our acceptance as of God. We are

continually thrown into the company of professors of religion. What must we try then, in them that we may follow John's directions? Not their words altogether, though words sometimes are quite sufficient to manifest a man's real character, for a "fool's voice is known by the multitude of words." (Eccles. 5:3.) But men may say anything; and the more men's consciences are hardened the more boldly and presumptuously they can speak. What man in business trusts men's words, unless they have other evidence? How deceptive words are! What imposition is continually practised by plausible words and strong protestations, loud declarations, and repeated promises. Men of business look for something beyond all these words: they want realities, substance, facts, deeds and documents, responsibility and security. And shall we be less wise than they? Shall the children of this world be wiser in their generation than the children of light? We then have to try the spirits, our own and others, to see whether they are of God, leaving to novices and self-deceivers to be beguiled by the plausible words of hypocrites in Zion.

ii. But how shall we try them? There are four ways whereby we may try the spirits, whether they are of God.

1. The first is by *the word of truth*. God has given us the Scriptures, blessed be his holy name, as a perfect revelation of his mind and will. There he has deposited his sacred truth in all its purity and blessedness, that it may shed a continual and steady light from generation to generation. We must then bring ourselves and others to the test of the Scriptures to know whether the spirit which is in us or in them is of God or not. Now in this chapter John gives us several tests whereby to try the true spirits. One is the confession that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. In those days there was a set of pestilent heretics who denied the real humanity of our blessed Lord. They held that his body was not real flesh and blood of the substance of the Virgin, but a mere shadowy appearance. But what was the effect of this vile and damnable error? To destroy in a moment all the effects of Christ's suffering and death; for if his body were a shadowy body, there could be no taking of the nature of the children, no

substitution of himself in their place and stead, and therefore no true sacrifice, no real atonement for sin. In this day we do not hear much of an error like this, for it seems quite to have died out. And yet men may deny that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh if they deny the fruits that spring out of his coming in the flesh. An Antinomian, for instance, still denies it, because Jesus Christ came to make us holy, to keep us from ungodliness, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. The Antinomian spirit, therefore, really denies that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh; for it denies the power of his resurrection in raising us up to a new life, the efficacy of his blood to sanctify as well as to atone, and indeed all that Jesus has done to reconcile us unto God, as far as regards its manifestation in our hearts and lives. So also the Pharisaic spirit equally denies that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. If you can save yourself by your own works, what do you want Jesus Christ for? Why need Jesus Christ have come in the flesh if your works could save you, and you can stand upon your own righteousness? Thus the Pharisee denies that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh as much as the Antinomian. And could we pursue the point through all its various bearings, we should find that every manifestation of the spirit of error is a virtual denying that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh; for his coming in the flesh is the root of all blessings and of all blessedness, as the root of all our standing in him and of every blessing with which we are blessed in him. The spirit, therefore, of error, in all its branches is a virtual denial of Jesus Christ having come in the flesh.

But again, John gives us another test, the *hearing of the apostles*. "He that is of God heareth us." A listening to God's word as revealed in the Scriptures, a drinking into the very spirit of truth as delivered by the apostles and handed down in the word of God, a receiving tenderly and graciously, with a child-like spirit, God's truth, so as to be saved and blessed thereby, is a test to which we must bring every spirit, whether the spirit of truth or the spirit of error.

2. But I said that there is another test whereby we are to try the

spirits, and that is by the *work of God upon our own soul*. Many have the word of God in their hands and in their mouths; but what is the word of God to them? They have no light to see its meaning; no understanding to enter into its holy and gracious declarations; no faith to believe what it reveals; in a word, it has no effect upon them. To bring them therefore to the word of God would be like taking a blind man and putting scales in his hands to weigh an article of merchandise. He has no eyes to see scales or weights. You must have eyes to see the tests in God's word that you may apply God's word as a test to try whether you possess a true or false spirit. The work of God upon your own soul, the life of Jesus in your own breast, the operations of the Spirit upon your own conscience, the gracious feelings produced within you by the power of God—this is a test besides the Scriptures whereby we try the spirits. Let me open up this a little more fully and clearly by appealing to your own experience. You are thrown sometimes into the company of some of those characters which I have just described, and get into conversation with them; for they are generally very forward to talk. Say then that you meet with a man, a great professor of religion, but full of that light, trifling, carnal, careless spirit, which I have pointed out as marking a spirit of error. Is not your soul grieved? Do you not see, do you not feel that the grace of God is not in that man, or, at least, sadly buried by his worldly spirit? Can you not come to some decision in your own breast that this carnal, trifling, worldly, proud, covetous spirit which you see in him or in others is not the Spirit of Christ, and that the man who is so thoroughly under its influences and manifests it so clearly and visibly in his life and conduct, is not a partaker of the grace of Christ? But why do you come to this decision? Because you know what the Spirit of Christ does in you, and that you are a living witness of the tenderness it communicates, the fear of God it implants, the reverence of the name of God it produces, the carefulness and jealousy over self, the desire to be right, the fear to be wrong, which are the effects and fruits of the grace of God. You find these things in your own breast if you are a partaker of the grace of Christ. You bring then the spirits which you daily encounter in your path to the test; and if these are directly opposed to what

the Spirit of Christ has done for and in you, you say, "The Spirit of Christ is not here. There is no tenderness of conscience in this man, no reverence of God, no fear of his great name, no sense of the evil of sin, no holy mourning nor godly sorrow for it, no forsaking it, no walking as becomes a Christian. Call this the Spirit of Christ? The Spirit of Christ is not in it." Thus, as you have divine teaching in your own bosom, you bring to that inward test the spirits which are continually presenting themselves; and by weighing them tenderly, cautiously, and carefully—not in a proud, dictatorial way, but with great caution, fearing lest you may deceive yourself from a wrong judgment, you weigh in this inward balance the true spirit and false, and from the inward testimony of God in your soul spiritually discern for your own guidance which is the spirit of truth and which is the spirit of error. This may seem harsh doctrine; and indeed it would be so unless it were scriptural, and unless this spirit of judgment were carefully regulated by the Spirit's inward teaching. Does not the apostle say, "He that is spiritual judgeth [or "discerneth," margin] all things?" (1 Cor. 2:15.) "Ye have an unction from the Holy One," says John, "and ye know all things." But where is this unction? "The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you." (1 John 2:20, 27.) In this way the Lord is "a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment." (Isa. 28:6.) Are you not sensible, ye discerning people of God, what spirit is breathed from the pulpit by the minister under whom you sit? And here let me drop a word to all who fear God now before me. Don't look to the words of the minister you hear so much as to his spirit. Of course, if he preach the truth, his words will be in harmony with it; but he may preach the letter of truth without being under the influence of the Spirit of truth. Is the Spirit of Christ in him? Does the blessed Spirit communicate through him any gracious influence to your soul? Is there any softening of your spirit under his word; any unction resting upon your soul; any tenderness drawing up your affections Godward; any sweet reviving and blessed renewing of the love and power of God in your soul, as known and experienced in the days of old? Or are you searched, rebuked, reprov'd, admonished, warned, cautioned by an inward light, life, and power which flow into your heart through his word?

Are you sensibly humbled, broken down, and softened into contrition, humility, meekness, and quietness of spirit, with confession and supplication before the Lord? I repeat the word: Try the man's spirit; for many false prophets are gone out into the world. How many ministers breathe a harsh, proud, contentious, self-exalting spirit; a spirit which, call it what you will, or disguise itself as you may, is alien altogether to the Spirit of Christ. No humility, no brokenness, no tender regard for God's honour and glory, no separation of the precious from the vile, and no commending themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God, show themselves in them. Again, I say, try the spirits whether they be of God.

3. There is a third test, whereby we try the spirits; viz., *the effects and influences* of this spirit in our own bosom.

This test is closely allied to the preceding, but is of a more practical nature. If you are possessed of the light and life of God in your soul, you will watch the influence of your own spirit. You will observe how it influences your thoughts, your movements, your words, your actions; how it is in you as a guiding light to all that is good, and a sensible bar to all that is evil. Sometimes, for instance, you feel softened, humbled, melted down before the footstool, sweet spirituality of mind flowing in, heavenly affections flowing out, a separation from the spirit of the world, making you desire to be alone with God, and to enjoy a sense of his presence and love in your heart. This is a right spirit: the very spirit of truth, the very spirit of Christ. It has right effects, right influences, and by this you see it is the spirit of truth. Or sometimes you may find a different spirit working in you—pride, harshness, self-justification, covetousness, rebellion, self-pity, entanglement in business and worldly cares, and all these secretly quenching the life of God in your soul. You are sensible of this wrong influence in your breast; you can see it is not the spirit of holiness nor the Spirit of Christ, but an alien spirit, a spirit diametrically opposed to the spirit of truth and love.

4. There is another test, the *influence* which the *spirit has upon others*. You will have an influence upon those with whom you live.

There will be an influence emanating from you towards your families, your servants, your friends, and those with whom you are brought into daily contact. And you may trace in your own bosom, for you will be honest with yourself, the workings of a gracious spirit and the workings of an ungodly spirit. Sometimes you find peevishness, fretfulness, hasty temper manifesting itself in words and expressions highly unbecoming the grace and spirit of Christ. You are condemned; you go to bed with a heavy heart; you can hardly go to sleep because through the day you have manifested an angry temper, or been too much entangled in business. Here you trace the effect of a wrong spirit. Or you get into argument and find working in you a dividing spirit, a spirit of jealousy, or prejudice, or enmity, or dislike to some of the dear family of God. You are conscious you have an unforgiving spirit that you cannot master, but you are not insensible to it; you hate its workings and abhor its influence. Now watch the influence of your spirit upon others. And a minister has to watch this especially—the influence his spirit has upon the people. Are there effects and fruits following his word? Are they searched, tried, examined? Is their conscience made more alive and tender? Is there a gracious influence attending the ministry of the word? I should not be fit to stand here in the name of the Lord unless I stood up in the Spirit of Christ; and if I stand up in the Spirit of Christ, and with the grace of Christ in my heart, the word of Christ in my mouth, there will be communicated to you a gracious influence which you will sensibly feel—not always feel; but from time to time there will be a gracious influence attending the word to your heart, by which sometimes your doubts and fears are removed, your burdened soul encouraged, your difficulties cleared up, Christ made precious, and the things of God sealed upon your heart with fresh life and power.

Thus, by these tests—the word of God, your own experience, the effect and influence of the spirit upon yourself, the effect and influence of your spirit upon others—we may try the spirits whether they are of God. And if we find that we have the right spirit, or are seeking more of its influence, let us thank God and take courage.

## TRYING THE SPIRITS

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Thursday evening, August 1, 1844

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God." 1 John 4:1

There are two evils in the human heart, which, when thoroughly ripened and brought to a head, become, the one, gross superstition, and the other open infidelity; superstition crediting everything, however false; infidelity believing nothing, however true. These two opposite evils, being closely bound up in the heart of every man by nature, assume various shapes and gradations in different persons; and do not, in every individual, reach the same height, or attain to the same development. And, indeed, one of these evils will be usually more marked in some individuals than the other; the bias of some being more to superstition, and the bias of others, more to infidelity. Generally speaking, the weaker the mind, the more superstition preponderates; and the stronger the mind, the more does infidelity prevail.

As, then, we watch our minds, **and if God the Spirit is at work upon our conscience, He will make us watch its internal movements,** we shall find these two evils, more or less, continually working. If we observe, also, the minds and movements of others, we shall find these two evils similarly developed in them. For instance, in every church there are members who would superstitiously receive, as a man of God, well nigh every minister who stands up in a pulpit; they are so overrun with natural superstition, that when a man stands up in the name of the Lord, a secret awe falls upon their mind, and they almost adore him as a servant of God, though he is perhaps the veriest hypocrite that ever disgraced his profession. In other members of churches, the opposite feeling, a spirit of suspicion and incredulity, is found to work, so as scarcely to receive any

one as a true gospel minister. Were the administration of the affairs of the church and the choice of ministers put solely into the hands of the former, the pulpit would be open well nigh to all; were it confined to the latter, it would be almost too narrow for anybody. Thus, between these two evils, our own minds, and the minds of others, are continually balancing; and only God the Spirit can give us a right judgment in all things, and keep us from being overcome by superstition on the one hand, or by infidelity on the other.

The Apostle John, in his day, saw both this superstitious and this infidel spirit working. There were some that "believed every spirit:" and there were others that "denied that Jesus Christ was come in the flesh." Just as there is a counterfeit to every coin of the realm, and the Government could not issue a new coin which would not immediately be imitated; so, in proportion to the power and depth which God displayed in the times of the apostles, did Satan put forth counterfeit power and counterfeit depth. Did the Lord, in those days, make bare His arm, and work more manifestly and conspicuously than at other times? Satan raised up his counterfeits, and brought powerful antagonists to oppose the wonderful work which God was carrying on. Thus, in the primitive churches, evil spirits were abroad, raising up erroneous opinions, entangling men's minds in delusion and error, and seducing them into doctrines of devils. And thus, as the Spirit of God worked powerfully in the members of God's family, the spirit of evil worked powerfully in the children of Satan.

The Apostle John living at a late period of the Apostolic age, and writing his Epistle, but a short time before his decease, seeing how many of these seducing spirits then were abroad, warned the believers to whom he was writing against a superstitious reverence to all who stood up in the name of the Lord: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because," he adds, "many false spirits are gone out into the world."

The injunction, then, is **not** to believe every spirit, but to "try the spirits whether they are of God." You will observe, the Apostle does not enjoin his beloved brethren to try men's words, but to try their **spirits**. It is not **words**, so much as the **spirit** in which words are spoken, that really act upon the mind. **Words** come and go, according to the vulgar saying, "they come in at one ear, and go out at the other;" they leave no abiding impression; but the **spirit**, either for good or evil, that is, the working of God the Spirit on the heart, or the working of Satan, the evil spirit, in the carnal mind, leaves an abiding impression for good or evil. John, therefore, does not bid us watch men's **words**; for a man may say anything, and the baser and blacker a hypocrite he is, the more boldly and confidently can he speak. Nor does he bid us weigh **men's actions**, though actions are often great indications of men's minds; but he carries us beyond both words and actions, and, by bidding us watch men's **spirits**, takes us into the secret chambers from which words flow, and to the hidden springs by which actions are influenced.

**"Try the spirits."** Weigh and examine the spirit of a man, whether it be of God. Now, in doing this, a man taught of God will first **try his own spirit**; and when he has tried his own spirit, he will be in a proper situation, and not before, to try the spirits of others.

With God's blessing, then, I shall endeavour this evening to show how a child of God is called upon not to believe even his own spirit, but to try it, whether it is of God; when he has done this, and come to some little decision in his own mind, how then he is to go forth with these scales that have been suspended in his own heart, and try the spirits of others; and by the same scales, and by the same influence, that he has come to some decision upon himself, to arrive at some decision upon them.

I.—When God the Spirit quickens a man's soul into spiritual life, He takes possession of him, makes his body His temple, dwells in him, lives, moves, breathes, and acts in him and upon him. This is the privilege of every living soul—that the Spirit of God is in

him, making his body His temple. Now the Spirit of God in the soul cannot lie inactive; He cannot be inert in a man; He must work, and that powerfully and effectually. As, then, the Spirit of God sheds abroad light and life in the conscience, He communicates power, wisdom, and discernment to the soul wherein He dwells. In the light of His own inshinings, in the life of His own quickenings, do we see and feel His operations in our heart and conscience. And when, as He gives us light to see and life to feel, we compare His dealings in the heart with what we read in the Scriptures, and thus bring the word of God to bear upon what the Spirit is doing in us, we have a twofold evidence on which to stand, and are not ashamed of our hope.

Now, just in proportion as the Spirit of God works feelingly and experimentally in a man's heart, will Satan, that evil spirit, work in his carnal mind, and by working on our depraved nature, bring forth those evil fruits which are so bitter and painful to every tender and exercised conscience.

Let us look, then, at what the Spirit of the Lord is and does in a man, and how we try our own spirit to see whether it is of God.

1. Wherever the Spirit dwells, He is the **Spirit of wisdom and understanding**. We find this spoken of the Spirit which rested on Jesus. "The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the **spirit of wisdom and understanding**, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord" **Isa 11:2,3**. The Spirit dwells in Christ without measure; but He dwells in measure in His members. His gifts and graces were given to Christ without measure, but they are given in measure to Christ's people. The Holy Ghost rested on the human nature of Christ as a Spirit of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding: and so in His members He is also a Spirit of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding; and He thus gives them a knowledge of the truth of God. So that the truth of God being seen in the light, and felt in the life of the Spirit of God, as our inward teacher, we are brought to see and feel what God has declared in the Scriptures to be eternal truth. Thus, His threatenings and warnings, His

purity and holiness as declared in the Law, and what too in the gospel He has revealed concerning Himself, are known, felt, and believed to be true.

2. But the Spirit of the Lord in a believer's heart, is not merely the Spirit of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, but also a **Spirit of fear**; as we read of the Spirit that rested upon Christ, that it was "the spirit of knowledge and **of the fear of the Lord.**" Not, indeed, of "the fear that hath torment," but of filial and godly fear, of that fear which is a "fountain of life to depart from the snares of death." So that, wherever the Spirit of God takes up His abode in a believer's heart, He is in that believer a fountain of life bubbling up in all the sensations and emotions of godly fear.

3. Again. The Spirit, in the heart of a child of God is a **Spirit of prayer**. The promise especially runs, "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications." **Zec 12:10** And the Apostle says, "We know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." **Ro 8:26** The Spirit of prayer is given to the soul when God the Spirit first falls upon it; and the Spirit of prayer never ceases out of the heart till prayer is lost in eternal praise. It may indeed, like water in a well, sink so low as to be scarcely visible; and it is always subject to fluctuations. Sometimes it seems, like a river at low water, almost to have ebbed out; but then the tide rises, and the stream flows once more; so the Spirit of prayer once more flows forth into the ears of, and meets with an answer from God Himself.

What a mercy it is, what an inestimable blessing, to have something of the Spirit of prayer in the soul, to feel it working in us powerfully, working in us daily; to know what it is to go to a throne of grace, with pantings, longings, and breathings after God's manifested presence; and to feel springing up all those inward feelings by which the Spirit of supplication is ever attended. And thus, not to come before the Lord with dead

formality or lip-service; but to go as Hannah went, and "pour out our hearts before the Lord." Sometimes when we go before the Lord, cold, dead, and lifeless, the Spirit of prayer powerfully springs up, and we are enabled to pour out our petitions before the throne. Sometimes we come burdened, and by pouring out the heart before the Lord, leave the burden at His feet. And sometimes, as the Spirit of prayer rises up in the heart, light is cast upon the path wherein we are walking, the temptation is broken wherein we are entangled, and the snare made manifest to us; and light, life, and feeling are experienced in our soul.

4. Again. Wherever the Spirit of God dwells in a man's heart, He stamps upon him that mark which the Lord took notice of as so conspicuous in King Josiah. "Because **thine heart was tender.**" **2Ch 34:27** What a mercy, what an inestimable mercy to have bestowed upon us a tender heart; and to have that promise fulfilled in our experience! "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." **Eze 36:26** What a mercy to have a heart in any measure softened before God; to experience some dissolvings away under a sense of His goodness and mercy; to feel an inward yielding of our soul to the touch of God, as the wax yields to the seal, and the clay to the potter; to have a rebellious heart broken, so that we cannot any longer go on kicking against the pricks, nor run recklessly and heedlessly on; to find a measure of tenderness before the Lord, so as to mourn over sin as a bitter thing; and when the base backslidings of our heart are opened up, and the guilt of them lies upon our conscience, to fall beneath it, the sinews of self-righteousness being cut in twain, and to be melted down into godly sorrow and contrition at His feet! And what a curse a hard heart is that feels nothing, that submits to nothing, that falls down before nothing, but is armed, like leviathan, even against the terrors of the Almighty! What a mercy for you and me, if we have known and felt anything of a heart made tender before the Lord, so as to want nothing but to experience His heavenly fingers in our soul moulding us after His own blessed image, as

the potter's hands mould the clay into the vessel he intends to make!

5. Wherever the Spirit of God dwells in a man's heart, He also dwells there as a **Spirit of faith**. As we read, "We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak." **2Co 4:13** Not but that a living soul feels, nay, deeply feels the opposite workings of the spirit of unbelief in him; not but that he is tried, and that at times powerfully, with the workings of atheism and infidelity; not but that at times it seems to him impossible to believe the simplest truths of God's word. But in spite of all these, there is such a thing as feeling in the conscience a spirit of faith; and that quite a different thing from the implicit confidence of superstition, whereby a man believes delusion and error. The spirit of faith does not believe anything; it believes only what the Spirit of God reveals to it. It is not a dead faith, that gives credence to Satan's lies: but being "a spirit of faith" in the soul, it receives only such truths as God the Spirit reveals to the conscience, brings with His own divine authority, and seals with His own heavenly witness on the heart. What a mercy it is sometimes to feel this spirit of faith within: to find that when the Lord brings the promise, there is a hand in the soul to receive it; when He applies His rebukes to the conscience, there is an inward submission to them; and when truth comes with power to the soul, there is an inward spirit felt, whereby that truth is received in love, tenderness, and affection, and there is an embracement of it in its beauty, glory, and power in the conscience! This is as different a thing from the superstitious credence of a Papist or a Puseyite, as light from darkness, or heaven from hell.

6. Again. Wherever the Spirit of the Lord is in the soul, He is there as the Spirit of a **sound mind**; as the Spirit speaks to Timothy **2Tim 1:7** "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." And it is a mercy, a great mercy, to have a sound mind. A sound mind is one not attracted by every passing novelty, that does not receive

every wild doctrine, is not caught by every rushing blast of enthusiasm, is not turned aside by the deceptive powers of Satan as an angel of light. The Spirit of the Lord being in the soul as a spirit of a sound mind, receives only sound truth, such truth only as is commended to the conscience, and such as only the spiritual understanding sees, spiritual faith embraces, spiritual hope anchors in, and spiritual love enjoys. What a mercy it is for people where the minister has the "spirit of a sound mind;" who is not caught by every doctrine that comes floating forth on the wings of novelty, not attracted by every false light that Satan may raise up, not deluded by delusive experiences, nor the blaze and glare of fleshly holiness; but in the "spirit of a sound mind," discovers the real from the counterfeit, and brings forth that which he has tasted, felt, and handled of the word of life. This spirit of a sound mind will keep him steady and upright amid all the delusions of the day, and preserve him single and sincere amidst all the tossings to and fro of the winds of error.

7. Again. Wherever the Spirit dwells in a man's heart, He will be there a **Spirit of love**, for "the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost." This will produce love to Jesus, as the only hope of salvation; love to the people of God, because the heart is united to them in the bonds of sympathy and affection; love to the truth, because it is brought with power into the conscience, and a sweetness found in it more than of honey and the honeycomb.

8. Again. Wherever the Spirit of truth dwells in a man, He is there a **spirit of uprightness and integrity**. Such a one will never call evil good, or good evil; will never put light for darkness, or darkness for light; will never mistake bitter for sweet, or sweet for bitter. But there will be in him a spirit of honesty, integrity, and godly simplicity, whereby, whether in himself or others, that which is right is known to be right, and that which is wrong is known to be wrong. So that no artificial coverings, no false glossings, no hypocritical designs, no enthusiastic pretensions, can long hide from him what truth is and what error is, whether working in his own mind, or manifested in that of others. By this

spirit of integrity, when he errs or falls, it is acknowledged; when he backslides, he deeply bewails it; and when he is entangled in Satan's snares, he mourns and sighs on account of it.

Now such and similar marks will there be in every one that has received the Spirit of God. And by these marks, so far as the Lord the Spirit shines upon them, we may try ourselves and try others. True religion, vital godliness, will always have a peculiar testimony in the conscience of its possessor; there is a power in it which may be counterfeited, but never can be mistaken by those who have felt it. And as a man lives under the testimony and shinings in of the Spirit, he will have I do not say an abiding witness, for he will have great conflicts, will be shot at by Satan's fiery darts, and harassed by the infidelity of his depraved nature; but he will, at times, have an inward witness that he is a partaker of the grace of God, by feeling the operation of the Spirit bringing forth these graces and fruits in his soul. Having this inward witness of the Spirit, he sees his experience contained in every page of the Scriptures: and having his understanding enlightened in the truth, he perceives how in the Psalms and in the Prophets, in the Old Testament and in the New, that the men of God were similarly taught and exercised. And thus finding his experience so powerfully confirmed by the testimony of God's saints in the word, he will go forth with his twofold witness, to put into practice John's injunction, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God." **That** is the great point he has to do—"try the spirits;" that is, to weigh, to examine, to bring to the touchstone, to discern, so far as the Lord shall give him wisdom, the spirits, whether they are of God; not to take things for granted; not to receive everything from the pulpit with implicit submission; not to allow the extinguisher of priestcraft to be put over his judgment; but as far as God the Spirit enables and teaches him, to try the spirits that come before him whether they are of God.

Now this does not imply any great boasting or confidence on the part of him that tries; nay, rather, he cannot try the spirits himself until he is clothed with humility. It is only so far as he is

possessed of a broken heart and contrite spirit that he is able to try them aright; for he has to try them not in the flesh, not as thinking himself a man of wondrous judgment, not with carnal ideas of his own discernment, to say, "I will try this man or that." But covered with humility, having godly fear powerfully at work, feeling the spirit of contrition in the soul, he goes forth tenderly, warily, and watchfully; and in that secret court of conscience where God has tried him, and in that heart where God the Spirit dwells, does he try the spirits whether they are of God. There is much harsh judgment, and hasty, rash cutting off in many persons that springs from bad temper, envy, jealousy, pride, suspicion, want of love, a morose and sullen disposition, vanity and self-conceit. A man may cut and slash on the right hand and the left, and call this "trying the spirits," when he is only giving vent to his own pride and self-importance, and is but an instrument in the hands of Satan to harass and distress God's people. This is not the "trying of the spirits" that John speaks of.

II.—But let us now look at some marks of that spirit which is not of God; and which God's people feel in a measure in themselves, and see more fully developed in others.

1. One mark of the spirit which is not of God, is **a spirit of hardness**. I use the word "spirit," because the Scriptures speak in the same way of "the spirit of error," **1Jo 4:6**, "of antichrist," **1Jo 4:3**, "of whoredoms," **Ho 4:12**, and so on. We read that "the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go." **Ex 10:20** And we read, "God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear." **Ro 11:8** A spirit of hardness, then, is an infallible mark of the spirit not being of God. By hardness, I mean the opposite of tenderness. Opposition to God's truth, an unwillingness, an inability to fall under the power of it; setting up our prejudice, our pride, our preconceived opinions against the solemn authority of God, and maintaining a rugged, unbending, unyielding temper.

Now this is a very different thing from firmness. Gospel firmness and judicial hardness are two very different things. A man cannot be too firm when God the Spirit has meekened his heart, and made the truth precious to him; but he will not have hardness of spirit; he will fall in a moment before truth. Let God only bring one of His people upon His heart; let Him only touch his conscience with His finger, and he is broken to pieces. But it is not so with the heart that is hard; neither law nor gospel has an effect there, but even a profession of religion is carried out in an unyielding spirit, a hard, self-opinionated perverseness.

Now we are called upon to "try the spirits." But wherever there is a spirit in man it will communicate itself to others. Spirit is of a diffusive nature. It is so naturally. The wind that blows in our face, and impels ships on the broad seas, spreads itself from place to place, and fills every corner; there is a certain impulse connected with the wind that makes it universally felt. So spirit is diffusive, whether the Spirit of God for good, or the spirit of evil for evil. Now, do you try the spirits of men in this way. Try the spirits of the companions with whom you associate, that make a profession of religion; see whether there be any hardness in them, an unbending temper; see whether what is said to them on divine things make any impression; whether there be any softness, brokenness, tenderness, or any yielding of themselves to the truth of God. And if you sit under a sound ministry, watch whether the minister has a hard spirit. You will soon discover it, if God has made your conscience soft and tender, as Job said, "For God maketh my heart soft." **Job 23:16** Watch whether his words fall as if they came from a hard heart. If so, they will communicate a similar measure of hardness to you. You will find, instead of that tenderness, softness, and contrition that you felt in times past, there will be a creeping over you by gradual steps a numbness, a hardness, a searedness, whereby truth seems to have lost its power; it does not sink into the conscience, nor carry with it that humbling impression it formerly did. How much the beginnings of this fearful evil are like the letting out of water! When once a man's heart begins to be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, or whenever a hard spirit is communicated

from the pulpit to the people, it is the beginning of a fearful evil; and, if God prevent not, it will lead to awful backsliding.

Sometimes we feel the spirit of deadness within, but that is a different thing from the spirit of hardness. People say, "How hard and dead they are." But they are two different things. A man may feel dead, and unable to move his soul Godward, and yet not be hard. For he feels if God put forth His power, his heart will become like wax to the seal. Deadness is the absence of good and right feeling; hardness, the presence of bad and wrong feeling; so that deadness and hardness are not the same thing. But sometimes there is in us a spirit of hardness also, which steels our hearts against God's dealings with us in providence however kind, and mars that softness of conscience which we once had. But how a child of God dreads lest this hardness should grow upon him!

2. A spirit of **vain confidence** is from the devil; and you are to try whether the spirit that comes before you is of this kind. Sometimes we feel vain-confidence creeping upon us; a spirit of presumptuous assurance that does not spring from the Spirit's inward witness; a sort of fleshly confidence, that when it works brings death into the soul. I know the feeling well; a proud daring boldness, which is as different from God's teachings and leadings as hell is from heaven. Now, as we feel the workings of this vain-confidence in ourselves, it opens our eyes to see it in others; and as we detest the spirit in our own hearts, we cannot but abhor it in theirs. For myself I must say, of all persons, I would least choose for my companions those who have much of this vain-confidence; and of all preachers, those whom I would least wish to hear Would be those in whom it is most manifested.

There is such a thing as true confidence given and maintained by the Spirit. Every grace and fruit of the Spirit will attend this; and its companions will be humility, godly fear, contrition, tenderness of conscience, deadness to the world, prayerfulness, and heavenly-mindedness. But the confidence that rests upon the doctrines of grace in the letter only, is a confidence that God never gave. It is usually little else but health, strength and good

spirits carried into religion; and its general companions are pride, worldliness, covetousness, frivolity, levity, self-indulgence, and carnality. Depend upon it, this vain confidence in minister or people is death to all that is good. When once a vain-confident spirit takes hold of them, and they can rest in a dead assurance, and believe and talk as though they were going to heaven, whilst they know nothing of the Spirit's inward teachings and testimony, and are not broken down in godly fear, it will be the death of everything good and spiritual in that people and congregation. When ministers get possessed of this vain-confident spirit, it will be sure to spread itself. Spirit, as I before said, is of a diffusive nature; it will communicate itself. And if a man stand up in vain-confidence, and you give him your ears and heart, if God the Spirit do not mercifully break the snare, depend upon it, that vain-confidence will soon spread and grow upon you.

Look, and see whether you are now standing in this vain-confidence. Perhaps, some years ago you had more doubts, fears, and exercises than at present; but you say, "Now I have lost them all; and can talk more confidently of going to heaven!" But what has been the cause of the removal of these doubts and fears? What has made them take flight, and brought you out of them into this confidence wherein you now stand? Has it been by the liftings up of the light of God's countenance upon you? Has the Lord Himself raised you out of the dust, given you the inward witness of the Holy Ghost, and softened, melted, and humbled you by His teaching? In a word, is your confidence felt in a broken heart and a contrite spirit? Is your soul dissolved at times in godly sorrow, and brought into sweet communion with a broken-hearted Jesus? Or does it rest merely in the doctrines of the Bible? Have you borrowed it from some minister? Do you speak confidently because the members of your church do so; and because doubts and fears are generally scouted and ridiculed where you attend? Does your assurance rest upon the letter of the word without the inward witness and sealings of the Spirit? Depend upon it, if it stand not in the inward witness and testimony of the Spirit, it is a spirit of vain-confidence, however subtle and refined. And you had better be harassed with doubts

and fears all your life than get out of them in any other way than God's way.

3. A spirit of **presumption** and **irreverence** in divine things is a sure mark that the spirit is not of God. I think of all painful things to a living soul, one of the most is to see a spirit of irreverence in the things of God. Lightness, frivolity, irreverence in the pulpit; a talking to God as an equal, instead of lying at His feet as a suppliant—how painful a spectacle to the soul that has been taught to tremble at His word! I do not say a man of God may not be entangled in this snare; but where can his conscience be, not to see the awfulness of approaching a holy God without reverence of His dread majesty? What says the Scripture? "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire." **Heb 12:28,29** How the Lord has visited with the hottest tokens of his displeasure those who dared to rush irreverently before Him! How Nadab and Abihu were consumed because they offered strange fire! **Le 10:1,2** How Uzzah, because he touched the ark, not being a Levite, was smitten by the immediate judgment of God! How more than fifty thousand of the men of Bethshemesh were smitten with a "great slaughter," because they dared irreverently to look into the ark of God! **1Sa 6:19** Is He not the same holy, jealous Jehovah now? And will He suffer any man to rush into His presence with irreverence, and talk to Him as though he were His fellow? O where can a man's conscience be, who can go before the Lord without some reverence and godly fear in exercise?

Now this spirit is diffusive, like every other spirit, for good or bad. Tender, reverent feelings soon get damped; and if we do not take an early alarm, and heed the first admonitions of the Spirit, we know not how soon the same irreverence may creep upon us. A man may as well think he can expose his face to the wind, and not feel it blow upon him, as expose his conscience to an irreverent spirit, and think it will produce no injurious effect. "Try the spirits," then, and see whether they be of God: see whether this familiarity of approach to the throne of grace in yourself or

others be the spirit of irreverence and presumption, or whether it be the inward teachings of the Holy Ghost in a tender conscience.

4. **Thinking lightly of sin;** talking about it as though it need never grieve or trouble a living soul; peaking of it in a reckless manner, as though it did not matter whether we lived to God's glory, or to our own worldly ease and advancement; in a word, making sin appear anything but that horrible thing which God hates—that abominable thing which caused the Son of God to agonize, bleed, and die; is a spirit which is not of God. The Holy Spirit of God will never lead a man to think lightly of sin; nay, He will make his very heart at times almost bleed under it. There are some who deny that a believer can backslide. If they had ever felt what has passed through my soul, they would almost weep tears of blood, if blood could flow down their cheeks, that they have such base adultery and such vile idolatry striving for dominion in their carnal mind. It is greatly to be feared that an Antinomian spirit widely prevails in the Calvinistic churches, and is, for the most part, propagated from the pulpit to the pew. An unexercised minister, with a sound creed, soon drops into carnality and self-indulgence; sin becomes packed on the old man and the devil; and the doctrine of grace is easily substituted for the power of grace. But any preaching that allows or encourages a hearer to walk in forbidden paths, to indulge his flesh, to live prayerlessly and carelessly, to slight the precepts of the word, and scorn ail reproof and rebuke, and all the time maintain a towering profession, is not from the Spirit of God, but a spirit from the devil—a spirit fraught with the most pernicious consequences.

Now we are to **"try the spirits."** We are not to submit implicitly to what every man who stands up in a pulpit may choose to say. We are not to receive, as written by the Spirit, every book put into our hands that is called a religious work. We are not to believe every word that is spoke by persons professing a sound creed. We are commanded, God the Spirit calls upon us, to "try the spirits" by our own experience, and by the doctrine, experience, and precept recorded in the book of God. Now, do so, my friends. I would charge it upon your conscience. Do see what

impression the things connected with religion have upon your minds. Look at the religious books you read: see what impressions they leave upon your heart. Look at the persons professing godliness that you associate with; see what effects attend their conversation. Above all, look at the ministers you hear; and see what impressions they leave by their ministry on your conscience.

O, if I were to come to this chapel, as I do once a year, and go away feeling that I had left the people more hardened, more presumptuous, more trifling, more vain-confident, more reckless by my ministry, I should never desire to enter this pulpit again. My desire is, God knows, that something spiritual, something profitable, something abiding, some permanent fruit may come out of my labours; that the spirit communicated from my lips may be a spirit for good, a spirit of humility, a spirit of brokenness, a spirit of contrition, a spirit of godly fear, a spirit of separation from, and deadness to, the world and all its pleasures, a spirit of love, a spirit of communion with the Lord of life and glory, a spirit which shall bear some feeble resemblance, some faint likeness, to a sorrowing, suffering, broken-hearted Jesus. And if a man has any other object in view, except to be an instrument in God's hand, to communicate a blessing to God's people, whereby some may be called, others comforted, and all the Lord's people have the work of grace more deepened in their conscience, and the word of God more powerfully felt in their hearts, and more powerfully brought forth in their lives,—if a man has any other motive, and stand up in any other spirit, he is a disgrace to the name of a minister of the gospel.

Now do you try what effect the ministers whom you hear have upon you. When you hear preaching, you that have consciences, secretly examine what impression has been left upon your heart. As you pass through the streets on leaving the chapel, do you find that some rain and dew have distilled in your consciences? Does the spirit of prayer seem more increased—the evils of your vile heart more opened up—your refuges of life more discovered—the Lord Jesus more endeared—the power of eternal things made more manifest to your soul? Is there in your heart a

desire to be alone, that you may secretly pour out your soul before the Lord, and look up to Him that He would come down manifestly and bless you?

If you go away from this chapel, from hearing any one that preaches in this place, with your heart moistened refreshed, softened, the love of the world mortified, sin crucified, your soul cast more into the mould of Christ's likeness, your affections drawn heavenward, you have received good; and the Spirit, which is of God, has been in a measure communicated. But if you go away from this chapel, or any other, and feel hardened, careless, vain-confident, puffed up with I know not what notions; and the next day can rush into the world with redoubled ardour, and take what the minister says for a fresh motive to plunge more eagerly into business and the things of time and sense, O beware of the snare that this may be made to you. Let the deacons and members take care to have "men of God" to stand up here, and to flee from all other ministers as they would from a pestilence. And so far as the deacons are men of discernment, they will "try the spirits:" they will not be seeking merely for men who shall draw great congregations, obtain the largest collections, bring most persons into the church, or most advance the temporal prosperity of Zoar. Let all such carnal motives fall. If they are men who fear God, and have the Lord the Spirit as their teacher, this will be their prevailing motive—to obtain such ministers as shall profit the souls of the people most, and who have the most evident traces of the Lord being present to bless their word. They will, when the ministers have left, watch the effect of their ministry; what crops of fruitfulness spring up to God's glory: what godly sorrow, brokenness of heart, love to God, love to the brethren, spirit of prayer, deadness to the world, appear as its fruits: and their desire will be, that every good word and work should abound in the church to the glory of God.

Thus, as far as the Spirit of God is your teacher, you are called upon to "try the spirits whether they are of God." And thus, a child of God will have, more or less, perpetual cause for inward trial. Sometimes he will be trying his own heart, to see how God

is dealing with him: and it will be his happiness if he can find some sweet testimony that the Lord is dealing with him in mercy. Sometimes he will try the books that come before him, (for, "the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat,)" **Job 34:3**: and he will cast aside every book, however sound in doctrine, that does not communicate grace to his soul. Those works, written by gracious men, which have power and feeling, such as Hart's Hymns, Bunyan's Grace Abounding and Pilgrim, and Huntington's Works, will be his chiefly prized books, that his soul, under the Spirit's teaching, may be imbued with some of the rain and dew that fell upon those blessed men.

And, as he tries the spirits, he will get more weaned from a name to live, with a few doctrines floating in the brain; and he will see men and women in different colours from what he did in times past. Those will be his chief religious associates who are most humble and tender-hearted, and most free from gossiping and religious news mongering; whose conversation is most seasoned with salt, whose conduct is most consistent and self-denying, who walk most solitary and alone, and whose religion generally is most of inward life and feeling—to such he will feel a close union, and of such he will say, "With these do I wish to live and die." And as the Holy Spirit leads him more and more into vital godliness, he will be more thoroughly weaned from the flesh in all its forms, will desire to live more under the bedewings and droppings of God the Spirit, and will come to this solemn conclusion in his mind, that five minutes communion with the Lord of life and glory, and to live under His teachings and anointings, is far better than all the intercourse he can have with the world, or all the conversation he can have with the people of God. Thus his religion will be narrowed up into a smaller compass, so as to consist more simply and singly in the inward dealings of God with his soul. And as he is brought more and more into the furnace, the dross and tin of his false religion will be more taken away, and he will come forth a vessel meet for the Master's use, more purged and refined, with more of the image, mind, and likeness of Christ stamped upon him.

Now, it may take us many years spiritually to see these things, and more to feel their power. We may know them in early days, but not very deeply. I can, I hope, say for myself, that ever since I felt the power of eternal things, I have contended for the life and power of vital godliness. Thus, when I was in the Church of England, buried under a whole dust-heap of formality, I used to preach the same things I do now, so far as I was led into them, though I did not then know there were such persons as experimental preachers, or such works as experimental books. But, as the Lord taught me, I spoke as I felt, feebly indeed, I confess, and in much ignorance and darkness, but simply and sincerely. And now, it is the desire of my soul, to cleave to and contend more singly and simply, not for notions and forms, but for the inward teachings, guidings, and leadings of God the Spirit in the conscience; to know nothing, but by His teaching; to be nothing, but by His making; and to have nothing, but by His bestowing. And thus, if the Lord be our Teacher, we shall desire to live more to the Son of God, and less to ourselves, to cease from the creature, to be like clay in the hands of the Potter, and the desire of our souls will increasingly be, that He would work in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure, and make us what He would have us to be.