

An EXPOSITION of the Gospel of JOHN

by A.W. Pink

Volume Three
John 15:7-16 – 21:15-25

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CHRIST THE TRUE VINE (CONCLUDED)

Below is an Analysis of the second section of John 15: —

1. Fellowship and prayer, verse 7.
2. The Father glorified by much fruit, verse 8.
3. Fruit found in love, verses 9-10.
4. Fruit found in joy, verse 11.
5. Fruit found in peace, verse 12.
6. The proofs of Christ's love, verses 13-15.
7. The purpose of Christ's choice, verse 16.

That the theme of this second section of John 15 is the same as was before us in its opening portion is clear from verses 8 and 16: in both of these verses the word “fruit” is found, and as we shall see, all that lies between is intimately connected with them. Before taking up the study of our present passage let us summarize what was before us in our last lesson.

The vine and its branches, unlike the “body” and its head, does not set forth the vital and indissoluble union between Christ and His people — though that is manifestly presupposed; instead, it treats of that relationship which exists between Him and them while they are upon earth, a relationship which may be interrupted. The prominent thing is fruit-bearing and the conditions of fertility. Three conditions have already been before us. First, to be a fruit-bearing branch of the vine, one must be in Christ. Second, to be a fruit-bearing branch of the vine, the Father must purge him by the cleansing action of the Word. Third, to be a fruit-bearing branch of the vine, he must abide in Christ. The first two are solely of God's grace: they are Divine

actions. But the third is a matter of Christian responsibility, and this what is enforced throughout John 15.

As pointed out in the introduction to our last chapter, the broad distinction between John 14 and 15 is that in the former we have the grace of God unfolded; in the latter Christian responsibility is pressed. Further evidence of this will be found in the frequent repetition of two pronouns. In John 14 the emphasis is upon the “me”; in John 15 upon the “ye.” In John 14 it is: “believe also in me” (verse 1); “no man cometh unto the Father but by me” (verse 6); “If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also” (verse 7); “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?” (verse 9); and so on. Whereas in John 15 it is “ye are clean” (verse 3); “Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit” (verse 8); “continue ye in my love” (verse 9); “Ye are my friends, if” etc. (verse 14). The word “ye” occurs no less than twenty-two times in John 15!

That which is of such deep importance for the Christian is the third condition noted above; hence our Lord’s repeated emphasis upon it. Mark how in John 15:4 the word “abide” occurs no less than three times. Note how the same truth is reiterated in John 15:5. Observe how John 15:6 is devoted to a solemn statement of the consequences of failure to “abide” in Christ. Observe also how this same word “abide” is found again in John 15:7, 9, 10, 11, and 16. Just as necessary and imperative as Christ’s command “Come unto me” is to the sinner, so absolutely essential is His “Abide in me” to the saint. As then this subject of abiding in Christ is of such moment, we will now supplement our previous remarks upon it.

First, to abide in Christ is to continue in the joyful recognition of the value of His perfect sacrifice and the efficacy of His precious blood. There can be no fellowship with the Lord Jesus, in the full sense of the word, while we harbor doubts of our personal salvation and acceptance with God. Should some soul troubled on this very point be reading these lines, we would earnestly press upon him or her the fact that the only way to be rid of torturing uncertainty is to turn the eye away from self, unto the Savior. Here are His own blessed words:

“He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth (abideth) in me, and I in him” (John 6:56),

That means that I feed upon, am satisfied with, that Sacrifice of sweet savor which has fully satisfied God.

Second, to abide in Christ is to maintain a spirit and an attitude of entire dependency on Him. It is the consciousness of my helplessness; it is the realization that “severed from him, I can do nothing.” The figure which the Lord here employed strongly emphasizes this. What are the branches of a vine but helpless, creeping, clinging, things? They cannot stand alone; they need to be supported, held up. Now there can be no abiding in Christ while we entertain a spirit of self-sufficiency. To have no confidence in the flesh, to renounce our own might, to lean not unto our own understanding, precedes our turning unto Christ: there must be a recognition of my own emptiness before I shall turn to and draw from His fulness. “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.” In itself a branch has absolutely no resources: in union with the vine it is pervaded with life.

Third, to abide in Christ is to *draw from His fulness*. It is not enough that I turn from myself in disgust, I must turn to Christ with delight. I must seek His presence; I must be occupied with His excellency; I must commune with Him. It is no longer a question of my sufficiency, my strength, or my anything. It is solely a matter of His sufficiency. The branch is simply a conduit through which flows the fruit-producing juices, which result in the lovely dusters of grapes. Remember that the branch does not produce, but simply bears them! It is the vine which produces, but produces through the branch, by the branch being in the vine. It is not that the believer finds in Christ a place of rest and support, whither he may go in order to produce his own fruit. This is the sad mistake made by those who are ever speaking of their own self-complacency, self-glorifying experiences, which shows that their souls are occupied with themselves rather than with Christ. It is of the greatest practical importance to know that Christ is “all and in all” not only as our standing before God and our ultimate Perfection, but also as to our present life to the glory of the Father.

“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7).

The connection between this verse and the ones preceding it is as follows. In John 15:4 and 5 the Lord had exhorted His disciples to abide in Him. In John 15:6 He had warned them what would be the consequences if they did not. Now He turns, or rather returns, to the consolatory and blessed effects which would follow their compliance with his admonition. Three results are here stated. First, the answer to whatever prayers they presented to God; the glorification of the Father; the clear witness to themselves and to others that they were His disciples. Thus would Christ most graciously encourage us.

“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” What erroneous conclusions have been drawn from these words! How often they have been appealed to in order to justify the most unworthy views of prayer! The popular interpretation of them is that if the Christian will only work himself up to an importunate pleading of this promise before the throne of grace, he may then ask God for what he pleases, and the Almighty will not — some go so far as to say He cannot — deny him. We are told that Christ has here given us a blank check, signed it, and left us to fill it in for what we will. But 1 John 5:14 plainly repudiates such a carnal conception — “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.” Therefore, what we ask shall not be done unto us unless our will is subordinated to and is in accord with the will of God.

What then is the meaning of our Lord’s promise? Certainly it does not give praying souls *carte blanche*. For God to gratify us in everything we requested, would not only be dishonoring to Himself, but, oftentimes, highly injurious to ourselves. Moreover, the experience of many of those who frequent the throne of grace dissipates such a delusion. All of us have asked for many things which have not been “done unto” us. Some have asked in great earnestness, with full expectation, and they have been very importunate; and yet their petitions have been denied them. Does this falsify our Lord’s promise? A thousand times no! Every word

He uttered was God's infallible truth. What then? Shall we fall back upon the hope that God's time to answer has not yet come; but that shortly He will give us the desire of our hearts? Such a hope may be realized, or it may not. It all depends upon whether the conditions governing the promise in John 15:7 are being met. If they are not, it will be said of us "Ye ask, and have not, because *ye ask amiss*" (James 4:3).

Two conditions here qualify the promise: "If ye abide in me." Abiding in Christ signifies the maintaining of heart communion with Christ. "And my words abide in you": not only must the heart be occupied with Christ, but the life must be regulated by the Scriptures. Note it is not here "my word," but "my words." It is not the Word as a whole, but the Word, as it were, broken up. It is the precepts and promises of Scripture personally appropriated, fed upon by faith, hidden in the heart. It is the practical heeding of that injunction, "Man shall not live (his daily life) by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." And mark that it is Christ's words abiding in us. It is no fitful, spasmodic, occasional exercise and experience, but constant and habitual communion with God through the Word, until its contents become the substance of our innermost beings.

"Ye shall ask what ye will." But for what would such a one ask? If he continues in fellowship with Christ, if His "words" remain in him, then his thoughts will be regulated and his desires formed by that Word. Such an one will be raised above the lusts of the flesh. Such an one will

["bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" \(2 Corinthians 10:5\),](#)

proving "what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2). Consequently, such, an one will ask only for that which is according to his will (1 John 5:14); and thereby will he verify the Lord's promise "it shall be done unto you."

Such a view of prayer is glorifying to God and satisfying to the soul. For one who communes with the Savior, and in whom His Word dwells "richly," supplication is simply the pulsation of a heart that

has been won to God. While the believer is in fellowship with the Lord and is governed from within by His Word, he will not ask for things “amiss.” Instead of praying in the energy of the flesh (which, alas, all of us so often do), he will pray “in the Spirit” (Jude 20).

“Why is there so little power of prayer like this in our own times? Simply because there is so little close communion with Christ, and so little strict conformity to His words. Men do not ‘abide in Christ,’ and therefore pray in vain. Christ’s words do not abide in them, as their standard of practice, and therefore their prayers are not answered. Let this lesson sink down into our hearts. He that would have answers to his prayers, must carefully remember Christ’s directions. We must keep up intimate friendship with the great advocate in Heaven, if our petitions are to be granted” (Bishop Ryle).

“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit” (John 15:8). This is an appeal to our hearts. The “glory” of the Father was that which Christ ever kept before Him, and here He presses it upon us. He would have us concerned as to whether our lives honor and magnify the Father, or whether they are a reproach to Him. An unfruitful branch is a dishonor to God. What an inducement is this to “abide in Christ”!

It is time that we now inquire as to the *nature* or *character* of the “fruit” of which Christ here speaks. What is the “fruit,” the much fruit, by which the Father is glorified? Fruit is not something which is attached to the branch and fastened on from without, but is the organic product and evidence of the inner life. Too often attention is directed to the outward services and actions, or to the results of these services, as the “fruit” here intended. We do not deny that this fruit is frequently manifested externally, and that it also finds expression in outward works is clear from John 15:6: “Severed from me ye can do nothing.” But there is a twofold evil in confining our attention to these. First, it often becomes a *source of deception* in those who may do many things in the will and energy of the flesh, but these are dead works, often found on corrupt trees. Second, it becomes a source of discouragement to children of God who, by reason of sickness, old age, or unfavourable circumstances, cannot engage in such

activities, and hence are made to believe that they are barren and useless.

“We may say, in brief, that the fruit borne by the branches is precisely that which is produced by the Vine; and what that is, may be best understood by looking at what He was as God’s witness in the world. The fruit is Christlike affections, dispositions, graces, as well as the works in which they are displayed. We cannot undervalue the work of faith and labor of love; but we would remember that ‘the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance’; and those who are prevented from engaging in the activities of Christian service, may often be in circumstances most favorable to the production of the fruit of the Spirit” (“Waymarks in the Wilderness”).

It is deeply important for us to recognize that the “fruit” is the outflow of our union with Christ; only thus will it be traced to its true origin and source. Then will it be seen that our fruit is produced not merely by Christ’s power acting upon us, but, as it truly is, as the fruit of the vine. Thus, in every branch, is HIS word literally verified: “From me is thy fruit found” (Hosea 14:8), and therefore should every branch say, “Not I, but the grace of God.” This is all one as to say that our fruit is Christ’s fruit; for God’s operations of grace are only wrought in and by Christ Jesus. Thus saints are “filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God” (Philippians 1:11). If there be any love, it is “the love of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:14); if there be any joy, it is Christ’s joy (John 15:11); if there be any peace, it is His peace, given unto us (John 14:27); if there be any meekness and gentleness it is “the meekness and gentleness of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:1). How thoroughly this was realized by the apostle, to whom it was given to be the most signal example of the vine sending forth fruit by His branches, may be gathered from such expressions: “I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me” (Romans 15:18). “Christ speaking in me” (2 Corinthians 13:3); “He that wrought effectually in Peter... was mighty in me” (Galatians 2:8); “Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20): “I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13).

Thus, and thus only as this is recognized, all dependency upon and all glorying in self is excluded, and Christ becomes all in all.

“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit” (John 15:8). There are four relationships which need to be distinguished. Life in Christ is salvation. Life with Christ is fellowship. Life by Christ is fruit-bearing. Life for Christ is service. The “fruit” is Christ manifested through us. But note the gradation: in John 15:2 it is first “fruit,” then “more fruit,” here “much fruit.” This reminds us of the “some thirty-fold, some sixty, and some an hundred” (Mark 4:20).

“So shall ye be my disciples” (John 15:8). With this should be compared John 8:31: “If ye continue in my Word, then are ye my disciples indeed.” Continuance in the Word is not a condition of discipleship, but an evidence of it. So here, to bear much fruit will make it manifest that we are His disciples. Just as good fruit on a tree does not make the tree a good one, but marks it out as such, so we prove ourselves to be Christ’s disciples by displaying Christlike qualities.

“As the Father hath loved me, so I have loved you” (John 15:9). There is no change of theme, only another aspect of it. In the two previous verses the Lord had described three of the consequences of abiding in Him in order to fruitfulness; here, and in the three verses that follow, He names three of the varieties of the fruit home; and it is very striking to note that they are identical with the first three and are given in the same order as those enumerated in Galatians 5:22, where the “fruit of the Spirit” is defined. Here in John 15:9, it is love; in John 15:11, it is joy; while in John 15:12 it is peace — the happy issue of brethren loving one another.

“As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you.” “As the Father loved Him from everlasting, so did He love them; as His Father loved Him with a love of complacency and delight, so did He love them; as the Father loved Him with a special and peculiar affection, with an unchanging, invariable, constant love, which would last forever, in like manner does Christ love His people; and with this He enforces the exhortation which follows” (Dr. John Gill).

“As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love.” (John 15:9).

Christ’s love to us is unaffected by our changeableness, but our enjoyment of His love depends upon our continuance in it. By this continuance in His love, or abiding in it, as it should be (the Greek word is the same), is meant our actual assurance of it, our reposing in it. No matter how mysterious His dispensations be, no matter how severe the trials through which He causes us to pass, we must never doubt His immeasurable love for us and to us. The measure of His love for us was told out at the Cross, and as He is the same to-day as yesterday, therefore He loves us just as dearly now, every moment, as when He laid down His life for us. To “abide” in His love, then, is to be occupied with it, to count upon it, to be persuaded that nothing shall ever be able to separate us from it. Dwelling upon our poor, fluctuating love for Him, will make us miserable; but having the heart fixed upon His wondrous love, that love which “passeth knowledge,” will fill us with praise and thanksgiving. Very blessed but very searching is this. To “abide” in Christ is to abide in His love. Our growth proceeds from love to love.

“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love.” (John 15:10).

Even still more searching is this. There can be no fruit for the Father, no abiding in Christ’s love, unless there be real subjection of will. It is only in the path of obedience that He will have fellowship with us. Alas, how many err on this point. We are living in an age wherein lawlessness abounds.

Insubordination is rife on every hand. In many a place even professing Christians will no longer tolerate the word “commandments.” Those who would urge the duty of obedience to the Lord, are regarded as enemies of the faith, seeking to bring Christians into bondage. Satan is very subtle, but we are not ignorant of his devices. He seeks to persuade sinners that they must keep God’s commandments in order to be saved. He tries to make saints believe that they must not keep God’s commandment, otherwise they will be putting themselves “under law,” beneath a yoke grievous to be borne. But let these specious lies of the Devil be

tested by Scripture, and their falsity will soon appear. 1 Corinthians 9:21 tells us that we are “under the law to Christ.” Romans 13:10 assures us that “love is the fulfilling of the law”: the fulfilling mark, not the abrogating of it, nor a substitution for it. The apostle Paul declared that he “delighted in the law of God after the inward man,” and that he “served the law of God” (Romans 7:22-25). And here in John 15 the Lord Himself said to His disciples, “If ye *keep my commandments*, ye shall abide in my love. O fellow Christians, let no sophistry of man (no matter how able a Bible teacher you may deem him), and no deceptive art of Satan, rob you of this word of the Savior’s; a word which we all need, never more than now, when all authority, Divine and human, is more and more flouted. Note that this was not the only time that Christ made mention of His commandments and pressed upon His people their obligations to keep them. See John 13:34; John 14:15; John 15:10; Matthew 28:20, etc.

“Even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love” (John 15:10).

Here is the final word against those who decry godly obedience as “legalism.” The incarnate Son walked according to His Father’s commandments. He “pleased not himself” (Romans 15:3). His meat was to do the will of the One who had sent Him. And He has left us an example that we should follow His steps.

“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked” (1 John 2:6).

The one who disregards God’s “commandments” is not walking as Christ walked; instead, he is walking as the world walks. Let no one heed the idle quibble that the “commandments” of Christ are opposed to or even different from the commandments of the Father. Christ and the Father are one — one in nature, one in character, one in authority.

“The commandments of Christ include the whole of the preceptive part of the inspired volume, with the exception of those ritual and political statutes which refer to the introductory dispensations which have passed away” (Dr. John Brown).

And let it be said again, that no Christian can abide in Christ's love unless he is keeping Christ's commandments!

“Even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.” The “even as” refers to the character of Christ's obedience to the Father.

“His obedience was the obedience of love, and so must ours be. His obedience was but the expression of His love. External obedience to Christ's commandments, if not the expression of love, is, in His estimation, of less than no value, for He sees it to be what it is — vile hypocrisy or mere selfishness. No man will continue in His love by such obedience. His obedience was, in consequence of its being the result of love, cheerful obedience. He delighted to do the will of His Father. It was His meat to do the Father's will, and so must be our obedience to Him. We must run in the way of His commandments with enlarged hearts. We are to keep them, not so much because we must keep them as because we choose to keep them, or, if a necessity is felt to be laid upon us, it should be the sweet necessity resulting from perfect approbation of the law, and supreme love to the Law-giver. Christ's obedience to the Father was universal — it extended to every requisition of the law. There was no omission, no violation; and in our obedience to the Savior, there must be no reserves — we must count His commandments to be in all things, what they are — right; and we must abhor every wicked way. Christ's obedience to the Father was persevering. He was faithful unto death; and so must we be. This is His promise: To him that overeometh will I give to sit with me on my throne, even as I have overcome, and am set down with my Father on his throne' (Revelation 3:21). It is thus, then — only thus — by keeping the commandments of our Lord as He kept the commandments of His Father, that we shall continue in His love, as He continued in His Father's love” (Dr. John Brown).

“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you” (John 15:11).

The “these things” covers the whole of the ten preceding verses. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) is “love, joy, peace.” Having mentioned love in the previous verse, Christ now goes on to speak

of joy. Just as in John 14:27 there is a double “peace,” so here there is a twofold joy. First, there is the joy of Christ Himself, that joy which had been His during His sojourn on earth. He mentions this in His prayer in John 17: “These things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves” (verse 13). How this reveals to us the inner life of the Savior! Abiding in His Father’s love, He had a joy which certainly not His enemies and perhaps His friends would have credited the “Man of sorrows.” His joy was in pleasing the Father, in doing His will and glorifying His name. Then, too, He rejoiced in the prospect before Him. “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:2). This double joy of the incarnate Son, is mentioned in Psalm 16, where the Spirit of prophecy recorded the Savior’s words long beforehand: “I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth” (verses 8, 9). This was the joy of communion and obedience. “Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore” (verse 11): this was the joy “set before him.”

“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you.” The “these things” refers, more specifically, to the maintaining of communion with Christ, and the conditions upon which they may be realized. When fellowship with the Lord Jesus is broken, joy disappears. This was illustrated in the experience of the Psalmist. David had sinned; sinned grievously against the Lord, and in consequence, he no longer enjoyed a comforting sense of His presence. David was wretched in soul, and after making earnest confession of his sin, he cried, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation” (Psalm 51:12): salvation he had not lost, but the joy of it he had. It was the same with Peter: he “went out and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:62). A child of God can only be miserable when he is away from Christ. It is important for us to recognize and realize that we need Christ just as much for our everyday life, as we do for eternity; just as really for the fruit which the Father expects from us, as for our title to Heaven.

[“And that your joy might be full” \(John 15:11\).](#)

The grounds of the Christian's joy are not in himself, but in Christ: "Rejoice in the Lord" (Philippians 4:4). But the measure in which we enter into this is determined by our daily communion with the Lord.

"Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, and these things write we unto you that your joy may be full" (1 John 1:3, 4).

Our joy ought to be steady and constant, not fitful and occasional:

"Rejoice in the Lord *always*: and again I say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4).

Joy is not "happiness" as the world uses the term; it is much deeper. The worldling finds his happiness in circumstances and surroundings; but the Christian is quite independent of these. Paul and Silas, in the Philippian dungeon, with backs bleeding, "sang praises unto God" (Acts 16:25). What a blessed triumphing over circumstances was that! Prison-walls could not cut them off *from Christ!* But how this puts us to shame! The reason why we are so often dull and despondent, the cause of our restlessness and discontent, is because we walk so little in the light of the Lord's countenance. May we earnestly seek grace to heed the things which He has "spoken unto us" that our joy may be "full."

"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

"Love is benignant affection, and the appropriate display of it. In this most general meaning of the term, 'love is the fulfilling of the law.' The exercise of this principle in supremacy, in a well-informed intelligent being, secures the performance of all duty. It cannot coexist with selfishness and malignity, the great causes of sin. In the degree it prevails, they are destroyed. 'Love does' — love can do 'no evil' (Romans 13:10). Love does — love must do — all practical good. If evil is done — if good is not done — it is just because love is not there in sufficient force" (Dr. John Brown).

It is important that we distinguish between love and benevolence. The benevolence of Christ knows no limits to any of His people. Just as the Father maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth the rain on the just and on the unjust, so Christ ever ministers to and supplies the every need of each of His people, whether they are abiding in Him or no. But just as He abides only in the one who is abiding in Him, just as he finds complacency only in him who keeps His commandments (John 14:21), so the Christian is to regulate his actions and manifest his love.

“As a Christian I am to cherish and exercise love toward every one who gives evidence that he is a brother in Christ. It is only in this character that he has any claim upon my brotherly affection, and the degree not of my good will, for that should in every ease be boundless; yet my esteem of, and complacency in a Christian brother, should be proportioned to the manifestation which he makes of the various excellencies of the Christian character. The better he is, and shows himself to be, I should love him the better. My love should be regulated on the same principle as Christ’s, whose benevolence knows no limit in reference to any of His people, but whose esteem and complacency are always proportioned to holy principles and conduct on the part of His people” (Dr. John Brown).

[“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” \(John 15:13\).](#)

It is to be observed that these words follow right on after Christ saying, “love one another as I have loved you.” In view of this, we believe that John 15:13 to 16 set forth a number of proofs of Christ’s love, each of which manifested some distinctive feature of it, and that these are here advanced in order to teach us how we should love one another. The Lord places first the highest evidence of His love: He laid down His life for His people. It is to be observed that in the Greek the word “man” is not found in this verse. Literally rendered it reads, “greater than this love no one has, that one his life lay down for friends his.” Christ emphasizes once more the great fact that His death, imminent at the time He spoke, was purely voluntary. He “laid down” His life; none took His life from Him. This life was laid down for His friends, and in thus dying on their behalf, in their stead, He furnished the supreme demonstration of His love to and

for them. Romans 5:6-10 emphasizes the same truth, only from a different standpoint. There, the objects of Christ's atoning sacrifice are described as Divine justice saw them, they are viewed as they were in themselves, by nature and practice — ungodly, sinners, enemies. But here in John 15 the Savior speaks of them in the terms of Divine love, and as they were by election and regeneration — His "friends."

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Now in this verse the Lord not only speaks of His own unselfish, sacrificial, illimitable love, but He does so for the express purpose of supplying both a motive and an example for us. He has given us a commandment that we "love one another," and that we love our brethren as He loved them.

There is to be no limitation in our love: if occasion requires it we are to be ready to lay down our life one for another. The same truth is found in John's first Epistle:

"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren"

(1 John 3:16).

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." How these scriptures rebuke us! What is it worth if we hold the theory that we are ready, in obedience to God's Word, to lay down our lives for our brethren, when we fail so sadly in ministering to the common and daily needs and sufferings of God's children?

"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18)!

"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14).

Here is the second proof of Christ's love for His own. He had treated them with unreserved intimacy. He had brought them into close fellowship with Himself. He had dealt with them not as strangers, nor had He acted as men do toward casual acquaintances. Instead, He had, in infinite condescension, given them the unspeakable privilege of being His friends. And such they would continue, so long as they did whatsoever He had commanded them, for the Lord will not be on intimate terms with any who are out of the path of obedience. This was something far higher than the attitude which the Rabbis maintained toward their disciples, and higher still than the feeling which a master entertained for his servants. The Lord of glory deigned to treat his disciples and servants as friends!

“Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.” It is to be carefully noted that Christ did not here say, “I am your friend?”

Just now there is a great deal in the more popular hymnbooks about Jesus as our friend. How few seem to appreciate the desire of our Lord to make us His friends! The difference is very real. When a man who has attained the highest position in the nation notices a man of the laboring class and calls him his friend, it is a condescension, for he hereby exalts that unknown man to his own level. But for the insignificant man to say of the famous one, ‘He’s my friend,’ by no means exalts that one; indeed, it might be considered a presumption, a piece of impudence. This familiarity, this calling Jesus our Friend, is dimming in people’s hearts the consciousness that He is something more than that: He is our Savior! He is our Lord! He is really, in His own essential nature, our God” (Mr. C. H. Bright).

The same rebuke is called for by those who term the incarnate Son of God their elder Brother! It is true that He, in marvellous grace, is “not ashamed to call us brethren,” but it ill requites that grace for us to term Him our “Elder Brother.” Let us ever remember His own word “Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am” (John 13:13).

“Henceforth I call you not servants: for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends: for all

things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:15).

Here is the third proof of the love of Christ for His own. He not only treated the disciples as friends, but He owned them as such, and took them fully into His confidence. Our thoughts at once revert to Abraham, who is expressly called “the friend of God” (James 2:23). The reference no doubt is to what we read of in Genesis 18:17. God was about to destroy Sodom. Lot knew nothing of this, for he was at too great a moral distance from God. But the Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?” In Abraham God found delight, and therefore did He make him the confidant of His counsels. It is striking that Abraham is the only Old Testament saint directly termed the friend of God (see Isaiah 41:8). But Abraham is “the father of all them that believe,” and here the Lord calls his believing children His “friends.” The term speaks both of confidence and intimacy — not our confidence in and intimacy with Him, but He in and with us. He would no longer call them “servants,” though they were such; but He makes them His companions. He reveals to them the Father’s thoughts, bringing them into that holy nearness and freedom which He had with the Father. What a place to put them into! If they were not fit to receive these intimacies, He would be betraying the confidence of the Father! It is the new nature which gives us the needed fitness.

“I have called you friends.” This is not to be restricted to the Eleven, but applies equally to all His blood-bought people. The King of kings and Lord of lords not only pities and saves all them that believe in Him, but actually calls them His friends! In view of such language, we need not wonder that the apostle said, “The love of Christ passeth knowledge.” What encouragement this should give us to pour out our hearts to Him in prayer! Why should we hesitate to unbosom ourselves to One who calls us His “friends”? What comfort this should give us in trouble. Will He not minister of His own mercy and grace to His “friends”? And what assurance is here for the one who doubts the final issue. Weak and unworthy, we all are in ourselves, but Christ will never forsake His “friends”!

“For all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (15:15).

The “all things” here were those which pertained to His Mediatorship. Mark 4 supplies us with a striking illustration of how the Lord made His disciples His special confidants: “And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables....

Without a parable spake he not unto them (the multitudes): and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples” (verses 11, 34). And again in the Gospel records we find the Savior distinguishing His disciples by similar marks of His love. To them only did He confide His approaching betrayal into the hands of wicked men. To them only did He declare that His place in the Father’s House should be theirs. To them only did He announce the coming of the Comforter.

In like manner Christ has revealed many things to us in His Word which the wise of this world know nothing about.

“For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say Peace and safety: then sudden destruction cometh upon them as travail upon a

woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief” (1 Thessalonians 5:2-4).

How highly we should value such confidences. How much would He reveal to us, now hidden, if only we gave more diligent heed to His commandments! Ever remember that “the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him”! Ere passing to the next verse let it be pointed out again that the Lord was not only here referring to the evidences of His own love for us, but was also making known how our love should be manifested one toward another. “He that hath friends will *show himself friendly*” (Proverbs 18:24). Then let us abstain from encroaching on a brother’s spiritual liberty; let us not usurp dominion over a brother’s faith; let us treat our brother not as a servant, still less as a stranger, but as a friend!

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you” (John 15:16).

“This love was at the foundation of all for them: and to it they owed, and we owe, that choice was on His side, not ours. ‘Ye have not chosen me,’ He says, ‘but I have chosen you.’ Thus in conscious weakness the power of God is with us: and as He sought us when lost, when there was nothing but our misery to awaken His compassion — so we may count assuredly upon Him, whatever our helplessness, to perfect the work He has begun. What comfort lies for us in the royal work, ‘I have chosen you’!

“But grace enables us to fulfill the conditions necessarily imposed by the holiness of the Divine nature, and cannot set these aside: therefore the closing words. They are in the same line with others that we have lately heard: which they emphasize only in a somewhat different way. Fruit that abides is that which alone satisfies God. How much that looks well has not that quality in it which ensures permanence. How much that seems truly of God reveals its character by its decay! This ‘abiding’ connects itself, in the Gospel of John, with the Divine side of things which is seen all through” (Numerical Bible).

The following questions are to help the student prepare for our next lesson:

1. What is the link between verses 17 to 27 with the context?
2. What is our Lord’s central design in this passage?
3. Wherein is the depravity of man exhibited?
4. Why does Christ repeat verse 12 in verse 17?
5. What is the meaning of verse 19?
6. What is the force of “had not had sin,” verses 22, 24?

7. Of what does the testimony of verses 26, 27 consist?

JOHN 15:17-27

CHRIST FORTIFYING HIS DISCIPLES

The following is an Analysis of the closing section of John 15: —

1. Christians commanded to love one another, verse 17.
2. Christians warned of the world's hatred, verse 18.
3. Causes of the world's hatred, verses 19-21.
4. The greatness of the world's guilt, verses 22-24.
5. The fulfillment of God's Word, verse 25.
6. The witness of the Spirit, verse 26.
7. The witness of Christians, verse 27.

The principal Subject in the passage which is to be before us is the world's hostility against Christ and His people. Its hatred is mentioned seven times solemn witness to its awful entirety and inveteracy. The transition from the preceding section is quite natural and easy. The Lord had been speaking to and of "*his own*;" now He contemplates "*the world*." He had just declared that His disciples are His friends; now He turns to describe His and their enemies. He had set before the apostles the proofs of His love for them; now He warns them of the world's hatred. The connection between the last verse of the previous section and the opening one of our present portion is most significant. "These things I command you, that ye love one another." Various motives had been presented for them loving one another, chief among them being the example of His own wondrous love. Now an entirely new and different reason is advanced: Christians need to be united together by the bonds of brotherly affection because the world, their common enemy, hated them.

A loving heart would feign discover or induce love everywhere. To be ungratified in that desire and more than that, to be hated, is a hard and bitter lot, the bitterest ingredient in all affliction. Therefore does the Lord

here faithfully prepare His disciples for such an experience, that they might not marvel at the world's hostility nor be stumbled by it — “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you” (1 John 3:13). Graciously did the Savior proceed to fortify His disciples against the storm of persecution which He knew full well would burst upon them shortly after His departure. Charged with such a mission, proclaiming such a message, invested with miraculous powers of benevolence, the apostles might fondly imagine that the world would soon be won to Christ. But they must be prepared for disappointment. Therefore, did Christ arm them beforehand, that their spirits might not be overwhelmed by the bitter malice and opposition which they would surely encounter.

There is little or nothing in the Gospel records to intimate that the apostles had been subjected to persecution while their Master was with them. After the seventy were sent forth, we read that they

“returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject unto us through thy name” (Luke 10:17).

When the scribes and Pharisees were offended because the disciples transgressed the tradition of the elders, eating with unwashed hands, instead of assailing them directly, the complaint was laid before the Lord Jesus (Matthew 15:2). When the Savior was arrested in the Garden, He said to the officers, “Let these (the apostles) go their way” (John 18:8). Even after His crucifixion, they were allowed to go, unmolested, back to their fishing (John 21:23). But after His return to the Father, they too would experience the world's malignity. Therefore did the Lord forewarn them of the treatment which they must expect and would certainly receive at the hands of the ungodly.

The warning which the Lord Jesus here gave the apostles is much needed by young believers to-day. The inexperienced Christian supposes that the hatred of the world against him is a reproach. He

thinks that he is to blame for it. He imagines that if only he were kinder, more gentle, more humble, more Christlike, the enmity of unbelievers would be overcome. This is a great mistake. The truth is, the more Christlike we are the more shall we be antagonized and shunned. The most conclusive proof of this is found in the treatment which our blessed Savior received when He was in the world. He was “despised and rejected of men.” If then the purest love which was ever manifested on earth, if goodness incarnate was hated by men in general, if the brighter His love shone, the fiercer was the enmity which it met with in response, then how can we expect to be admired and esteemed by the world? Surely none will entertain the horrible thought that any of us can surpass the prudence of the Son of God!

And how all of this rebukes the popularity which so many professing Christians, yea, and many of the professed servants of the Christ now enjoy! Have we forgotten that severe rebuke,

“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4)!

Solemn indeed are the terms used here. Adulterers and adulteresses are they who seek and enjoy illicit love. In like manner, for a professing Christian — one who claims to love Christ — to seek his delight in the world, to company with the ungodly, is to be guilty of spiritual adultery.

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

“Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2).

“These things I command you, that ye love one another” (John 15:17).

There is something peculiarly searching and heart-rebuking in this. How humbling to find that Christ had to command us to love one another! How humbling to hear Him repeating this command, for He has already given this same commandment to His disciples in John 13:34! And how humbling to find Him here repeating it again, for He had only just said,

“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12)!

Was it because He foreknew *how little* Christian love would be exercised among His people? Was it because He knew how much there is in each of us that is so unlovely? Was it because He foresaw that the Devil would stir up bitterness and strife among His followers, seeking to make them bite and devour one another? Whatever may or may not have been before Him, one thing cannot be denied — Christ has expressly commanded His people to love one another.

“These things I command you, that ye love one another.” Not only does the insistent emphasis of our Lord upon this world indicate that here is something which every Christian needs to take seriously to heart, but the large place given to it in the Epistles adds strong confirmation. The following commandments of the Holy Spirit through the apostles are but repetitions and expansions of the precept now before us:

“Be kindly affectioned one to another” (Romans 12:10).

“Forbearing one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2).

“Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”

(Ephesians 4:3).

“Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another” (Ephesians 4:32).

“If any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Colossians 3:13).

“See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Peter 1:22).

“Love the brotherhood” (1 Peter 2:17).

“And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves” (1 Peter 4:8).

“Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous” (1 Peter 3:8).

Envy, malice, ill-feeling, evil-speaking among brethren are a sure proof of the lack of this brotherly love!

“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18).

Here the Lord introduces the subject of the world’s enmity, and He begins by pointing out to His apostles that what they would suffer was only what He had suffered before them; they must not be surprised then at finding themselves in the midst of a hostile people. For their part they must be meek and gentle, living peaceably with all men so far as they would allow them to. They must do nothing maliciously to provoke or warrant the hatred of the world; but if they were faithful to the Lord, they must be prepared for the same evil treatment which He met with.

“Ye know that it hated me before it hated you.” The word “before” here refers not so much to time as it does to experience. Christ was assuring them that He trod the very same path which they would be called on to follow. He had preceded them in it:

“When he putteth forth his own sheep he goeth before them” (John 10:4).

How this should comfort us! It was Christ identifying the disciples with Himself. If we belong to the Lord Jesus that is sufficient to arouse the world’s rancor. But it is blessed to know that it hates us because of Him, not because of ourselves! It is the repulsion of

human nature for what is of God. And nowhere is the awful depravity of fallen man more evidenced than in his hatred of that which is pure, lovely, good, holy.

“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19).

Here the Lord proceeds to state the various causes of the world's hatred. Two are given in this verse: first, His people are no longer “of the world;” second, Christ had “chosen them out of the world.” The two are really resolvable into one: it is because Christ has chosen us out of the world that we no more belong to it. We no longer share its spirit, are no more actuated by its aims, are not now governed by its principles. Note the Lord's emphatic emphasis here: five times in this one verse does the Lord mention “the world”! Do you, He seems to ask, desire the smiles of men, are you anxious to stand high in their favor? That would be tragic indeed; that would prove you also belonged to the world. In John 8:23, Christ had declared of Himself, “Ye are from beneath; I am from above; ye are of this world; I am not of this world.” Now, for the first time, He predicates the same thing of His disciples. It is striking to note that this was not until after John 14:31, and Christ had (figuratively) taken His place — identifying the disciples with Himself in that place — on resurrection ground. It is only as united to a risen Christ that we are taken (positionally) out of “the world.”

“I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” It is remarkable that the first reason Christ here gives as to why the world hates believers, is because of their election. “The world cannot endure the thought of God's sovereignty and electing love” (Mr. F. W. Grant). The world is enraged at the very idea of Christians being the singled-out favorites of God. Strikingly was this demonstrated almost at the beginning of our Lord's public ministry. After announcing that the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1, 2 found its fulfillment in His mission, He went on to say how that while the heaven was shut up for three years and a half, during the subsequent famine, though there were many widows in Israel, God, in His sovereign grace, sent Elijah unto none but the widow of Zarephath; and though there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha,

none of them were cleansed, though God in His sovereign mercy healed Naaman, the Syrian. The response to our Lord's words was very shocking.

“And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong” (Luke 4:28, 29).

It is just the same to-day. Nothing so stirs up the enmity of the carnal mind as to hear of God's absolute sovereignty: choosing some, passing by others. Then how much worldliness there must now be in many professing Christians! It should be noted in the example cited above that it was the religious world which was so enraged against Christ: it was the synagogue- worshippers that sought to murder the Savior, because He pressed upon them the fact that God had compassion on whom He pleases. Nor have things changed for the better. Let any servant of God to-day expound the truths of Divine election and foreordination, and he will be assailed the most fiercely by those who claim to be the people of God. So, too, with believers in general. Let their lives attest their calling, let their walk make it manifest that they are not “of the world,” because “chosen out of it,” and the bitter enmity of the ungodly will indeed be excited. But let us not be cast down at this, rather let us see in the hostility of unbelievers a precious evidence that we are one with Him whom the world cast out.

“Therefore the world hateth you.” It will not hate mere professors. The man who is conformed to this world, who takes part in its politics, who shares its pleasures, who acts according to its principles, even though he bears the name of Christ, will not be ostracised or persecuted. The woman who is conformed to this world, who follows its fashions, who enjoys its society, who works for its reformation, will not be shunned by it. The world loves its own. But those who walk in separation from the world (and they are few in number), those who follow a rejected Christ, will know something of what it means to enter into “the fellowship of his sufferings” (Philippians 3:10). God has said,

“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).

But let such recall and be cheered by those words of our Savior,

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:10, 12).

“Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord” (John 15:20).

How touching is this! Christ would have us forget no words spoken by Him! He here reminds the apostles of what He had said to them a little previously, though in another connection — showing how full His utterances are, designed for various applications. His purpose here is to press upon us that it is a mark of genuine discipleship if we share the experiences of our Master, encountering the hatred of the world.

“If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also” (John 15:20).

The “if” looks back to the same word at the beginning of John 15:18 and 19. If you are My followers, My friends, then must you have fellowship in My sufferings. They have persecuted the Lord, and just so far as they live and act accordingly, they will also persecute His servants. The world may boast of its liberal principles; it may for a time tolerate a lukewarm Christianity; but, let the people of God be out and out for Him, and the secret hatred of the heart will soon manifest itself. When the “I have chosen you out of the world” becomes a practical reality, then the world’s rage and ban will be displayed. But after all, what is the world’s hatred in comparison with Christ’s love! And yet, as has been said,

“If there is anything that true Christians seem incessantly forgetting, and seem to need incessantly reminding of, it is the real feeling of unconverted people towards them, and the treatment they must expect to meet with” (Bishop Ryle).

“If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.” There seems to be a note of irony here. The Lord had spoken nought but the unadulterated truth of God, yet the world had not kept His sayings. And why? Because His sayings condemned them.

“For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov’d” (John 7:20).

“The world cannot hate you (His unbelieving brethren); but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil” (John 7:7).

And just so far as we proclaim the truth of God, so will men (in general) reject our message!

“They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us” (1 John 4:5, 6).

“But all these things will they do unto you for my name’s sake, because they know not him that sent me” (John 15:21).

Here the Lord gives the deepest reason why His disciples would be hated by the world. “For my name’s sake” means, of course, on account of it. It was because they would represent Him, acting as His ambassadors, that men would persecute them. Christ would grant His people the high privilege of sharing His sufferings:

“If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you” (1 Peter 4:14).

It is the confession of Christ's name which arouses the enmity of depraved hearts. May we, like Moses, "esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt" — the world (Hebrews 11:26). "Because they know not him that sent me": far from this ignorance affording an excuse, it was inexcusable, because wilful.

["If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin" \(John 15:22\).](#)

Here is an example of where the words of Scripture cannot be taken in their absolute sense. When our Lord declared of the Jews that He had not become incarnate and spoken unto them "they had not had sin," He does not mean that they would have been without sin in every sense. The chief design of the first three chapters of Romans is to establish the fact that all the world, Jew and Gentile alike, were "guilty before God." Christ was speaking in a comparative sense. Compared with their immeasurable guilt of rejecting the Lord of glory, their personal sins were as nothing. Similar instances where things are represented absolutely, though intended in a comparative sense, are frequent in Scripture. For example:

["All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing" \(Isaiah 40:17\).](#)

["So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" \(1 Corinthians 3:7\).](#)

There had been sin all along, and the governmental dealings of God with men clearly evidenced that He took account of it. But evil as man had shown himself all through his history, the coming of Christ to the earth brought sin to such a head, that all that had gone before was relatively speaking, a trifling thing when compared with the monstrous evil that was done against incarnate Love. It is a question of the standard of measurement. There are a number of passages which clearly teach that there will be degrees of punishment meted out to those who are lost: Matthew 11:22; Hebrews 10:28, 29, etc. The degree of punishment will be determined by the heinousness of the sins committed, and that will be decided by the degree of light

sinned against. When One who was more than man came into the world, the Divine dignity of His person, the love and light which He manifested, brought in a new standard of measurement. Christ was here speaking according to the glory of His person. It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of judgment than for Capernaum. And why? Because the latter turned its back upon the King of kings and Lord of lords.

The principle here enunciated by the Savior is very solemn in its application, and one which we all do well to take to heart. Spiritual privileges carry with them heavy responsibilities:

“For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.” (Luke 12:48)!

To dwell in a land of open Bibles and preached Gospel, places men on a very different footing before God than the heathen who have never heard of Christ. Judgment will be according to the light enjoyed! The mere fact that men knew the way of truth, and walked not therein, will only increase their condemnation. To receive Divine instruction and not improve it, is, as Christ here plainly declares, to leave men without any cloak (or “excuse”) for their sin.

“He that hateth me hateth my Father also” (John 15:23).

The Lord here furnished proof that the sin of despising Him involved guilt of unparalleled magnitude. Christwords were not only His own words, but the Father’s also. He and the Father were one. The idea of some that they can acceptably worship the Father while rejecting His Son is a deceit of man’s depraved heart and a lie of the Devil.

“The Jews professed that they loved God, and that on the ground of that love they hated Christ; the God however, whom they loved was not the true God, but a phantom which they named God. The fact that they rejected Christ, in spite of all His words of spirit and truth, showed them to be the enemies of the Father” (Hengstenberg).

“He that hateth me hateth my Father also.” Very solemn is this. In the previous verses the Lord had shown that the principal reason

why the world would hate His disciples was because of their oneness with Himself. Now He shows that the reason why the world hated Him was because of His oneness with the Father. Christ revealed the Father. He was the express image of His person. In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He that saw Him, saw the Father also. His doctrine was the truth of God. His life revealed the perfections of God. His laws expressed the will of God. To dislike Him, then, was proof positive that they hated God. It is a most fearful fact, but one most clearly revealed in Scripture, that men in their natural state are “haters of God” (Romans 1:30); their minds being “enmity against God” (Romans 8:7). It is this hatred of God which causes people to reject Christ and dislike Christians. Conversely their rejection of Christ demonstrates their hatred of God. Christ is the test of the state of every human heart! “What think ye of Christ?” honestly answered, reveals whether we are His friends or His enemies. There is no God in the universe except the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and if men do not believe in, love, worship and serve the Son, they hate the Father. Just as faith begets love, so unbelief begets hatred.

“If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father” (John 15:24).

How decidedly does the Lord Jesus place Himself above all the other messengers of God that had preceded Him! The words “they had not had sin” have the same force here as in John 15:22. If Israel had not enjoyed such privileges, they had not contracted such guilt. If they had not heard Him who spake as never man spake, and if they had not witnessed works such as never man performed, their criminality in the sight of God would have been so much less that, in comparison with their culpability now that they had heard and seen and believed not, had been as nothing. It is to be noted that Christ first mentioned what He had spoken unto them (John 15:22), and they referred to the works which He had done among them.

“If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin, but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.” “The presence and testimony of the Son of God had the gravest possible results. It was not only an infinite blessing in

itself and for God's glory, but it left men, and Israel especially, reprobate. Law had proved man's weakness and sin, as it put under the curse all who took their stand on the legal principle. There was none righteous, none that sought after God, none that did good, no, not one. The heathen were manifestly wicked, the Jews proved so by the incontestable sentence of the law. Thus every mouth was stopped, and all the world obnoxious to God's judgment. But the presence of Christ brought out, not merely failure to meet obligations as under law, but *hatred of Divine goodness* come down to men in perfect grace... Sin before or otherwise was swallowed up in the surpassing sin of rejecting the Son of God come in love and speaking not merely as man never spoke, but as God had never spoken."

["But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause" \(John 15:25\).](#)

Terrible indictment of Israel was this. "There was nothing in Christ to provoke hatred in any but morally disordered, depraved minds. Nothing in His character, it was faultless; nothing in His doctrines, they were all true; nothing in His laws, they were holy, just and good. He never had done the world any harm: He had spent His life in bestowing favors on men. Why, then, did they hate Him, why did they persecute Him, why did they put Him to death? They hated Him because they hated His Father" (Dr. John Brown.)

"But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause." Here the Lord was tracing the world's enmity back to its true source. He had given no cause for it; it must therefore be attributed to their desperately wicked hearts. The Lord was further fortifying His disciples. They must not be surprised nor offended at the bitterness and malice of the ungodly. His conduct had been mild and benevolent; yet they hated Him. Let us see to it that we give men no "cause" to hate us. Let their enmity against us be provoked only by fellowship with Christ:

["It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord. If they have called the Master of the](#)

house Beelzebul, how much more shall they call them of his household!” (Matthew 10:25).

“But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.” No doubt Christ was also anticipating an objection here. How is such hatred possible? Why does God permit it? The Lord answers by saying, This hatred of the world is but the fulfillment of God’s Word, and therefore of His inscrutable counsels. So little do the wicked affect by their malice, they only fulfill the Scriptures — while they draw down upon themselves the judgments which other passages therein announce. In quoting here from “their law,” Christ showed that the written Word testified against Israel!

“But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me” (John 15:26).

The connection here is apparent. The Lord had been warning the disciples of the opposition they would meet with from that kingdom over which Satan is “the Prince.” But that only distresses the more their already saddened hearts, therefore did their tender Master revert again to His original promise — the one promise repeated most frequently in this Paschal Discourse — that the Divine Comforter would come to their relief. It was presupposed in John 15:20, 21 that His disciples would be hated, like Himself, on account of their word. He predicted their fate to them as His witnesses. It was obvious that they should think, But how shall we poor, weak men persist in our testimony, yea, even bear it in the face of such predicted hatred? He therefore confirms to them their vocation, and predicts to them with equal clearness that they shall bear Him testimony in the future (John 15:27).

“Not of themselves, however, and in their own human persons: the Paraclete (the Comforter) will conduct the cause. He then, however, returns to the former again, and consoles them by the emphatic assurance that they might not stumble at this: I have now (more clearly than ever before) foretold to you both the coming of the

Spirit as a Witness against the hatred of the world, and at the same time the continuance of that hatred in spite of His testimony” (Stier).

“But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.” That the Spirit is here said to “proceed from the Father” (a statement which has split the Greek from the Roman “Church,” into whose differences we shall not here enter) is *supplementary* to what the Lord had said in John 14:26. There the Comforter was to be sent in Christ’s name: here He proceeds from the Father. The two statements placed side by side, bring out the unity of the Godhead. This additional word also shows that the Spirit was not exclusively subordinate to Christ, as some have argued from John 14:26. “He shall testify of me,” amplifies His former word in John 14:16, “another Comforter.” The Spirit would further Christ’s interests, and be unto the disciples (only in another way) all that Christ would have been unto them had He remained on earth.

“But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.”

“Here the Comforter is viewed as sent by the ascended Christ from the Father, and consequently as witness of His heavenly glory. This is an advance on what we saw in the previous chapter where Christ asks and the Father gives the Paraclete to be with them forever, sending Him in His Son’s name. Here the Son Himself sends, though of course, from the Father. The Spirit of truth is thus the suited Witness of Christ as He is above” (The Bible Treasury).

“Whom I will send” brings out the glory of the exalted Savior in a most striking way.

“And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:27).

Here the Lord explains to the disciples how the Spirit would testify and of what it would consist. He would not make any corporeal manifestation of Himself as had the Son, but He would bear witness

in and through the disciples. He would testify that which they had already seen in Him, and that which they had already heard from Him — nothing besides, essentially different or new. Thus it will be seen that the two “testimonies” of John 15:26 and 27 are not separate and independent, but natural and harmonious.

“And ye also shall bear witness.” Marvellous grace was this. Neither hostility nor hatred had quenched the compassion of Christ. The world might cast Him out, yet still would His mercy linger over it. Before judgment ultimately descended on the world, a further witness to Himself should be given it, a witness which has already continued for over eighteen centuries! May Divine power enable every real Christian to witness faithfully and constantly for our absent Lord. May we by lip and life bear testimony, in season and out of season, to His excellency, and to Him as our sufficiency.

The following questions are to aid the student on the opening portion of John 16: —

1. What is the central theme of verses 1-11?
2. What is the meaning of verse 1?
3. What does the last clause of verse 2 go to prove?
4. What blessings would “remembrance” bring the apostles, verse 4?
5. Why did the apostles ask “Whither goest Thou?” verse 5?
6. Why “expedient” for Christ to go, verse 7?
7. In what way does the Spirit “reprove the world,” verse 8?

JOHN 16:1-11

CHRIST VINDICATED BY THE SPIRIT

The following is an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us:

1. Reason why Christ warned His disciples, verse 1.
2. Details of what they would suffer, verse 2.
3. Cause of the world's hostility, verse 3.
4. Christ's tender solicitude, verse 4.
5. The disciple's self-occupation, verses 5, 6.
6. The promise of the Spirit, verse 7.
7. The Spirit vindicating Christ, verses 8, 11.

The chapter division between John 15 and 16 is scarcely a happy one, though perhaps it is not an easy matter to indicate a better: John 16:12 would probably have been a more suitable point for the break, for verse 12 obviously begins a new sub-section. In the passage which is to be before us we find the Lord continuing the subject which had engaged Him at the close of chapter 15. There He had been speaking of the hatred of the world against the Father, against Himself, and against His disciples. Then He had assured them that He would send the Holy Spirit to conduct His cause. The character in which Christ mentioned the Third Person of the Godhead "the Comforter" — should have quieted the fears and sorrows of the apostles. Now Christ returns to the world's hatred, entering more into detail. Previously, He had spoken in general terms of the world's enmity; now He proceeds to speak more particularly, sketching as He does the future fortunes of Christianity, describing the first chapter of its history.

Most faithfully did the Savior proceed to warn His disciples of the treatment which would be meted out to them by their enemies. Strikingly has Mr. John Brown commented upon our Lord's conduct on this occasion.

“The founders of false religions have always endeavored to make it appear to be the present interest of those whom they addressed to acquiesce in their pretensions and submit to their guidance. To his countrymen the Arabian impostor held out the lure of present sensual indulgence; and when he at their head, made war in support of his imposture, the terms proffered to the conquered were proselytism, with a full share in the advantages of their victors, or continued unbelief with slavery or death. It has indeed been the policy of all deceivers, of whatever kind, to conceal from the dupes of their artifice, whatever might prejudice against their schemes, and skillfully to work on their hopes and fears by placing in a prominent point of view all the advantages which might result from them embracing their schemes, and all the disadvantages which might result from their rejecting them. An exaggerated view is given both of the probabilities of success, and of the value of the benefits to be secured by it, while great care is taken to throw into the shade the privations that must be submitted to, the labor that must be sustained, the sacrifices that must be made, the sufferings that must be endured, and the ruin that may be incurred, in joining in the proposed enterprise.

“How different the conduct of Jesus Christ! He had no doubt promised His followers a happiness, ample and varied as their capacities of enjoyment, and as enduring as their immortal souls; but He distinctly intimated that this happiness was *spiritual* in its nature, and to be fully enjoyed only in a *future* world! He assured them that, following Him, they should all become inheritors of a kingdom; but He with equal plainness stated that that kingdom was not of this world, and that he who would enter into it must ‘forsake all,’ and ‘take up his cross.’ Himself poor and despised, ‘a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief.’ He plainly intimated that His followers must be ‘in the world, as He was in the world.’”

The disciples of Christ were to be hated by the world! But it is highly important that we do not form too narrow a view of what is

meant by “the world.” Satan has tried hard to obliterate the line which separates between those who are “of the world” and those who are “not of the world.” And to a large extent he has succeeded. The professing “Church” has boasted that it would convert the world. To accomplish this aim, it has sought to popularize “religion.” Innumerable devices have been employed — many of

which even a sense of propriety should have suppressed — to attract the ungodly. The result has been the world has converted the “professing Church.” But notwithstanding this it still remains true that “the world” hates the true followers of the Lamb. And nowhere is this more plainly evident than in those who belong to what we may term the religious world. This will come before us in the course of our exposition.

The closing verses of our present portion announce the relationship of the Holy Spirit to “the world” and it is this which distinguishes the first division of John 16 from the closing section of John 15. In the concluding verses of John 15 the Lord had spoken of the world’s hatred, and this still engages Him in the first few verses of chapter 16. But in verse 7 He refers once more to the Holy Spirit, and in verses John 8:11 presents Him as His Vindicator. It is this which has guided us in selecting the title of our present chapter: its suitability must be determined by the interpretation which follows.

“These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended” (John 16:1).

Before the Lord describes in detail the forms in which the world’s hostility would be manifested, He paused to acquaint the disciples with His reasons for announcing these things. First, it was in order that they should not be “offended” or “stumbled” or “scandalized” as the word means. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. Christ would prepare His people beforehand by telling them plainly what they might expect. Instead of contending among themselves which should be the greatest, He bids them prepare to drink of the cup He drank of and to be baptised with the baptism wherewith He was to be baptised. It was not that He would discourage them, far from it; He would fortify them against what lay ahead. And bow this evidenced the tender concern of their Master. How it demonstrates

once more that He “loved them unto the end”! And how gracious of the Lord to thus warn us! Should we not often have *stumbled* had He not told us beforehand what to expect?

“These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.” That there was need for this warning is very evident. Already the question had been asked,

“Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?” (Matthew 19:27).

Moreover, that very night all would be “offended” because of Him:

“Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night; for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad” (Matthew 26:31).

But, it may be asked, Why should Christ here forewarn the disciples when He knew positively that they would be offended? Ah! why tell Peter to “watch and pray lest he enter into temptation” (Mark 14:38), when the Lord had already foretold that he would deny Him thrice! Why command that the Gospel should be preached to every creature when He foreknows that the great majority will not believe it! The answer to each of these questions is: to enforce human responsibility.

“They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service” (John 16:2).

Out of the catalogue of sufferings to which the disciples should be subjected, the Lord selects for mention two samples of all the rest: an extreme torture of the mind and the final infliction upon the body. It is indeed solemn to observe that this persecution of Christ’s people comes from the religious world. The first fulfillment of this prophecy was from the Jews, who professed to be the people of God. But Christ identifies them with the world. Their sharing in and display of its spirit showed plainly where they belonged. And the same is true to-day. Where profession is not real, even those who

bear the name of Christ are part of “the world,” and they are the first to persecute those who do follow Christ. When the walk of the Christian condemns that of the worldly professor, when faithfulness to his Lord prevents him from doing many things which the world does, and when obedience to the Word obliges him to do many things which the world dislikes, then enmity is at once aroused and persecution follows — persecution just as bitter and real to — day, though its forms be changed.

“To be ‘put out of the synagogue’ was more than simply to be excluded from the place of public worship. It cut a man off from the privileges of his own people, and from the society of his former associates. It was a sort of moral outlawry, and the physical disabilities followed the sufferer even after death. To be under this ban was almost more than flesh and blood could bear. All men shunned him on whom such a mark was set. He was literally an outcast; in lasting disgrace and perpetual danger. Those familiar with the history of the dark ages, or who are acquainted with the effects of losing caste among the Hindoos, will be able to realize the terrors of such a system” (Mr. Geo. Brown).

Sometimes the degradation of excommunication was the prelude to death. Cases of this are recorded in the book of Acts. We find there mention made of a class called “zealots.” They were a desperate and fanatical faction who thirsted for the blood of Christians.

“And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink, till they had killed Paul. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy” (Acts 23:12, 13).

That such men were not restricted to the lower classes is evident from the case of Saul of Tarsus, who tells us that in his unregenerate days,

“I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and

when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them”
(Acts 26:9, 10).

How fearfully do such things manifest the awful depravity of the human heart! It has been the same in every age: godliness has always met with hatred and hostility.

“Cain, who was of the wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous” (1 John 3:12).

He that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked” (Proverbs 29:27).

“They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly” (Amos 5:10).

It is the same now. Faithfulness to Christ will stir up religious rancour. In spite of the boasted liberalism of the day, men are still intolerant, and manifest their enmity just so far as they dare.

“And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me” (John 16:3).

Here the Lord traces, once more, the world’s undying ill-will to its true source: it is because they are not acquainted with the Father and the Son. Hatred and persecution of God’s children are both the consequence and the proof of the spiritual ignorance of their enemies. Had the Jews really known the Father in whom they vainly boasted, they would have acknowledged the One whom He had sent unto them, and acknowledging Him, they would not have mistreated His followers. Thus it is to-day!

“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. And every one that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him” (1 John 5:1).

“But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them” (John 16:4).

The Lord had already given one reason (John 16:1), why He had spoken these things to the disciples, now He gives them another: He made these revelations that their faith in Him might be increased when the events should confirm His prophecy. The fulfillment of this prediction would deepen their assurance in Him as the omniscient God, and this would encourage them to depend upon the veracity of His promises. If the evil things which He foretold came to pass, then the good things of which He had assured them must be equally dependable.

“And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you” (John 16:4).

“The Lord also tells them why He had not told them at the first. The full revelation was more than their weak hearts could bear. They would be staggered at the prospect. They must be gradually trained to this. Not all at once, but by little and little, as they were able to bear it, He unfolds the scheme of His cross, and of their duties and dangers. The Lord has milk for His babes, and meat for His strong men. And there was as yet no need for this. For He Himself was with them, and by the less could prepare for the greater. He was with them, as a nurse with her children; to lead them on from strength to strength, from one degree of grace and Christian virtue to another. But now that He was about to depart from them, and leave them, as it were, to themselves; to see how they will acquit themselves in that contest for which He has been training them all the while; it is necessary that all the more plainly and fully He should lay before them their future — at first this was not needed. ‘Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.’ And He was yet with them and could gradually unfold it to them. And there was yet time. But as time goes on, we see Him and hear Him opening page after page of the volume of His secret Providence to their opening minds; till finally, as here, He tells them plainly and fully even of the extremest trials that are coming upon them” (Mr. Geo. Brown).

“And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you.” But how are we to reconcile this with such passages as Matthew 5:10, 12; Matthew 10:21, 28, etc.? In addition to the solution offered above, namely, that Christ gradually unfolded these things to the apostles, we may point out:

First, He had not previously said that the world would do these things unto them; that is, He had not hitherto intimated that they would be hated by all men.

Second, previously He had not declared that the reason for this hatred was because of men's ignorance of the Father and the Son.

Third, He had not previously predicted that such persecution would proceed from the delusion that the perpetrators would imagine that they were doing God a service!

“But now I go my way to him that sent me” (John 16:5).

There are some who would connect this first clause of the verse with the end of John 16:4, thus: “And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you; but now I go my way to him that sent me.” And then after a brief pause, the Lord asked, “And does no one of you ask whither I go; but because I have thus spoken to you, your heart is filled with sorrow.” This is quite likely, and seems a natural and beautiful connection.

“And none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou?” (John 16:5).

In John 13:36, we find Peter asking Christ, “Whither goest thou?” But this was an unintelligent forwardness, for he evidently thought that the

Lord was going on an earthly journey (cf. John 7:5). In John 14:5: Thomas said, “We know not whither thou goest,” but this was more by way of objection. What the Lord wanted was an intelligent, sympathetic, affectionate response to what He had been saying. But the apostles were so absorbed in grief that they looked not beyond the cloud which seemed to overshadow them. they were so occupied with the present calamity as not to think of the blessing, which would issue from it. They were depressed at the prospect of their Master's departure. Had they only asked themselves whither He was going, they would have felt glad for Him; for though it was their loss, it was certainly His gain — the joy of being with His Father, the rest of sitting down on high, the blessedness of entering again

into the glory which He had before the foundation of the world. It was therefore a rebuke for their self-occupation, and how tenderly given!

“But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart” (John 16:6).

How often it is thus with us! We magnify our afflictions, and fail to dwell upon the blessings which they bear. We mourn and are in heaviness in the “cloudy and dark day,” when the heavens are black with clouds and the wind brings a heavy rain, forgetting the beneficial effects upon the parched earth, which only thus can bring forth its fruits for our enjoyment. We wish it to be always spring, and consider not that without winter first, spring cannot be. It was so with the disciples. Instead of making the most of the little time left them with their Master, in asking Him more about His place and work in Heaven, they could think of nothing but His departure. What a warning is this against being swallowed up by over-much sorrow! We need to seek grace to enable us to keep it under control.

“But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart.” It is blessed to learn that the disciples did not continue for long in this disconsolate mood. A very different spirit was theirs after the Savior’s resurrection. Strikingly is this brought out in the concluding verses of Luke’s Gospel: “And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.” Forty days of fellowship with Him after He had come forth victor of the grave, had removed their doubts, dispelled their fears, and filled their souls with joy unspeakable.

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you” (John 16:7).

Blessed contrast! The disciples, at the moment, had no thought for Him, but He was thinking of them and assured them that though they lost Him for a while, it would be their gain. Though they had

failed to ask, their compassionate Master did not fail to answer. Ever more ready to hear than we are to pray, and want to give more than we desire; ready to make allowance for them in their present distress, and thinking always more of the sufferings of others than His own; thinking more now of those He is leaving behind, than of the agony He is going forth to meet — before they call He answers, answers what should have been their request, declaring unto them the expediency of His departure.

“Nevertheless” is adversative: I know you are saddened at the prospect of My departure, but My going is needful for you. “I tell you the truth”: the personal pronoun is emphatic in the Greek — I who love you, I who am about to lay down My life for you: therefore you must believe what I am saying. I tell you the truth. Your misgivings of heart have beclouded your understandings, you misapprehend things. You think that if I remain with you, all the evils which I have mentioned would be prevented. Alas, you know not what is best for you. “It is expedient for you that I go away”: It is for your profit, your advantage. It is striking to note the contrast between our Lord’s use here of “expedient” from the same words on the lips of Caiaphas in John 11:50!

But what did the Lord mean? How was His going away their gain? We believe that there is a double answer to this question according as we understand Christ’s declaration here to have a double reference. Notice that He did not say “It is expedient for you that I go my way to him that sent me?” as He had said in John 16:4. He simply said, “it is expedient for you that I *go away*.” We believe that Christ designedly left it abstract. Whither was He “going” when He spake these words? Ultimately, to the Father, but before that He must go to the Cross. Was not His first reference then to His impending death? And was it not highly expedient for the disciples and for us, that the Lord Jesus should go to and through the sufferings of Calvary?

“For if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you.” “The atoning death of Christ was necessary to make it consistent with the

Divine government to bestow on men these spiritual blessings which are necessarily connected with the saving influence of the Holy

Spirit. All such blessings from the beginning had been bestowed with a reference to that atonement; and it was fitting that these blessings, in their richest abundance, should not be bestowed till that atonement was made” (Mr. John Brown).

“‘Unless I go away,’ that is, unless I die, nothing will be done — you will continue as you are and everything will remain in its old state: the Jews under the law of Moses, the heathen in their blindness — all under sin and death. No scripture would then be fulfilled, and I should have come in vain” (Mr. Martin Luther).

But while we understand our Lord’s first reference in His words “If I go not away” to be to His death, we would by no means limit them to this. Doubtless He also looked forward to His return to the Father. This also was expedient for His disciples.

“So fond had they grown of His fleshly presence, they could not endure that He should be out of their sight. Nothing but His corporeal presence could quiet them. We know who said, If Thou hadst been here, Lord, as if absent, He had not been able to do it by His Spirit, as present by His body. And a tabernacle they would needs build Him to keep Him on earth still; and ever and anon they were still dreaming of an earthly kingdom, and of the chief seats there, as if their consummation should have been in the flesh. The corporeal presence therefore is to be removed, that the spiritual might take place” (Bishop Andrews).

In other ways, too, was it “expedient” for His disciples that the Savior should take His place on High. It is of a *glorified* Christ that the Spirit testifies, and for that the Savior had to “go away.” Moreover, had Christ remained on earth He had been *localized*, His bodily presence confined to one place: whereas by the Spirit He is now omnipresent — where two or three disciples are gathered together in His name, there is He in the midst. Again; had the Lord Jesus remained on earth there had been far less room and opportunity for His people to exercise faith. Furthermore, this cannot be gainsaid: after Christ had ascended and the Spirit descended, the apostles were new men. They did far more for an absent Lord, than they ever did while He was with them in the flesh.

“But if I depart, I will send him unto you” (John 16:7).

“Every rendering of this verse ought to keep the distinction between ‘apeltho’ and ‘poreutho,’ which is not sufficiently done in the English Version, by ‘going away’ and ‘depart.’ ‘Depart’ and ‘go’ would be better! The first expressing merely the leaving them, the second, the *going up* to the Father” (Dean Alford). We believe our Lord’s fine discrimination here confirms our interpretation above of the double reference in His “if I go not away,” though we know of no commentator who takes this view.

“And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8).

There is hardly a sentence in this Gospel which has been more generally misunderstood than the one just quoted. With rare exceptions this verse is understood to refer to the benign activities of the Holy Spirit among those who hear the Gospel. It is supposed to define His work in the conscience prior to conversion. It is regarded as a description of His gracious operations in bringing the sinner to see his need of a Savior. So firmly has this idea taken root in the minds even of the Lord’s people, it is difficult to induce them to study this verse for themselves — study it in the light of what precedes, study it in the light of the amplification which follows, study the terms employed, comparing their usage in other passages. If this be done carefully and dispassionately, we feel confident that many will discover how untenable is the popular view of it.

It should be very evident that something must be wrong if this verse be interpreted so as to clash with Christ’s explicit statement in John 14:17, “The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive.” What then is the character of the “reproof” that is here spoken of? Is it an evangelical conviction wrought in the heart, or is it something that is altogether external? Almost all the older commentators regarded it as the former. We, with an increasing number of later writers, believe it is the latter. One of the leading lexicons of the twentieth century gives as the meaning of *elencho*, “to bring in guilty; to put to shame by proving one to be wrong; to convict with a view to condemnation and judgment, but not necessarily to convince; to

bring in guilty without any confession or feeling of guilt by the guilty one.”

The general use of the word in the New Testament decidedly confirms this definition. It occurs in John 3:20:

“For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved,”

which obviously means: lest the evil nature of his deeds should be so manifested by the light that excuse of extenuation would be impossible. It is found again in John 8:46, “Which of you convinceth me of sin?”: most certainly Christ did not mean, Which of you is able to *convince* Me, or make Me *realize* I have sinned. Rather, Which of you can substantiate a charge? which of you can *furnish proof* of sin against Me? It is rendered “reproved” in Luke 3:19, meaning “charged,” not made to feel guilty. So too in Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2.

Thus, in each of the above passages “elencho” refers to an objective condemnation, and not to a subjective realization of condemnation. In 1 Timothy 5:20 it is rendered, “rebuke”. So also in Titus 1:13; Titus 2:15; Hebrews 12:5; Romans 3:19. Clearer still, if possible, is its force in James 2:9, “But if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, and are convicted of the law as transgressors.” Rightly did Bishop Ryle say in his comments on John 16:8,

“Inward conviction is certainly not the meaning of the word rendered ‘reprove.’ It is rather refutation by proofs, convicting by unanswerable arguments as an advocate, that is meant.”

The next point to be considered is, How does the Holy Spirit “reprove the world of sin,” etc.? In order to answer this question aright it needs to be pointed out that our Lord was not, in these verses, describing the mission of the Holy Spirit, that is, the specific work which He would perform when He came to earth. We grant that at first sight the words “He will reprove” appear to describe His actual operations, but if everything in the passage is attentively studied, should it be seen that this is not the case. We believe our present verse is similar in its scope and character to Matthew 10:34,

“I came not to send peace, but a sword.” To send a “sword” was not the nature of Christ’s mission, but, because of the perversity of fallen human nature, it was the effect of His being here. Again, in Luke 12:49 He said, “I am come to send fire on the earth.” It is the very presence of the Spirit on earth which, though quite unknown to them, reproveth or condemns the world.

The Holy Spirit ought not to be here at all. That is a startling statement to make, yet we say it thoughtfully. From the standpoint of the world, Christ is the One who ought to be here. The Father sent Him into the world, Why, then, is He not here? The world would not have Him. The world hated Him. The world cast Him out. But Christ would not leave His own “orphans” (John 14:18, margin). He graciously sent the Holy Spirit to them, and, to the angels and His saints, the very presence of the Holy Spirit on earth “reproves”, or brings in guilty, the world. The Holy Spirit is here to take the place (unto His disciples) of an absent Christ, and thus the guilt of the world is demonstrated.

Confirmatory of what has been pointed out, observe particularly the character in which the third person of the Godhead is here contemplated: “and he shall reprove.” Who shall do so? The previous verse tells us, “The Comforter.” The Greek word is “paracletos” and is rightly rendered “Advocate” in 1 John 2:1. Now an “advocate” produces a “conviction” not by bringing a wrong-doer to realize or feel his crime, but by producing proofs before a court that the wrong-doer is guilty. In other words, he “reproves” objectively, not subjectively. Such is the thought of our present passage: it is the actual presence of the Holy Spirit on earth which objectively reproveth, rebukes, convicts “the world.”

“Here the Holy Spirit is not spoken of as dealing with individuals when He regenerates them and they believe, but as bringing conviction to the world because of sin. The Holy Ghost being here, convicts the world, i.e., what is outside where He is. Were there faith, He would be in their midst: but the world doth not believe. Hence Christ is, as everywhere in John, the standard for judging the condition of men” (Mr. W. Kelly).

But some may object, If this passage be not treating of a subjective work of evangelical conviction, why does the Holy Spirit “reprove” the world at all? what is gained if the world knows it not? But such a question proceeds on an entire mis-conception. We say again, these verses are not treating of what the Spirit does, but mention the *consequence* of His being here. John 9:39 gives us almost a parallel thought,

“And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.”

In John 3:17 we are told, “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world.” How then are these two passages to be harmonized? John 3:17 give us the mission on which God sent His Son; John 9:39 names one of the consequences which resulted from His coming here. His very presence judged everything that was contrary to God. So the presence of the Spirit on earth judges the world, condemns it for Christ’s being absent.

“Of sin, because they believe not on me” (John 16:9).

The presence of the Divine Paraclete on earth establishes three indictments against “the world.” First “of sin.”

“He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not” (John 1:10).

The word “knew” here means far more than to be cognizant of or to be acquainted with. It means that the world loved Him not, as the word “know” is used in John 10:4, 5, 14, 15, etc. In like manner, unbelief is far more than an error of judgment, or nonconsent of the mind: it is aversion of heart. And “the world” is unchanged. It has no more love for Christ now than it had when its princes (1 Corinthians 2:8) crucified Him. Hence the present tense here: “because they believe not on me.”

“Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more” (John 16:10).

The personal “I” links up with John 16:7, the last clause of which should be carefully noted: ‘7 will send him unto you.’ The Paraclete is here as Christ’s “Advocate.” Now the office and duty of an “advocate” is to vindicate his client when his cause permits of it: to do so by adducing evidence which shall silence his adversary. It is in this character that the Holy Spirit is related to “the world.” He is here not to improve it, and make it a better place to live in, but to establish its consummate sin, to furnish proof of its guilt, and thus does He vindicate that blessed One whom the world cast out.

If it were the subjective work of the Holy Spirit in individual souls which was here in view, it had necessarily read, “He will convict the world... of unrighteousness,” because it is destitute of it. But this is not the thought here at all. It is the Spirit’s presence on earth which establishes Christ’s “righteousness,” and the evidence is that He has gone to the Father. Had Christ been an impostor, as the religious world insisted when they east Him out, the Father had not received Him. But the fact that the Father did exalt

Him to His own right hand demonstrates that He was completely innocent of the charges laid against Him; and the proof that the Father has received Him, is the presence now of the Holy Spirit on earth, for Christ has “sent” Him from the Father. The world was unrighteous in casting Him out; the Father righteous in glorifying Him, and this is what the Spirit’s presence here established.

“Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged”
(John 16:11).

Had our passage been describing the work of the Spirit in producing conversion this order had been reversed, the “judgment” would have preceded the (un) “righteousness.” Let this detail be carefully pondered. If the Spirit’s reproof of “sin” means His bringing the sinner to realize his lost condition, and His reproving of “righteousness” means making him feel his need of Christ’s righteousness, then wherein would be the need of still further convincing of “judgment”? It does not seem possible to furnish any satisfactory answer! But understanding the whole passage to treat of the *objective* consequences of the Spirit’s presence on earth, then John 16:11 furnished a fitting conclusion.

“Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.” This is the logical climax. The world stands guilty of refusing to believe in Christ: its condemnation is attested by the righteousness of Christ, exhibited in His going to the Father: therefore nothing awaits it but judgment. The Spirit’s presence here is the evidence that the Prince of this world has been judged when He departs sentence is *executed*, both on the world and on Satan.

“This, therefore, is the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the world. It is heaven’s reversal of the world’s treatment of Christ. It is the answer of the righteous Father to what the world has done to His Son, and must not be interpreted of Gospel conviction” (“Things to Come,” Vol. 5, p. 142).

The following questions are to aid the student for our next lesson:

1. What did Christ mean by “ye cannot bear them now,” verse 12?
2. Have the “many things” been said, verse 12?
3. What is implied by the word “guide,” verse 13? Meditate on it.
4. What is meant by “he shall not speak of himself,” verse 13?
5. Where has the Spirit shown us “things to come,” verse 13?
6. To whom was Christ referring in verse 16?
7. Find the verse which records the disciples “rejoicing,” verse 22.

JOHN 16:12-22

CHRIST GLORIFIED BY THE SPIRIT

Below is an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. The need for the Spirit's coming, verse 12.
2. The purpose of the Spirit's coming, verse 13.
3. The end accomplished by the Spirit's coming, verse 14.
4. The subordination of the Spirit, verse 15.
5. The effect of the Spirit's coming, verse 16.
6. The disciples' mystification, verses 17-19.
7. The Lord's profound prediction, verses 20-22.

That which is central in this second section of John 16 is the Holy Spirit glorifying the Lord Jesus. The more closely our present passage be studied, the more will it be found that this is the keynote of it. At first sight there does not seem to be any unity about this portion of Scripture. In John 16:12, the Lord declares that He had yet many things to say unto the apostles, but they were unable to bear them. In John 16:13-15, Christ made direct reference to the Holy Spirit, and what He would do for and in believers. In John 16:16 the Savior uttered an allegorical proverb (see John 16:25), which mystified the disciples, causing them to ask one another what He meant by it. While in the last three verses He made mention of their sorrow and of the joy which would follow His departure. Yet, varied as these subjects appear to be, closer study will show that they are intimately connected and logically grow out of what is found in the opening verses.

Nowhere else did our Lord give so full a word concerning the blessed person and work of the Holy Spirit. Seven things are here postulated of Him. He would act as "the Spirit of truth," He would

guide believers into all truth, He would not speak of Himself, He would speak what He heard;

He would show believers things to come; He would glorify Christ; He would take of the things of Christ and show them unto His people. Why, then, it may be asked, have we not entitled this chapter, The Work of the Spirit with and in Christians? Because what is here predicated of Him is in special and direct relation to Christ. It is the Holy Spirit glorifying the Lord Jesus, glorifying Him by magnifying Him before believers. Not only is this expressly affirmed in John 16:14, but the character in which He acts throughout affords further proof.

In John 16:7 the Savior declared,

“But I the truth say to you, It is profitable for you that I should go away: for if I go not away the Paraclete will not come” (Bagster’s Interlinear).

Now in John 16:13, He says, “But when he, the Spirit of the truth, [the Greek has the article] has come, he will guide you into all the truth.” It is, then, as the Spirit of Christ that He is here viewed. This is further emphasized in John 16:14: “He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you” — words which are repeated in John 16:15. It is therefore plain that the central and distinguishing subject of our present section is *Christ glorified by the Spirit*. How this applies to the dosing verses will be indicated in the course of our exposition.

“It has been repeatedly shown, and in this chapter most expressly, that the presence of the Spirit depended on the departure of Christ to heaven consequently fitting the saints for the new truths, work, character, and hopes of Christianity. The disciples were not ignorant of the promises that the Spirit should be given to inaugurate the reign of the Messiah. They knew the judgment under which the chosen people abide, ‘until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest,’ so vast outwardly, no less than inwardly, the change when God pats forth His power for the Kingdom of His Son. They know that He will pour out His Spirit upon all flesh; not only

the sons and daughters, the old and young of Israel enjoying a blessing far beyond all temporal favors, but the servants and the handmaidens, in short, all flesh, and not the Jews alone sharing it.

But here it is the sound heard when the great High Priest goes in into the sanctuary before Jehovah (Exodus 28:35), and not only when He comes out for the deliverance and joy of repentant Israel in the last days. It is the

Spirit given when the Lord Jesus went on high, and by Him thus gone. For this they were wholly unprepared, as indeed it is one of the most essential characteristics, of God's testimony between the rejection and the reception of the Jews; and the Spirit, when given, was to supply what the then state of the disciples could not bear" (Bible Treasury.)

Never can we be sufficiently thankful for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Though our blessed Savior is in heaven, we have a Divine Person with us on earth: a person who quickens us (John 5:21), who indwells us (1 Corinthians 6:19), who loves us (Romans 15:7), who leads us (Romans 8:14), who gives us assurance of our sonship (Romans 8:16), who helpeth our infirmities by making intercession for us (Romans 8:26), and who has sealed us unto the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30). O that we may not grieve Him. O that we may recognize His indwelling presence and act accordingly. O that we may avail ourselves of His Divine fulness and power.

["I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" \(John 16:12\).](#)

The contents of John 16:8 to 11 are parenthetical in their character, in that in John 16:1 to 7 Christ has been speaking of and to His disciples, digressing for a moment to complete what He said previously about "the world." Now He turns to consider His own again, and they in connection with the sending of the Holy Spirit to them. The Lord had yet many things to say unto those who had followed Him in the day of His rejection, things which it was deeply important for them to know, but things which they were then in no condition to receive — "ye cannot bear them now." The Greek word here for "bear" is used in a double sense in the New Testament,

literally and figuratively. In John 10:31 it is rendered, "Then the Jews *took up* stones again to stone Him": they *laid hold* of these stones. In Luke 10:4 it is translated, "*Carry* neither purse nor scrip." In Matthew 20:12, the word is employed figuratively: "Thou hast made them equal with us which have *borne* the burden and heat of the day." So in Revelation 2:2: "I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil." From these references it would appear that our Lord signified that the apostles were then incapable of laying hold of or retaining what He, otherwise, would have said to them; incapable because they could not endure such revelations.

"I have yet many things to say unto you, hut ye cannot bear them now." The fact that the Eleven were in no condition to receive, unable to endure these further revelations from the Savior, demonstrated their need for the Holy Spirit to come and guide them into all the truth: suitable introduction, then, was that for this new section! Moreover, it hints strongly of the nature of the "many things" which Christ then had in mind. The apostles were prejudiced. Their hearts were set on the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. They could not tolerate the thought of Christ leaving them and returning to the Father. But the Lord Jesus could not at that time ascend the throne of David. Israel had rejected Him, and bitter would be the results for them, though most merciful would be the consequences for the Gentiles. Hence, we take it, that what our Lord here had in view was God's rejection of Israel, and His turning unto the Gentiles: the abolishing of the old covenant, and the introduction of the new: the abrogation of the ceremonial law and the bringing in of another order of priesthood: instructions for the government of His churches: prophecies concerning the future.

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." This is both blessed and searching. Blessed, because it shows our Lord's tender considerateness: He would not press upon them what they were in no condition to receive. Few things are more irritating than to hear without understanding. What an example for teachers now to follow! Much discernment and wisdom is needed if we are to minister the Word "in season," a word suited to the

spiritual condition of our hearers, and such wisdom can only be obtained by earnest waiting upon God. But there is also a searching and solemn force to this utterance of Christ's. How many a communication would He not make to us, could we "bear" it! Paul had to have a thorn in the flesh sent him, lest he be exalted above measure through "the abundance of the revelations" which he received when he was caught up into Paradise; and in view of this, we are strongly inclined to believe that the "many things" which Christ had in mind also included revelations about Paradise and Heaven, the more so in view of John 16:5: "But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou?" But "sorrow" had filled their hearts (John 16:6), and this unfitted them for fuller disclosures about the Higher World.

["Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth" \(16:13\).](#)

Here is the answer to a question which must have occurred to many in meditating upon the previous verse: Did these apostles ever after bewail a lost opportunity? No; graciously did the Lord provide against that. "Howbeit," even so, though they could not bear these things then, when the Paraclete had come, He should guide them into all the truth! The One who would thus undertake for them is called "The Spirit of the truth." In addition to affirming that He was the Spirit of "the truth" (of Christ), this title also emphasized His suitability for such a task, His competency as the Savior's Witness. The Spirit was fully qualified because He is "the Spirit of the truth": because of His perfect knowledge of the Truth, because of His infinite love for the Truth, and because of His absolute incapacity for falsehood. Scripture speaks of "the spirit of error" (1 John 4:6). There is a lying spirit who controls the blind, that leads the blind, and in consequence they "both fall into the ditch."

Another thing suggested by this title of the third person of the Godhead is His relation to and connection with the written Word, which, like the incarnate Word is also called "the truth": "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). The inspiration of the Holy Scriptures is in a unique sense the work of the Holy Spirit: "holy [separated] men of God spake moved by the

Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). So too the interpretation of Scripture is the special work of the Spirit:

“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 unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save [by] the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but [by] the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:9-11).

Before he can see, man must have both sight and light. Eyes cannot see in the darkness, and light shows nothing to the blind. So with regard to the Truth: there must be the seeing eye and illuminating light. For an interpreter we need a trustworthy guide, an infallible teacher; and he is to be found not in the “Church,” the “voice of tradition,” the “intuitive faculty,” or in reason, but in the Spirit of God. He it is who quickens, illumines, interprets, and the only instrument which He uses is the *written* Word. Therefore is He called “the Spirit of *the truth*.”

“He will *guide* you.” There are three classes of people who need to be “guided”: those who are blind, those who are too weak to walk alone, or those journeying through an unknown country. In each of these senses does the Holy Spirit guide God’s elect. By nature, we are spiritually blind, and He guided us into the way of “truth” (2 Peter 2:2). Then as “babes” in Christ, He has to teach us how to walk (Romans 8:14). Then as travelers through this wilderness scene, as we journey to the Heavenly Country, He points out the “narrow way which leadeth unto life.” Note carefully, “He will guide you into all the truth,” not “bring you into”: there must be a *yieldedness* on our part, a corresponding obedience! If the Spirit “guides” our steps, the necessary implication is that we are walking with Him, that we are closely following His directions. This term also suggests an orderly, gradual and progressive advancing: we grow in “knowledge” as well as in “grace” (2 Peter 3:18).

“He will guide you into all the truth,” not all truths, but “all the truth.” God’s truth is one connected, harmonious, indivisible whole

(compare our remarks on John 7:16). “All the truth” here means all revealed truth, which is recorded in the written Word. That we have in our hands “all the truth” is clearly implied by one of the dosing verses in the last book of the Bible:

“If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this Book” (Revelation 22:18).

“For he shall not speak of himself.” This does not mean, as some suppose, that He should not speak about Himself. He has told us much about Himself in every section of the Scriptures. But He would not speak *from* Himself, *independently* of the Father and the Son. As the Son came not to act independently of the Father, but to serve His Father, so the Spirit is here to serve the Son. The reference is to His administrative position.

“I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just: because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (John 5:30).

“I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world these things which I have heard of him” (John 8:26).

“These declarations respecting both the Son and Spirit must appear inconsistent with Their supreme Divinity, to every one who does not know the doctrine of the economical subordination of the Son and Spirit in the great plan of human redemption. *Essentially* the Spirit and the Son are equal to, for they are one with, the Father. *Economically*, the Father is greater than the Son and the Spirit, for He sends Them; the Son is greater than the Spirit, for He sends Him. Without apprehending this distinction, we cannot interpret the sacred Scriptures, nor form any clear notion of the way of salvation. The Spirit like the Son, would be faithful to Him who appointed Him. In speaking to the apostles, in conveying information to their minds, He would communicate just what He was sent to communicate, without excess, without defect, without variation” (Mr. Brown).

“But whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak” (John 16:13).

This is parallel with John 15:15, “For all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you.” What a searching word is this for every teacher!

“If the Spirit may not speak of Himself, if He speaks only what He has heard of the Father and the Son — O, preacher! how canst thou draw thy preaching out of thyself, out of thy head, or even thy heart?” (Gossner).

“And he will show you things to come” (John 16:13).

Mark the progressive order in these several statements concerning the work of the Spirit. In John 14:26 the Lord declared that the Spirit would recall to the apostles the past: “But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things and *bring all things to your remembrance*, whatsoever I *have said* unto you.” In John 15:26, we learn that the Spirit would testify of the present glory of Christ. But here, in John 16:13, it is promised that He would show them things concerning the future! There are many prophecies scattered throughout the Epistles — far more than most people imagine — which the Spirit has given. But the main reference, no doubt, in this word of Christ, was to the book of the Revelation, the opening sentence of which reads, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass.” It is the Revelation of *Jesus Christ*, for He is its chief subject and object; yet it was given by the Holy Spirit, hence the seven times repeated, “He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what *the Spirit saith* unto the churches!” Thus whether it be things past, things present, or things to come, Christ is the grand Center of the Spirit’s testimony!

“He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you” (John 16:14).

This is the prime object before the Spirit: whether it be revealing the truth, speaking what He hears, or showing things to come, the *glorification of Christ* is the grand end in view. The light of the

knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6) is both the center and capstone of Divine truth. This is the vital test for every lying spirit which would obtrude itself into the place of the Spirit: rationalism, ritualism, fanaticism, philosophy, science falsely so-called, all *dishonor* Christ, but the Spirit always magnifies Him. It is a notable fact that (so far as the writer is aware) nowhere in the Epistles has the Holy Spirit told us anything about *the Father* which had not previously been revealed in and by the Lord Jesus; but He has told us many things about *the Son*, which Jesus uttered not in the days of His humiliation.

“He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.” The blessed work of the Spirit in revealing to believers the precious things of God is strikingly brought out in 1 Corinthians 2:

“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” (John 2:9).

This is a reference to Isaiah 64, and most Christians when quoting it stop at this point, but the very next verse goes on to say, “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”

“All things that the Father hath are mine” (John 16:15).

Very blessed is this: the Lord Jesus would not speak of His own glory apart from that of the Father. It is very similar to His words in John 17:10: “And all mine are thine, and thine are mine.”

“Thus there is opened for us a glimpse into the living blessed bond of love in receiving and giving in the eternal ground of the triune essence of the Godhead. The Father hath from eternity given to the Son to have life and all things in Himself, yet always He is the Son who revealeth the Father, only as the Fatherhood remains with the Father. But all things the Son bringeth and giveth to the Father again, honoreth and glorifieth Him in His being glorified in His people. And this through the Spirit, who with equal rights in this

unity taketh from the sole fulness of the Father and the Son, all that He livingly offers in His announcement” (Stier).

“Take of mine” should be “receive of mine” as in the previous verse, otherwise the force of “therefore” here would be lost — in the Greek the word is the same in both verses.

“A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father” (John 16:16).

In the previous verses Christ had touched upon lofty things, now He comes down to the level of His apostles’ needs. He condescends to stoop to their weakness, by addressing Himself to their anguished hearts. From the awful heights of the three persons of the Godhead, He descends to the sorrows and joys of His disciples. “A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me.” But what did the Savior mean? This cryptic utterance of His sorely puzzled those to whom it was first addressed, as is clear from the verses which follow. Christ Himself termed it a proverbial form of speech (John 16:25), and this must be kept in mind as we seek its interpretation. Before inquiring into the meaning of our Lord’s words here, let us first ask as to His purpose in thus speaking so enigmatically.

The Lord had previously said to the disciples,

“Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. Little children, yet a *little while* I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say unto you” (John 13:31, 33).

But it is plain that they understood Him not: “Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou?” (John 13:36). He had said,

“I go to prepare a place for you... and whither I go ye know, and the way ye know” (John 14:2, 4).

But Thomas had responded,

“Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” (John 14:5).

He had said,

“Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more.” (John 14:19).

But they were unresponsive:

“Now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou?” (John 16:4).

Now the Lord repeats in parabolic form what He had previously announced, in order to arouse them from their stupor of sorrow and to make a deeper impression upon their minds. That His end was gained is evident from the next verse. But we believe that He had a still deeper reason: He was also supplying them with material for comfort in future days of trial. Later, when they recalled these words, they would recognize that the first part of them had received fulfillment — a “little while” after He had spoken and they saw Him not; and this would cheer them with the sure hope that in another “little while” they would see Him again.

“A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me.” In less than two hours, most likely, He was arrested in the Garden, and there the apostles lost sight of their Master — even Peter and John saw Him but for a very little while longer. But He not only disappeared from their bodily vision, but *spiritually* too they lost sight of Him. Their faith was eclipsed. The words of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus no doubt expressed the common sentiment among His followers at that time:

“But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel” (Luke 24:21).

The fact that they believed not (Mark 16:11, 13) when they first heard of His resurrection, revealed their state of heart. They were in the darkness of doubt, and therefore could not see Christ with the eye of faith. But their seeing Him not, physically and spiritually, was

of short continuance. After “a little while” — only three days — He reappeared to them, and then He disappeared again for another “little while” from their bodily vision, though never more would they spiritually lose sight of their Lord and their God.

Now while the above is probably the primary reference in our Lord’s words, we have no doubt but that they contain a much deeper meaning, and an application to the whole company of Christians.

“There is, as for Christ Himself, the breaking through death into life, so for the disciples a deeply penetrating, fundamental *change from sorrow to joy*. By no means merely their sorrow at His death, and their joy on His living again, after the analogy of the sorrow and joy of the children of men in their changing experience; but as the mediating expression of an essential internal process which the Holy Spirit completed in their case, but which is still going on to the end of all. Thus as *the way of the disciples through sorrow to joy* between the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord was already for them something preparatory and typical, it becomes to us a type of the way which *all His future disciples* have also to pass through that godly sorrow which distinguishes them fully from the world into the joy of faith and life in Christ Jesus” (Stier).

“A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again a little while, and ye shall see me.” We believe that it is misleading to place a comma after the word “again,” because there are two distinct periods here in view, two “little while’s”: “a little while and ye shall not see me” referred, first, to the interval between His death and resurrection; “and again a little while and ye shall see me,” which first found its fulfillment after His resurrection, but in its deeper meaning signifies ye shall see Me in a more intimate and spiritual sense. Only ten days after His ascension, by the aid of the Spirit, they saw Him in a new, a deeper, a fuller way than ever before. But there is still a further meaning, with a wider application: “And again a little while”: compare with this Hebrews 10:37: “For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry”! After this present interval of Christ’s session at God’s right hand, believers will “see him as he is” and be forever with Him.

“Because I go to the Father.” This is assigned as the reason why the disciples should “see” Him after a “little while.” It must be remembered that He was going to the Father in a special character; namely, as the One who had gloriously finished the work which had been given Him to do. He was therefore going to the Father as One entitled to a rich reward. This reward would be bestowed upon Him personally, but also upon the people whom He had purchased for Himself. Hence, His going to the Father thus guaranteed the sending of the Holy Spirit to that people (Acts 2:33) and it was by the Spirit they were enabled to “see” Him (Hebrews 2:9). Thus it was His glorification which afforded the means for Him to now reveal Himself unto us spiritually. Moreover, because He has gone to the Father in this character, He will yet come again and receive us unto Himself (John 14:23) when we shall see Him, no longer through a glass darkly. His going to the Father thus manifested His title and fitness to introduce us to the Father’s House!

“Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father?” (John 16:17).

The Lord’s words sounded strangely in the ears of the disciples, and some of them began to discuss the seeming paradox. That they should see Him, and that they should not see Him! — it sounded like a contradiction in terms. And even His expression of going to the Father was by no means plain to them. They thought that the Messiah would remain on the earth (John 12:34). There was no place in their theology for His leaving them and returning to the Father. And yet there ought to have been: see Psalm 68:18; Psalm 110:1. They erred through not knowing the Scriptures; hence their bewilderment here. How forcibly this illustrates the fact that the difficulties we find in the words of Scripture are self-created due to our preconceptions and prejudices.

“They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? We cannot tell what he saith” (John 16:18).

This refers, apparently, to the answer which others among the Eleven made to those of their number (mentioned in the previous

verse) who were quietly discussing what the Lord had just said. The first group were completely bewildered; the second puzzled mainly by the “little while.” They “desired” to ask Christ, as is clear from John 16:19; yet they refrained from doing so. And how slow, oftentimes, are we to seek for light! “Ye have not, because ye ask not” (James 4:2)! God has designedly put many things in His Word in such a way that their meaning cannot be obtained by a rapid and careless reading. He has done so in order to exercise us, and to drive us to our knees; to make us cry, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psalm 119:18); and to pray, “That which I see not, teach thou me” (Job 34:32).

“Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again a little while, and ye shall see me?” (John 16:19).

“It may seem strange that the desire did not at once find expression in direct inquiry; for surely they had been long enough with Him, and had known Him sufficiently well to induce the conviction that He was ‘meek and lowly in heart,’ and always more ready to give, than they were to receive, instruction. The truth seems to be, that on this occasion they were both ashamed and afraid to seek the information which they were anxious to obtain — ashamed to acknowledge their ignorance on a subject on which their Master had so often addressed them; and afraid, it may be equally, that they should draw down on themselves a faithful, though kindly rebuke. What is said of a former declaration, seems to have been true of that which now perplexed them, ‘they understood not the saying, and they were afraid to ask him’; Mark 9:32” (Mr. John Brown).

“It is to be noted that the Lord did not reply directly to their intended question. He does not give them further information on the subject concerning which they were curious. The point which perplexed them was His promised speedy return. They had half made up their minds to lose Him. They had a kind of vague, undefined suspicion that their worst fears regarding Him were about to be realized: but if so, what could He mean by speaking of this quick return? If He must die, how can it be only for a little while?” As yet they knew not the Scriptures what the rising from the dead should mean. Their minds

were confused, and their hearts filled with sorrow. So the Lord dwells upon this point of time, though He does not directly answer the desired question. He prefers now rather to give them some general prospect of brighter days to come: their sorrow shall give place to joy: that should be short, this should be lasting; that for a time only, this forever.” (Mr. George Brown).

The Lord knows what things we have need of before we ask: all things are open before Him, even our hearts! He would not leave His disciples in uncertainty:

“Before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear” (Isaiah 65:24).

There is something very impressive in the way in which the Lord Jesus here repeats what He had said just before: evidently with the intention of fixing these words in their minds. Seven times in these four verses occurs this expression “a little while.” How the Spirit would impress upon us the brevity of our earthly pilgrimage! How the Lord here emphasizes the blessed truth that we should be daily, hourly, expecting His return!

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy” (John 16:20).

There is no change of subject here as some have strangely thought. Instead, the Lord mentions the effects of not seeing Him and seeing Him again. The double meaning of His words in John 16:16 must be borne in mind — their immediate reference to the apostles, and their wider application to all Christians. As they concerned the Eleven, Christ made it known that they would first mourn for Him as one dead, and not only would the decease of their unfailing Comforter result in deep lamentation, but the rejoicing of the world over its seeming victory and His defeat would intensify their sorrows. But after a short season their grief would be turned into rejoicing.

Strikingly was this prediction fulfilled. When Mary Magdalene came to the apostles to announce the Savior’s triumph over the

grave, she found them mourning and weeping (Mark 16:10). When Christ approached the two disciples walking to Emmaus, He asked

“What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another? as ye walk and are sad” (Luke 24:17).

How often during those three days must they have remembered His words “Ye shall weep and lament.” And while the beloved disciples were sunk in sorrow, their enemies were rejoicing. Solemnly does this come out in the prophetic plaint of the Messiah: “Let not them that are mine enemies wrongfully rejoice over me: neither let them wink with the eye that hate me without a cause” (Psalm 35:19). But these words of Christ also have a direct application to all His people on earth: “Sorrow” is their portion too how could it be otherwise as identified with the Man of sorrows during the time of His rejection! The awful enmity of men against God; the way in which the world still treats His beloved Son; the many false prophets who dishonor the Lord; the absence of the Savior Himself; and the sight of our fellow-creatures rushing heedlessly to destruction, these are enough to make Christians “weep and lament.” Add to these our own sad failures, and the failures of our brethren — often more apparent to us than our own and we can at once perceive the force of the apostle’s words,

“Even we ourselves groan within ourselves waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23).

“But your sorrow shall be turned into joy” (John 16:20).

The woman who saw the risen Savior as they returned from the sepulcher “with fear and great joy” (Matthew 28:8) ran to announce the glad tidings to the disciples. When He Himself appeared to them we read, “Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord” (John 20:20). And when He ascended on high

“they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy” (Luke 24:52).

But mark here the minute discrimination of our Lord’s language. It was not only that their sorrow should give place to joy, but be

“turned into joy.” Their sorrowing became joy! The very cause of their sorrow — the death of Christ — now became the ground and subject of their joy! Grief would not only be replaced by joy, but be transmuted into joy, even as the water was turned into wine! The Cross of Christ is glorified into an eternal consolation. And what was it, or rather Who was it that brought this about? None other than the Holy Spirit. He has so interpreted for us the death of the Savior that we now cry,

“God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14).

So our title for this chapter still holds good here: it is *Christ glorified by the Spirit*.

The final meaning of this profound and full word of Christ’s, “your sorrow shall be turned into joy,” will find its ultimate realization in all His people when He comes to receive us unto Himself. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. And even here the exactitude of our Lord’s language is to be seen: our “sorrow” shall be “turned into joy”: our present groanings are but creating within us a larger capacity for joy in the grand hereafter:

“Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17).

But how fearful the contrast in the case of unbelievers: “Woe unto you that laugh now: for ye shall mourn and weep” (Luke 6:25)!

“A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world” (John 16:21).

Plain and simple though this verse appears to be, yet we believe, there is a depth and fulness in it which has never been fully apprehended. First of all it is evident that we have a double parallelism:

“a little while and ye shall not see me” (John 16:16),

“ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice, and ye shall be sorrowful” (John 16:20),

“a woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come” (John 16:21),

all refer to the same thing — the same period of time, the same experience. So too “again a little while and ye shall see me” (John 16:16), “your sorrow shall be turned into joy” (John 16:20), and

“as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world” (John 16:21),

also correspond. What we have here in verse 21 repeats, but in figurative language, what Christ had said in the previous verses. The Lord now illustrates by a reference to the most familiar of all examples of joy issuing from sorrow. The force of the figure used to portray our sufferings intimates the necessity of them, their severity, their brief duration, and the fact that they are antecedent to and productive of joy. So much is clear on the surface. But in its deeper meaning the figure which the Savior here employed went beyond His literal language in the previous verse.

The symbolical domain of nature has much to teach us if we have eyes to see and hearts to receive. God has wisely and graciously ordered it that the pangs of the mother are compensated in her joy over the fruit of her anguish. And this is a symbolical prophecy, written in nature by the Creator’s finger, of the birth of the new man. That, too, is preceded by travail, both on the part of the Spirit and of the one He brings forth: but here travail gives place to joy. The same process is also repeated in the Christian life. The travail-pangs of “mortification” are the precursors of resurrection-joys. There must be, for us too, the cross before the crown. There must be fellowship with the sufferings of Christ, before we share His glory (Romans 8:17). Plain intimation of this is given in His words here: “her hour is come” — the same expression used by Him so often in conjunction with His own “travail” The Holy Spirit has also used

this same figure of a travailing woman to set forth the relation in which this present life stands to the future life: see Romans 8:12, 19, 22, 23.

Marvellously full is this word of Christ's. Fulfilled not only in the experience of the apostles, fulfilled in our regeneration, it is still further fulfilled in our Christian life.

“And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you” (John 16:22).

There is little need for us to enter into a lengthy exposition of this verse. In it the Lord gathers up into a brief summary all that He had said from John 16:15 onwards. There is the same fulness of reference as before. Directly, it applied, to the case of the apostles. For a short season they sorrowed over their Master's death and absence. This gave place to rejoicing at His resurrection and ascension. But the permanency of their joy “none taketh from you” — was secured by the coming of the Spirit. But our Lord's words were also addressed to the entire body of His people, therefore, as has been said,

“The way of the first disciples between the Passion and Pentecost is a type of the whole interval of the Lord's Church between His departure to the Father and His final return” (Stier).

The following questions are to aid the student on the dosing portion of John 16: —

1. In what “day,” verse 23?
2. What is meant by “ask me nothing,” verse 23?
3. What is the meaning of the first part of verse 24?
4. When did Christ show them “plainly,” verse 25?
5. What is the meaning of verse 26?
6. Did the disciples really understand Christ now, verse 29?

7. In what sense did Christ “overcome the world,” verse 33?

JOHN 16:23-33

CHRIST'S CONCLUDING CONSOLATIONS

The following is an Analysis of the dosing section of John 16: —

1. Asking the Father in the name of Christ, verses 23, 24.
2. Christ's promise to show the Father plainly, verse 25.
3. The Father's love made known, verses 26, 28.
4. The confession of the apostles, verses 29, 30.
5. Christ's challenge of their faith, verse 31.
6. Christ's solemn prediction, verse 32.
7. Christ's comforting assurance, verse 33.

Our present section contains the dosing words of our Lord's Paschal Discourse. We trust that many readers have shared the writer's sense of wonderment as we have passed from chapter to chapter and verse to verse. A truly wondrous one was this address of Christ. It stands quite by itself, for there is nothing else like it in the four Gospels. Here the Savior is alone with His own, and most blessedly does He reveal His tender affections for them. Here He speaks no longer to those whose hopes were to be realized in Judaism. Here He anticipates what is treated of in fuller detail in the Epistles, speaking as He does of the *Christian's* position, portion, privileges and responsibilities. There is a fulness in His words which it is impossible for us to exhaust, a depth we can never completely fathom in this life. Every verse will richly repay the most diligent and prolonged study.

In the closing verses of John 16 the Lord Jesus proceeds to set forth even more fully the blessings and privileges which were to issue from His going to heaven, declaring, too, the Father's love for those whom He had given to the Son. First, He assures believers of the

readiness of the Father to grant unto them whatsoever they asked Him in the Son's worthy name.

Next, He tells them that in thus asking, their joy should be made full. Then He announces that the time would come when He should no more speak in dark sayings, but He would show plainly of the Father. This is followed by the declaration that the Father loveth them because they loved the Son. Then He reminds them again that, having come forth from the Father into the world, He would leave the world and return to the Father. After this there is a break made by the disciples affirming their faith in Him. This is met by the solemn warning that, nevertheless, they would forsake Him. Then He closes by His never-to-be-forgotten words, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." May the Spirit of the Truth grant us His sorely needed guidance as we ponder this passage together.

["In that day ye shall ask me nothing" \(John 16:23\).](#)

This short sentence has proven a sore puzzle to many of the commentators. There is wide difference of opinion, both as to what "day" is in view here, and as to what is signified by "ye shall ask me nothing." That Christ was here looking forward needs not to be argued; but how far forward is what many have not found it easy to decide. Did He mean that day, after the brief interval of separation when they should meet again, of His resurrection? Did He mean the day of pentecost, when the Spirit was to descend upon them, enduing them with power? Did He mean the whole period of Christianity, the "day of salvation?" Or, did He employ this term in the sense that it has in so many Old Testament prophecies (see Isaiah 2:11; Isaiah 5:30; Isaiah 11:10, etc.), the day of His public manifestations? Or, did He look beyond the bounds of earth's history to the unending perfect "day", the Day of glory? Each of these meanings has been severally contended for by able expositors, and in view of the profound fulness of our Lord's words, we would hesitate to limit them to any one of these possible alternatives: probably several of them are to be combined.

"And in that day ye shall ask me nothing." This is not the first time that this expression was used by Christ. In John 14:20 we find that He said, "At [in] that day ye shall know that I am in my Father and

ye in me, and I in you.” But even there this expression can hardly be limited to one specific reference. If the reader will turn back to our comments on that verse he will find that we have explained it to signify: first, the day when the Holy Spirit was given to guide believers into all the truth; second, and ultimately, to the clay of glory, when we shall know even as we are known. It is thus that we understand “In that day” here in John 16:23; having both a narrower and wider meaning, a nearer and a remoter application.

“When in immediate connection with what has just been said, we find the greatest promise connected with the strikingly prominent ‘in that day’ it becomes needful to mark carefully the meaning of this formula. It is obvious that it cannot mean any individual day; and we cannot avoid seeing that the time signified by it *begins with the day* of the resurrection, if we rightly understood the great turning point of the future, which our Lord since John 14:3 has had always before His eyes, has its commencement in the resurrection-morning after the night of suffering and death. But as certain as we have seen embraced in John 16:20-22, a comprehensive glance at all the future of the Church, must we in this connected but heightened conclusion of all, give the words their furtherest reach of signification. The Lord, as we think at least, intends this ‘in that day’ to include tint of all, the whole period of the dispensation of the Spirit, which already typically commenced in His first return and seeing them again: — and then, pre-eminently, the end of this time, the *consummation of the fulness of the Spirit* in His own when He shall have unfolded and imparted all that is Christ’s to His people. This is plain from the greatness of the promise connected with it, which can never have its full realization till that goal is reached. ‘And in that day *ye shall ask me nothing*. Great and unfathomable word.’” (Stier.)

But what is meant by “ye shall ask me nothing?” Strangely and deplorably has this been perverted by some. There have been a few who have argued from this verse that we are here forbidden to address Christ, directly, in prayer. But Acts 1:24; 7:59, to say nothing of many passages in the Epistles, dearly refutes such an error.

“Ye shall ask me nothing.” The first key to this is found in the particular term our Lord here employed. In the Greek another word

is used in the latter part of this same verse where He says, “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.” While it is true that these two words are used, in some passages, almost interchangeably, yet that they have a distinct meaning is clear from several considerations. If the usage of each word be carefully traced through the New Testament it will be found that the former (erotao) is expressive of familiar entreaty, whereas the second (aiteo) signifies a lowly petition. Hence, whilst the Lord Jesus is found employing the former in His asking the Father on behalf of His disciples, never once does He use the latter term. Even more significant is it to find that Martha — who had not sat at His feet and learned of Him as had her more spiritual sister — used the latter word when she said,

“I know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee” (John 11:22);

failing to discern the Divine glory of His person, she supposed that He would have to appeal to God as a suppliant.

According to its classical usage, “erotao” signifies “to ask questions, to make inquiry in order to obtain information.” It is employed in this sense in a number of passages: to seek no further, we find it bearing this meaning in John 16:19. “Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do you inquire among yourselves?” But like the words “in that day,” so “ye shall ask me nothing” seem to have a double significance here — a relative and an absolute, an immediate and remote, a primary and an ultimate.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you” (John 16:23).

Here is the second key to the first part of this verse, so far as its primary meaning and immediate application is concerned: asking the Father everything, is contrasted from asking the Son nothing. “In that day” refers primarily to the time when, the Holy Spirit was given to them, in which “day” we are now living. But when the Holy Spirit came, Christ would be absent; then, instead of asking the Savior questions (as they did constantly while He was with them), they would petition the Father.

“The Lord is really signifying the great change from recourse to Him as their Messiah on earth for every difficulty, not for questions only, but for all they might want day by day, to that access to the Father into which He would introduce them as the accepted Man and glorified Savior on high” (Mr. W. Kelly).

This accounts for the “Verily, verily” with which Christ introduced this second statement: it emphasized the certainty and sufficiency of the new recourse of the disciples which He now made known unto them. And how this emphasized His “it is *expedient for you* that I go away” (John 16:7)! Petitions in Christ’s all-prevailing name the apostles would be permitted to present to the Father, which was something no saint before the Cross had ever been instructed to urge. As the God of Israel He had been known: but now believers were to approach Him in the conscious relationship of children addressing their *Father!*

But if we look forward to the ultimate fulfillment of Christ’s words “in that day ye shall ask me nothing,” they signify that *in the Glory* we shall know even as we are known, and there will no longer be any need to interrogate Him about any of the problems which now so sorely perplex us. Then we shall — to speak in the language of the context — understand the meaning of our present “sorrows” and “rejoice” forever, for the wise Love that appointed them. Having thus pointed us forward to the final goal, the Lord provides encouragement for us as we journey toward it — “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name he will give it you.” The “whatsoever” must be qualified by whatever is for the Father’s glory, will promote His Son’s interests, and is for our good.

“Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name” (John 16:24).

The Lord was not reproofing His disciples for a failure in their prayer-life, but was announcing one of the consequences of the great change then at hand. If the reader will note carefully what we said on John 14:13, 14, he will see how impossible it was for saints to pray in the name of the Lord Jesus before His ascension. In the previous verses we have learned what the results of the coming of the Spirit would be saintwards, here we are shown the effects *Godwards*. Consequent on Christ’s exaltation, the Spirit in and with

believers would draw out their hearts in prayer, teaching them to present their petitions to the Father in the all-prevailing name of the Son.

“Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).

“I enjoin you thus to pray, that not only may you be delivered from all despondency and heart-trouble, but that in the enjoyment of all heavenly and spiritual blessings, and in the possession of all that is necessary and sufficient to secure the success of the great enterprise on which you are about to enter, you may be filled with holy happiness, heavenly joy — joy in the Holy Spirit. There is a close connection between the two advices given by an apostle under the influence of the Spirit of His Master: ‘Rejoice evermore: pray without ceasing’ (1 Thessalonians 5:16, 17). The second is the means of securing the first. If we cease to pray, we are likely to cease to rejoice — we must ‘pray without ceasing’ that we may ‘rejoice evermore’: and were we, instead of being anxious, careful, and troubled about many things, to ‘be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, make our requests known unto God, with thanksgiving’ (Philippians 4:6), assuredly the ‘peace of God, would keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus’; and, amid external troubles, our joy would be full” (Mr. John Brown).

“These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father” (John 16:25).

It will be noted that the margin gives “parables” as an alternative for “proverbs.” In this word of Christ there is, again, a fulness of meaning which no brief definition can comprehend. In the Greek there are two words used (for the one Hebrew word “*mashal*”) — “*parabole*” and “*paroimia*”: the former is never used in John’s Gospel: the latter occurs in John 10:6 and here. Possibly it had been better to render it “dark saying” in the present instance, as the Lord sets it in antithesis to “showing plainly of the Father.” And yet the thoughts connected with “proverbs” is not to be excluded. The wisdom of Solomon is recorded in his “Proverbs.” So the Lord here

intimates that He, the Truth, the “greater than Solomon,” would not do otherwise than speak in sentences with a fulness of meaning which no mere mental acumen can penetrate. But again, the Greek word here may properly be rendered “parables,” and the distinctive idea connected with this term is probably to be included as well.

“Parables are truths given and yet concealed from those who cannot or will not receive them; but to the ready heart that can take them in, they can be made known, as we see in Matthew 13:13-16. The parables there were not understood by His enemies and would not have been by the disciples, but He opened them. A parable is not a story to illustrate a truth; it is the truth itself. As though He would say, ‘It will not be received, but I will speak it nevertheless.’ It is like a nut, needing to be cracked open, but the kernel is there; and rich too. Now He had spoken to them in that way. Many of the incidents that occur have truth in them that would be open only to the ear and eye of the new man, enlightened and exercised by the Holy Spirit.

“He had said these things, whether they understood them or not; but the hour was coming when He would no more speak unto them in parables, but would show them plainly of the Father. That is now by the Holy Spirit. ‘There is no book in me Scripture that is more full of teaching that requires fellowship with the subject, and the mind of the writer — the Sprat — than the Gospel of John. Wherein we fail, it is that we are so little in fellowship with Him. The deeper the fellowship, the more thoroughly we would understand all that has been told. That is, men, the reason for speaking in parables, but not doing it when the Holy Spirit comes (there are no parables in the Epistles, and note 2 Corinthians 3:12: A.W.P.). The Holy Spirit’s business is to take of the things of Christ and tell them out and make them actually ours.’ (Mr. Malachi Taylor).

The Lord went on to say that the time (hour) was at hand when He would speak no more obscurely to the disciples, but would plainly “show them of the Father.” This promise began to be accomplished even before Pentecost. On the very day of His resurrection, “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded” to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, “the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). To Mary Magdalene He made known that His Father

was His brethren's Father (John 20:17). So in Luke 24:45 we are also told, "Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures." But the complete fulfillment was given in the coming of the Spirit to guide them into all the Truth: then the veil was completely taken off their hearts, and with open face they contemplated the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. In John 16:14 the Lord had said the Spirit would "show," here He says "I will show"; there He had spoken of the Spirit showing the things "of mine," here "I will show of the Father." This interchange strikingly attests the unity of the three Persons in the Godhead.

["At that day ye shall ask in my name" \(John 16:26\).](#)

In the day of the Spirit believers would ask the Father in the name of Christ, not only plead His name as a motive, but come to God in the value of His person. What an incentive is this for each Christian reader to engage in this holy exercise!

"The benefit of prayer is so great that it cannot be expressed. Prayer is the dove which, when sent out, returns again, bringing

with it the olive-leaf, namely, peace of heart. Prayer is the golden chain which God holds fast, and lets not go until He blesses. Prayer is the Moses' rod which brings forth the water of consolation out of the Rock of Salvation. Prayer is Samson's jawbone, which smites down our enemies. Prayer is David's harp, before which the evil spirit flies. Prayer is the key to heaven's treasures" (John Gerhard.)

"And I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you." The first design of Christ in these words was to repel a false notion which many have entertained, namely that the Father must be besought by Christ before He will notice us. It is not that Christ here denies that He would intercede for us, but He would assure us that such intercession on His part is not needed to induce the Father to love us — the next verse makes it very clear. It was Christ assuring His disciples that, following His exaltation ("in that day"), the way would be open for them to come into the Father's presence. "I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you."

“This no more denies Christ’s intercession for us, than John 16:23 forbids the servant praying to his Lord about His work or His house. It is not an absolute statement, but it is simply an ellipse, which the words following explain.” (Mr. W. Kelly.)

“For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.” (John 16:27).

This at once indicates the line of thought in the Savior’s mind at the close of the previous verse. It was not that He had to coerce the Father either to hear our prayers or to love us. The favors which we receive from the Father are not extorted from Him by the importunate pleading of the Savior. So far from the Father having no regard for our happiness He loves us, loves us with a special love of approbation because we love His Son: therefore is He ever ready to minister to our welfare, watching over us with paternal affection and care. The Father does not love us because Christ intercedes for us; but Christ intercedes for us because we are the objects of the Father’s special love. What a blessed word is this! Spoken for our assurance and comfort as we journey homewards. Whatsoever they ask in Christ’s name shall be given them, is secured by the love of the Father, no less than by the intercession of Christ; nay, even more so, inasmuch as the only fountain is more than the only channel, though both are equally necessary in their own places.” (Mr. John Brown.)

“For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.” It is to be noted that “love” is here placed before “believing.” One reason for this was because Christ had just been speaking of love in the previous verse; now He proceeds to speak of faith so as to prepare the way for that profession of faith which the disciples at once made. But no doubt the word “believe” here is used as in John 14:1. It was not the initial act of faith in the Lord Jesus, but the confiding in and on Him after His return to the Father.

“I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.” (John 16:28).

“Having been led to mention His coming forth from God, our Lord concludes His explicatory remarks by stating in the fewest words the truths which, above all others, it was of importance that the disciples should hold fast in the hour of temptation, which was just coming on them to try them.” (Mr. John Brown.)

These are the vital facts for faith to lay hold of.

First, Christ came forth from the Father. He is the heavenly One come down to earth; not only “sent” officially, but “come” by voluntary consent.

Second, He came into the world; and why? That He might be the Savior of sinners.

Third, He has gone back to the Father. How? Through death and resurrection. With what intent? To diffuse from on high the benefits of His redeeming work. Christ’s design here was to show the apostles how fully warranted was their confidence in Himself.

“His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou earnest forth from God.” (John 16:29, 30).

This confession of the apostles looks back to what Christ had just said in John 16:27, 28. The assurance that the Father Himself loved them had comforted their hearts: the declaration from their Master’s own lips that they “loved and believed” in Him gave them new confidence. As Calvin beautifully puts it: “The disciples did not fully understand the meaning of

Christ’s discourse; but though they were not capable of this, the mere odor of it refreshed them.” All was no longer dark to them; their faith was confirmed. When they declared, “now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb” (obscure saying), they were looking back to what He had said in John 16:25. It seems clear that the apostles imagined the “day” the Lord mentioned had already arrived, and that their Master was now making good His promise to

them. This is the more evident from their statement, “Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee,” which looks back to John 16:23: “And in that day ye shall ask me nothing.”

“Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou earnest forth from God.” The disciples perceived that the Lord had accurately discerned their thoughts, and, unasked, had solved their difficulties. Yet it is dear that they failed to take in the fulness of what He had just said. They believed that He had come forth from “God” (John 16:27). So far, so good. But He had spoken of coming forth from “the Father” and of returning to Him (John 16:28). Upon this they were silent, and for a very good reason: at that time they neither believed nor understood that deeper point of view. The “Father” is God truly. But God speaks of the one Divine Being who is over all Creator, Governor, Sustainer, Judge. *Father* speaks of *relationship*, the relationship of God to His children. Of this the disciples, as yet, understood little, perhaps *nothing*.

“We believe that thou camest forth from God.” Really this went no further than a confession that He was the promised Messiah. Nicodemus said, “Rabbi, we know thou art a teacher come from God” (John 3:2). The woman of Samaria exclaimed,

“Come see a man who told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?” (John 4:29).

Those who witnessed the miracle of the loaves avowed, “This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world” (John 6:14). Peter testified,

“We believe, and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” — not “Father”! (John 6:69).

Martha said,

“Yea, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” (John 11:27).

The word of the apostles here in John 16:30 went no farther than these other confessions. “We believe that thou camest forth from God.” In truth they had apprehended nothing that raised them above the effect of Christ’s rejection; only the realization that He came forth from the Father and was returning to Him, could give this.

“They had no conception of the mighty change from all that they had gathered of the Kingdom as revealed in the Old Testament, to the new state of things that would follow His absence with the Father on high and the presence of the Holy Spirit here below. It sounded plain to their ears; but even up to the ascension they feebly, if at all, caught a glimpse of it. They to the last clung to the hopes of Israel, and these surely remain to be fulfilled another day. But they understood not this ‘Day,’ during which, if the Jews are treated as reprobate, even as He was rejected of them, those born of God should in virtue of Christ and His work be placed in immediate relationship with the Father. His return to the Father was a parable still, though the Lord does not correct their error, as indeed it was useless: they would soon enough learn how little they knew. But at least even then, they had the inward consciousness that He knew all, and, as He penetrated their thoughts had no need that any should ask Him. ‘Herein we believe that thou camest out from God.’ Undoubtedly — yet how far below the truth He had uttered (in John 16:28), is that which they were thus confessing! The Spirit of His Son sent into their hearts would give them in due time to know the Father; as redemption accomplished and accepted could alone provide the needful ground for this” (The Bible Treasury).

No wonder the Lord had just previously announced to the apostles: “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them *now*”!

“Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe?” (John 16:31).

It seems to us that the Lord was here challenging their faith. In a real sense they did believe that He was the promised Messiah — “come out from God.” But their faith was on the eve of being severely tested, and under that testing it would be shaken to its very foundations; though fail it would not. He with His own omniscient foresight, knew what lay ahead of them. The indignity, the

sufferings, the crucifixion of their Master would indeed cause them to be “offended.” Their faith was genuine; but it was not strong as they supposed. This explains, we think, the “now” — “Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe?”; ye believe Me while I am with you and things are going according to your minds, but what will you do when I shall be taken from you, delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, die, and be buried! The Lord then was warning them against their self-confidence.

“We need not doubt that the profession of the Eleven was real and sincere. They honestly meant what they said. But they did not know themselves. They did not know what they were capable of doing under the pressure of the fear of men and strong temptation. They had not rightly estimated the weakness of the flesh, the power of the Devil, the feebleness of their own resolutions, the shallowness of their own faith. All this they had yet to learn by painful experience. Like young recruits, they had yet to learn that it is one thing to know the soldier’s drill and wear the uniform, and quite another to be steadfast in the day of battle. Let us mark these things and learn wisdom. The true secret of spiritual strength is self- distrust and deep humility. ‘When I am weak, then am I strong’ (2 Corinthians 12:10). None of us, perhaps, have the least idea how much we might fall if placed suddenly under the influence of strong temptation. Happy is he who never forgets the words, ‘Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall,’ and, remembering our Lord’s disciples, pray daily, ‘Hold thou me up and then I shall be safe.’” (Bishop Ryle).

“Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone” (John 16:32).

This was spoken For the disciples’ sakes, that His prediction of the heavy hour of pressure might prepare them for it. It was said to humble them, to destroy their present self-confidence. Note the opening, “Behold” to arrest their attention! “Ye shall be scattered!” Without the Shepherd, they would be dispersed abroad. “Every man to his own” — his own shelter or hiding- place. Each of them would provide for his own safety. When the storm burst there was shelter

for all *but* Christ. He performed His Work of Atonement *alone*, because He *alone* was qualified to do it.

“And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me”
(John 16:32).

How gracious of the Savior to address this word for the comfort of their hearts! Moreover, the consciousness of the Father’s presence was the stay of His own heart. This is clear from Isaiah 50:7,

“For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded; therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.”

“Let us here, in transition to the following verse mark how all this is a type for the entire future of the Church. Often is this scattering of the disciples from His presence repeated, in various degrees and with various manifestations, but He is not alone. And even if in this day all men were to leave Him, He abides what He is, and the Father is with Him. His holy cause can never be forsaken or lost” (Stier).

Similarly Calvin remarks: “Whosoever well ponders this will hold firm his faith though the world shake, nor will the defection of all others overturn his confidence; we do not render God full honor unless He alone is felt to be sufficient to us.”

“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace” (John 16:33).

Having made a final reference to the awful “hour” then at hand, the Lord winds up His matchless discourse with a parting word of *encouragement* and *victory*. He here condenses into a single sentence the instruction which He had given them in the upper room. The “peace” of His own was what His tender heart was concerned about.

“Ever thinking more of others than of Himself, even in this near prospect of the bitter Cross, He forgets His own grief in the grief of His disciples. He is occupied in comforting those who ought to have been His comforters” (Mr. G. Brown).

The “peace” of which He spake can be enjoyed only by communion with Himself. In the previous verse He had mentioned their forsaking Him; but He had not forsaken them. Three days later He would return with His “peace be unto you” (John 20:19), then did they learn, once for all, that in Him alone *was peace to be found*. *But He does not hide from them the fact that “in the world” they should have “tribulation,” but He first assures them that, notwithstanding this, there was peace for them in Him.*

“In the world ye shall have tribulation” (John 16:33).

This is not to be restricted to the *violent* enmity of the ungodly. It is a general term for distress of any kind. The Latin word from which our “tribulation” is taken, was used of the flail which separated the wheat from the chaff. There are temptations, trials, troubles in the world as well as from it. “In the world” is to be in the place of testing. While the Christian is left down here he suffers from the weakness and weariness of the body, from temporal losses and disappointments, from the severing of cherished ties, as well as from the sneers and taunts, the hatred and persecution of the world. But though “in the world” is tribulation, “in Christ” there is “peace.” The world cannot rob us of that, nor can its evil “prince” destroy it. But let us never forget that this “*peace*” is *only* enjoyed by *faith*. It is only as we abide in conscious communion with the Savior that we can anticipate the unclouded and unending joys of the future. The peace which is for us in Christ is appropriated just so far as faith lays hold of our perfect acceptance, our eternal security, and our wondrous portion in Him.

“But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

The influence and power of “the world” is powerful, but not all-powerful. It has been fought and overcome. One greater than it, mightier than its “prince,” has been here, and vanquished it. The world did its utmost in the battle, but the Son of God prevailed. Noah *condemned* the world (Hebrews 11:7), but Christ *conquered* it. It has no longer any power left but what He permits. It was in the way of temptation, suffering and obedience that He fought and won. Therefore let us “Be of good cheer.” The world is a conquered

world; it has been conquered for us by Christ. Then let us take courage. The storms of trial and persecution may sometimes beat fiercely upon us; but let them only drive us closer to Christ.

“But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” What a glorious close for this Discourse! The foundation of peace is our Savior’s personal victory, here anticipated by Him before the conflict! How this should stimulate us. The world is still essentially the same; but *so is Christ!* And our Lord is still saying, “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

There must be no surrender, no compromise, no fellowship with the world. Here is our Lord’s war-cry: him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Revelation 3:21). Ere long the conflict will cease by the victory gained, for

“Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).

The day is nigh at hand when Christ shall come to reward His servants. Then shall the victor be crowned.

“And oh, the delight of casting these crowns at His feet, and ascribing forever and ever, glory, and honor, and dominion and blessing to the Great Overcomer, to Him who conquered for us, who conquered in us, who made us more than conquerors! It is sweet to anticipate this glorious result of all our tribulations and struggles; and in the enjoyment of *peace in Him* amidst these struggles and tribulations, to raise, though in broken accents, and with a tremulous voice, the song which, like the sound of great waters, shall unceasingly, everlastingly, echo through heaven, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain’” (Mr. John Brown).

Let the student work on the following questions as preparation for our next lesson: —

1. What does the “lifting up of His eyes” teach us, verse 1?

2. What did Christ refer to in “glorify thy Son,” verse 1?
3. How is verse 2 related to Christ’s petition?
4. Does verse 3 give a definition of “eternal life” or — ?
5. Why did Christ refer to the Father as “the only true God,” verse 3?
6. What was Christ’s “glory” before the world, verse 5?
7. By how many different pleas (in verses 1, 4) does Christ support His petition in verse 5?

JOHN 17:1-5

CHRIST INTERCEDING

The following is an Analysis of the first section of John 17:

1. The Son praying, verse 1.
2. His desire for the Father's glory, verse 1.
3. His own glory subsidiary, verse 1.
4. The consequences of His glorification, verse 2.
5. The way to and means of eternal life, verse 3.
6. The Son rendering an account of His stewardship, verse 4.
7. His reward, verse 5.

The seventeenth of John contains the longest recorded prayer which our Lord offered during His public ministry on earth, and has been justly designated *His High Priestly Prayer*. It was offered in the presence of His apostles, after the institution and celebration of the Lord's Supper, and immediately following the Paschal discourse recorded in 14 to 16. It has been appropriately said, "The most remarkable prayer followed the most full and consoling discourse ever uttered on earth" (Matthew Henry). It differs from the prayer which Christ "taught his disciples," for in that there are petitions which the Savior could not offer for Himself, while in this there are petitions which none else but Christ could present. In this wonderful prayer there is a solemnity and elevation of thought, a condensed power of expression, and a comprehensiveness of meaning, which have affected the minds and drawn out the hearts of the most devoted of God's children to a degree that few portions of Scripture have done.

In John 17 the veil is drawn aside, and we are admitted with our great High Priest into "the holiest of all." Here we approach the

secret place of the tabernacle of the Most High, therefore it behoves us to put off our shoes from off our feet, listening with humble, reverent and prepared hearts, for the place whereon we now stand is indeed holy ground. We give below a few brief impressions of other writers.

“This is truly, beyond measure, a warm and hearty prayer. He opens the depths of His heart, both in reference to us and to His Father, and He pours them all out. It sounds so honest, so simple; it is so deep, so rich, so wide, no one can fathom it” (Martin Luther).

Melanchthon, another of the Reformers, when giving his last lecture before his death, said on John 17:

“There is no voice which has ever been heard, either in heaven or in earth, more exalted, more holy, more fruitful, more sublime, than the prayer offered up by the Son to God Himself.”

The eminent Scottish Reformer, John Knox, had this chapter read to him every day during his last illness, and in the closing scene, the verses that were read from it consoled and animated him in the final conflict.

“The seventeenth chapter of the Gospel by John, is, without doubt, the most remarkable portion of the most remarkable book in the world. The Scripture of truth, given by inspiration of God, contains many wonderful passages, but none more wonderful than this — none so wonderful. It is the utterance of the mind and heart of the Godman, in the very crisis of His great undertaking, in the immediate prospect of completing, by the sacrifice of Himself, the work which had been given Him to do, and for the accomplishment of which He had become incarnate. It is the utterance of these to the Father who had sent Him. What a concentration of thought and affection is there in these few sentences! How ‘full of grace,’ how ‘full of truth.’ How condensed, and yet how clear the thoughts, — how deep, yet how calm, the feelings which are here, so far as the capabilities of human language permit, worthily expressed! All is natural and simple in thought and expression — nothing intricate or elaborate, but there is a width in the conceptions which the human

understanding cannot measure — a depth which it cannot fathom. There is no bringing out of these plain words all that is seen and felt to be in them” (Mr. John Brown).

“The chapter we have now begun is the most remarkable in the Bible. It stands alone, and there is nothing like it” (Bishop Ryle).

Even Mr. W. Kelly with his caution and conservatism writes,

“Next follows a chapter which one may perhaps characterise truly as unequalled for depth and scope in all the Scriptures.”

This prayer of our Lord is wonderful as a specimen of the communications which constantly passed between the Son and His Father while He was here on earth. Vocal prayer seems to have been habitual with our Savior. While being baptised He was engaged in prayer (Luke 3:21). Immediately on the commencement of His public ministry we find that, after a short repose, following a day of unremitting labor,

“He rose up a great while before day, and went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35).

On the eve of selecting the twelve apostles He

“went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12).

It was while engaged in the act of prayer that He was transfigured (Luke 9:29). And it was while praying that He ceased to breathe (Luke 23:46). Only the briefest mention is made as to the substance of these prayers — in most instances none at all. But here in John 17, the Holy Spirit has been pleased to record at length His prayer in the upper room. How thankful we should be for this!

Perhaps the most interesting way to view this prayer is as *a model* of His high priestly intercession for us, which He continually makes in the immediate presence of God, on the ground of His completed and accepted sacrifice. The first intimation of this is found in the fact that the Lord Jesus here prayed audibly in the presence of His

disciples. He prayed that their interests might be secured, but He prayed audibly that they should be aware of this, that they might know what a wondrous place they had in His affections, that they might be assured that all His influence with the Father would be employed for their advantage. More plainly still is this intimated in John 17:13: “And now come I to thee and these things I speak in the world, *that* they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves” — *q.d.* “These are intercessions which in heaven I will never cease to make before God; but I make them now in the world, in your hearing that you may more distinctly understand how I am there to be employed in promoting your welfare, so that you may be made in large measure, partakers of My happiness.”

“The petitions for Himself are much briefer than those which He presents for His people — the former being only two, or, rather, but one, variously expressed; while the latter are quite a number, earnestly urged with a variety of pleas. This arrangement and division of the matter of the prayer justifies the view which has not unfrequently been taken of it: that it was throughout *intercessory* and the substance and model of that intercession which He constantly makes in heaven as our great High Priest” (Mr. T. Houston).

It is in His *mediatorial* character that the Savior here prays: as the eternal Son, now in the form of a Servant. The office of a mediator or day’s-man is “to lay his hand upon both” (Job 9:33); to treat with each party, in the previous chapters we have beheld Christ dealing with believers in the name of the Father, opening His counsels to them; now we find Him dealing with the Father on behalf of believers, presenting their cause to Him, just as Moses, the typical mediator, spoke to God (Exodus 19:19) and from God (Exodus 20:19), so did our blessed Savior speak from God and to God. And He is still performing the same office and work: speaking to us in the Word, speaking for us in His intercession on High.

The prayer that we are now about to meditate upon is a standing monument of Christ’s affection for the Church. In it we are permitted to hear the desires of His heart as He spreads them before the Father, seeking the temporal, spiritual and eternal welfare of those who are His own. This prayer did not pass away as soon as its

words were uttered, or when Christ ascended to heaven, but retains a perpetual efficacy.

“Just as the words of creation hath retained their vigor these six thousand years: ‘Increase and multiply: Let the earth bring forth after its kind,’ so this prayer of Christ’s retains its force, as if but newly spoken” (Mr. T. Manton).

Let us remember our Lord’s words,

“Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest *me always*” (John 11:41, 42)

as we ponder this prayer together.

“These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven” (John 17:1).

The first four words look backwards and their meaning is fixed by the opening clause in John 16:33. They refer to the whole consolatory discourse recorded in the three preceding chapters. Having completed His address to the disciples, He now lifted up His eyes and heart to the Father. The connection is emphasized by the Spirit: “These words spoke Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said.” What an example for all of His servants! He had said everything to the apostles which a wise kindness could dictate in order to sustain them in the supremely trying circumstances in which they were about to be placed, and as the hour was at hand when they were to be separated from Him, He employs the few moments now remaining in commending them to the care of the Father — His Father and their Father. From *preaching* He passed to *prayer!* Thereby He teaches us that after we have done all we can to promote the holiness and comfort of those with whom we are connected, we should in prayer and supplication beseech Him, who is the author of all good, to bless the objects of our care and the means which we have employed for their welfare.

“Doctrine has no power, unless efficacy is imparted to it from above. Christ holds out an example to teach them, not to employ themselves only in sowing the Word, but by mingling prayers with

it, to implore the assistance of God, that His blessing may render their labors fruitful” (John Calvin).

“And lifted up his eyes to heaven.” While delivering the discourse recorded in the previous chapters His eyes, no doubt, had been fixed with tender solicitude upon His disciples. But now as a token that He was about to engage in prayer, He lifts up His eyes toward heaven.

“This shows that bodily gestures in prayer and worship of God are not altogether to be overlooked as unmeaning” (Bishop Ryle).

The gesture naturally expresses withdrawal of the thoughts and the affections from earthly things, deep veneration, and holy confidence. It denoted the *elevation* of *His heart* to God. Said David, “Unto thee O Lord, do I *lift up* my soul” (Psalm 25:1). In true prayer the affections go out to God. Our Lord’s action also teaches us the *spiritual reverence* which is due God: the heaven of heavens is His dwelling-place, and the turning of the eyes toward His Throne expresses a recognition of God’s majesty and excellence.

“Unto thee *lift I up* mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens” (Psalm 123:1).

Again, such a posture signifies *confidence in God*. There can be no real prayer until there is a turning away from all creature dependencies:

“I will *lift up* mine eyes unto the hills. From whence cometh my help? My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:1, 2)

The believer looks around, and finds no ground for help; his relief must come from God above.

“And said, Father.” The Mediator here addresses God as *Father*. He was His “Father” in a threefold sense.

First, by virtue of His human nature, miraculously produced. His body was “prepared” for Him by God (Hebrews 10:5). Just as in the

human realm the begetter of the child is its father, so the One who made the body of Christ, became the Father of His human nature:

“And the angel answered and said unto her [Mary], the Holy Spirit 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).

The man Christ Jesus is thus in a peculiar sense, the Son of God. In like manner, Adam, who was created by God in His own image and likeness, is called “the son of God” (Luke 3:38).

Second, God stands in the relation of “Father” to our Lord as the *Head* and *Representative* of the holy family redeemed from among men. He is thus “The first born among many brethren” (Romans 8:29). To this the apostle seems to refer when he applies to the Lord Jesus that Old Testament word

“I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son” (Hebrews 1:5).

Third, the appellation “*Father*” given to the first person of the Trinity by our Savior, primarily, and usually refers to that *essential* relation which subsisted between the first and second persons of the God head from all eternity. *Identity of nature* is the chief idea suggested by the term. In Romans 8:32, Christ is spoken of as God’s “*own Son*,” intimating that He is a Son in a sense absolutely peculiar to Himself.

“And said, Father.” Two things were expressed.

First, *relationship*: the relationship of sonship. This was His claim to be heard. It was as though He had said, “O thou with whom I have existed in unity of essence, perfection, and enjoyment from the unbegun eternity, and by whose will and operation I have been clothed miraculously with human nature and constituted the Head of all appointed unto salvation — I now come to thy throne of grace.”

Second, it indicated *affection*. It expressed love, veneration, confidence, submission. In whom should a son trust if not in his father? It was as though He had said, “I trust Thy power, Thy wisdom, Thy benignity, Thy faithfulness. Into Thy hands I commend Myself. I know that Thou wilt hear My prayer for Thou art My Father!” Previously Christ had commanded prayer: here, by His own blessed example He *commends* to us this holy exercise.

“The hour is come.” This is the seventh and last time that the Lord Jesus refers to this most momentous “hour” — see our remarks on John 2:4. This was the greatest “hour” of all — because most critical and pregnant with eternal issues — since hours began to be numbered. It was the hour when the Son of God was to terminate the labors of His important life by a death still more important and illustrious. It was the hour when the Lord of glory was to be made sin for His people, and bear the holy wrath of a sin-hating God. It was the hour for fulfilling and accomplishing many prophecies, types and symbols which for hundreds and thousands of years had pointed forward to it. It was the hour when events took place which the history of the entire universe can supply no parallel: when the Serpent was Permitted to bruise the heel of the woman’s Seed; when the sword of Divine justice smote Jehovah’s Fellow; when the sun refused to shine; when the earth rocked on its axis; but when the elect company were redeemed, when Heaven was gladdened, and which brought, and shall bring to all eternity, “glory to God in the highest.”

But why did the Savior begin His prayer by referring to this “hour”? As a plea *to support the petitions that He was about to present*.

“In our Lord’s prayer for Himself there is pleading as well as petition. Prayer is the expression of desire for benefit by one who needs it, to one who, in his estimation, is able and disposed to confer it. Request or petition is therefore its leading element; but in the expression of desire by one intelligent being to another, it is natural that the reasons *why* the desire is cherished, and the request presented, should be stated, and the grounds unfolded, on which the hope is founded, that the desire should be granted. Petitions and pleading are thus connected in prayer from man to man; and they are so, likewise, in prayer from men to God. Whoever reads carefully

the prayers uttered by holy men, influenced and guided by the Spirit of God, recorded in Scripture, will be struck with the union of petition and pleading, by which they are distinguished. When they are brought ‘near to God’ — when they, as Job says, ‘find him and come even to his seat,’ how do ‘they *order their cause* before him, and fill their mouths with arguments’ (Job 23:3-4)² They ‘*plead*’ with Him, as Jeremiah expresses it” (John 12:1). (Mr. John Brown).

Christ’s first plea was the intimate and endearing relation in which He stood to the object of worship: “*Father... glorify thy Son.*” There is a powerful plea in each of these words. His second plea was “the hour is come” — the time *appointed* for granting this petition had arrived. Like so many of His words in these closing chapters, “the hour” here seems to have a *double* significance: referring not only to His sufferings, but also looking forward to the resurrection — side of the Cross — compare our remarks on John 13:31.

“This is the appointed period for the remarkable glorification of the Son by the Father in His sufferings, by His sufferings, for His sufferings under them, after them. ‘The time, yea, the set time, is come,’ and if the time be come shall not the event take place? It is a matter of Divine purpose, and when was a Divine purpose falsified! It is a matter of Divine promise, and when was a Divine promise frustrated!” (Mr. John Brown).

“Glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee” (John 17:1).

This is so closely connected with what follows in the next two verses that it is difficult to treat of it separately. In John 17:2 and 3 Christ describes the particular mode of glorifying the Father on which His heart was set, and the aspect of the glorification of Himself which He here prays for, namely, to have power over all flesh and to give eternal life to as many as the Father had given Him. There was a *double* object of desire, a *double* subject of prayer; the glorification of the Father in the bestowal of eternal life upon the elect, and the glorification of the Son as subsidiary to this as the necessary and effectual means of accomplishing it. Thus we see the perfect *disinterestedness* of Christ. He prayed to be “glorified” not

for His *own* sake, but that *the Father* might be glorified in *our* salvation! Here again we see Him loving us “unto the end!”

“Glorify thy Son.” This was the Savior requesting the Father to support Him on the Cross, afterwards to bring Him out of the grave and set Him at His own right hand, so as to bring to a triumphant completion the work given Him to do; and this in order that the glorious attributes of the Father His justice, holiness, mercy and faithfulness — might be exhibited and magnified, for God is most “glorified” when the excellencies of His character are manifested to and acknowledged by His creatures. The glorification of the Son, in accord with the double meaning of the “hour” here, would mean Glorify Me *in* My sufferings, and glorify Me *after* My sufferings. In both of these aspects was His prayer answered. The angel sent to strengthen Him in the Garden, the testimony of Pilate — “I find no fault in him,” — the drawing of the dying thief to the Savior while He hung upon the Cross, the rending of the temple veil, the confession of the centurion, “Truly, this was the Son of God,” were all so many responses of the Father to this petition. His resurrection and exaltation to the highest seat in Heaven, was His glorification following His sufferings.

There is much for us to learn here.

First, mark the connection: “the hour is come, glorify thy Son.”

“The true remedy of tribulation is to look to the succeeding glory, and to counterbalance future dangers with present hopes. *This* was comfort against *that* sad hour. So it must be our course: not to look at things which are seen, but to things which are not seen (2 Corinthians 4:17); to defeat sense by faith. When the mind is in heaven it is fortified against the pains which the body feeleth on earth” (Mr. Thos. Manton-Puritan).

Second, observe what Christ sought: to be “glorified” by the Father — not to be enriched by men, not to be honored by the world. This should be our desire too. Christ rebuked those who received honor one from another instead of *seeking* the honor that cometh from God (John 5:44), and because they loved the praise of men, more than the

praise of God (John 12:43). We should not only seek for grace, but glory.

Third, note that Christ asked for what He knew would *be* given Him. The Father had said “I have both glorified, and will glorify again” (John 12:28). Neither promises nor providence render prayer meaningless or useless.

Fourth, Christ prayed for this glory in order that *He* might glorify *the Father*. Here too, He has left us an example. Whatsoever we do is to be done to the glory of God, and nothing should be asked from Him save for His glory.

“As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him” (John 17:2).

“The Father is first of all to be glorified in the humanity of the God-man, who presents Himself to that end; then, through Him in His disciples, so that in this first word concerning the mutual glorification, that is already involved and included which follows in John 17:10. In John 17:2 we have a more specific development and explanation of the sense in which this glorification of the Father to and in fallen humanity is meant” (Stier). We regard the connecting “as” or “according as” as having a double force, supplying a *reason for* and describing *the manner of* the Father’s glorification of Christ. Let us examine the verse in this order of thought.

Verse 2 contains the third plea which the Savior presented to the Father: to glorify the Son was in accord with the place which the Father had destined Him to fill, and the work which He had appointed Him to perform: the glorification of the Son was necessary to His filling that place and executing that work. The place which God had destined Him to occupy was that of rightful authority over the whole human race, with complete control of all events in connection with them (see John 5:22; Ephesians 1:19-21, etc.). The work appointed Him was to give eternal life to all the elect. But in order to the *accomplishment of* this purpose the Son must be glorified in and by and for His sufferings. He must be glorified by expiating sin upon the Cross, by being raised from the

dead, and by being set at God's right hand so as to be put into actual possession of this authority and power. How cogent then was His plea! Unless the Father glorified Him, He could not accomplish the ends of His mediatorial office.

The Father, in His eternal counsels, had appointed the Son to save a portion of the human race; to conduct to glory many sons, who, like their brethren in the flesh, were going to destruction. These had been given Christ to save. By nature they were "dead in trespasses and sins": guilty, depraved, destitute of spiritual life, incapable of thinking, feeling, choosing, acting, or enjoying; communion with the all-holy, ever-blessed One. If ever they were to be saved they must have eternal life bestowed upon them by the Savior, and for Him to impart this inestimable boon, He must be exalted to the place of supreme dominion. This, then, was the Savior's "argument" or plea here: the Father's glory being the *end* in view.

Verse 2 also describes *the manner* of the Father's glorification in and by the Son: let Thy Son glorify Thee by saving souls "according as" Thou hast appointed Him so to do. "As thou hast given" obviously means promised to give — see such scriptures as Psalm 89:27; Daniel 7:14, etc. The fact that this "power" or authority over all flesh is *given* to Christ, at once shows the *character* in which He here appears, namely, as Mediator. That Christ *receives* this "gift" shows us that free grace is no dis-honorable tenure. Why should haughty sinners disdain Divine charity, when the God-man was willing to accept a gift from the Father! "Power over all flesh" means, first, dominion over the whole human race. But it also means, most probably, authority over all creatures, for Christ "is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him" (1 Peter 3:22).

"All power in heaven and earth" has been given to Him (Matthew 28:18). Not only is He the "head of every man" (1 Corinthians 11:3), but the "head of all principality and power" (Colossians 2:10).

"As thou hast given him power over *all flesh*, that he should give eternal life to as *many as* thou hast given him." We must distinguish between Christ's universal authority and His narrower charge. Authority has been given Him over all; but out of this "all" is an

elect company, committed to Him as a charge. This was typified by Joseph of old; authority over *all* Egypt was conveyed to him by the king, but his *brethren* had a special

claim upon his affections. “The keys of heaven are in the hands of Christ; the salvation of every human soul is at His disposal” (Bishop Ryle). How blessed to rest upon this double truth — the universal dominion of Christ, His affection for His own. All has been put into the hands of our Savior, therefore the Devil himself cannot move except so far as Christ allows. This universal dominion has been bestowed upon Christ “that” (in order that) He may *give* eternal life to God’s elect. The elect were given to Christ by way of *reward* (Isaiah 53:10-12), and by way of *charge* (John 6:37; 18:9).

“And this is life eternal that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

There has been considerable difference of opinion as to what is meant by “this is eternal life.” We shall not canvass the various interpretations that have been given, rather shall we seek to indicate what we believe was our Lord’s meaning here. “This is life eternal,” more literally, “this is the eternal life — that,” etc. A parallel form of speech is found in John 3:19: “And this is the condemnation — that,” etc. In the words that follow in John 3:19 the *ground* and *way* of condemnation are stated — “light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” This helps us to arrive at the first meaning here: “This is the eternal life — that they might know thee,” etc. — this is the way to it. Again, in John 12:50 we read, “His commandment is — life everlasting” that is, the outward *means* of it. Once more, in 1 John 5:20, we read, “*This is* the true God and eternal life” — Christ is the *Author* of it. Taken by themselves the words of this verse might be understood as speaking of the characteristics and manifestations of “eternal life,” but the context would forbid this. Christ is here *amplifying* the *plea* of the previous verse. Thus: unless I am glorified, I cannot bestow eternal life; without My ascension the Holy Spirit will not come, and without Him there can be *no knowledge* of the Father and His Son, and so by consequence, no eternal life, for “knowing God” and “eternal life” are inseparable.

Therefore “this is eternal life — that they might know thee” etc., obviously signifies, This is the *way to*, the *means of* eternal life, namely, by the knowledge of God imparted by Jesus Christ.

“This is the eternal life, that they know thee” (literal rendering). The knowledge spoken of here is not speculative but practical, not theoretical but experimental, not intellectual but spiritual, not inactive but saving. That it is a saving knowledge, which is here in view is clear from the *double* object — God and Christ. He that knoweth God in Christ knoweth Him as His reconciled Father, and so resteth on and in Him. “And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee” (Psalm 9:10). The knowledge here spoken of presupposes a walk in harmony with it, produced by it:

“Hereby we do know *that we know him, if we keep his commandments*” (1 John 2:3).

How this strengthened the plea of the Savior here scarcely needs pointing out. What would bring more “glory” to the Father than that He should be known (trusted, loved, served) by those to whom the Son gave eternal life! “Eternal life” contains the essence of *all* blessing: “This is *the* promise that he hath promised us — eternal life” (1 John 2:25). Spiritual or eternal life consists in knowing, living on, having communion with, and enjoying endless satisfaction in the Triune God through the one Mediator.

“Know thee, the *only* true God.” Appeal is made to this by Unitarians in their horrible efforts to disprove the Godhead of the second and third persons of the Trinity. That Christ cannot be here denying the Deity of Himself and of the Spirit we well know from many other passages, but what did He mean by affirming that the Father is “the only true God”? We believe the answer is twofold: —

First, Christ was here *excluding the idols* of the Gentiles — false gods, el., 1 Thessalonians 1:9: — to denote that that Godhead is only true that is in the Father. The Son and the Spirit are not excluded because they are of the same essence with the Father. The Son and the Spirit are “true God,” not without, but in the Father. “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30); “the Father is in me, and I in him” (John 10:38): not divided in essence, but distinguished in

personality. In 1 John 5:20 the Son Himself is called “the only true God!” Which no more excludes the Father than John 17:3 excludes the Son. Many such exclusive statements are to be found in Scripture, that must be expounded by the analogy of faith. For example: “No one knoweth the Father, but the Son, and none knoweth the Son, but the Father” (Matthew 11:27); but this excludes not the Spirit, for He “searcheth the depths of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10). One person of the Trinity does not exclude the others. When Scripture insists there is no God but one, it simply denies that all others who are “*called gods*” are such.

Second, Christ was here speaking in view of the order and *economy* of salvation, for He had just mentioned the giving of “eternal life.” In the economy of salvation the Father is ever represented as *Supreme*, the One in whom the sovereign majesty of Deity resideth. The Son sustains the office of *Mediator*, and in *this* character He could rightly say, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28) In like manner, during the present dispensation, the Holy Spirit is the *Servant of the Godhead* (see Luke 4:17-23 and cf. John 16:13 and our remarks thereon). In the order of redemption the Father is the principal party representing the whole Godhead, because He is the Originator and Fountain of it.

“And Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” The connecting “*and*” gives plain warning that the Father, “the only true God” cannot be “known” apart from “Jesus Christ”! Just as the “only true God” is opposed to the vanities of the Gentiles, so is “Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent” to the blindness of the Jews! “Sent” has a threefold intimation and signification. It points to His Deity: “We believe that thou *camest forth from God*” (John 16:30). It refers to His incarnation:

“When the fullness of the *time was come*, *God sent forth His Son made of a woman*” (Galatians 4:4).

It also signified His office of Mediator and Redeemer. For this reason He is called “The apostle and high priest of our profession” (Hebrews 3:1), and apostle means the *sent* one. Jesus Christ is the great Ambassador to treat with us from God.

It is worthy of note that this is the only place in the New Testament where our Lord called Himself “Jesus Christ.” In so doing He affirmed that He, *Jesus* the Son of man, and Son of God was the only true *Christ* (Messiah): thereby He repudiated every false notion of the Messiah, as in the previous clause He had excluded every false god. It is very striking to observe how that in 1 John 5:1 we are told, Whosoever believeth that *Jesus is the Christ* is born of God,” while in 1 John 5:5 we read,

“Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that *Jesus is the Son of God?*”

Do you, dear reader, know the Father and the Son — the Father as revealed in and by Jesus Christ! If you do not, you have not eternal life.

“I have glorified thee on the earth” (John 17:4). Here is the next plea of the Savior: I have glorified Thee, do Thou now glorify Me. God has been glorified in creation (Psalm 19:1) and by His providences (Exodus 15:6-7, etc.); but to a superlative degree, in an altogether unique way, He had been glorified by the Son. Christ has glorified the Father in His person (Hebrews 1:3). He glorified Him by His miracles (Matthew 9:8, etc.). He glorified Him by His words, constantly ascribing all praise to Him (Matthew 11:25, etc.). But above all He had glorified Him by His holy life. The Savior was sent into the world as the Representative of His people, to render obedience to that law which they had violated (Galatians 4:4); and perfectly bad He in thought and word and deed discharged this duty. In Him — full of grace and truth — the disciples had beheld a moral glory possessed by none save Him who abode in the bosom of the Father. “I have glorified thee *on the earth*” — in the place where He had been so grievously dishonored.

In view of having glorified the Father on earth, the Son said “glorify thou me.”

“The more we examine the Gospel of John, the more we shall see One who speaks and acts as a Divine Person — one with the Father alone could do, but yet always as One who has taken the place of a servant, and takes nothing to Himself but *receives* all from His

Father. 'I have glorified thee: now glorify me.' What language of equality of nature and love! But He does not say, 'And now I will glorify myself.' He has taken the place of man to receive all, though it be a glory He had with the Father before the world was. This is of exquisite beauty. I add, it was out of this the enemy sought to seduce Him, in vain, in the wilderness" (Mr. Darby).

["I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" \(John 17:4\).](#)

Here is the *final plea* of the Savior for His glorification. When He entered this world, He affirmed, "Lo, I come *to do* thy will, O God" (Hebrews 10:7). At the age of twelve, He said, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's *business*?" (Luke 2:49). In John 4:34 He declared, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to *finish his work*." Now He says, "*I have finished* the work which thou gavest me to do." He anticipated by a few hours His cry from the Cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30). The Savior referred to His work on earth as though He had been already exalted to heaven. How evident it is all through His prayer that His *heavenly mediation* is in view — "Now I am no more in the world" (John 17:11)!

"I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." As the eternal Son He had, in the character of the faithful Servant, done what none other could do. He had performed the Father's will: He had delivered His message: He had not only taught but perfectly exemplified the truth. He had "finished transgression and brought in everlasting righteousness" (Daniel 9:24). He had put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. He had "restored that which He took not away" (Psalm 69:4). Thus had He glorified the Father upon earth and finished the work given Him to do. There was every reason then *why* He should be "glorified." Every moral attribute of Deity required it. Having endured the Cross, He was fully entitled to enter "the joy set before Him." Having poured out His soul unto death, it was but meet that the Father should "divide him a portion with the great" (Isaiah 53:12). Having glorified Him on earth, it was fitting that the Savior should be glorified in heaven.

“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).

Having presented the various pleas suited to His glorification, the Son now returns to His petition. The verse before us conducts us to a height which we have no means of scaling. All that we can do is to humbly ponder its words in the light of the context and parallel scriptures. When the Savior says, “glorify thou *me*” He speaks as *the Mediator*, as “Jesus Christ” (John 17:3). As Jesus Christ He had been humiliated; now, as Jesus Christ, He was to be glorified. The Father’s answer to *this* is seen in Acts 2: “This *Jesus* hath God raised up... let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made *that same Jesus*, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (verses 32, 36) — compare also Philippians 2:9-

But the glorification here must not be confined to His *humanity*, as the remainder of the verse shows. As the *eternal Son* He has humbled Himself (Philippians 2:6), and as *the Son* He has been exalted and magnified see Psalm 21:1-6; 110:1; Ephesians 1:17-23; Revelation 5:11-14.

That Christ *asked to be* “glorified,” demonstrated His perfections: not even as risen did He glorify Himself. In addition to the fact that His glorification had been promised and earned by Him, three reasons may be given *why* He asked for it. First, for the *comfort* of His apostles who were troubled over

His humiliation. Second, for our instruction: to teach us that suffering for God is the highway to glory. Third, for the *benefit* of His Church: Christ must be glorified before it could prosper. The example of the Savior here teaches that we should pray that the Father may be pleased to honor us by fitting and using us to lead men to a knowledge of the only true God through Jesus Christ, and to enable us, in our creature measure, to glorify Him on earth and to finish the work which He has given us to do.

The following questions are to help the student on the next section:

1. How many pleas does Christ here present on behalf of His own, verses 6,12?
2. Of whom is Christ speaking in verse 6?
3. In what senses were the elect “given” to Christ, verse 6?
4. What important truth is pointed in the “ands” of verse 8?
5. How harmonize verse 9 with Luke 23:34?
6. Why “Holy” Father, verse 11?
7. What is the unity of verse 12?

JOHN 17:6-12

CHRIST INTERCEDING (CONTINUED)

The following is an Analysis of the second section of John 17: —

1. What Christ had done for God's elect, verse 6.
2. The response of the elect, verses 6, 7.
3. The consequent assurance of the elect, verse 8.
4. The elect alone prayed for by the Mediator, verse 9.
5. Reasons why Christ prayed for the elect, verses 9-11.
6. Christ praying for their preservation and unity verse 11.
7. Christ's accompanying plea, verse 12.

John 17 is the sequel to chapter 13. In each the actions of our great High Priest are in view. But the services are different, both together giving us a full representation of our Advocate on high. In the 13th chapter He had, as it were, laid one hand on the defiled feet of His saints; here He lays the other hand on the throne of the Father, forming thus a chain of marvellous workmanship reaching from God to sinners. In the 13th chapter His body was girt, and He was stooping down towards our feet; here, His eyes are lifted up (John 17:1), and He is looking in the face of the Father. What that is asked for us, by One who fills up the whole distance between the bright throne of God and our defiled feet, can be denied? All must be granted — such an One is heard always. Thus we get the sufficiency and acceptability of the Advocate” (Mr. J. G. Bellett).

That order in which the Savior here presents His petitions, and the *pleas* by which He urges them, are deserving of the closest notice. The prayer has three main divisions: in John 17:1 to 5 He prays for *Himself*; in John 17:6 to 19 He prays for *the disciples* then alive: in John 17:20 to 26 He prays for those who should *believe*. In praying

for Himself, His own glorification, the great end in view is *the Father's* glory. In John 17:1

He says: “glorify thy Son, *that* thy Son also may glorify thee,” and in John 17:5 He adds: “glorify thou me with thine own self.” This, be it noted, is *before* He asks a single thing for His people. Just as in The disciples' prayer, “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name” was the *opening* petition, so here in “The Lord's Prayer” the Father's interests come first. Inseparably connected are the two things: the Father's glory and the Son's glory. In praying for Himself before His people He shows us that in *all* things He has the pre-eminence (Colossians 1:18).

In studying the different pleas for His own glorification, we find that they were seven in number, and this supplies us with the first of a most striking series of sevens which runs through this prayer. The various pleas were as follows:

First, because of His filial relationship with God — “Father,” John 17:1.

Second, because the appointed time for it had arrived — “The hour is come,” John 17:1.

Third, because authority over all flesh had been given Him by Divine appointment and promise, John 17:2.

Fourth, because His bestowal of eternal life on God's elect had also been promised Him, John 17:2.

Fifth, because in bestowing eternal life on the elect He would be bringing them to a knowledge of the Father, John 17:3.

Sixth, because He had glorified the Father on the earth, John 17:4.

Seventh, because He had finished the work which had been given Him to do, John 17:4. For these reasons He asks that His request be granted.

Ere passing from the first section of this prayer, attention should be called to the lovely manner in which the Son there kept before Him the glory of the Father.

First, He had said: “Father... glorify *thy* Son” (17:1), not “the Son”: He desired no glory for Himself apart from the Father!

Second, “*that thy* Son *also* may glorify thee” (John 17:1): not separately, but in perfect union.

Third, “As *thou* hast given him power over all flesh” (John 17:2): blessed is it to see the place which He gives the Father.

Fourth, “that he should give eternal life to as many as” — He redeems with His blood? No; but — “to as many as *thou* hast given him” (John 17:3)! Thus, again, does He refer all to the Father.

Fifth, “And this is life eternal that they might know *me*”? No; but — “that they might know *thee*, and Jesus Christ, whom *thou* hast sent” (John 17:3).

Sixth, “I have finished the work which *thou* hast given me to do” (John 17:4): nothing was done for self. He ascribes honor to the Father for originating and appointing that work!

Finally, when He prays to be glorified, it is touching to see how He puts it: “glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had before the world was”, No, no; but instead “with the glory which I had *with thee* before the world was”: not for a moment would He dissociate His own glory from His Father! Truly is this altogether Lovely One “fairer than the children of men.”

We have now completed the first main section of John 17, verses 1-5, where Christ is seen praying for Himself. In the second section, verses 6-19, He prays for the *living disciples*. This second section is also subdivided into two parts, though it is not easy to classify them. In verses 6 to 12 the fundamental reason is brought out as to *why* the Savior prays for His disciples and not for the world—because of their *relation* to Himself. Out of this grows the petition for their *preservation* — *the* essence of all intercession. In verses 13 to 19 the

Lord prays for His disciples as left here in the world, presenting their several needs as growing out of this. We shall confine ourselves now to the first subdivision.

While this prayer resolves itself into three divisions there is a most striking apparent *unity* about it. The substance of Christ's prayer for Himself is: Place Me in circumstances in which I may glorify Thee in the salvation of men. The substance of His prayer for the disciples is: Fit them for glorifying Thee in promoting the salvation of men, through prosecuting the work to which I have called them as My instrumental agents. The substance of His prayer for the whole company of the redeemed (John 17:20-26) is: Bring them to entire conformity to Thyself in mind, will and enjoyment, that Thou mayest be glorified to the uttermost by their being saved to the uttermost. Thus the glory of the Father is the paramount consideration from the beginning to the end. A close study of the details will fully bear this out. But though everything is subordinated by Christ to the Divine glory, yet the blessings asked for the apostles and the whole company of the redeemed are viewed not only in reference to the glory of the Father directly, but to the glory of the Son, in whom and by whom the Father was to be glorified. The plea for blessing them is that "I am glorified in them" (John 17:10), and the ultimate design is "that they may behold my glory" (John 17:24).

"The prayer of our Lord for His apostles, like the prayer for Himself, comprehends both petition and pleading. He asks blessings for them, and He states the grounds on which He asks these blessings for them. The transition at the beginning of the sixth verse is similar to that at the twentieth verse, though not so distinctly defined. There He says, 'I pray not for them alone,' i.e., the apostles (rather the entire company of disciples at that time, A.W.P.), 'but for them also which shall believe in me through their word.' Here He in effect says, 'I pray not for myself alone, but for the men to whom I have manifested thy name.'

"The great blessing which our Lord asks for the apostles is that they may be *one*, as the Father and the Son are; that is, that they may be united with Them as to mind and will, and aim and operation in the great work of glorifying God in the salvation of men. *That* is the ultimate object of His desire in reference to them; the other petitions

are for what is necessary in order to this. The blessings necessary to the obtaining of this blessing are two: First, *Conservation* — ‘Keep them through, or in, or in reference to, thine own name’; ‘Keep them from the evil one or the evil thing that is in the world, that they may be one, as we are.’ Then, second, *Consecration* — ‘Sanctify them through, or in reference to, thine own name’; all the rest is occupied with pleadings — most powerful and appropriate pleadings” (Mr. John Brown).

While it is true that in John 17:6 to 19 the Lord is praying directly and immediately for His *apostles*, it is clear to us that they are here viewed, as in the preceding chapters, in a *representative* character. Were this not the case, there would be *no place* at all in this prayer for all the others of His believing disciples at that time, for John 17:20 speaks only of those who were to believe at a later date. The careful student will note that Christ was most particular to *describe* the ones He here intercedes for in terms which are common to *all* believers. It is with this understanding that we shall now proceed with our exposition.

“I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me, and they have kept thy word” (John 17:6).

Four things are to be carefully noted in this and the following verses: the persons for whom Christ intercedes; the *characters* in which they are presented; the *petitions* offered on their behalf; and the *particular* pleas by which each separate petition is urged. It is to be noted that the Lord did not begin by asking for the blessing of His disciples; rather did He first *describe* the ones he was about to pray for: in John 17:6 to 10 it is *presentation*, in John 17:11 and 12 it is *supplication*. It is beautiful to see that as the Savior here comes before the Father as intercessor, He presents “His own” *along with Himself*. It reminds us of His word, spoken long before by the spirit of prophecy, “Behold I and the children whom the Lord hath given me” (Isaiah 8:18, quoted in Hebrews 2:13). It was the fulfillment of what had been so strikingly foreshadowed by the high priest of Israel:

“And Aaron shall bear the names of the *children of Israel* in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart when *he goeth in* unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually” (Exodus 28:29).

So here, when our great High Priest entered the presence of the Father, *He* bore our names on His heart before Him! That which made this possible was His own glorification, consequent upon His “finished work” (John 17:4, 5).

“I have manifested thy name unto *the men* which thou gavest me out of the world.” Here is the first proof that the Lord had more than the eleven apostles in view. He designedly employed language that was strictly applicable to *all* His believing people at that time. During His earthly life He had made known the Father’s name to far more than the Eleven. 1 Corinthians 15:6 speaks of the risen Savior being seen by “over five hundred brethren at *once*.” So, too, far more than the apostles had been given to Christ *out of the world; and again, a larger company than the apostles had “kept his word.” Three things were here mentioned by Christ to recommend to the Father these objects of His petition: they were acquainted with the Father’s name; they were the subjects of His distinguishing grace; they were obedient to His will. Thus the Lord Jesus spoke of what He had done, what the Father had done, and what the disciples had done.*

“I have *manifested thy name* unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world.” Herein Christ fulfilled that prophecy,

“I will *declare thy name* unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee” (Psalm 22:22).

To make known the Father’s name was to reveal Him, manifest His character, display His perfections. As we are told at the beginning of this Gospel, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, *he hath declared him.*” The Son alone was competent for this. Christ had manifested the Father’s perfections in His perfect life, wondrous miracles and sublime teaching. But only those who had been given Him by the Father were able to receive this manifestation. Christ has made known the Father to *all* the elect:

“I write unto you, *little children*, because *ye* have known the Father” (1 John 2:13).

So perfectly did Christ discharge this office that He could say,

“He that hath seen *me* hath seen the *Father*” (John 12:9).

“Thine they were, and thou gavest them me.” All creatures belong to the Father by creation (Hebrews 12:9), but this is not what is here in view. Christ is speaking of a *special* company which had been given to Him. The reference, then, is to the sovereign election of God, whereby He chose a definite number to be His “peculiar people” — His in a peculiar or special way. These were *eternally* His: “chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4); and by the immutability of His purpose of grace from John 11:29, they are *always* His. This plea was made by Christ to the Father not only for the urging of the petition which followed, but for the *comfort* of the disciples. Despised by Israel they might be, hated by men in general, the special objects of Satan’s enmity; yet were they the peculiar favourites of God. Again, this plea of Christ’s affords *us* instruction *in prayer*. *The more we discern the Father’s interests in us, the greater our confidence when we come to Him a prayer. What assurance would be ours if, when we approached the throne of grace, we realized that the Father’s heart had been set upon us from the beginning of all things!*

“And thou gavest them me.” Thine by foreordination; Mine by special donation.

“The acts of the three persons of the Trinity are commensurate; of the same sphere and latitude; those whom the Father chooseth, the Son redeemeth and the Spirit quickeneth. The Father loveth none but those which are given to Christ, and Christ taketh charge of none but those that are loved by the Father. Your election will be known by your interest in Christ, and your interest in Christ by the regeneration of the Spirit. All God’s flock are put into Christ’s hands, and He leaveth them in the care of the Spirit: ‘Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ’ (1 Peter 1:2). There is a chain of salvation; the

beginning is from the Father, the dispensation through the Son, the application by the Spirit; all cometh from the Father, and is conveyed to us through Christ by the Spirit” (Mr. Thos. Manton).

“Thou gavest them me.” The elect are given to Christ, first by way of reward:

“When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed... He shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. *Therefore* will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong” (Isaiah 53:10-12.)

“Ask *of me*, and I shall give thee the heathen tot thine *inheritance*, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession” (Psalm 2:8).

The elect were given to Christ, secondly, by the way of *charge*.

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise *cast out* [reject]... And this is the

Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should *lose nothing*, but should raise it up again at the last day” (John 6:37, 39).

The elect were intrusted to Christ to take care of. Thus the *faithfulness* of Christ to the Father is engaged on our behalf. If a single one of God’s elect were to perish, the glory of the perfect Servant would be tarnished for all eternity. How absolute, then, is our security!

“And they have kept thy word.” The last reference, no doubt, is to God’s *call*, which went forth through Christ. When these disciples heard that word of command, they rose up, left all, and followed Him. Moreover, they had *continued* with Him. When many “went back and walked no more with him,” the Savior said unto the Twelve, “Will ye also go away?” Their answer, through Peter, was

prompt and unwavering: To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:66-68); contrast verse 38. The Lord spoke here absolutely from the standpoint of their faith, no notice being taken of their failures to apprehend that Word. How beautiful, how blessed, to see our great High Priest, notwithstanding the feebleness of their faith and their frequent unbelief, presenting the disciples before the Father according to the perfections of *His own love* — that love which "imputeth no evil" (1 Corinthians 13:5). They had kept the Father's word, but O how imperfectly. But love notices not their defects, dwelling only upon their truth, submission and obedience! Satan is an accuser, and even speaks evil of believers; but Christ, our Advocate, takes our part, and ever speaks well of us. Thus is the highest commendation Christ can give His people: "They have kept thy word."

["Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of *thee*" \(John 17:7\).](#)

The Lord continues to speak in commendatory terms of His disciples. "These are wonderful words when we consider the character of the eleven men to whom they were applied. How weak was their faith!

How slender their knowledge! How shallow their spiritual attainments! How faint their hearts in the hour of danger! Yet a very little while after Jesus spoke these words they all forsook Him and fled, and one of them denied Him with an oath. No one, in short, can read the four Gospels with attention and fail to see that never had a great Master such weak servants as Jesus had in the eleven apostles. Yet these very servants were the men of whom the gracious Head of the church speaks here in high and honorable terms. The lesson before us is full of comfort and instruction. It is evident that the Lord sees far more in His believing people than they see in themselves, or than others see in them. The least degree of faith is very precious in His sight. Though it be no larger than a grain of mustard seed, it is a plant of heavenly growth, and makes a boundless difference between the possessors of it and the men of the world. The eleven apostles were weak and unstable as water; but they believed and loved their Master when millions refused to own Him. And the language of Him who declared that a cup of cold

water given in the name of a disciple should not lose its reward, shows plainly that their constancy was not forgotten” (Bishop Ryle).

It is blessed to note the *characters* in which Christ here presents the disciples to His Father.

“It is most comforting to find that all these glorious desires for the saints our Lord grounds simply on this: that they have received the Son’s testimony about the Father, and had believed surely in the Father’s love. How full of blessing it is to see that we are presented before God simply as believing that love! How surely does it tell us that the pleasure of our God is this: that we should know Him in love, know Him as the Father, know Him according to the words of Him who has come out from His bosom. This is joy and liberty. And it is indeed only as having seen God in love, seen the Father and heard the Father in Jesus, that makes us the family. It is not the graces *that* adorn us, or the services that we render, but simply that we *know the Father*. It is this which distinguishes the saint from the world, and gives him his standing, as here, in the presence of the Father” (Mr. J. G. Bellett).

“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).

The “for” which here introduces what follows explains the *all things* in the previous verse. The disciples had entered, by grace, into that of which the world was completely ignorant, namely, that the Father was the source of all that was given to the Son. Some “wondered” at His words and works; others, in their enmity, blasphemously attributed them to Satan. Not only had the disciples learnt that He came out from the Father, but they had perceived that the means (the “words”) of bringing them into such blessing were also of the Father. The Savior had treated them as “friends,” committing to them those intimate communications of grace which the Father gave to Him, and this that they might know the Divine relationship into which His wondrous love had brought them. Nor had this been in vain. Slow of heart they truly were (as, alas! are we), yet they *received* the truth, and receiving it they knew that He was the Son of

the Father's love. Thus does the Savior explain how souls are brought into such nearness to the Father.

It is instructive to note the *order* here: "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." How this makes manifest the fact that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). How plain is the lesson here taught us! If our faith is to be strengthened, deepened and increased, it can only be by our diligent attention to, prayerful meditation upon, and personal appropriation of the words of God! So, too, *knowledge*, spiritual knowledge — discernment and understanding — is the fruit of "receiving" God's words. It is to be noted that the initial "receiving" has preceded it. The "believing" comes last here, though the Lord Jesus admits no other faith than that which is based upon an intelligent acquaintance with His person — cf. Romans 10:13.

["I pray for them: I pray not for the world; but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine" \(John 17:9\).](#)

The world here is a general name for mankind in their fallen state. There is a "fashion of this world" (1 Corinthians 7:31), a common mould, according to which the characters of men are formed. There "is a course of this world" (Ephesians 2:2), in which all walk, except those who are on the narrow way" which leadeth unto life. All who have not been "transformed by the renewing of their minds" (Romans 12:2) are, as a matter of course, "conformed to this world." For the unbelieving, Christ prayed not:

"For whom He is the Propitiation, He is an Advocate; and for whom He died, He makes intercession, and for no others in a spiritual saving way." (Mr. John Gill).

"I pray not for the world." But how is this to be harmonized with the fact that while He was on the Cross the Savior did pray for His enemies — "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"? It is important that we should distinguish between the prayers of Christ as the perfect Man and the prayers of Christ as *Mediator*. There are several of the Psalms which plainly intimate that the Lord

Jesus prayed for His foes, but this was to show us that as a perfect Man, subject to that holy law which required each one to love his neighbor as himself, He harboured no revenge. He prayed for the ungodly in answer to His human duty, but not officially as the Mediator. So He taught His disciples,

“Love your enemies, bless them which curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

But here in John 17 Christ is seen as the great High Priest, therefore He prays only for “His own.”

“But for them which thou hast given me.” How this should bow our hearts in adoring worship! What thanksgivings it calls for! Oh what an inestimable privilege to be one of the objects of *Christ's* intercession. Millions passed by unprayed for by Him; but those who belong to the “*little flock*” (Luke 12:32) are held up by Him before the throne of grace. One of the disciples asked Him,

“Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?” (John 14:22).

So may we ask, “How is it that Thou wilt *pray for us*, and not for the world?” Others more accomplished, with more pleasing dispositions, who daily put us to shame in many ways, *left out*, and we taken in! The finite mind, yea the renewed mind, can discover no answer. All that we can say is, it was the *sovereign grace* of the sovereign God who singled us out to be the objects of His distinguishing favors. Let the world call it *selfishness* in us if they will, but let us express in praise to God our profoundest gratitude, and seek to live as becometh His elect ones. Let us also follow the example of Christ here and manifest our greatest love for those who have been chosen out of the world.

“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all, *especially* unto them who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

But do Christ's words in John 17:9 forbid us to pray for the wicked? No, indeed. Christ's mediatorial acts as our great High Priest are not our standard of conduct; but in His walk as the perfect Man He *has* left us "an example." On the Cross He prayed for His *enemies*. So we are commanded to pray for our enemies; and it is our duty to pray for all men. See Romans 10:1; 1 Timothy 2:1.

"For they are thine." In the previous verses the Savior had *described the characters* of those for whom He was about to intercede, now He *presents the reasons why* He prayed for them. The first is, "for they are thine." Though given to the Mediator by grant — both as a reward and as a charge — they are still the Father's; that is, He has not relinquished His right and property over them. As a father who giveth his daughter in marriage to another does not lose his fatherly propriety, so those given to Christ are still the Father's "for *they* (in sharp contrast from 'the world') are thine" fixes the meaning of "thine they were" in John 17:6 — "thine" not by creation, but by *election*. "The world" *also* belongs to the Father by creation! What a powerful plea was this; the ones for whom Christ was about to pray were *the Father's*, therefore, for His own glory and because of His affection for that which belonged to Him, He would keep them.

["And all mine are thine, and thine are mine" \(John 17:10\).](#)

Here is the second motive for His request: the interests of the Father and the Son could not be separated; what belonged to the one belonged to the other. Indubitable proof of His absolute Deity; it is because the Savior is one with the Father that They have rights and interests no less boundless than common. The Holy Spirit is not here mentioned, though He is certainly not to be excluded. As Mr. Manton well said, "They are the Father's children, Christ's members, and the Spirit's temples."

["And I am glorified in them" \(John 17:10\).](#)

This was His third plea. Since the Son was the supreme Object of the Father's affections, then this was another reason for Him preserving those in whom the Savior was glorified. What a place for us! To be the subjects of this mutual affection of the Father and the Son! The world knew Him not, Israel received Him not; but these

disciples by their faith, love, and obedience, glorified Him; therefore did He make special intercession for them. And how imensely practical is this for us! The more we glorify Christ, the more confidence shall we have of His intercession for us —

“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32).

“And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we” (John 17:11).

What a touching plea is this! The Savior reminds the Father that the disciples would be deprived of His personal care as present with them, and this would expose them the more to the world. He had been their Guide, their Guardian, their ever-present and all-sufficient Friend. And how He had borne with their infirmities, upheld them in weakness, protected them from evil! But now He was leaving them, going to the Father, and into *His* hands He now commits His own charge.

“But these are in the world.” God could take each saint to Heaven the very day he believed (as He did the dying thief) did He so please; but for reasons of His own He leaves them here for a shorter or longer season. He does so for His own wise purposes:

“I pray not that thou shouldest take them out *of* the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John 17:15).

He gets more glory by leaving us here. As a quaint old writer said, “It is more wonderful to maintain a candle in a bucket of water than in a lantern.” God’s power is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). God sent Jacob and his family into Egypt that He might there exhibit before his descendants His mighty power on Pharaoh. We are left here that we might be tried:

“Be not slothful, but followers of them who through *faith and patience* inherit the promises” (Hebrews 6:12).

There is a measure of sufferings appointed (1 Thessalonians 3:3), and each of us must receive his share. Another reason why we are left in the world is to make us appreciate the more the coming glory. The roughness of our pilgrim path makes us yearn for rest; our present strangership deepens our desire to be at Home.

“Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me.” The term “holy” is here descriptive of character. The root meaning of the word is *separation*, and as applied to God it signifies that He is far removed from evil. But this is simply negative. God is not only elevated high above all impurity, but He is absolutely, essentially pure in Himself. That God is *holy* signifies that He is lifted high above all finite creatures.

“Who shall not fear thee O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy” (Revelation 15:4).

The titles of God in Scripture are suited to the requests made of Him:

“Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace” (2 Thessalonians 3:16);

“Now the God of *patience* and *consolation* grant you to be likeminded one toward another” (Romans 15:5),

where the apostle prays for brotherly forbearance among the saints. The *connection* in which the Savior here addresses “the holy Father” is striking. He was asking for the preservation and unification of His disciples, and He requests the Father to do this for them in strict accord with His holy nature. The Lord would have us know with whom we have to do; He would have us pray for an ever-deepening abhorrence of sin — “Ye that love the Lord, hate evil” (Psalm 97:10).

“Keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me.” How this brings out the *value* Christ sets upon us and the deep

interest He has in us! About to return to the Father on high, He asks the Father that He will preserve those so dear to His heart, those for whom He bled and died. He hands them over to the care of the very One who had first given them to Him. It was as though He said: I know *the Father's* heart! He will take good care of them! And why was it, why is it, that we *are* so highly esteemed by Christ? Clearly not for any excellency which there is, intrinsically, in us. The answer must be, Because we are *the Father's love gift to the Son*. It is striking to observe that just *seven* times in this chapter Christ speaks of those whom the Father had "given" Him — see verses 2, 6 (twice) 9, 11, 12, 24. In John 3:16 we learn of the Father's love *to us*; here in John 17 we behold the Father's love *to Christ*. God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son; and He so loved His Son as to give Him a people who, conformed to His image, shall through all eternity, show forth His praises. Marvellous fact! We are the Father's love gift to His Son. Who then can estimate the value which Christ puts upon us! The *worth* of a gift depends upon the one who made it; its intrinsic value may be paltry, but when made by a loved one it is highly prized for *his* sake. So we, utterly unworthy in ourselves, are ever regarded by Christ in all the inestimable worth of that love of the Father which gave us to Him! Thus does the eye of our great High Priest ever look upon us with affection and delight. How this ought to endear Him to our hearts!

Little wonder then, in view of what has just been before us, that the *first* thing the Savior asked for on behalf of those given to Him by the Father was their *preservation*. He was leaving them in a hostile world:

"He asks that they may be kept from evil, from being overcome by temptation, from being crushed by persecution, from every device and assault of the Devil" (Bishop Ryle).

But some find a difficulty here, why should Christ pray for their continuance in grace? Was not such a request meaningless, useless? Had He not affirmed that no sheep of His *should* ever perish! Ah, how futile for the finite mind to *reason* about spiritual and Divine things! But does Scripture throw any light on this apparently needless petition of Christ? Yes; it shows us, throughout, that God's *decrees* do not render void the use of *means*; yea, many of God's

decrees are accomplished through the employment of instrumental agencies; and one of these chief means is prayer! It is the old nature, still in the Christian, which makes needful the intercession of Christ!

“That they may be *one*, as we.” This refers not to a manifestation of ecclesiastical oneness; rather is it a oneness of personal knowledge of and fellowship with the Father and the Son, and therefore oneness in spirit, affection, and aim. It is a oneness which is the outcome not of human agreement or effort, but of Divine power, through making each and all “partakers of the divine *nature*.” Has this request of the Savior been granted? It has. In Acts 4:32 we read, “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of *one* soul.” And is it not still true that among the *real* people of God, despite all their minor differences, there is still a real, a fundamental, and a blessed, underlying unity — they all believe God’s Word is inspired, inerrant, of final authority; they *all* believe in the glorious person and rest upon the all-sufficient sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ; they *all* aim at the glory of God; they *all* pant for the time when they shall be forever with the Lord. “*One as we*” shows that the union here prayed for is a Divine, spiritual, intimate, invisible, unbreakable one!

“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name; those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled” (John 17:12).

“The Lord, then, in committing His own to the Father, whom in that name He was keeping whilst here, speaks of having kept them safe, save that one who was doomed to destruction. Awful lesson! that even the constant presence of Jesus fails to win where the Spirit brings not the truth home to the conscience. Does this enfeeble Scripture? On the contrary, the Scripture was thereby fulfilled. Chapter 13 referred to Judas that none should be stumbled by such an end of his ministry. Here it is rather that none should therefore doubt the Lord’s care. He was not one of those given to Christ by the Father, though called to be an apostle; of those so given He had lost none. Judas was an apparent, not a real, exception, as he was not a child of God but the son of perdition. To see the awful end of so heartless a course would only give more force to His works of grace

who, if He left the world for the Father, was bringing them into His own associations before the Father” (Bible Treasury).

“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name; those that thou gavest me I have kept.” None but a Divine person could “keep” them. He had preserved them from the machinations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. None had apostatized; all had “*continued*” with Him in the day of His humiliation (Luke 22:28).

“And none of them is lost, but the son of perdition.” Note carefully, He did not say, “*except* the son of perdition,” rather, “*but* the son of perdition.” He belonged *not* to “them,” that is, to those who had been given Him by the Father. The disjunctive participle is used here, as frequently in Scripture, to *contrast those* belonging to two *different* classes. Compare Matthew 12:4; Acts 27:22; Revelation 21:27. Not one of them given to Christ can or will be lost. “Father, *I will* that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am.”

“That the scripture might be fulfilled.” *The* reference is to Psalms 41 and The presence of the traitor among the apostles was one of the many proofs that the Lord Jesus was the promised Messiah. Four reasons may be suggested for Christ referring to Judas here. To show there was no failure in discharging the trust which the Father had committed to Him; to assure the disciples of this, so that their faith might not be staggered; to demonstrate that Christ had not been deceived by Judas; to declare God’s hand and counsel in it — “that the scripture might be fulfilled.”

The following questions are to prepare the student for our next lesson: —

1. What is meant by “my joy fulfilled in themselves,” verse 13?
2. What is meant by “they are not of the world,” verse 14?
3. Why are believers left here in the world, verse 15?
4. Why the repetition of verse 14 in verse 16?

5. What is the “sanctification” of verse 17?
6. What is the meaning of verse 18?
7. How did Christ “sanctify himself,” verse 19?

JOHN 17:13-19

CHRIST INTERCEDING (CONTINUED)

The following is an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us:

1. Christ's desire for His disciples' joy, verse 13.
2. The disciples hated by the world, verse 14.
3. Christ's prayer for their preservation, verse 15.
4. The disciples identified with Christ in separation from the world, verse 16.
5. Christ's prayer for their sanctification, verse 17.
6. The disciples sent into the world as Christ was, verse 18.
7. Christ's provision for their sanctification, verse 19.

One chief reason why the Lord Jesus uttered audibly the wonderful prayer recorded in John 17 in the hearing of His apostles was that they might be *instructed* and *comforted* thereby, and not the apostles only, but all His people since then. This is clear from verse 13: "And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world that (in order that) they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves."

"He addresses His Father as taking His own place in departing, and giving His disciples theirs (that is, His own), with regard to the Father and to the world, after He had gone away to be glorified with the Father. The whole chapter is essentially putting the disciples in His own place, after laying the ground for it in His own glorifying and work. It is, save the last verses, His place on earth. As He was divinely in heaven, and showed a divine, heavenly character on earth, so (He being glorified as man in heaven) they, united with Him, were in turn to display the same. Hence we have first the place

He personally takes, and the Work which entitled them to it” (Mr. J. N. Darby).

The above quotation (rather clumsily worded) will repay careful thought. It is to be noted that the final ground on which the Savior asked to be glorified was not His own personal perfections, not His essential oneness with the Father, but, instead, that *Work* which He completed here below. In this He presented a valid and sure title *for us* to join Him in the same heavenly blessedness, and also laid the foundation for *us* taking *His* place here below. Mark how this is emphasized all through:

First, “I have given *them* the words which thou gavest *me*” (John 17:8).

Second, “that *they* might have *my* joy fulfilled in themselves” (John 17:13).

Third, “*they* are not of the world, *even as I* am not of the world” (John 17:16).

Fourth, “As thou hast *sent me* into the world, even so have I *sent them*

into the world” (John 17:18).

Fifth, “I sanctify *myself* that *they also* might be *sanctified*” (John 17:19).

Sixth, “the glory which thou gavest me, I have given *them*” (John 17:22).

Seventh, “that the love wherewith thou hast loved *me* may be *in them*” (John 17:26).

What a place! What a privilege! What an honor! Amazing the grace and the love which bestowed it.

Wondrous is the position we occupy, the place which is ours — the same place of blessing which *Christ* enjoyed *when* He was here. It is true that we are blest through Christ, but that is not all the truth, nor

by any means the most striking part of it: we are also blest *with* Him. The love wherewith the Father had loved the Son, should be in the disciples. They should enter into the consciousness of it, and thus would *His* joy be fulfilled in them. It is *this* that we are called to, the enjoyment in this world of the love which Christ knew here below: His Father's love. What was *His* delight? Was it from the world? Surely not. He was *in* the world, but never *of* it; His joy was from and in the Father. And He has communicated to us the *means* which ministers to this joy: "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me" (John 17:8).

The above aspect of truth is further developed in John 17 in the sevenfold *way in which the Lord Jesus has identified us with Himself*.

First there is identity in *fellowship*: "As thou hast given him power over all flesh that he should give eternal life (Himself, see 1 John 1:1) to as many as thou hast given him" (John 17:2).

Second, identity of *spirit* and *aim*: "that they may be one as we" (John 17:11).

Third, identity in *separation*: "they are not of the world *even* as I am not of the world" (John 17:14).

Fourth, identity of *mission*, "*as* thou hast sent me into the world, *even so* have I sent them into the world" (John 17:18).

Fifth, identity in *fellowship*: "*As* thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that *they also* may be one in us" (John 17:21).

Sixth, identity of imparted glory: "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them" (John 17:22).

Seventh, identity in *love*: "that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:23).

Another thing which it is blessed to behold is that, in this Prayer the Lord Jesus *renders an account* of His work to the Father, and this in *seven* particulars:

First, He had glorified the Father on earth (John 17:4).

Second, He had finished the work which had been given Him to do (John 17:4).

Third, He had manifested the Father's name unto His own (John 17:6).

Fourth, He had given them the Father's words (John 17:8, 14).

Fifth, He had kept them as a shepherd keeps his sheep (John 17:12).

Sixth, He had sent them forth into the world (John 17:18).

Seventh, He had given them the glory which the Father had bestowed upon Him (John 17:22) — mark the “I have” in each verse. How striking it is to note that in His work among the saints everything was in connection with *the Father*: it was the Father He had glorified; it was the Father's name He had manifested, etc.

The portion which is now to engage our attention is the second division of the second section of this Prayer. In the first section, John 17:1-5, the Savior prays for Himself. In the second section, John 17:6-19, He prays for His disciples. From John 17:6 to verse 12, He is principally engaged in presenting to the Father the persons of those for whom He was about to intercede, interspersing two petitions for their preservation and unification. In John 17:13-19, He continues His supplications on their behalf, verse 13 being the transitional point between the two sub-divisions.

“And now I come to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves”
(John 17:13).

Though it be by no means easy to trace the connection between this verse and those which precede and follow, yet the meaning of its contents is clear and blessed. The Savior would not only have His people safe in eternity, but He desires them to be happy here and now: He would have them enter into His joy. It was for this reason He had uttered this Prayer while He was here upon earth. How this

reveals the affections of our great High Priest! He might have offered this Prayer in silence to the Father, so that we had known nothing of its gracious and comforting details. But that would not have satisfied the heart of the Lord Jesus. He spoke audibly so that the apostles might hear Him, and He has caused it to be written down too, so that we also might know of His deep interest in us. How it behoves us, then, to prayerfully read and re-read and meditate frequently upon what is here recorded for our peace, our edification, our happiness!

“And now come I to Thee.” The commentators are divided as to whether these words signify, And now I *address* Thee in prayer, or, And now I am leaving the earth and *returning* to Thee. Probably both senses are to be combined. The whole of this Prayer was in view of His almost immediate departure from the world and His ascension on high. But it is more than this. As pointed out in the introductory remarks of our first chapter on John 17, what we have here is also a *pattern, a sample* we might almost say, of the intercession which the Mediator is now making at God’s right hand. This Prayer was first uttered on earth, therefore the “now come I to thee” would signify, I supplicate before Thy throne of grace. This Prayer is now being repeated in Heaven (whether audibly or not we cannot say), and for that, Christ had to return to the Father, hence “now come I to thee” would have this additional force.

In the verse before us there is both declaration and supplication. The Savior is pressing His suit on behalf of those whom the Father had given Him. In view of His own departure, and their condition in the world, He justifies His earnestness in prayer for them. I am leaving them, therefore I must make provision for them. I approach Thee on their behalf; I am speaking aloud for their benefit; I have let them know that I am to be restored to that glory which I had with Thee before the world was; I have given them the assurance that they are the objects of Thy distinguished favor, and that they are Thy love gift to Me; I have let them see how deeply concerned I am about their preservation and unification — and all of this that “they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.”

“These things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.” In the immediate application to the apostles,

we understand our Lord's reference to be: In view of their deep dejection, I have sought to turn their sorrow into joy, by permitting them to hear Me commending them and their cause, with such cheerful confidence, to My Father and their Father. But this by no means exhausts the scope of His words here. There was a more specific reference in His mind, something which was designed for the instruction and consolation of all His people.

“That they might have *my joy* fulfilled in themselves.” *What joy?* The joy that He had at that very time, the joy which had been the portion of His heart all through those thirty-three years while He tabernacled among men. It was the joy of *fellowship with the Father*. It was *this* which He had before Him when, speaking by the Spirit of prophecy long before, He said:

“The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel; my reins also instruct me in the night seasons. I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is *glad*, and my glory *rejoiceth*” (Psalm 16:5-9).

Though a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, yet “the joy of the Lord” was His “strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). It was to this He referred when He said to the disciples “I have meat to eat (*a satisfying portion*) that ye know not of” (John 4:32).

“That they might have *my joy* fulfilled in themselves.” *This* was what the heart of the Savior craved for His people, and for this He had made full provision. In this Prayer, Christ makes it known that *we* have been brought into the same position before the Father that *He* had held, and just in proportion as we consciously enter into it, *His joy* is fulfilled in us. As the result of His finished work every barrier has been removed, the veil has been rent, a “new and living way” has been opened for us, and therefore have we access into “the holiest of all,” and are invited to “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:19-22). His Father is our Father; His *relation* to God — that of Son — is now ours; for

“because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6).

Therefore does the Holy Spirit tell us,

“Truly *our fellowship is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, THAT *your joy may be full*” (1 John 1:3-4).

It is blessed to mark how solicitous the Savior was over the happiness of His people. When He departed He sent the Holy Spirit to be their Comforter. In His Paschal Discourse He said,

“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and *your joy* might be full” (John 15:11).

In His instructions He bade them:

“Ask and ye shall receive, that *your joy* may be full” (John 16:24).

A miserable Christian is therefore a self-contradiction. A joyless Christian is one who is out of communion with the Father: other objects have engaged his heart, and in consequence he walks not in the light of His countenance. What is the remedy? To confess our sins to God; to put away everything which hinders our communion with Him; to make regular use of the means which He has graciously provided for the maintenance of our joy the Word, prayer, meditation, the daily occupation of the heart with Christ, dwelling constantly on the glorious future that awaits us, proclaiming to others the unsearchable riches of Christ.

“I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them” (John 17:14).

The connection of this with the previous verse is easy to perceive. In John 17:8, the Lord had said, “I have given unto them the *words* which thou gavest me”: this means more than that He had expounded to them the Old Testament Scriptures. The reference, we believe, is to what we read of in Isaiah 50:4.

“The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning. He wakeneth mine ear to hear, as the learned.”

Each morning had the perfect Servant waited upon the Father for His message or messages for each day, and those messages had been faithfully delivered. But here He says: “I have given them thy *word*.” It was the testimony of what the Father was — *that* was the source of *His* joy, and now would be of *theirs*. “*And the world hath hated them*”:

“In proportion as they had their joy in God, would it be realized how far the world was away from Him, and it would hate them as not of it. The light would bring its shadows, and they would be identified with Him in sorrow and joy alike” (Numerical Bible).

“*And the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world*” (John 17:14).

The inhabitants of this world are fully under the dominion of its “prince,” and led by him are wholly taken up with the things of time and sense, namely, all that is “not of the Father” (1 John 2:16). Therefore do the men of the world bear an implacable hatred to Christ and His people, *because* “they are not of the world.” Once Christians *were* “of the world,” they followed its “course,” and were fully “conformed” to its policy, its principles, its aims, But grace has delivered them from this “present evil world” (Galatians 1:4), so *that* they now have new affections, new interests, a new Master. They have been separated from the world, and in proportion as they follow Christ their lives *condemn* the world (Hebrews 11:7). Therefore does the world hate them: it secretly plots against them, it inwardly curses them, it says all manner of evil against them, it opposes them, it rejoices when any evil befalls them.

“Even as I am not of the world.” “The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven” (1 Corinthians 15:47). Christ never was of the world. He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, *separate* from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26). So He declared to the Jews:

“Ye are from beneath; I am from above; ye are of this world; I am not of this world” (John 8:23).

But *how* is it also true of His people that *they* are “not of the world?” Because,

“If any man be in Christ he is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

In consequence of this, he is a “partaker of the heavenly calling” (Hebrews 3:1), his “citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20), he has been begotten unto an heavenly inheritance (1 Peter 1:3-5). In view of this, he is but a “stranger and pilgrim” here, journeying to his Home on High.

“I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” This is another argument or plea — their danger — by which the Savior urges His petition for their preservation. They were being left by Him in the midst of an hostile world, therefore were they in sore need of protection. They no longer had anything in common. They could have no fellowship with the world: they could not take part in its worship: they could not further its plans. Therefore would they be despised, boycotted, persecuted.

“They also that render evil for good are mine adversaries; *because* I follow the thing that is good” (Psalm 38:20).

“For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a *just* man and an *holy*” (Mark 6:20).

“Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you” (1 John 3:13).

The Savior knowing that the world would not change, therefore besought the Father on behalf of those whom He left here.

“I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John 17:15).

“This also He speaks, most assuredly, for the instruction of the hearers of His prayer. He thus admits that it might be reasonable *to* ask this: on the one hand, it must appear to the disciples a good and desirable thing, while on the other hand, by de-dining such a prayer intimates that it would be the reverse... So, also, contrary to the deep desire which all future disciples would feel: a desire which is not to be compared, however, with that of Elijah, oppressed by despondency (1 Kings 19:4), nor to be regarded as the desire of lethargy, but such as the apostle expressed in Philippians 1:23. In their first conversion and joy almost all more or less feel a desire to be at once with Him above. And often we think concerning others, Well for them now to die, for they would be safe in Heaven! But the Lord knows better, and we should learn a better lesson from His words on this occasion. *He* asked not for this, then ask it not *thyself*, either for *thyself* or for others! Reply to thine own desires to depart, nevertheless, it is *better*, for it is more *needful*, to remain in the flesh and in the world. Content *thyself* with praying for thy *preservation*, until thou hast fulfilled all thy work” (Stier). Bishop Ryle has pointed out that, “Three of the only prayers not granted to saints, recorded in Scripture, are the prayers, of Moses, Elijah, Jonah *to be* ‘taken out of the world.’” How very striking!

“I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.” In John 17:11 Christ had said, “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me,” here He amplifies for the benefit of His disciples — “keep them from *the evil*.” *The* Greek word for “evil” may be translated either “evil one” or “*evil* thing”: probably both are included.

“Keep them from the author of evil, and from evil itself; from sin, from the power and snares of the Devil, from destruction, until their course is run. Satan is the author; the world is the bait; sin is the hook. Keep them from the Devil that they may not come under his power; from the world, that they may not be deceived by its allurements” (Mr. Manton).

A spiritual victory over it is therefore better than a total exemption from it. Thus the Lord again teaches us here how to pray: not to be delivered from the world, but from its evil. That Christ asked the

Father to “*keep us*” shows that it is not within our power to keep ourselves: “kept by *the power of God* through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5).

God has many ways of keeping us, but they may be reduced to two: by His Spirit or His providence. The one is inward, the other is outward. By the power of the Holy Spirit the evil within us is restrained: “I also *withheld* thee from sinning against me” (Genesis 20:6). By the Spirit grace is imparted to us: “I will put my fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from me” (Jeremiah 32:40). By His providences He removes occasions to and objects of sin:

“For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; *lest* the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity” (Psalm 125:3).

“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 Corinthians 10:13).

The fact that we are unable to keep ourselves should work in us the spirit of dependency. Our daily confession should be,

“O our God, wilt thou not judge them? For *we* have *no* might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee” (2 Chronicles 20:12);

our daily prayer should be, “*Lead us not* into temptation, but *deliver* us from evil.” The fact that God is able and willing to keep us should inspire confidence, deepen assurance, and fill us with praise: “I know whom I have believed, *and am persuaded* that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” Just as the diver, encased in his watertight suit is surrounded by water, but preserved from it, so the believer, living in this evil world is kept by the mighty power of God, His arm encircling us.

“They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:16).

The same words are found in John 17:14, but in a different connection: there He was stating the chief reason why the world hated them; here He is advancing a reason *why* He asked the Father to keep them from evil — because “they are not of the world.” The truth of this verse applies in a sevenfold way:

First, Christians have a different *standing* from those who belong to the world: their standing is in Adam, ours in Christ; they are under condemnation, we “accepted in the beloved.”

Second, we possess a different *nature*: theirs is born of the flesh, ours “of the Spirit”; theirs is evil and corrupt, ours holy and Divine.

Third, we serve a different *Master*: they are of their father the Devil, and the desires of their father they do; we serve the Lord Christ.

Fourth, we have a different *aim*: theirs is to please self, ours to glorify God.

Fifth, we have a different *citizenship*: theirs is on earth; ours in heaven.

Sixth, we live a different *life*: far below the standard set before us it is true: nevertheless, no Christian (in the general tenor of his conduct) goes to the same excess of sin as does the worldling.

Seventh, we have a different *destiny*: theirs is the Lake of Fire, ours is the Father’s House on High. The “world” is a system built up away from God, and from it we have been taken, delivered, separated. The Lord grant needed grace to us all that we may *manifest* this in our daily walk.

“They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” “It is a fact and not an obligation, though the firmest ground of obligation. They *are* not of the world, not merely they ought not to be; whilst if they are not, it is grievous inconsistency to seem to be of the world. It is false to our relationship for we are the Father’s and given to the rejected Son who has done with the world; and if it be said that this is to bring in everlasting and heavenly relationships now be it so:

this is exactly what Christianity means in principle and practice. It is faith possessing Christ who gives the believer His own place of relationship and acceptance on high, as well as of testimony apart from His rejection by the world below; which He has to make good in words and ways, in spirit and conversation, whilst waiting for the Lord... That the world improves for Christ or His own is as false as that the flesh can ameliorate. It is the light become darkness! It is the natural man knowing enough to forego what is shameless, and invested with a religious veil; it is the world essentially occupying itself with the things of God in profession, but in reality of the world where common sense suffices for its services and its worship, and the mind of Christ would be altogether inapplicable. What a triumph to the enemy! It is just what we see in Christendom; and nothing irritates so much as the refusal so to walk, worship or serve.

“It does not matter how loudly you denounce or protest: if you join the world, they will not mind your words, and you are faithless to Christ. Nor does it matter how much grace and patience you show: if you keep apart as not of the world, you incur enmity and hatred, and contempt. A disciple is not above his Master, but every one that is perfected shall be as his Master. To act as not of the world is felt to be its strongest condemnation! And no meekness or love can make it palatable. Nor does God intend that it should, for He means it as part of the testimony to His Son. And as the world neither receives nor understands the Father’s Word, so it hates those who have and act on that Word” (Bible Treasury).

“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

On no detail in this Prayer, perhaps, has there been wider difference of opinion than on this verse. Those who regard John 17:6-19 as containing our Lord’s intercession for the apostles only (among whom is Mr. John Brown as well as several other eminent expositors), understand this to mean: Consecrate them (as were Israel’s priests of old) to the important mission that lies before them, i.e., by anointing them with the Holy Spirit. But against this view there are, in our judgment, insuperable objections. Not only is it, we think, abundantly clear, that the Savior was here praying for *all* His people, but the preposition used in this verse precludes such a

thought: it is “Sanctify them *through [by]* thy truth.” Had it been a matter of setting apart unto ministerial duties it would have been “Sanctify them *for* (unto) thy truth.”

The subject of *sanctification* is a deeply important one; one on which much ignorance prevails, and we are tempted to turn aside and discuss it at some length; but this would be beside the scope of our present work; suffice it now if we offer a bare outline. First of all, the word “*sanctify*” (so “*holy*”) has one uniform meaning throughout Scripture, namely, *to set apart*; usually but not always, some one or some thing set apart unto God for His use. The word never has reference to inward cleansing, still less to the eradication of the carnal nature. Take its usage in John 17:19: “For their sake I *sanctify myself*.” This can *only* mean, For their sakes *I set Myself apart*.

In Jude 1, we read of those who are “*sanctified by God the Father*.” The reference there is to His eternal predestination of the elect when He set them apart in Christ from our doomed race. In Hebrews 10:10 (cf. Hebrews 13:12), we read of being sanctified “through the offering of the body *of Jesus Christ*, once for all.” The reference there is to our being set apart by ransom from those who are the captives of Satan. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and 1 Peter 1:2, we read of “*sanctification of the Spirit*.” The reference there is to the new birth, when He sets us apart from those who are dead in trespasses and sins. Here in John 17:17 sanctification is “*by the truth*,” that is, by the written Word of God. The sanctification of the Father, of Jesus Christ, and of the Spirit, each have to do with *that* which is *positional* and *absolute*, admitting of no degrees, concerned not with a gradual process, but with what is complete and final. But “*sanctification by the truth*” is *practical* and *progressive*. Just so far as I walk according to God’s Word shall I be *separated* from evil. Thus we discover a most intimate connection between these two petitions of Christ for His own: “keep them from the evil” (John 17:15), “Sanctify them by thy truth” (John 17:17): the former is secured by the latter. So also we may perceive the close relation of John 17:17 to verse 16: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” — now “sanctify them by thy truth”: because they are *not* of the world, cause them to walk in separation from it.

“Thy word is truth.” The written Word is (not “contains”) unadulterated truth, because its Author cannot lie. In it there is no error. Because the Word is God’s truth it is of final authority. By it every thing is to be tested. By it our thoughts are to be formed and our conduct is to be regulated. Just because God’s Word is *truth* it *sanctifies* those who obey it:

“according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth *which is after godliness*” (Titus 1:1).

If then the Word is truth what a high value we should put upon it. If it is by the truth we are sanctified, how dearly we should prize it. How solemn too is the converse: if truth *separates* from evil, error *conducts into* evil. It was so at the beginning: it was believing the Devil’s lie which plunged our race into sin and death! Then beware of error: as poison is to the body, so is error to the soul. Shun those who *deny* any part of God’s truth as you would a deadly plague: “Take heed *what ye hear*” (Mark 4:24).

“As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world” (John 17:18).

Wonderful statement is this, anticipatory of what He says in John 20:21: “as my Father hath sent me, so send I you.” How evident that Christ has given us *His* place — His place of acceptance on high, His place of witness here below! But those who witness here below have a special character: it is as those belonging *to Heaven* that we are called upon to bear testimony in the world. Christ did not belong to the world, He was the Heavenly One come down to earth; so we, as identified with Him, as partakers of the heavenly calling, are now commissioned to represent Him here below. What a proof that we *are not* “of the world?” It is only as first “chosen out of the world,” that we can be “sent into the world!” That this is not limited to the apostles is clear from 1 John 4:17, which is speaking of *all* believers — “as he is, so are we in this world.”

“As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I sent them into the world.” Christ was sent here to reveal the Father, to show forth His glory, so we are sent into the world to show forth Christ’s glory,

which is to the glory of the Father. Christ was sent here on an errand of mercy, to seek and to save that which was lost; so we are here as His agents, His instruments, to preach His gospel, to tell a world dead in sin of One who is mighty to save. Christ was here “full of grace and truth”; so we are to commend our Master by gracious and faithful lives. Christ was here as the Holy One in the midst of a scene of corruption; so we are to be the “salt of the earth.” Christ was here as the Light; so we are to shine as lights in this dark place. Christ was furnished with the Spirit, who anointed, filled, and led Him; so we have received the Spirit, to anoint, fill and guide us. Christ was ever about His Father’s business, ’pleasing not Himself, but ever making the most of His brief sojourn here below; so we are to redeem the time, to be instant in season and out of season, always abounding in the work of the Lord. It is thus that Christ is “glorified” *in us* (John 17:10). What a dignity this gives to our calling!

“As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.” The connection of this verse with the previous one is most significant. There the Savior had prayed the Father to sanctify by the truth those that He was leaving behind; here He adds, I have sent them into the world. This is a plea to support His petition. It was as though He had said: “Father, Those for whom I am interceding are to be My representatives here below, as I have been *Thy* Representative; therefore separate them from the pollutions of this evil world, fill them with the spirit of devotedness, that they may be examples of holy living.” It is to be noted that when Christ first sent forth the Twelve, He instructed them:

“Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:5-6).

But now He sends them into the “world,” to preach the Gospel to every creature. The chosen nation does not occupy the place of distinctive blessing during this dispensation; Christianity bears a witness to Jew and Gentile alike.

“And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth” (John 17:19).

“This is the second plea advanced by Christ in support of His petition in John 17:17’ He had urged their commission, now His own merit. Justice might interpose and say, ‘They are unworthy’; but Christ saith, ‘I sanctify myself for them.’ He dealth with the Father not only by way of entreaty, but merit; and applieth Himself not only to the goodwill of the Father, as His beloved One, but to His justice, as One that was ready to lay down His life as a satisfaction” (Mr. Manton).

“And for their sakes I sanctify myself.” Just as there is a *double* meaning to the “hour” (John 17:1),

and “I come to thee” (John 17:13) etc., so is there to “I sanctify myself.” Its first and most obvious reference is to *the Cross*. I, the great High Priest, set apart Myself for My people — I devote Myself as the Lamb of God to be slain for them, see Hebrews 10:14. In saying He did this that *they* might be “sanctified by the truth,” He affirmed that His own official sanctification was the *meritorious cause* of their being sanctified practically. In declaring that He sanctified Himself, the Lord Jesus called attention to how *freely* and *voluntarily* He entered upon His sacrificial service. There was no necessity or compulsion: He laid down His life of Himself (John 10:18). This He did for “*their* sakes,” namely, the whole company of God’s elect — another sure proof that *all* His people are in view throughout this Prayer! “Christ also loved *the church*, and gave himself for it; that he might *sanctify* and cleanse it” (Ephesians 5:25, 26)! “Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate” (Hebrews 13:12)!

“And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.” The deeper and ultimate reference of Christ in these words was to His being set apart on High as the glorified Man, the object of His people’s affections, contemplation, and worship. “He set Himself apart as a heavenly man above the heavens, a glorified man in the glory, in order that all truth might shine forth in Him, in His Person, raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father — all that the Father is, being thus displayed in Him; the testimony of divine righteousness, of divine love, of divine power; the perfect model of that which man was according to the counsels of God, and as the expression of His power morally and in

glory — the image of the invisible God, the Son, and in glory. Jesus set Himself apart, in this place, in order that the disciples might be sanctified by the communication to them of what He was; for this communication was the truth, and created them in the image of that which it revealed. So that it was the Father’s glory revealed by Him on earth, and the glory into which He had ascended as man; for this is the complete result — the illustration in glory of the way in which He had set Himself apart for God, but on behalf of His own. Thus there is not only the forming and governing of the thoughts by the Word, setting us apart morally to God, but the blessed affections flowing from our having this truth in the Person of Christ, our hearts connected with Him in grace” (Mr. J. N. Darby).

The following questions are to prepare the reader for our dosing study on John 17: —

1. How many series of sevens can you find in John 17?
2. What is the unity prayed for in verse 21?
3. What is the “glory” of verse 22?
4. What is the unity of verse 23?
5. What is the connection of verse 24?
6. Why “righteous” Father, verse 25?
7. What is the meaning of verse 26?

JOHN 17:20-26

CHRIST INTERCEDING (CONCLUDED)

The following is an Analysis of the dosing section of John 17: —

1. Christ's heart embracing all the redeemed, verse 20.
2. Christ's prayer for their unity, verse 21.
3. Christ's imparting to them His glory, verse 22.
4. Christ and His saints manifested in glory, verse 23.
5. Christ yearning for us to be with Himself, verse 24.
6. Christ contrasting the world from His own, verse 25.
7. Christ assuring us of the Father's love, verse 26.

We have now arrived at the dosing section of this wonderful Prayer, a section which supplies a glorious climax to all that has gone before. In it our Lord gives the gracious assurance that He was here praying not for the apostles only, nor simply for the entire company of those who had followed Him while He was here on earth, but for *all* His people:

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe in me through their word” (John 17:20).

It is not that the Savior now begins to present *separate* petitions for *another* company than those prayed for in the preceding verses, but that those who were to believe, all through the generations that should follow, are here *linked with* the first Christians.

Seven things Christ asked the Father for the whole company of His redeemed.

First, He prayed for their *preservation*: “Holy Father, *keep* through thine own name those whom thou hast given me” (John 17:11).

Second, for their *jubilation*: “that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves” (John 17:13). Third, for their *emancipation* from evil: “that thou shouldst keep them *from the evil*” (John 17:15).

Fourth, for their sanctification: “*sanctify* them by thy truth” (John 17:17).

Fifth, for their *unification*: “that they all may be one” (John 17:21).

Sixth, for their *association* with Himself: “that they also, whom thou hast given me, be *with me* where I am” (John 17:24).

Seventh, for their gratification: “*that they may behold my glory*” (John 17:24).

A careful analysis of this Prayer reveals the fact that just as the Lord urged the one petition which He made for Himself by *seven* pleas, so He supported the *seven* petitions for His people by *seven* pleas,

First, He asked the Father to preserve, sanctify and glorify His people, because they were the Father’s love-gift to the Son; see John 17:9: this was an appeal to the Father’s love for *Him*.

Second, because of the Father’s personal interest in them, see John 17:9, 10. What a mighty plea was this: “they are thine” — Thine elect, Thy children; therefore undertake for them!

Third, because His own glory was connected with them, John 17:10: Mine honor and glory are infinitely dear to Thee, and what glory have I in the world save what comes from My redeemed! These are they who show forth My praises here below! were they to perish, were they to apostatize, where would My honor be? Note how the Savior presses this again at the end of John 17:21 and in verse 23.

Fourth, because He was leaving them: He pleads their desolation, and asks the Father to make it up to them in another way.

Fifth, because He was leaving them “in the world,” see John 17:11, 15: consider, O Father, *where I* am leaving them: it is a wicked, polluting place — then protect them for My sake.

Sixth, the world hated them, see John 17:14: they are surrounded by bitter enemies, and urgently need Thy protection.

Seventh, because He set Himself apart (died) for their sakes, see verse 19: therefore, let not My costly sacrifice be in vain!

It is also to be observed that in this Prayer believers are contemplated in a sevenfold *relation to the world*.

First, they are given to Christ out of the world, John 17:6.

Second, they are left in the world, John 17:11. **Third**, they are not of the world, John 17:14. **Fourth**, they are hated by the world, John 17:14.

Fifth, they are kept from the evil in the world, John 17:15.

Sixth, they are sent into the world, John 17:18.

Seventh, they will yet be manifested in glorified unity before the world, John 17:23.

There are *seven* “gifts” referred to in this chapter: four of which are bestowed upon the Mediator, and three upon His people.

First, Christ has been given universal “power” or dominion (John 17:2).

Second, He was given a “work” to do (John 17:4).

Third, *He was given a “people” to save* (John 17:6).

Fourth, He has been given a richly-merited “glory” (John 17:22).

Fifth, we have been given “eternal life” (John 17:2).

Sixth, we have been given the Father’s “word” (John 17:8).

Seventh, we have been given the “glory” which the Father gave to the Son (John 17:22).

Though verses 20-26 form a clearly-defined separate section of John 17, yet are they so closely connected with the previous sections that the perfect unity of the whole is apparent. That which is *distinctive* about these closing verses is the *glorification* of Christ’s people. The Lord looks forward to the blessed consummation, while tracing the several steps or stages which lead up to it. Just as it was with the Head Himself, so is it with His members: in His own case, His impending *sufferings* merged into His *glorification* (John 17:1, 4), so after speaking of the afflictions which His people would suffer while in the world (John 17:14-19), He turns now to *their* glorification (John 17:22, 24). Thus did He fill out His “I am glorified in them” (John 17:10) — nothing more being said of them entering the kingdom of God through much tribulation.

The position which John 17:20-26 occupy in this Prayer is the key to their interpretation. They are found at the end of it. This of itself is sufficient to indicate the scope of its contents. In the previous sections the Lord Jesus had prayed for His people according to their needs while they were here in the world. But now He looks forward to the time when they shall no more be in the world; when, instead, they shall be where He now is. Therefore does He pray that they may be unified, glorified, and satisfied. This will come before us in detail in the course of our exposition.

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word” (John 17:20).

Up to this point the Lord had referred specifically only to the body of disciples alive at that time, but now He lets us know that He was here praying for *all* Christians. The “neither pray I for these alone” takes in *all* the petitions and pleas contained in John 17:6 to 19; “but for them *also*” intimates that not only does He hereby appropriate to all future disciples what He had just said of and asked for the living disciples of that day, but also that *they*, as well as we, were included in all that follows. What honor did the Lord here put upon individual believers: *their* names are in Christ’s will or testament; *they* are bound up in the same bundle of life with the apostles. Just as David,

when about to die, prayed not only for Solomon his successor, but also for all the people, so Christ not only prayed for the apostles, to whom was committed the government of the church after His departure, but for all believers unto the end of the age.

“Neither pray I for these alone.” How this reveals Christ’s love for *us!* He thought of us before we had our being: He provided for us before we were born! As parents provide for their children’s children yet unborn, so did the Lord Jesus remember *future* believers, as well as those of the first generation. Christ foresaw that the Gospel would prevail, notwithstanding the world’s hatred, and that numbers would yield themselves to the obedience of faith; therefore, to show that *they* had a place in His heart, He names them in this His testament. It was Esau’s complaint, “Hast thou but one blessing, O my father?” when he came too late, and Jacob had already carried away the blessing. But *we* were not born too late to receive the blessing of Christ’s prayers. He had regard to us even then; therefore, each born-again-soul can say, “He prayed for me”! “Who can reckon up the numbers which have been saved? Who can say how many more will be brought to swell the dimensions of the one flock, ere Christian testimony shall have attained its predestined consummation? Till then the full tale of those for whom the Lord prayed will not be disclosed” (Mr. C. E. Stuart). As this wondrous Prayer stretches forward into eternity, only in eternity will it be fully understood.

“But for them also which shall believe on me through their word.” Note three things: the persons prayed for; the mark by which they are identified faith in Christ; the ground and warrant of their faith — the Word. Once again (cf. John 17:9) the Lord makes it known that believers, and believers only, have an interest in His mediatorial intercessions. Christ still confines Himself to the elect! He does not pray for all men, whether they believe or no.

“His prayers on earth do but explain the virtue and extent of His sacrifice. He sueth out what He purchased, and His intercession in heaven is but a representation of His merit; both are acts of the same office. Partly because it is not for the honor of Christ that *His* prayers should fall to the ground: ‘I know that thou hearest me always’ (John 11:42). Shall the Son of God’s love plead in vain; and

urge His merit and not succeed? Then farewell the sureness and firmness of our comfort. Christ's prayers *would* fall to the ground if He should pray for them that shall never believe" (Mr. Manton).

The *description* here given of those who *do* have an interest in Christ's intercession is their *faith* in Him. *This* is the fundamental mark of their identification. He mentions not their love, their obedience, their steadfastness (though these *are* necessary in their place), but their faith. Wherever our participation of the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection are spoken of, the one thing named is *faith*. Why? Because this is a grace which compels us to look *outside* of ourselves to *Him!* Faith is the great essential, for faith is the mother of obedience and the other graces. But, mark it is no vague and undefined faith: "which shall believe *on me.*" To believe in Christ is to have confidence in and to rely upon Him; it is to trust Him, to rest upon Him.

The *ground* and *warrant* of our faith is "their word," that is, the word of the apostles.

"Before the apostles fell asleep, they, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, embodied in the books of the New Testament their doctrine and its evidence, gave an account of what they had taught, and of the miraculous works which had proved that they *were* taught of God. In these writings they *still* continue to testify the Son. The apostles alone are '*God's ambassadors*' in the strict sense of that word. They alone stand 'in Christ's stead' (2 Corinthians 5:20). They had 'the mind of Christ' in a sense peculiar to themselves; and that mind is in *their writings*. 'Their sound is gone out into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.' Romans 10:18." (Mr. J. Brown).

It is only through the Word that we believe in Christ (Romans 10:14, 17).

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which *shall* believe in me through their word." This is the more blessed if we bear in mind the circumstances under which these words were uttered. The public ministry of Christ was now over, and those who believed on Him, in comparison with those who believed not, were few indeed. And now He was to be put to a criminal's death, and the faith of His

disciples, already severely tried, would be made to tremble in the balance. How blessed then to listen to these words of His; He was not discouraged; He knew that the corn of wheat, which was to fall into the ground and die, *would* bring forth much fruit; like Abraham of old, He “staggered not at the promise of God (that He should have a ‘Seed’ that would satisfy him) through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.” He looked to the future, from things seen to things unseen, and beheld them who were yet to swell the numbers of His “little flock.”

“This was the ‘joy set before him’ (Hebrews 12:2), and ‘these things he spake in the world,’ in the presence of His apostles, ‘that they might have his joy fulfilled in themselves’ (John 17:13). How well fitted was His cheerful confidence to re-assure their failing spirits — to revive their all-but-expiring: hopes! And how must the recollection of this Prayer have delighted them amid their painful yet joyous labors, when He successfully employed them to ‘gather to Him His saints, those with whom He had made covenant by sacrifice,’ Psalm 50:51” (Mr. J. Brown).

“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21).

Upon this verse we write with some reserve, not being at all sure of the *nature* of the *unity* here prayed for by Christ. In 17: 11 He had asked for the oneness of all His people who were on earth at that time, here He adds to them those who were afterwards to believe — “that they *all* may be one.” In John 17:11 His request was that His people “may be one as we,” here that “*they all* may be one as thou, Father, art *in* me, and I in thee, that they also may be one *in* us.” It seems that a *mystical* union is in view here. But who is competent to *define* the *manner* in which the Father is in the Son and the Son *in* the Father! No doubt one reason why the Savior mentioned the *unity* of His people so frequently in this Prayer (John 17:11, 21, 22, 23) was to intimate that the middle wall of partition which had for so long divided Jews from the Gentiles was on the point of being broken down, and that now He would “make in himself of twain *one new man*” (Ephesians 2:15).

“That the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” This is what presents a real difficulty to the writer. The previous part of the verse seems to speak of the *mystical* union which binds believers together; but the last clause shows that it is one that shall powerfully affect the world. It is clear then the unity here prayed for by the Lord is yet to be *manifested* upon the earth. But it is equally clear that this manifestation is still *future*, for Christ is here speaking of those which *were* to believe on Him (John 17:20), and now asks, “that *they all* may be one.”

“That the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” It is to be carefully noted Christ *did not* here pray that the result of the manifested unity of His people should be that “the world may *believe in me*,” but “that the world may believe that thou hast *sent me*.” These two things are widely different. By the “world” is here meant, the world of the ungodly. But unregenerate men are never brought to believe in Christ by any *external displays* of Divine power and goodness — the benevolent miracles wrought by Him clearly prove this. Nothing but the *Word applied by the Spirit* ever quickened sinners into newness of life.

“And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them”
(John 17:22).

Christ here speaks of a “glory” which the Father had given to Him. Clearly, this is not His *essential* glory, which He possessed as the eternal Son, as co-equal with the Father; which glory He never relinquished. Nor is it the visible and external glory which He laid aside when He took the Servant form (Philippians 2:6, 7), when He “who was rich,” for our sakes became “poor,” which glory He had asked to be restored to Him again (John 17:5). Rather is it that “glory” which He *acquired as* the incarnate One, as the reward for His perfect work here on earth. It is to this that Isaiah referred when he said, “Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he hath poured out his soul unto death” (Isaiah 53:12). An inheritance has been given Him (Hebrews 1:2), and this He will share with His own, for, by wondrous grace, we are “joint-heirs” with Christ (Romans 8:17).

But what is meant by “the glory which thou gavest me I *have* given them”? The Lord is speaking from the standpoint of the Divine decrees, and thus “callesth those things which be not as though they were” (Romans 4:17). It is parallel with Romans 8:30: “Whom he justified, them he also glorified” — not “will glorify.” So absolutely certain *is* our future glorification *that* it is spoken of as a thing already accomplished. But though the actual bestowment of the glory be yet future, it is presented for faith to lay hold of and enjoy even now, for

“*faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen*” (Hebrews 11:1).

“That they may be one, even as we are one” (verse 22). Verse 22 opens with the word “And,” and what follows explains what the Lord had said in the previous verse. The union referred to is *the consequence* of “glory given” to us — “the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; *that* (in order that) they may be one, even as we are one”! Our spiritual union is begun now, but it only attains its full fruition in the life to come. That this oneness *results from* Christ’s bestowal on us of His acquired glory proves that it is no man-made unity about which we hear so much talk and see so little evidence these days!

“I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me” (John 17:23).

Here is further evidence that the unity for which our Lord prayed in John 17:21 is one that is to be manifested in *the future*, for John 17:22 and 23 follow without any break. The being “made perfect in one” is to have its realization at the return of Christ for His saints:

“Till we all come in *the unity of the faith*, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a *perfect man*, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

“God having provided some better thing for us (New Testament saints), that they (Old Testament saints) without us should not *be made perfect*” (Hebrews 11:40).

It is then that Christ will “present it to himself a glorious church... holy and without blemish” (Ephesians verse 27). Then will there be perfect oneness in faith, knowledge, love, holiness, glory.

“That the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” When God’s elect have all been gathered together in one (John 11:52), when the glory which Christ received from the Father has been imparted to them, when they shall have been made perfect in one, then shall the world have such a clear demonstration of God’s power, grace and love toward His people, they shall *know* that the One who died to make this glorious union possible was the sent One of the Father, and that they had been loved by the Father as had the Son, for

“When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him *in glory*” (Colossians 3:4);

then

“he shall come to be glorified in his saints and admired in all them that believe... in that day” (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

“And hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” As one has rightly said, “This expression is stupendous — God loveth the saints as He loveth Christ.” Mr. Manton points out that “The ‘as’ is a note of casuality as well as similitude. He loveth us because He loved Christ, therefore it is said, ‘He hath made us accepted in the Beloved’. (Ephesians 1:6). The ground of all that love God beareth to us is for Christ’s sake. We are chosen in Him as the Head of the elect (Ephesians 1:4), pardoned, sanctified, glorified, in and through Him. All these benefits and fruits of God’s love are procured by Christ’s merit. Three chief ends are accomplished thereby. First, it makes the more for them *the freeness of His grace* that the reason why He loveth us is to be found outside of ourselves. Second, it makes for His *own glory*: God could not love us with honor to Himself if His wisdom had not found out this way of loving us in

Christ: there was a double prejudice against us — our corrupt nature was loathed by His holiness, our transgressions provoked a quarrel with His justice. Third, it makes for *our comfort*, for if God should love us for our own sakes it would be a very imperfect love, our graces being so weak, and our services so stained.”

The particle “as” also signifies a similitude and likeness.

First, there is likeness in the *grounds* of it. The Father loveth Christ as His *Son*, so He loveth us as His *sons* (1 John 3:1). Again; the Father loveth Christ as His *Image*, He being “the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person” (Hebrews 1:3); so He loveth the saints, who are by grace renewed after His image (Colossians 3:10).

Second, there is a likeness in the *properties* of it. He loves Christ *tenderly*; so us — “as *dear children*” (Ephesians 5:1): He loves Christ *eternally*: so us — “I have loved thee with an *everlasting love*” (Jeremiah 31:3). He loves Christ *unchangeably*: so us — see Malachi 3:6.

Third, there is a likeness in the *fruits* of it. In the intimacies of communion: John 5:30, cf. 15:15. In the bestowal of spiritual gifts: John 3:35, cf. 1 Corinthians 3:22, 23. In reward: Psalm 2:7, 8, cf. Revelation 2:26. What a stay for our poor hearts is this! What comfort when hated by the world, to know that the Father loved us as the Son! What a glorious theme for our daily meditation! What cause for adoring worship!

“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me” (John 17:24).

As we have meditated upon the different verses of this profound chapter the words of the Psalmist have occurred to us again and again:

“Such knowledge too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it” (Psalm 139:6).

How pertinently do they apply to the lofty point which we have now reached! This 24th verse may well be regarded is the climax of this wonderful Prayer. Once more, the Redeemer says, “Father,” for He is suing for a child’s portion for each of His people; it is not simply wages, such as a servant receives from his master, but an inheritance such as children receive from their parents — the inheritance being the Father’s House, where the Savior now is. Here for the first time in this prayer Christ says “I will.” It was a word of authority, becoming Him who was God as well as man. He speaks of this as His right, on account of His *purchase* and of the *covenant* transactions between the Father and the Son concerning those given to Him. “I will” comported with the *authority* (John 17:2) which the Father has given Him over all flesh and the glory into which He has entered (John 17:5, 22). Or again, this “I will,” uttered just before His death, may be regarded as His “testament” — this was the legacy which He bequeathed to us: Heaven is ours, an inheritance left us by Christ!

“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am.” What comfort is here! What sweeter words for *meditation* than these of Christ? What *assurance* they breathe: not one of the elect shall fail to enter Heaven! What joy is here:

“In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11).

The queen of Sheba said,

“Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom” (1 Kings 10:8).

They that shall stand before the Lord and see His glory are much more happy. How this reveals to us the heart of the Savior: He will not be satisfied till He has all His blood-bought ones in His presence — “for ever with the Lord.” For this He is coming personally to take us to be with Himself:

“I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3).

“That they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me.”

“It is not on the one hand that which is personal from everlasting to everlasting, beyond creature ken, that in the Son which I presume none really knows nor can, save the Father who is not said to reveal Him. Neither is it on the other hand the glory given to the blessed Lord which is to be manifested even to the world in that day, in which glory we are to be manifested along with Him. Here it is proper to Himself on high, yet given Him by the Father, as we are in His perfect favor to behold it: a far higher thing than any glory shared along with us, and which the Lord, reckoning on unselfish affections Divinely formed in us, looks for our valuing accordingly as more blessed in beholding Him thus than in aught conferred in ourselves. It is a joy for us alone, wholly outside and above the world, and given because the Father loved Him before its foundation. None but the Eternal could be thus glorified, but it is the secret glory which none but His own are permitted to contemplate — ‘blest answer to reproach and shame’ — not the public glory in which every eye shall see Him. Nothing less than that meets His desire for us. How truly even now our hearts can say that He is worthy? (Bible Treasury).

“For thou lovest me before the foundation of the world”
(John 17:24).

This is mentioned as the reason why the Father had given Him this glory. And how it supplies us with a standard for measurement — the glory which has been conferred upon our blessed Savior is commensurate with the everlasting love which the Father had for Him! What a glory must it be! And O the privilege, the honor, the bliss of beholding it. How this should make us yearn for the time when we shall gaze upon His resplendent glory!

“O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee; but I have known thee” (John 17:25).

It is not easy to determine the precise relation which the last two verses of John 17 bear to the preceding ones. If their words be attentively considered, they will be seen to express no desire and to

ask for no blessing, nor do they contain any plea to enforce the previous petitions. With Mr. Manton we are inclined to say,

“It is a part of Christ’s supplication; He had made His will and testament, and now allegeth the equity of it.”

Thus we understand the “*O righteous Father*” here to have a double force. First, God is not only merciful, but just, in glorifying the elect; His grace reigns through righteousness (Romans 5:21). It expressed the Savior’s confidence in the *justice* of the Father that He would do all things well.

“He was asking for what *He* was entitled to according to the stipulation of the eternal covenant. *Justice* required that His requests should be granted.” (Mr. John Brown).

The words “O righteous Father” are also to be connected with what follows — “the world hath not known thee.” This is very solemn. Christ not only left the world without His intercession, but He turned it over to the justice of the Father. Not only did Divine *righteousness* bestow heavenly glory on the elect, but Divine *righteousness* refuses to bestow it on the unbelieving world. “The world hath not known thee.” therein lies their guilt —

“Because that which *may be known* of God is manifest to them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are *without excuse*” (Romans 1:19, 20).

“O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee; but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.”

“The Lord draws the line definitely between the world and His own, and makes it turn not on rejecting Himself but on ignoring His Father. Here, therefore, it is a question of judgment in result, however grace may tarry and entreat; and therefore He says, ‘Righteous Father,’ not ‘Holy Father,’ as in John 17:11 where He asks Him to keep those in His name, as He had done whilst with

them. Now He sets forth not the lawlessness of the world, not its murderous hatred of Himself or of His disciples, nor yet of the grace and truth revealed in the Gospel, nor of the corruptions of Christianity and the church, which we are sure lay naked and open before His all-seeing eyes, but that on the one side the world knew not the Father, and on the other that the Son did, as the disciples that the Father sent the Son: words simply and briefly said, but how solemn in Lord here linking us with Himself — “I have known... these character and issues!” (Bible Treasury).

How blessed to see the have known?

“And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:26).

Here the Lord briefly sums up what He had done and would still do for His disciples — make known the Father unto them. He returns at the end to what He had said at the first, see verse 6. The I “will declare it” is not to be limited; true, Christ is now, by the Spirit, revealing the Father, but He will continue so to do throughout eternity. Then He states *why* He is the Declarer of the Father’s name “*that* [in order that] the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

“Where Christ is known as the Father’s sent One, the deepest blessing and the highest privileges are even now given, and not merely what awaits the saints at Christ’s coming. If ever there was one capable of estimating another, it was the Son in respect of the Father; and His name, the expression of what He was, with equal competency He made known to us. He had done it on earth to the disciples; He would do so from heaven whither He was going; and this that He might give them and us, the consciousness of the same love of the Father which rested ever on Himself here below. As if to cut off the not unnatural hesitation of the disciples He added the blessed guarantee of His own being in them, their life. For they could understand that, if they lived of His life, and could be somehow as He before the Father, the Father might love them as Him. This is just what He does give and secure by identification

with them, or rather as He puts it, ‘and I in them.’ Christ is all and in all.” (Bible Treasury).

“And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it; that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may he in them, and I in them.” How striking to note that *love*, not eternal life, or faith, or even glory, is the last word here:

“And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three, but *the greatest of these is love*” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

But let it be particularly observed that the love of the Father dwelleth in us only through the mediation of the Son, hence the final words, “and I in them,” cf. John 17:23. Again, how blessed the conjunction here: Christ in us, the love of the Father in us, by the power of the *Holy Spirit*,

“the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by *the Holy Spirit*” (Romans 5:5)!

Suitable close was this. The section began with,

“having loved his own which were in the world, he *loved* them unto the end” (John 13:1), and it closes with “that *the love* wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them!” In the genial warmth and glorious radiance of that love shall we bask throughout eternity.

The following questions are to prepare the student for our next lesson:

1. What type was fulfilled in verse 1?
2. What is suggested by the “garden,” verse 1?
3. Why is there no reference here to His agony?
4. What made them fall to the ground, verse 6?
5. Why did Christ repeat His question, verse 7?

6. In what character did Christ speak at the end of verse 8?
7. What important practical truth is exemplified in verse 11?

JOHN 18:1-11

CHRIST IN THE GARDEN

Below is an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. Jesus and His disciples cross the Cedron, verse 1.
2. Judas' knowledge of this place of retirement, verse 2.
3. Judas conducting the Lord's enemies there, verse 3.
4. Christ's challenge and their response, verses 4, 5.
5. Christ's power and their lack of discernment evidenced, verses 6, 7.
6. Christ protecting His own, verses 8, 9.
7. Peter's rashness and Christ's rebuke, verses 10, 11.

The eighteenth chapter begins a new section of our Gospel. Chapter 1 is introductory in its character; 2 to 12 record our Lord's ministry in the world; 13 to 17 show Him alone with His disciples, preparing them for His departure; 18 to 21 is the closing division, giving us that which attended His death and resurrection. Here, too, everything is in perfect accord with the distinctive character of John's delineation of Christ. The note struck here is in quite a different key from the one heard at the end of the Synoptics. That which is prominent in the closing scenes of the fourth Gospel is not the *sufferings* of the Savior, but the lofty *dignity* and Divine *glory* of the God-man.

“As the last section (13 to 17) involved His death, it must take place. He has given in His record to Him who sent Him, whose counsels had determined before what was to be done, and whose prophets showed before that Christ should suffer (Acts 2:23; Acts 3:18; Acts 4:28); and now that must be which makes all these assertions true. Without these two chapters (18, 19), therefore, none of the precious

things which have thrilled the heart in the previous chapters could be possible; nay, more, none of His own assertions as to what He would be and do, of giving eternal life, of having any of the world, of coming again for them, of sending the Holy Spirit, of preparing a place for them, of having them in the glory with Him, or of having that glory at all; there would be no assembly of God, no restoration of Israel, no gathering of the nations, no millennium, no new heavens and new earth, no adjustment in righteousness of the ‘creation of God’ of which He is the beginning, no display of grace, no salvation, no revelation of the Father — all these and much more were contingent on His death and resurrection. Without these all things in this book drop out and leave a blank, the blackness of darkness” (Mr. M. Taylor).

John 18 opens with an account of the Savior and His disciples entering the Garden, but in recording what took place there nowhere is the presiding hand of the Holy Spirit more evident. Nothing is said of His taking Peter and James and John into its deeper recesses, that they might “watch with him.” Nothing is said of His there praying to the Father. Nothing is said of His falling upon His face, Of His awful agony, of the bloody sweat, of the angel appearing to strengthen Him. Perfectly in place in the other Gospels, they are passed over here as unsuited to the picture which John was inspired to paint. In their place other details are supplied — most appropriate and striking — which are not found in the Synoptics.

“Into that Garden, hallowed by so many associations, the Lord entered, with the Eleven; and there took place the Agony related in the Synoptics, but wholly passed over by John. Yet *he* was very near the Lord, being one of the three taken apart from the rest by Christ, and asked to watch with Him. The rest were told to sit down a little way off from the Master. If any of the Evangelists then could have written with authority of that solemn time *John* was the one best fitted to do it. Yet he is the one who omits all reference to it! It might be thought that what the others had written was sufficient. Why, then, did he describe so minutely circumstances connected with the Lord’s apprehension! The special line of his Gospel, presenting the Lord as a Divine Person, will alone explain this. As Son of God incarnate he presents Him, and not as the suffering Son of man. We

shall learn, then, from him that which none of the others mention, though Matthew was present with Him, how the Lord's personal presence at first over-awed Judas and the company with that traitor" (Mr. C. E. Smart).

In each of the Synoptics, as the end of His path drew near, we find the Savior speaking, again and again, of what He was to suffer at the hands of men; how that He would be scourged and spat upon, be shamefully treated by Jew and Gentile alike, ending with His crucifixion, burial and resurrection. But here in John, that which is seen engaging His thoughts in the closing hours was His *return to the Father* (see John 13:1; 14:2; 16:5; 17:5). And everything is in perfect accord with this. Here in the Garden, instead of Christ falling to the ground before the Father, we behold those who came to arrest the Savior falling to the ground before Him! Nowhere does the perfect supremacy of the Lord Jesus shine forth more gloriously: even to the band of soldiers He utters a *command*, and the disciples are allowed to go unmolested.

["When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron" \(John 18:1\).](#)

The "these words" refer to the paschal Discourse and the High Priestly prayer which have engaged our attention in the previous chapters. Having delivered His *prophetic message*, He now prepares to go forth to His *priestly work*. The "Garden" is the same one mentioned in the other Gospels, though here the Holy Spirit significantly omits its name — Gethsemane. In its place, He mentions the "brook Cedron," identical with "Kidron," its Hebrew name, which means "dark waters" — emblematic of that black stream through which He was about to pass. The Cedron was on the east side of the city, dividing Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives (Josephus). It was on the west side of the city that He was crucified: thus did the Son of Righteousness complete His atoning circuit!

What, we may ask, was our Lord's design and purpose in entering the "Garden" at this time?

First, in accord with the typical teaching of the Day of Atonement. The victim for the *sin-offering* (unlike the burnt offering) was

destroyed “*without* (outside) the camp” (see Leviticus 4:12, 21; Leviticus 16:27); so the Lord Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin *outside* of Jerusalem:

“Wherefore Jesus also that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered *without* the gate” (Hebrews 13:12).

Therefore, as His atoning sufferings began here, He sought the Garden, rather than remain in Jerusalem.

Second, in crossing the brook Cedron, accompanied by His disciples, another Old Testament type was most strikingly fulfilled. In 2 Samuel 15 (note particularly verses 23, 30, 31) we read of David, at the time of his shameful betrayal by his familiar friend Ahithophel, crossing the same brook; crossing it in tears, accompanied by his faithful followers. So David’s Son and Lord, crossed the Cedron while Judas was betraying Him to His foes.

Third, His object was to afford His enemies the more free scope to take Him. The leaders of Israel had designed to lay hands on Him for some time past, but they feared the common people; therefore, that this impediment might be removed, the Savior chose to go out of the city to the Garden, where they might have full opportunity to apprehend Him, and carry Him away in the night, quietly and secretly. In addition to these reasons, we may add, His arrest in the solitude of the Garden made it the easier for His disciples to escape.

The entrance of Christ into the Garden at once reminds us of Eden. The contrasts between them are indeed most striking. In Eden, all was delightful; in Gethsemane, all was terrible. In Eden, Adam and Eve parleyed with Satan; in Gethsemane, the last Adam sought the face of His Father. In Eden, Adam sinned; in Gethsemane, the Savior suffered. In Eden, Adam fell; in Gethsemane, the Redeemer conquered. The conflict in Eden took place by day; the conflict in Gethsemane was waged at night. In the one Adam fell before Satan; in the other, the soldiers fell before Christ. In Eden the race was lost; in Gethsemane Christ announced, “Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none” (John 18:9). In Eden, Adam took the fruit from Eve’s hand; in Gethsemane, Christ received the cup from His Father’s hand. In Eden, Adam hid himself; in Gethsemane, Christ

boldly showed Himself. In Eden, God sought Adam; in Gethsemane, the last Adam sought God! From Eden Adam was “driven”; from Gethsemane Christ was “led.” In Eden the “sword” was drawn (Genesis 3:24); in Gethsemane the “sword” was sheathed (John 18:11).

“Where was a garden, into which he entered and his disciples” (John 18:1).

Christ did not dismiss the apostles as they left the upper-room in Jerusalem, but took them along with Him to Gethsemane. He would have them witness the fact that He was not seized there as a helpless victim, but that He voluntarily delivered Himself up into the hands of His foes. He

would thereby teach them, from His example, that it is a Christian duty to offer no resistance to our enemies, but meekly bow to the will of God. He would also show them His power to protect His own under circumstances of greatest danger.

“And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place” (John 18:2).

“Our Lord and Savior knew that He should be taken by Judas, and that this was the place appointed by His Father wherein He should be taken; for the 4th verse tells us ‘Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him,’ etc. He knew that Judas would be there that night, and, therefore, like a valiant champion, He cometh into the field first, afore His enemy. He goeth thither to choose, and singles out this place on purpose” (Mr. Thomas Goodwin).

“For Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples” (John 18:2).

This was the Savior’s place of prayer during the last week — a quiet spot to which He frequently retired with His apostles. In Luke 21:37 we read, “And in the daytime he was teaching in the temple; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called the mount of olives.” In Luke 22:39 we read, “And he came out, and went, as *he*

was wont to the mount of olives; and his disciples also followed him.” This was Christ’s place of devotion, and the place, no doubt, where many precious communications had passed between Him and the disciples; it is mentioned here to show the obduracy of the traitor’s heart — it also aggravated his sin.

The Savior knew full well that the treacherous apostate was well acquainted with this spot of holy associations, yet did He, nevertheless go there. On previous occasions He had *avoided* His enemies. “Then took they up stones to cast at him; but Jesus *hid* himself, and went out of the temple” John (John 8:59). These things spoke Jesus, and departed, and did *hide* himself from them (John 12:36). But now the hour was come; therefore did He make for that very place to which He knew Judas would lead His enemies.

“Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons” (John 18:3).

The “band” which Judas “received” evidently signifies a detachment of Roman soldiers, which Pilate had granted for the occasion; the Greek word means the tenth part of a legion, and therefore consisted of four or five hundred men. Some have questioned this, but the words of Matthew 26:47, “a great multitude with him” — strongly confirms it. The “officers from the chief priests and Pharisees” refer to the servants of Israel’s leaders. Luke 22:52 shows that the heads of the Nation themselves also swelled the mob” Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves?” As Christ was to die for sinners both of the Jews and Gentiles, so God ordered it that *Gentiles* (Roman soldiers) and *Jews* should have a hand alike in His arrest and in His crucifixion!

“Cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons” (John 18:3).

What an anomaly! Seeking out the Light of the world with torches and lanterns! Approaching the Good Shepherd with “weapons!” As though *He* would seek to hide Himself; as though *He* could be taken

with swords and staves! Little did they know of His readiness to be led as a lamb to the slaughter. Significant too is the general principle here symbolically illustrated: attacks upon the Truth were made by artificial lights and carnal weapons! It has been thus ever since. The “light of reason” is what men depend upon; and where that has failed, resort has been had to brute force, of which the “weapons” speak. How vain these are, when employed against the Son of God, He plainly demonstrated in the sequel.

“Jesus therefore, *knowing all things* that should come upon him” (John 18:4).

With this should be compared John 13:3, which presents a most striking comparison and contrast: “Jesus *knowing* that the Father had given *all things* into his hands”; the comparison is between our Lord’s omniscience in either reference; the contrast between the subjects of His knowledge there and here. In John 13:3 Christ spoke of “all things” being *given* into His hands; here in John 18:4 He anticipates the moment when “all things” were to be taken from Him, when He was to be “cut off” and “have *nothing*” (Daniel 9:26). His foreknowledge was perfect: for Him there were no surprises. The *receiving* of “all things” from the Father’s hands was not more present to His spirit than the loss of “all things” by His being cut off. In John 13 He contemplates the *glory*; here the *sufferings*, and He passed from the one to the other in the unchanging blessedness of absolute perfection.

“Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him.” These were the “all things” decreed by God, agreed upon by the Son in the eternal covenant of grace, predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures, and foretold, again and again, by Himself; namely, all the attendant circumstances of His sufferings and death.

“Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, *went forth*” — not out of the Garden as John 18:26 plainly shows, but from its inner recesses, where He had prayed alone. “Went forth,” first to awaken the sleeping three (Matthew 26:46), then to rejoin the eight whom He had left on the outskirts of the Garden (Matthew 26:36), and now to meet Judas and his company. This

“went forth” shows the perfect harmony between John and the Synoptics.

“And said unto them, Whom seek ye?” (John 18:4).

Our Lord was the first to speak: He did not wait to be challenged. His reason for asking this question is indicated in the “therefore” of the previous clause — “Jesus *therefore*, knowing all things that should come upon him, *went forth*, and said unto them, Whom seek ye?” That which the Holy Spirit has here emphasized is the *willingness* of Christ to suffer, His *readiness* to go forth to the Cross. He knew full well for what fell purpose these men were there, but He asks the question so that He might solemnly and formally surrender Himself to them. Once, when they wanted to take Him by force and make Him a king, He departed from them (John 6:15); but now that He was to be scourged and crucified, He boldly advanced to meet them. This was in sharp contrast from the first Adam in Eden, who, after his sin, *hid* himself among the trees of the garden. So, too, Christ’s act and question here bore witness to the futility and folly of their “lanterns and torches and weapons.”

“They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said unto them, I am” (John 18:5).

Why did they not answer, “Thee!”? Jesus of Nazareth stood before them, yet they did not say, “Thou art the one we have come to arrest.” It is plain from this circumstance that they did not recognize Him, nor did Judas, who is here expressly said to have “stood with them.” Despite their “lanterns and torches” their eyes were holden! Does not this go far to confirm our thought on the closing words of John 18:3 — the Holy Spirit designedly intimated that something more than the light which nature supplies is needed to discover and discern the person of the God-man! And how this is emphasized by the presence of Judas, who had been in closest contact with the Savior for three years! How solemn the lesson! How forcibly this illustrates 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4:

“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath *blinded* the minds of them which believe not.”

Even the traitor failed now to recognize the Lord: he too was stricken with dimness of vision. The natural man is spiritually blind: the Light shone in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not (John 1:5)! It is only as the light of God shines in our hearts that knowledge is given us to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6)!

“And Judas, also, which betrayed him, stood with them”
(John 18:5).

Only a few hours previous he had been seated with Christ and the Eleven, now he is found with the Lord’s enemies, acting as their guide. Some have argued that there is a discrepancy here between John’s account and what we read of in the Synoptics. In the latter we are told Judas had arranged with the soldiers that he would give them a sign, identifying the One they should arrest by kissing Him. This he did, and they laid hands on Him. But here in John 18 he is viewed as failing to recognize the Savior, yet there is no discrepancy at all. John does not relate what Matthew and the others give us, but instead, supplies details which they were guided to omit. John tells us what took place in the Garden *before* the traitor gave his vile sign. If the reader will compare Luke’s account he will see that the kiss was given by Judas at a point between what we read of in John 18, verses 9, 10.

“As soon then as he had said unto them, I am, they went backward, and fell to the ground” (John 18:6).

Another reason why notice is taken of Judas at the dose of the preceding verse is to inform us that he, too, fell to the ground. Observe the words “they went *backward*.” They were there to arrest Him, but instead of advancing to lay hands on Him, they retreated! Among them were five hundred Roman soldiers, yet they retired before His single “I am.” They fell back in consternation, not forward in worship! All He said was “I am”; but it was fully sufficient to overawe and overpower them. It was the enunciation of the ineffable Name of God, by which He was revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). It was a display of His Divine majesty. It was a quiet exhibition of His Divine power. It was a signal demonstration that *He* was “the word” (John 1:1)! He did not

strike them with His hand — there was no need to; He simply spoke two monosyllables and they were completely overcome.

But why, we may ask, should our Lord have acted in such a manner on this occasion? First, that it might be clearly shown He was *more* than “Jesus of Nazareth”: He was “*God* manifest in flesh,” and never was this more unmistakably evidenced. Second, that it might appear with absolute dearness that He *voluntarily* delivered Himself up into their hands — that it was not they who apprehended Him, but He who submitted to them. He was not captured, for He was not to (passively) *suffer* merely, but to (actively) *offer* Himself as a sacrifice to God. Here is the ultimate reason why it is reCORded that “Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them”: the *traitor’s* perfidy was needless and the captor’s weapons useless against One who is giving up Himself *unto* death and was soon to give Himself in death. If none had power to take His life from Him (John 10:18, 19), none had power to arrest Him. He here showed them, and us, that *they* were completely at *His* mercy — helpless on the ground — and not He at theirs. How easy for Him then to have walked quietly away, unmolested! First, they failed to recognize Him; now they were prostrate before Him. What was to hinder Him from leaving them thus? Nothing but His Father’s will, and to it He submissively bowed. Thus did the Savior give proof of His willingness to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin. In the third place, it left these men *without excuse*. Every detail in connection with our Lord’s passion had been determined by the Divine counsels, yet God did not treat those who had a hand in it as mere machines, but as responsible moral agents. Before Pilate sentenced Christ to death, God first gave him a plain intimation that it was an *innocent* Man who stood before him, by warning his wife in a dream (Matthew 27:19). So here with these Roman soldiers, who may never have seen Christ before. They cannot plead in the Day of judgment that they were ignorant of the glory of His person: they cannot say that they never witnessed His miraculous power, and had no opportunity given them to believe on Him. This exhibition of His majesty, and their laying hands on Him afterwards, makes their condemnation *just!*

It is very striking to observe that the Lord Jesus had uttered the same words on previous occasions, but with very different effects. To the

woman at the well He had said “I am” (John 4:26), and she at once recognized Him as the Christ (John 4:29). To the disciples on the storm-lashed sea He had said, “I am” (John 6:20 — see Greek), and we are told “they willingly received him into the ship.” But here there was no conviction wrought of His Messiahship, and no willing reception of Him. Instead, they were terrified, and fell to the ground. What a marvelous demonstration that the *same* Word is to some “a savor of life unto life,” while to others it is “a savor of death unto death”! Observe, too, that His Divine “I am” to the disciples in the ship was accompanied by “Be not afraid” (John 6:20); how solemn to mark its omission here!

Vividly does this forewarn sinners of how utterly helpless they will be before the Christ of God in a coming Day! “What shall He do when He comes to judge, who did this when about to be judged? What shall be His might when He comes to reign, who had this might when He was at the point to die?” (Augustine.) What, indeed, will be the effect of that Voice when He speaks in judgment upon the wicked!

“As soon then as he had said unto them, I am, they went backward, and fell to the ground.” This was a remarkable fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy given a thousand years before. It is recorded in the 27th Psalm, the whole of which, most probably, was silently uttered by the Savior as He journeyed from the upper-room in Jerusalem, across the brook Cedron, into the Garden. “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even my enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, *they stumbled and fell*” (verses 1, 2). Let the reader pause and ponder the remainder of this Psalm: it is blessed to learn *what* comforted and strengthened the Savior’s heart in that trying hour. Psalm 27 gives us the musings of Christ’s heart at this time, *Godwards*. Psalm 35 recorded His prayers against His enemies, *manwards*: “Let them be confounded and put to shame that seek after my soul: let them be *turned back* and *brought* to confusion *that devise my hurt*” (verse 4). *Still another Psalm should be read in this connection, the 40th. That this Psalm is a Messianic one we know positively from verses 7, 8. verses 11-17 were, we believe, a part of*

His prayer in Gethsemane, and in it He asked, “Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my soul to destroy it; let them be driven backward and put to shame that wish me evil” (verse 14). Thus was both Messianic prophecy fulfilled and prayer answered in this overwhelming of His enemies.

“Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye?” (John 18:7).

“This second question carries a mighty conviction, a mighty triumph with it over their conscience as if He had said, I have told you I am; and I have told it you to purpose, have I not? Have you not learned by this *who* I am, when your hearts are so terrified that you all fell down before Me! They had been taught by woeful experience who He was, when He blew them over, flung them down with His breath; and it might have turned to a blessed experience had God struck their hearts, as He did their outward man” (Mr. Thomas Goodwin).

“And they said, Jesus of Nazareth” (John 18:7).

They would not own Him as *the Christ*, but continued to speak of Him according to the name of His humiliation — “Jesus of Nazareth.” How striking and how solemn is this after what has been before us in John 18:6 — such an exhibition of Divine majesty and power, yet their hard hearts unmoved! No outward means will soften those who are resolved on wickedness. No miracles, however awesome, will melt men’s enmity: *nothing* will suffice except God works *directly* by His Word and Spirit. Another signal proof of the desperate hardness of men’s hearts in the case of those who were appointed to guard the Savior’s sepulcher. While keeping their watch, God sent an earthquake, and then an angel to roll away the stone from the grave’s mouth, and so awful were these things to the keepers that they “became as dead men.” And yet, when they reported to their masters and were offered a bribe to say His disciples stole the body of Christ while they slept, they were willing parties to such a lie. O the hardness of the human heart: how “desperately wicked”! Even Divine judgments do not subdue it. In a coming day God will pour out on this earth the vials of His wrath, and what will be the response of men? This:

“They gnawed their tongues for pain, and *blasphemed* the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and *repented not* of their deeds” (Revelation 16:10, 11).

Nothing but a miracle of sovereign grace, the putting forth of omnipotent power, can bring a blaspheming rebel out of darkness into God’s marvelous light. Many a soul has been terrified, as were these men in the Garden, and yet continued in their course of alienation from God.

“Jesus answered, I have told you that I am” (John 18:8).

The dignity and calmness of our Lord are very noticeable here. Knowing full well all the insults and indignities He was about to suffer, He repeats His former declaration, “I am”; then He added, “if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way.”

“Christ was about to suffer for them, and therefore it was not just that they should suffer too; nor was it proper that they should suffer *with* Him, lest their sufferings should be thought to be a part of the price of redemption. These words then may be considered as an emblem and pledge of the acquittal and discharge of God’s elect, through the surety-engagements and performances of Christ who drew near to God on their behalf, substituting Himself in their room, and undertaking for them in the counsel and covenant of peace, and laid Himself under obligation to pay their debts. Now, as there was a discharge of them from eternity, a non-imputation of sin to them, and a *secret* letting of them go upon the surety- engagements of Christ; so there was now an *open* discharge of them all upon the apprehension, sufferings, death and resurrection of Him” (Mr. John Gill).

“If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way” (John 18:8).

In John 13:1 we are told of Christ that “having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto *the end*.” How blessedly this is seen here. Christ’s first thought is not of Himself and what He was about to suffer, but of His disciples. It was the Shepherd protecting His sheep.

“The tender sympathy and consideration of our great High Priest for His people came out very beautifully in this place, and would doubtless be remembered by the Eleven long afterwards. They would remember that the very last thought of their Master, before

He was made a prisoner, was for them and their safety” (Bishop Ryle).

And how the Savior’s majesty here shines forth again! He was about to be taken prisoner, but He acts as no helpless captive, but rather like a king. “*Let these go their way*” was a command. Here am I, take Me; but I charge you not to meddle with them — touch not Mine anointed! He speaks as Conqueror, and such He was; for He had thrown them to the ground by a word from His lips. They were about to tie His hands, but before doing so He first tied theirs!

“If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way.” There is much for us to learn here.

First, it supplied another proof of how easily He could have saved Himself had He so pleased: He that saved others could have saved Himself; He who had authority to command them to let these go, had authority to command them to let Himself go.

Second, Christ only was to suffer: in the great work before Him none could follow —

“And there shall be *no man* in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement” (Leviticus 16:17).

He was to tread the winepress alone.

Third, Christ had other work for them yet to do, and until that work was done their enemies should and must leave them alone. So long as God has something for His servants to do the Devil himself cannot seize them. “Go,” said Christ, when warned that Herod would kill Him,

“and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out demons, and I do cures today *and* tomorrow” (Luke 13:32).

I will do those things in spite of him; he cannot prevent Me.

Fourth, here we see *grace*, as in the previous verse Divine *power*, exercised by this One who so perfectly “declared the Father” (verse 18).

Fifth, Christ would thus show His disciples how fully competent He was to preserve them amid the greatest dangers. We have no doubt but that these Roman soldiers and Jewish officers intended to seize the apostles as well — Mark 14:51, 52, strongly indicates this — but the Word of power went forth, “let these go their way,” and they were safe. We doubt not that the coming day will make it manifest that this same word of power went forth many times, though we knew it not, when we were in the place of danger.

“That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none” (John 18:9).

This “saying” refers not to an Old Testament prophecy but to that part of His prayer recorded in John 17:12 — “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost.” Though this has a peculiar respect unto the apostles, it is true of all God’s elect, who are given to Christ, and none of them shall be lost, neither their souls nor their bodies; for Christ’s charge of them reaches to both: both were given to Him, both are redeemed by Him, and both shall be saved by Him with an everlasting salvation; He saves their souls from eternal death, and will raise their bodies from corporeal death; therefore, that His care of His disciples, with respect to their temporal lives as well as eternal happiness, might be seen, He made this agreement with those who came to take Him, or rather laid this injunction upon them, to dismiss them and which it is very remarkable they did, for they laid hands on none of them, even though Peter drew his sword and struck off the ear of one of them. Thus did Christ give another signal proof of His power over the spirits of men to restrain them; and thus did He again make manifest His Deity.

“Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear. The servant’s name was Malchus” (John 18:10).

Peter exercised a zeal which was not regulated by knowledge: it was the self-confident energy of the flesh acting in unconsidered haste. It was the inevitable outcome of his failure to heed Christ’s word, “Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation” — it is failure to pray which so often brings us into temptation! Had Peter observed the ways of his Master and heeded His words, he would have learned that carnal weapons had no place in the fight to which He has called him and us. Had he marked the wonderful *grace* which He had just displayed in providing for the safety of His own, he would have seen that this was no time for smiting with the sword. What a fearful warning is this to every Christian for the need of walking in the Spirit, that we fulfill not the lusts of the flesh! The flesh is still in the believer, and a lasting object-lesson of this is the humbling history of Peter rash yet courageous when he should have been still; a few hours later, cowardly and base when he ought to have witnessed a good confession for Christ. But though Peter failed to act according to grace, the grace of God was signally manifested towards him. No doubt Peter struck with the intention of slaying Malchus — probably the first to lay hands on the Savior — but an unseen Power deflected the blow, and instead of the priest’s servant being beheaded he lost only an ear, and that was permitted so that a further opportunity might be afforded the Lord Jesus of manifesting both His tender mercy and all-mighty power. We may add that the *life* of Malchus was safe while Christ was there, for none ever died in His presence!

“Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear.” The sequel to this is supplied by Luke: “and he touched his ear, and healed him” (Luke 22:51)! Very striking indeed is this; it rendered the more excuseless the act of those who arrested Him, aggravating their sin and deepening their guilt. Christ manifested both His power and His grace *before* they laid hands on Him. This act of healing Malchus’ ear was the last miracle of the Savior before He laid down His life.

First, He appealed to their consciences, now to their hearts; but once they had seized their prey He left them to their own evil lusts.

“Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath” (John 18:11).

This was a rebuke, though mildly administered. Peter had done his best to nullify his Master’s orders, “Let these go their way.” He had given great provocation to this company armed with swords and staves: he had acted wrongly in resisting authority, in having recourse to force, in imagining that the Son of God needed any assistance from him. “Put up thy sword into the sheath”: the *only* “sword” which the Christian is ever justified in using is the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

“The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11).

How blessedly this entire incident brings out the varied glories of Christ: perfect supremacy and perfect subjection. He declared Himself the great “I am,” and His enemies fall to the ground; He gives the word of command, and His disciples depart unmolested. Now He bows before the will of the Father, and receives the awful cup of suffering and woe from His hand without a murmur. Never did such Perfections meet in any other; Sovereign, yet Servant; the Lion-Lamb!

God’s dispensations are frequently expressed as a cup poured out and given to men to drink. There are three “cups” spoken of in Scripture.

First, there is the cup of *salvation*:

“I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord” (Psalm 116:13).

Second, there is the *cup of consolation*:

“Neither shall men tear themselves for them in mourning, to comfort them for the dead; neither shall men give them the

cup of consolation to drink for their father or for their mother” (Jeremiah 16:7).

To this the Psalmist referred:

“My cup runneth over” (Psalm 23:5).

Our Lord Himself used the same figure, previously when He said,

“Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me” (Matthew 26:39).

It was a dreadful cup which He was to drink of.

Third is the cup of tribulation:

Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup” (Psalm 11:6).

So the prophet Jeremiah is bidden,

“Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it” (Jeremiah 25:15; cf. Psalm 75:8).

“The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” “*He* doth not say, A necessity is laid upon Me to drink this cup. He doth not simply say, My Father hath commanded Me to drink it, but, ‘shall I not drink it?’ It is a speech that implies His spirit knew not how to do otherwise than obey His Father, such an instinct that He could not but choose to do it. Even just as Joseph said, ‘how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?’ (Genesis 39:9), so Christ here, ‘shall I not drink it?’ It implies the highest willingness that can be” (Mr. Thomas Goodwin).

“The cup which *My Father* hath given me, shall I not drink it?” What a lesson Christ here teaches us. The Serpent was about to bruise His heel; the Gentiles were about to mock and scourge Him; the Jews cry, Away with Him. But the Savior looks beyond all secondary causes direct to Him of whom and through whom and to

whom were all things (Romans 11:36). Peter's eyes were upon the human adversaries; but no, He saith to Peter, there is a higher Hand in it. Moreover, He did not say, "which the *Judge* of all the earth giveth me," but "*my Father*" — the One who dearly loveth Me! How this would sweeten our bitter cups if we would but receive them from the *Father's* hand! It is not until we see His hand in all things that the heart is made to rest in perfect peace.

The following questions are to help the student prepare for our next lesson: —

1. What types and doctrinal truths are suggested by "bound," verse 12?
2. Why is verse 14 inserted here?
3. Why has the Holy Spirit given Peter so prominent a place?
4. Why of "His disciples and doctrine," verse 19?
5. Why did Christ say nothing about His disciples, verse 20?
6. Why did Christ say verse 21?
7. What is the meaning of verse 24?

JOHN 18:12-27

CHRIST BEFORE ANNAS

Below is an Analysis of the second section of John 18: —

1. Christ bound and led to Annas, verses 12-14.
2. Peter follows and is admitted to the palace, verses 15, 16.
3. Peter's first denial of Christ, verses 17, 18.
4. Annas questions Christ, and His reply, verses 19-21.
5. Christ smitten and His remonstrance, verses 22, 23.
6. Annas sends Christ to Caiaphas, verse 24.
7. Peter's second and third denials, verses 25-27.

In the passage before us John again supplies details which are not given by the other Evangelists. The Synoptics describe our Lord's appearing before Caiaphas: in the fourth Gospel this is passed over, and in its place we have His arraignment before Annas. As in the Garden, so in the high priest's palace, two of the Savior's perfections are prominently displayed: His lowliness and dignity: His immeasurable superiority over all who surrounded Him, friends or foes, and His complete submission before those in the seat of human authority. As the Son of God we see Him exposing the wickedness of all with whom He comes into contact; as the Son of man He carried Himself meekly before those who acted more like fiends than humans.

The structure of our present passage is quite complex. From Christ being led away to Annas, the Holy Spirit pauses to notice Peter following and then entering the high priest's house. After recording Peter's first denial, he is left warming himself at the fire, and then a brief account is given of what passed between Annas and Christ. Following the announcement that Annas sent Jesus bound to

Caiaphas, the Spirit returns again to Peter and describes the second and third denials. The central thing is plainly Christ's appearing before Annas and afterwards before Pilate, but the narrative is *interrupted* again and yet again to tell of the apostle's awful fall. Most vividly does this point a solemn lesson. God is not the author of confusion: it is sin which produces *disorder* and *hinders* the Spirit from taking the things of *Christ* and showing them unto us! It is *this* which is written large across John 18 if attention be paid to its structure and order of narrative.

But why is it that the Holy Spirit has made so prominent the sin of Simon in this portion of Scripture? Why has He broken into His account of what befell the Savior, by mentioning the threefold denial? Why, especially, after having previously recorded the same in each of the Synoptics? Ah, is it not to emphasize the *need* of Christ's atoning death, by showing us the *character* of those for whom He died! Was it not His design to show how fearfully sin *had* "abounded" before He portrayed the super-abounding of *grace*! Was it not suitable that He should first paint a *dark* background, so that the *perfections* of the Holy One might be brought into sharper relief! What comes out so plainly all through John — never more so than in these closing incidents — is Christ glorifying the Father in a scene where the ruin of sin was *complete* and *universal*.

"Then the band and the captain and the officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him" (John 18:12).

Behold here the amazing hardness of unconverted men. The company of those who arrested the Savior was made up of men of marked differences; it was composed of Gentiles and Jews, soldiers and servants of the priests and Pharisees, heathen and those who belonged to the covenant people of Jehovah. But in one respect they were all alike — they were *blind* to the glories of Him, whom they apprehended. Both parties had witnessed a signal exhibition of His power, when by a word from His lips He had thrown them all to the ground. Both parties had witnessed His tender mercy, when they saw Him heal the torn ear of the first to lay rough hands on Him. Yet, both remained insensible and unmoved, and now proceeded to coolly carry out their odious business of binding the incarnate Son of God. Terrible indeed is the state of the natural man. Let us not

wonder, then, at the unbelief and hardness of heart which we see on every side to-day; these things were manifested in the presence of the Savior, and will continue until He returns in judgment.

“Behold also the amazing *condescension* of our Lord Jesus Christ. We see the Son of God taken prisoner and led away bound like a

malefactor — arraigned before wicked and unjust judges — insulted and treated with contempt. And yet, this unresisting Prisoner had only to will His deliverance, and He would at once have been free. He had only to command the confusion of His enemies, and they would at once have been confounded. Above all, He was One who knew full well that Annas and Caiaphas, and all their companions, would one day stand before His judgment-seat and receive an eternal sentence. He knew all these things and yet condescended to be treated as a malefactor without resisting. One thing at any rate is very dear: the love of Christ to sinners is ‘a love that passeth knowledge.’ To suffer for those who are in some sense worthy of our affection, is suffering that we can understand. To submit to ill-treatment quietly, when we have no power to resist, is submission that is both graceful and wise. But to suffer voluntarily, when we have the power to prevent it, and to suffer for a world of unbelieving and ungodly sinners, unasked and unthanked — this is a line of conduct which passes man’s understanding. Never let us forget that *this is* the peculiar beauty of Christ’s sufferings when we read the wonderful story of His cross and passion. He was led away captive, and dragged before the high priest’s bar, not because He could not help Himself, but because He had set His heart on saving sinners — by bearing their sins, by being treated as a sinner, and by being punished in their stead” (Bishop Byle).

“Then the band and the captain and the officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him.” The first word ought to be translated “Therefore,” not “Then:” the words of the previous verse explaining its force: “Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” Having rebuked Peter for offering resistance, He bowed to the Father’s will. “*Therefore*” they “took Jesus and bound him” — like savage beasts they sprang upon their prey. We believe it was to this the Savior referred when, speaking by the Spirit of prophecy, He

declared, “Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion... dogs have compassed me, the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me.” We doubt not that they bound Him with heavy chains, for of him who furnishes, perhaps, the fullest type of Christ it is written,

“Joseph was sold for a servant: whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron” (Psalm 105:17, 18).

Is not the antitype of this more than hinted at in Isaiah 53:5, where we are told not only that He was “wounded for our transgressions” but “*bruised* for our iniquities”! — was it not when they “bound” His wrists and ankles with handcuffs and fetters!

Why did they “bind” Him? Four *historical* reasons we may give: because Judas had bidden them hold Him fast (Matthew 26:48), this because he remembered what is recorded in Luke 4:29, 30; John 8:59, etc.; because they would heap shame upon Him, treating Him as a lawless character; because they deemed Him worthy of death, thereby prejudicing His sentence. But behind these we may see a *typical* reason: God overruling for the fulfillment of it. *All* that befell Christ was to fulfill the types and prophecies that went before of Him. The most eminent type of Christ in His sufferings was Isaac, and the *first* thing that Abraham did to him, when about to offer him up as a sacrifice, was to *take* and *bind* him (Genesis 22:9)! So it was with the animals which were offered:

“*bind* the sacrifice with cords, unto the horns of the altar” (Psalm 118:27).

But deeper still, there was a *mystical* significance to this binding of the Savior: we were sin’s captives, therefore was He theirs! Our sins were the *cause* of His binding, therefore did He, as our Substitute, cry,

“innumerable evils have *taken hold upon me*; mine iniquities (ours, made His) *have compassed me about*” (Psalm 40:12)!

He *was bound that we might be set free*.

“It is a certain rule that what should have been done to us, something correspondent was done to Christ; and the virtue of His person was such, though it was done to His body, it brought us freedom from the like due to our souls; and by Him being thus bound and led, He Himself afterward, when He ascended, *led captivity captive*” (Mr. Thomas Goodwin).

How ready, then, should we be to be bound for Christ (in Hebrews 13:3 afflictions for His sake are called “bonds”!); and how little ought we to be moved by the vileness of those who persecute us, when we remember Him!

“And led him away to Annas first” (John 18:13).

The Savior was neither “driven” nor “dragged,” but led: thereby the Holy Spirit informs us, once more, of His *willing submission*. He offered no resistance. With infinitely greater ease than Samson of old, could He have burst His bonds “as a thread when it toucheth the fire”; but as prophecy had announced, “he was led as a *lamb* to the slaughter” — gentle and tractable. Here also He fulfilled not only prophecy but type: each animal that was to be offered in sacrifice was first led to *the priest* (Leviticus 17:5), so Christ was first brought to Annas. The road followed from the Garden to the house of the high priest was also significant. Gethsemane was at the foot of Olivet, on the east side of Jerusalem, beyond the brook Cedron. In journeying from there to the city, the gate through which they would pass was “the *sheep gate*” (Nehemiah 3:1, 32; Nehemiah 12:39; John 5:2, and see our notes on the last). The “sheep gate” was nigh unto the temple, and through it the sacrificial animals passed (first having been fed in the meadows adjoining the Cedron); so also went the *true Lamb* on this occasion! Note a striking contrast here: Adam was *driven* out of the Garden (Genesis 3:24); Christ was *led*!

“And led him away to Annas first; for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year” (John 18:13).

John is the only one who tells of the Savior being brought before Annas; the Synoptics describe His appearance before Caiaphas. Both Annas and Caiaphas are called “high priests.” The fact that

there were *two* high priests shows the confusion which prevailed at that time. Much has been written on the subject that provides neither information nor edification. So far as our own limited light goes, we take it that the Roman rule over Palestine supplies the key. In view of John 11:49 it seems that the Romans elected a high priest for Israel each year (compare Acts 4:6, which mentions no less than four, all living, who had filled that office), but in the light of Luke 3:1 it is dear that sometimes they were re-elected. According to the Law of God the high priest retained his office till death (Exodus 40:15; Numbers 35:25, etc.), therefore in the eyes of the *Jews*, Annas, not Caiaphas, was the real high priest: Caiaphas was formally acknowledged in a civic way, but Annas took precedence over him in ecclesiastical matters. This, we believe, explains why the Savior was brought *first* before Annas.

“Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people” (John 18:14).

The reference here is to what is recorded in John 11:49-52. Caiaphas apparently, was the first man to make the motion that Christ be put to death. The reason he advanced being a political one, with the evident intention of currying favor with the Romans. The callous selfishness of the man comes out plainly in his

“consider that it is expedient *for us* that one man should die for the people” (John 11:50).

He was addressing the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of Judaism, and in saying “for us,” rather than “for *them*,” he shows that he cared more for his office than for his nation.

“Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.” Why is this mentioned here? To show on *what* ground (from the human side) our Savior was crucified: it was out of political considerations, and those imaginary at best lest perchance “the Romans take away our place and nation.” The Holy Spirit has premised all the other sufferings of Christ thus, in order to show us that *no equity is* to be expected from all their proceedings against Him. They had resolved, *before* they

took Him, to put Him to death, and that for State considerations, therefore they would be sure to keep to their resolutions whether He were innocent or no, whether they could convict Him or not. The judge had given his verdict and determined the sentence *before* the trial took place! Here then is one of the Spirit's reasons for introducing this reference to the words of Caiaphas — to show us that in what follows we must not expect to find any favor shown to the Lord Jesus, nor must we be surprised if His trial was simply a farce, a glaring travesty of justice. In addition to this, we believe that God saw to it that there should be a plain testimony from the legal *head* of the nation as to the purpose and character of His Son's death: He was dying "FOR *the people*"!

["And Simon Peter followed Jesus" \(John 18:15\).](#)

Matthew tells us that he "followed afar off" (Matthew 26:58). In following Christ at all on this occasion Peter was clearly acting in the energy of the flesh, for Christ's will as to His disciples had been plainly expressed in the "let these go their way" (John 18:8).

"Lovingly anxious to see what was done to Him, yet not bold enough to keep near Him like a disciple. Anyone can see that the unhappy Peter was under the influence of very mixed feelings — love made him ashamed to run away and hide himself; cowardice made him ashamed to show his colors, and stick by his Lord's side. Hence he chose a middle course, the worst, as it happened, that he could have followed" (Bishop Ryle).

["And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest" \(John 18:15\).](#)

There has been much discussion and speculation as to who this "other disciple" was. A few of the old commentators and most of the modern believe that he was the writer of this Gospel; but whoever he may have been, it is almost certain that he was *not* John. In the first place, John was a poor fisherman of Galilee — far removed from Jerusalem — therefore it is most unlikely that *he* was on sufficiently intimate terms with the high priest as to enter his house,

and have authority over the door-keeper so as to order her to admit Peter. In the second place, John, being a Galilean, would have been recognized and challenged as was Peter (Matthew 26:69, 73). In the third place, whenever John refers to himself in this Gospel it is always as “the disciple *whom Jesus loved*” (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). Finally, Acts 4:13 makes it very plain that the high priest was *not* personally acquainted with either Peter or John! Who, then, was this “other disciple”? The answer is, We do not know. It may have been Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathaea, but we cannot be sure.

“But Peter stood at the door without” (John 18:16).

How significant and suggestive is this little detail — the door was shut! Was it not by *God’s providence* that the door was now closed? Happy for Peter had he remained on the outside. The Lord had plainly warned him to “watch and pray lest he *enter* into temptation.” But Peter disregards His admonition, and knocks for admission — why else should the other disciple have gone out? There is a practical lesson for *us* right here: God in His mercy put an impediment in Peter’s way, *stopping him* from going on to that which should be the occasion of his sin; so does He, oftentimes, with us. Therefore, when we find God, in His providence, placing some barrier in our path, it behooves us to pause, and examine well our grounds for going further along the same path we are in. If our way is warranted by *the Word* and our conscience is clear as to a certain line of duty, then obstacles are to be regarded only as *testings* of faith and patience; but otherwise they are *warnings* from God.

“Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spoke unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter” (John 18:16).

Ah! says the reader, does not *this* conflict with what has just been said on the first part of the verse? Would not the coming forth of the other disciple, his speaking to the door-keeper (unasked by Peter), and his bringing him in, indicate that God’s providences were working *in favor* of Peter’s entering the palace? Did it not look as though *God* were calling Peter to enter? The difficulty seems real, yet it is capable of a simple solution. Peter had *disregarded* the

warning of God — the shut door; he had *persisted* in having his *own* way — knocking for entrance; now God *removes* His providential barrier. How solemnly this speaks to us; may the Lord grant to each the hearing ear. When we *disregard* both the Word and warning providence of God, we must not be surprised if He then sets a snare for us. When we *insist on* having our own way, we must be prepared if God gives us up to our own heart's lust (Psalm 81:12). Jonah chafed against God's *word*, therefore when he fled from going to Nineveh and set his heart on Tarshish, he found a ship all ready for him to sail in! Here, then: is another most important practical lesson pointed out for us: the outward providences of God must not be taken for our guide when we have *refused* His Word and His warnings!

[“Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man’s disciples? He saith, I am not” \(John 18:17\).](#)

That the door-keeper was a maid rather than a man was obviously overruled by the providence of God: He would humble the pride of Peter in this way, that his weakness might stand out as a lasting warning against self-confidence. It was neither by one of the Roman soldiers nor one of the Jewish officers that the apostle was first challenged, but by a young woman! *Why* she should ask him the question she did, we are not told; whether she was moved by idle curiosity, or detected that he was a Galilean, or whether his countenance bore marks of agitation and fear, or whether — as is more likely — she concluded from Peter being a friend of the “other disciple” that he “*also*” was a follower of Christ, we cannot be sure. Note how *mildly* she framed her question: not, Are you a follower of this Insurrectionist, this Enemy of Judaism, this Blasphemer against God, but simply, “this man”! Yet, notwithstanding the sex of his questioner, and the mild form of her question, Peter told a downright lie. He said, “I am not.”

“The betrayal by Judas, though more dreadful, is almost less startling than the denial by Peter. We are less prepared for the cowardice of the one, than for the covetousness of the other. That the one should turn timid seems less natural, so to say — was less to be expected — than that the other should prove a traitor. ‘Wherefore let

him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (Mr. Geo. Brown).

“And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coal, for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself” (John 18:18).

What we have here is introductory to the second and third denials, recorded in John 18:25-27. Peter was cold. How profoundly and solemnly significant! The Christian who follows Christ “afar off” will soon be chilled and grow cold spiritually; then will recourse be had to fleshly stimulants for warmth and comfort. And the enemies of Christ — the world, the flesh, and the Devil — will provide their “fire” — their places and means of cheer!

“And Peter stood with them.” Ominous words are these. Of the traitor it was said “And Judas also, which betrayed him, *stood with them*”; now we find Simon in the same evil company!

“The apostle stood among the crowd of his Master’s enemies, and warmed himself like one of them, as if he had nothing to think of but his bodily comfort; while his beloved Master stood in a distant part of the hall, cold, and a prisoner. Who can doubt that Peter, in his miserable cowardice, wished to appear one of the party who hated Christ, and sought to conceal his real character by doing as they did? And who can doubt that while he warmed his hands he felt cold, wretched, and comfortless in his own soul?” (Bishop Ryle).

How true it is that

“The backslider in heart shall be filled *with his own ways*” (Proverbs 14:14)!

Some have pointed out that the Holy Spirit has here told us “it was cold” in order to impress us the more with the bloody *sweat* of Christ only a short while before!

“The high priest then *asked* Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine” (John 18:19).

The gross injustice of such a mode of procedure is glaringly apparent. Instead of preferring a charge against the Savior, and then summoning witnesses to *prove it*, Annas acted after the manner of the Inquisition, asking questions so as to ensnare the One before him. And this was the religious *head* of Israel, acting altogether against and without law, no indictment having been drawn up, no evidence brought forward to support it; nothing but a cowardly attempt to overawe the Prisoner by browbeating Him, so that he could obtain something which might be used against him.

“The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine.” The fact *that* Annas referred here to our Lord’s “disciples” at once indicates the malevolent character of his questioning: it was an ironical reference to those who had forsaken Him and fled! The high priest “asked Jesus of his disciples” — With what design did you gather them round you? Where are they? How many have you in reality now? He asked of them; he did not call for them: none were allowed to testify on His behalf! “And of his doctrine” — not for edification, but to see if it were a new teaching of His own, so that they might have wherewith to accuse Him. It is plain that at this stage they were at a loss for a charge. “The *disciples* are mentioned as His dependents, His followers, His party, His sworn confidants; the *doctrine* is inquired into as novelty, heresy, dangerous misleading error; both together pointing to the two charges which afterwards were urged — Insurrection against the Roman power, error or blasphemy against the Jewish” (Stier).

“Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world” (John 18:20).

Not *before*, but *to*, “the world.” Why did He not say “to the multitudes”? why “*to the world*”? It was the first hint of the *universality* of His message note how the “Jews” are referred to *separately*, later in the verse! “I spake *openly* to the world”: truth is bold and fears not the light. It is the emissaries of Satan who *hide* the leaven in the meal (Matthew 13:33); it is the servants of the Prince of darkness who haunt the “secret chambers” (Matthew 24:26). In saying that He spake *openly* to the world the Lord was indirectly *rebuking* Annas and his co-conspirators for their injustice of refusing Him a trial in open court.

“I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort” (John 18:20)

There is no article before “synagogue.” In affirming that He taught in the established places of public worship, the Lord gave proof that *He* was no lawless separatist, clandestinely proselytising, but honoring the institutions of God and acting as became His Prophet. “Whither the Jews always resort.” “He describes His cause and doctrine as properly *national*, for all the Jews. There is in the background of both question and answer, though the Lord put it directly not in words, the meaning that the main point in His teaching was the testimony to Himself as the *Messiah*: — thus where all the Jews as Jews are assembled in their national religion to worship God, there have I testified that which applies to *all* the Jews, that they all *should be* ‘My disciples’ and *ought to* acknowledge and join themselves to Me!” (Stier).

“And in secret have I said nothing” (John 18:20).

This does not mean that He had never instructed His disciples in private. The Lord was giving a general description of His public ministry. Moreover, His confidential communications to His own were but explanations or amplifications of what he had taught in the open. He had not two doctrines, one exoteric for the multitudes, and another esoteric for His intimate friends. In secret He had said nothing. In like manner, the badge by which *His* messengers may always be identified is described in 2 Corinthians 4:2:

“not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by *manifestation* of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”

In saying “in secret have I said nothing” the Savior unhesitatingly appropriated to Himself the identical declaration of Jehovah of old

“I *have not spoken in secret*, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the

Lord speak righteousness, I declare things that are right”
(Isaiah 45:19).

It is also blessed to observe that while Christ here gave a full, if brief, answer to Annas concerning His “doctrine,” not a word did He say about His “disciples.” As the Shepherd He *protected* His sheep! He alone was to suffer, therefore He alone assumed all responsibility!

“Why askest thou me?” (John 18:21).

Mark the quiet dignity of Christ. So far from being cowed, He turned and challenges the judge: “Why,” or better, “Wherefore askest thou me?” It was one of those questions of the Lord which never failed to pierce the heart. Why, do you, the high priest, pretend to be ignorant of what is common knowledge among the people! You have had many opportunities to hear Me yourself! You have expelled from the synagogue those who believe in Me; what meanest thou, then, by this questioning! It was the Light exposing the “hidden things of dishonesty.” It was the Holy One condemning the high priest for attempting to make a prisoner incriminate himself and supply evidence to be used against him.

“Ask them which heard me what I have said unto them:
behold, they know what I said” (John 18:21).

By thus appealing to those who had heard Him, the Lord still further rebuked the malicious secrecy which had induced them, through fear of the people, to take Him by night. The direction in which Christ pointed Annas is very striking. He did not say, Summon the deaf, the lame, the blind, the lepers I have healed. He did not say, Send for Lazarus of Bethany and question him! But, “Ask them which *heard me*.” It was “the *Word*” challenging them!

“Survey the dignity, the clearness, the gentleness, the supremely measured rightness and wisdom of this answer! In the full and perfect consciousness that He was no founder of a sect, deserving inquisition, He began with *I openly*, continued with *I*, and closed with profound feeling *who* He was, yet not expressing it with ‘what I have said.’ But, with the most proper discretion of one arrested and

charged, more righteous than Annas and his foolish questioning: —I may not and will not now, My life and doctrine lying before you, testify *for Myself*, or defend Myself — let all be investigated! Let the testimony of all bear witness!” (Stier).

“And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by, struck Jesus with the palm of his hand (margin with a rod’), saying, Answerest thou the high priest so?” (John 18:22).

How fearfully does this exhibit the enmity of the natural man against God, here manifest in the flesh! Meekly and mildly had our Lord replied to questions which deserved no answer, and all that He received in return was a cruel and cowardly blow. There is no hint of any remonstrance from Annas, nor have we any reason to suppose that he made any. And what shall be thought of a *judge* who allowed a bound prisoner to be treated in this fashion! Unable to meet the convicting and condemning truth, resource was had to force. It was might attempting to crush the right. This was the first blow which the sacred body of our Savior received from the *hands* of sinners, and this came not from one of the Roman soldiers, but from a Jew! The Greek word signifies “gave a blow on the face,” whether with his hand or with a stick is not determined; personally, we believe it was with the latter, and thus fulfilled Micah 5:1 — “They shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek.”

“Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?” (John 18:23).

There was no hot surging of the flesh here, no angry retort, no spirit of resentment. Under all circumstances the Lord Jesus manifested His perfections. But He only was “without sin”: contrast the apostle Paul in Acts 23. When the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to strike their prisoner in the mouth, Paul said, God shall smite thee thou whited wall. Yet it is beautiful to see how grace in him triumphed over the flesh: as soon as they asked him, “Revilest thou God’s high priest?” he answered,

“I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest, for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people” (Acts 23:2-5).

But He who is fairer than the children of men never had to retract a single word! O that we may learn of Him who was meek and lowly in heart.

“But if well, why smitest thou me?” The Savior still acted as became the Son of God: He questioned His questioner! He judged the one who had so unrighteously condemned Him. If the smiter had any sense of justice he must have felt keenly our Lord’s calm rebuke.

“Now Annas had sent him bound unto Caiaphas, the high priest” (John 18:24).

The word “had” here is misleading and is not warranted by the Greek. It was *following* what we read of in John 18:19-23 that Christ was turned over to Caiaphas. Annas had heard sufficient. He saw that to prolong the uneven contest would damage himself rather than his Prisoner; so, ignoring Christ’s piercing question, the blow of the officer and our Lord’s rebuke, he sends Him *bound* to his son-in-law, that the specious judgment might proceed as prudently as possible, but with the “If I have *spoken* (not ‘done’!) evil, *bear witness* of the evil” ringing in his ears.

“And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not” (John 18:25).

The first clause here is repeated from John 18:18 so as to connect the history. The “therefore” informs us *why it was* that these men should challenge Peter. He was standing “*with* them” (John 18:18), as one of them, and no doubt it was the flames from their “fire” which lit up his face and caused them to recognize him. He was warming himself — more concerned about his body than his soul. He was listening to their blasphemous talk about his Master, too timid to speak up and witness for Him. And it is written “Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Corinthians 15:33). So it proved here, for when these men asked the

apostle if he were one of Christ's disciples, he denied it. This gives additional force to the "therefore": Peter's being in the company of these enemies of the Lord was the occasion of his being challenged, and that became the occasion of his greater sinning! What a solemn warning for us to avoid the company of the ungodly! How urgently we need to heed the command! "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers"! But note it carefully that Peter did *not* deny that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, or the Savior of sinners — which, we think, none indwelt by the Holy Spirit ever did — but only that he was one of His "disciples"!

["One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith Did not I see thee in the garden with him?" \(John 18:26\).](#)

What a rebuke was this! Peter was standing "*with them*" (John 18:18), and now one reminds him that, only a little while before, he had stood "*with him.*" How this should have searched his conscience; how it ought to have opened his eyes to the place he now occupied. But poor Peter had boasted,

["Although all shall be offended yet will not I.... I will not deny thee in any wise" \(Mark 14:29, 31\);](#)

and so God left him to stand alone, to show him and us that except omnipotent grace upholds us we are certain to fall. Alas, what is man. What is our boasted strength but weakness, and when we are left to ourselves how our most solemn resolutions melt like snow before the sun!

["Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew" \(John 18:27\).](#)

"If any of his companions had been asked at what point of Peter's character the vulnerable spot would be found, not one of them would have said, He will fall through cowardice. Besides, Peter had a few hours before been so emphatically warned against denying Christ that he might have been expected to stand firm this night at least. Perhaps it was this very warning which betrayed Peter. When he struck the blow in the garden, he may have thought he had

falsified his Lord's prediction, and when he found himself the only one who had courage to follow to the palace, his besetting self-confidence returned and led him into circumstances for which he was too weak. He was equal to the test of his courage which he was *expecting*, but when another kind of test was applied in circumstances and from a quarter he had *not* anticipated his courage failed him utterly.

“Peter probably thought he might be brought bound with his Master before the high priest, and had he done so he would probably have stood faithful. But the Devil who was sifting him had a much finer sieve than that to run him through. He brought him to no formal trial, where he could gird himself for a special effort. The whole trial was over before he knew he was being tried. So do most of our real trials come; in a business transaction that turns up with others in the day's work, in the few minutes' talk or the evening's intercourse with friends, it is discovered whether we are so truly Christ's friends that we cannot forget Him or disguise the fact that we are His. In these battles which we must all encounter, we receive no formal challenge that gives us time to choose our ground and our weapons; but a sudden blow is dealt us, from which we can be saved only by habitually wearing a coat of mail sufficient to turn it, and which we can carry into all companies” (Mr. M. Dods).

Many are the lessons which we ought to learn from this sad fall of Peter.

First, in himself the believer is as weak as water. Only two hours before, Peter had partaken of the Lord's Supper, had heard the most touching Address and Prayer that ever fell on mortal ears, and had received the plainest possible warning — yet he fell!!

Second, it shows us the danger of self-confidence. “It is a beacon mercifully set up in Scripture, to prevent others making shipwreck.”

Third, it warns us of the consequences of prayerlessness: had Peter watched and prayed when the Lord bade him, he would have found grace to help in time of need.

Fourth, it reveals to us the perils of companionship with the wicked.

Fifth, it shows us the distasteful influence of the fear of man — “the fear of man bringeth a snare” (Proverbs 29:25), making us more afraid of the face of those we can see than the eye of God whom we cannot see.

Sixth, it should prepare us against surprise when our familiar friends fail us in the crucial hour — God often permits this to cast us back the more on Himself!

Seventh, did not God permit Peter to sin more grievously than any of the Eleven because He foreknew the extravagant regard which should afterwards be paid to *him* and his self-styled “successors”!

“After all let us leave the passage with the comfortable reflection that we have a merciful and faithful High Priest, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and will not break the bruised reed. Peter no doubt fell shamefully, and only rose again after heartfelt repentance and bitter tears. But he did rise again; he was not cast off forevermore. The same pitiful Hand that saved him from drowning, when his faith failed him on the waters, was once more stretched out to raise him when he fell in the high priest’s hall. Can we doubt that he rose a wiser and better man? If Peter’s fall has made Christians see more clearly their own great weakness and Christ’s great compassion, then Peter’s fall has not been recorded in vain” (Bishop Ryle).

The following questions are to help the student on the dosing section of John 18: —

1. Compare the Synoptics for what happened ere Christ appeared before Pilate.
2. What does verse 30 prove?
3. What does the second half of verse 31 go to show?
4. What did Christ mean by verse 36?
5. What is the force of the last clause of verse 37?

6. Why did God cause Pilate to say verse 39?
7. What is the deeper significance of verse 40?

JOHN 18:28-40

CHRIST BEFORE PILATE

The following is an Analysis of the closing section of John 18: —

1. Christ brought to Pilate's court, verse 28.
2. Pilate demanding a formal charge, verses 29, 30.
3. Pilate seeking to shelve his responsibility, verses 31, 32
4. Pilate examining Christ, verses 33-37.
5. Pilate affirms Christ's innocence, verse 38.
6. Pilate's attempt at compromise, verse 39.
7. Pilate's attempt fails, verse 39.

In our last chapter we contemplated the Lord Jesus in the presence of Annas, the *real* high priest of Israel: in the portion of Scripture which is for our present consideration we behold the Savior arraigned before Pilate. Much that occurred between these two things is omitted by John. In John 18:24 we read, "Now Annas sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest," and following the account of Peter's second and third denials we are told, "Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment" (John 18:28). This fourth Gospel tells us nothing about what transpired when our Lord appeared before Caiaphas, the *legal* high priest (by Roman appointment), of Israel. For this we have to compare Matthew 26:57- 68; 27:1, 2; Mark 14:53 to 15:2; Luke 22:54 to 23:1. Let us briefly summarize the contents of these passages.

As was pointed out in our last, sentence of death had been passed upon Christ *before* He was brought to trial at all (John 18:14); the examination before Caiaphas was, therefore, nothing more than a horrible farce. The Savior was tried before what ought to have been the holiest judicature on earth, but was condemned by the most

fearful perversion of justice and abuse of its forms that is recorded anywhere in history. The amazing contrasts presented are intensely affecting. The Friend of sinners was shackled by handcuffs and leg-irons. The Judge of all the earth was arraigned before a fallen son of Adam. The Lord of glory was treated with the foulest scorn. The Holy One was condemned as a blasphemer. Liars bore witness against the Truth. He who is the Resurrection and the Life was doomed to die.

With Caiaphas were assembled the “scribes and elders” (Matthew 26:57): in addition to these were the “chief priests and all the council” (Matthew 26:59). At this decisive crisis, when Israel’s rejection of their Messiah took its final and official form, all the leaders of the nation were solemnly convened. Their first act was to summon witnesses *against* the Lord, and the unprincipled character of the Sanhedrin, their utter unrighteousness, is glaringly apparent in that they “SOUGHT *false* witnesses against Jesus” (Matthew 26:59). The Sanhedrin had not the power to execute the death-penalty, therefore, some charge must be preferred against Him when they brought Him before Pilate — hence the seeking of the false witnesses. There were thousands who could have testified to the genuineness of His *miracles*; their own agents had acknowledged that never did man *speak* as He did; but such testimony as this was not what they wanted. Something must be devised which would give a semblance of justice in clamoring for His execution.

For a time their iniquitous quest was fruitless: “though many false witnesses came, yet found they none” — none who could supply what they wanted. But “at the last came two false witnesses” — the minimum number required by the Mosaic law, just as Jezebel obtained two false witnesses to testify against Naboth (1 Kings 21:18). They affirmed that Christ had said, “I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.” In obedient submission to His Father’s Word, the Savior had stood by in silence while these children of the father of lies had perjured themselves. Evidently dissatisfied at the flimsiness of such a charge, and uneasy at Christ’s calm dignity, the high priest arose “and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee?” But Jesus held His peace. Alarmed, most probably at the dignified

demeanor of his Prisoner, and fearful perhaps that His bearing might move the hearts of some in the Council, Caiaphas said,

“I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God” (Matthew 26:63).

“This was the method among the Israelites of proffering and accepting the oath; the appeal to God (and the formula of curse as the penalty of lying — which, however, was not ventured on now) was made on the one side, and the answer made thereupon was received, without any repetition of the oath being regarded as necessary on the part of the respondent. I adjure Thee by the *living* God (in whose office I stand, under whose power we all are, before whom Thou also standest, who knowest the truth, and judgeth between us and Thee) that Thou tell us, this holy Sanhedrin now here as before God, the truth. Thus does he avow, bearing testimony against himself in this most awful abuse of the name of God, that he *knows* this God as a *living* God who will not be mocked! He testifies of His truth, even while he is aiming to get the victory by a lie; of His power and majesty, while he is pushing his opposition to the uttermost? (Stier).

Now, for the first time, Christ spoke before Caiaphas. He penetrates the meaning of His questioner, recognizes all the consequences of His affirmation, but hesitates not to answer. As an obedient Israelite, it was His duty to respond to the adjuration of the ruling power (Leviticus 5:1; 1 Kings 22:16). Made “under the law” (Galatians 4:4), He was submissive to the last, even when it was perverted against Him. The Savior not only replied to His judge, but, maintaining His dignity to the last, added,

“Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64):

“Sitting” in contrast from Me now standing before you, while you sit in judgment upon Me; “power” in contrast from His then weakness (i.e., refusing to exercise His might); “Coming in the clouds of heaven” in contrast from *going* to the Cross! Caiaphas’ response was to rend his official robes — instead of putting them off

before the majesty of the great High Priest. In this act Caiaphas did, unknown to himself, but intimate that *God* had rent asunder the Aaronic priesthood! — a garment is only torn to pieces by its owner when he has no more use for it.

Following the rending of his robes, Caiaphas said, “What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now we have heard His blasphemy. What think ye?” *He* was the blasphemer. “What further need have we of witnesses?” betrayed his uneasy conscience; “Behold, now ye have heard him” was the signal that the mock trial was over. The answer he wanted was promptly given: “He is guilty of death.” Elated at their fancied triumph, “*then* did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophesy unto us thou Christ, who is he that smote thee?” Thus did Israel condemn their Messiah, rebellious man his God.

“When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor” (Matthew 27:1, 2),

thus fulfilling our Lord’s prediction,

“The Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him” (Mark 10:33, 34).

This brings us to the first point touched upon by John, whose narrative we shall now follow.

“Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early” (John 18:28).

“Then,” following the decision of the Council, recorded in Matthew 27:1; “led they”; still unresisting, He went as a lamb to the slaughter. Mark tells us (Mark 15:1) they “bound” Him; “unto the hall of

judgment,” Pilate’s court-room. “And it was early”: the disciples could not watch *with* Him one hour; His enemies had acted *against* Him all through that night! Alas, man has more zeal and energy, because more heart, for that which is evil than for that which is good. The same people who will listen, untired, half a day to a political discussion, or sit three hours through an opera, complain that the preacher is long-winded if he spends the whole hour in expounding the Word of God! “It was early”: their one object now was to obtain from Pilate, as swiftly as possible, his confirmation of the death- sentence.

“And they themselves went not into the judgment-hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover” (John 18:28).

The judgment-hall was *Gentile* property and to have entered it the Jews would be ceremonially defiled, and from that there was not time to be cleansed ere the passover feast arrived. Anxious to partake of the passover, they therefore went no further than the entrance to the praetorium. They would not enter Pilate’s hall, though they were ready to use him to further their own wickedness! What a proof was this of the worthlessness of religion where it has failed to influence the heart. Fully did they merit those awful words of Christ:

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matthew 23:27, 28).

These very men were here engaged in the vilest act ever perpetrated on earth, and yet they spoke of being “defiled”! They hesitated not to deliver their Messiah to the Gentiles, yet were scrupulous lest they be disqualified from eating the passover. So to-day there are some who are more concerned about the right form of baptism than they are of a scriptural walk; more punctilious about observing the Lord’s supper than to bring forth fruit to the glory of the Father. Let us beware lest we also “strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.”

“These ‘rulers of the Jews’ and the multitude that followed them were thorough *Ritualists*. It was their ritualism that urged them on to crucify the Son of God. Christ and ritualism are opposed to each other as light is to darkness. The true Cross in which Paul gloried and the cross in which modern ceremonialists glory, have no resemblance to each other. The Cross and the crucifix cannot agree. Either ritualism will banish Christ or Christ will banish ritualism.” (Mr. H. Bonar.)

“Pilate then went out unto them” (John 18:29).

That the whole Sanhedrin (Mark 15:1, 2), accompanied by a large crowd (Luke 23:1), should visit him at such a time (the passover feast), was sufficient to convince Pilate that some important matter required his attention; therefore, early morning though it were, he went out to them. That he was not taken by surprise we know, for only the previous night they had secured a cohort of Roman soldiers, which could not have been obtained without his permission. It was clear to him, then, that here was some culprit whom the Jews wished executed before the Feast began.

“And said, What accusation bring ye against this man?” (John 18:29).

Pilate’s question here confirms what we have just said above. He did not ask them what was the object of their visit, but simply inquired what charge they preferred against their prisoner. This was in accord with the Roman law which required three things: the making of a specific indictment, the bringing of the accusers before the accused, and the liberty granted to the latter to answer for himself (Acts 25:16). Pilate therefore acted honorably in demanding to know the nature of the crime charged against the Lord Jesus. God saw to it that out of their own mouths they should be condemned.

“They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee” (John 18:30),

The Jews were piqued at Pilate’s question. They were not anxious to prefer a charge, knowing full well that they had no evidence by

which they could establish it. It is clear that they hoped that Pilate would take *their* word for it — especially as they had obtained the soldiers from him so easily — and condemn their Prisoner unheard. With characteristic hypocrisy they now assumed an injured air: they posed as righteous men; they would have Pilate believe that *they* would never have arrested an *innocent* man. Their “if he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee” was tantamount to saying: “See who is before you — we are none other than the sacred Sanhedrin: we have already tried the case, and our judgment is beyond question: we only ask you now to give the necessary Roman sanction that He may be put to death.” Their hands were forced by Pilate, for Luke tells us

“they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a king” (Luke 23:2).

“Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him, according to your law” (John 18:31).

The whole responsibility now rested on Pilate. He was too well acquainted with the Jews’ expectations to suppose that the Sanhedrin would hate and persecute one who would free them from the Roman yoke. Their simulation of good citizenship was too shallow to deceive him. But he did not relish the task before him, and sought to evade it. The real character of the man comes out plainly here — timid, vacillating, temporizing, unprincipled. Pilate wished to have nothing to do with the case; he was anxious for the Jews to shoulder the full onus of Christ’s death. What cared he for justice, so long as he could get out of an unpleasant situation! He was anxious not to displease the Jews, therefore did he say, “judge him (sentence Him to death) according to your law.”

“The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death” (John 18:31).

This reply completely thwarted the wretched Pilate’s attempt to avoid the necessity of judging our Lord. They pressed upon the Roman governor that the legal power of passing the death sentence was no longer in their hands, therefore it was impossible for them to

do as he desired. They here warned Pilate that nothing but the execution of Christ would satisfy them. But a Higher Power was overruling:

“Of a truth against thy Holy servant Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever *thy* hand and *thy* counsel determined before to be done” (Acts 4:27,28).

“The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.” Though they were unaware of it, this was a remarkable confession. It was *their own* acknowledgment that Genesis 49:10 was now fulfilled “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come.” The heads of Israel here owned that *they* were no longer the rulers of their own nation, but were under the dominion of a foreign power. He that has the right to condemn a prisoner to death is the governor of a country. “It is not lawful” they said; you, the Roman governor, alone can do it. By their consent they no longer had a law-administrator of their own stock, therefore the “*scepter*” had departed, and this was proof positive that Shiloh (the Messiah) *had come!* How unaware wicked men are when they fulfill prophecy!

“That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die” (John 18:32).

Here again prediction was being fulfilled, all unconsciously by themselves. The refusal of Israel to take matters into their own hands, when Pilate put it there, only worked for the accomplishment of Christ’s own words:

“and shall deliver him to the *Gentiles* to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify” (Matthew 20:19).

Moreover, had the Jews still possessed the power of inflicting capital punishment for such crimes as they alleged against the Lord Jesus, the mode of execution would have been by stoning. By delivering Him to Pilate this ensured the Roman form of punishment, crucifixion, and thus did the saying of Christ come to pass:

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be *lifted up*” (John 3:14);

and again,

“I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto me. This He said, signifying *what* death he should die” (John 12:32, 33).

“Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews?” (John 18:33).

Here we have another glaring example of the gross injustice which was meted out to the Savior. First Annas, then Caiaphas, now Pilate, displayed the fearful enmity of the carnal mind against God — here manifest in flesh. Roman law required that the accused and the accusers should be brought face to face, and that the former should have an opportunity of replying to the charge laid against him (Acts 23:28), but this Pilate denied Christ. But what was far worse, Pilate examined Christ as the enemy of *Caesar* and the *Jews* were His only accusers! If the Lord Jesus were really opposing the authority and rights of the Emperor, why had not the Roman power taken the initiative? Where were the Gentile witnesses against Him? Were all the Roman officers indifferent to their master’s interests! Pilate knew that it was for *envy* (Matthew 27:18) the Sanhedrin had delivered Him up. He knew full well that the Savior was no malefactor: he could not have been ignorant of His public life — His deeds of mercy, His words of grace and truth; yet did he refuse Him a fair trial The fact that Pilate’s objection (John 18:31) was so easily silenced, revealed the pitiable weakness of his character. Sent to be the Governor of these Jews, they, nevertheless, compelled him to be their slave, the executioner of their wrath.

“Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the king of the Jews?” What lay behind this question? what was the state of Pilate’s mind when he asked it? With Bishop Ryle we are inclined to say, “On the whole, the question seems a mixture of curiosity and contempt.” The humble attire and lowly appearance of our Lord cannot fail to have struck

the Governor. The entire absence of any signs which the world associates with One possessing a kingdom must have puzzled him. Yet tidings of His “triumphal entrance” into Jerusalem only a few days before had doubtless reached his ears. Who, then, was this strange character who attracted the multitudes, but was hated by their leaders? who had power to heal the sick, yet had not where to lay His head? who was able to raise the dead, yet here stood bound before him?

“Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?” (John 18:34).

Our Lord was addressing Himself to Pilate’s conscience. Do you really desire to act justly? Is it information you are in quest of? or are you going to be the tool of those who delivered Me to thee? He would point out to him the injustice of any suspicions he might entertain. If you have reason to think I am a “king” in the sense in which you employ the term, then where are the Roman witnesses? If you are influenced only by what you have heard from the Sanhedrin, beware of heeding the word of those who are plainly My enemies. Christ was pressing upon him his individual responsibility of coming to some definite conviction concerning Himself. But why not have answered with a plain Yes or No? Because that, under the circumstances, was impossible? Pilate used the word “king” as a *rival* of Caesar, as a *rebel* against Rome. To have replied Yes, would have misled Pilate; to have said No, without qualification, would have been to deny “the hope of Israel.” The Lord therefore presses Pilate for a definition of this ambiguous term. Admire His consummate wisdom.

“Sayest thou this of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?”

“Our Lord, by this, would learn whether His claims to be king of the Jews was challenged by Pilate as protector of the Emperor’s rights in Judea, or merely upon a charge of the Jews. Upon this hung, I may say, everything in the present juncture; and the wisdom and purpose of the Lord in giving the inquiry. this direction are manifest. Should Pilate say that he had become apprehensive of the Roman interests, the Lord could at once have referred him to the whole course of His life and ministry, to prove that, touching the king,

innocency had been found in Him. He had taught the rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. He had withdrawn Himself, departing into a mountain alone, when He perceived that the multitude would have taken Him by force to make Him a king (John 6:15). His controversy was not with Rome... and Pilate would have had His answer according to all this had the challenge proceeded from himself as representative of the Roman power. But it did not" (Mr. J. G. Bellett).

“Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done?” (John 18:35).

Here Pilate betrayed his insincerity. He evaded Christ's penetrating question. He denied any personal interest in the matter. I am no Jew — I am not concerned about points of *religious* controversy. “What hast thou done?” — let us deal with *practical* matters. We doubt not that Pilate uttered his first question sneeringly — Am I a *Jew!* You forget that I, a noble Roman, can have no patience with visions and dreams. It was the haughty and contemptuous language of a prominent man of affairs. “Thine own nation and the chief priests” are the ones who are interested in ceremonial rites and recondite prophecies, and they have “delivered thee to me”! What is it that they have against you? Here he speaks as the judge: let us come to the business in hand.

“Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done?”

“This answer of Pilate conveyed the full proof of the *guilt of Israel*. In the mouth of him who represented the power of the world at that time, the thing was established, that Israel had disclaimed their King and sold themselves into the hand of another. This, for the present, was everything with Jesus — this at once carried Him beyond the earth, and out of the world. Israel had rejected Him, and His kingdom was, therefore, not from hence: for Zion is the appointed place for the King of the whole earth to sit and rule; and the unbelief of the daughter of Zion must keep the king of the earth away. The Lord, then, as the rejected King, listening to this testimony from the

lips of the Roman, could only recognize the present loss of His throne” (Mr. Bellett).

Hence Christ’s next words.

“My kingdom is not of this world’ (John 18:36).

First, observe that He did not say “My kingdom is not in this world,” but “My kingdom is not of this world.” Believers are not “of” this world (John 17:16), yet they *are* “in” it!

Second, observe His own qualifying and yet amplifying words at the dose of the verse: “but now is my kingdom not from hence.” The “now” is explained by Pilate’s declaration in the previous verse — re-read Mr. Bellett’s comments thereon. This was not said by Christ until after His final and official *rejection by Israel!*

Third, observe His explanatory “if my kingdom *were* of this world, *then* would my servants fight” — to deliver their king. Our Lord was graciously explaining to Pilate the *character* of that kingdom over which He will yet preside. Unlike all the kingdoms which have preceded it, My kingdom will not originate with man, but be received from God (Daniel 7:13, 14; Luke 19:12); unlike the kingdoms of man, which have been dependent upon the powers of the world, *Mine* will be an absolute theocracy; unlike theirs, which have been propagated by the world’s arms, *Mine* will be regulated by heavenly principles; unlike theirs, which have been characterized by injustice and tyranny, *Mine* will be marked by righteousness and peace.

In answering Pilate as He did we cannot but admire the wondrous grace and patience of our blessed Lord. The contemptuous “Am I a Jew?” of Pilate annulled his right to any further notice; his “what hast thou done?” gave the One before him the full right to maintain silence. But ignoring the insult, Christ continued to address Himself to his conscience. “My kingdom is not of *this* world” warned Pilate that there was *another* world, to which He belonged! “My *kingdom*,” which will not be brought in by “fighting,” was to assure him there was a Power *superior* to the boasted might of Rome, which then dominated the earth. “Now is my kingdom not *from*

hence” intimated that His kingdom would be far otherwise than those in which violence and injustice had ever held sway, and where, after all, there was nothing obtained but the semblance of right and truth. Thus instead of furnishing a positive reply to Pilate’s “What hast thou done?” He gave a negative answer which, however, plainly showed that *He* was guilty of no political evil and had done nothing against Caesar.

Some have wondered why Christ did not appeal to His wondrous and benevolent works of mercy when Pilate asked Him, “What hast thou done?” But those were a part of His Messianic credentials (Matthew 11:3-5, etc.), and therefore *only* for Israel. Others have wondered why Pilate did not refer to the smiting of Malchus in the garden, when the Lord affirmed “then would my servants fight.” Why had not the Sanhedrin informed Pilate of Peter’s temerity? Malchus was a servant of the high priest and nothing was more natural than that he should clamor for redress. The seeming difficulty is at once removed by a reference to Luke 22:51, where we are told that the Savior “touched his ear and *healed* him.”

“The miracle satisfactorily explains the suppression of the charge to have advanced it would have naturally led to an investigation that would have more than frustrated the malicious purpose it was meant to serve. It would have proved too much. It would have manifested His own compassionate nature, His submission to the law, and His extraordinary powers” (Mr. J. Blount).

“Pilate therefore said unto him, *Art* thou a king then?” (John 18:37).

The Governor was puzzled. The quiet and dignified bearing of the One before him, the threefold reference to His kingdom, the declaration that it was not of this world, the calm assertion that though in bonds *He* was possessed of “servants,” plus a strong hint that His dominion would yet be firmly established, though not by the sword, was more than Pilate could grasp. Pilate’s change from “Art thou the king of *the Jews?*” in John 18:33 to “Art thou a king then?” intimated he was satisfied there was nothing to fear politically, yet that Christ had made a claim which was incomprehensible to his mind. We believe that he had dropped his

scornful tone and asked this last question half earnestly, half curiously. That He *was* “king” our Lord would not deny, but boldly acknowledged “to this end was I born,” knowing full well what would be the cost of His affirmation. It is to this the Holy Spirit refers, “who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession” (1 Timothy 6:13). Though Israel received Him not, yet He *was* their king (Matthew 2:2). Though the husbandmen were casting Him out, yet He *was* the heir of the vineyard. Though His citizens were saying they would not have Him to reign over them, yet He *had been* anointed to the throne in Zion.

“To this end was I born, *and* for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth” (John 18:37).

Note how the Savior here linked together His kingdom and His bearing witness unto the truth. Truth is authoritative, imperial, majestic. This was a further word for Pilate’s conscience, if only his heart were open to receive it. Christ informs him that He possessed a higher glory than His title to David’s throne, even that of Deity, for it was as the Only-begotten of the Father that He was “full of grace and truth,” and His “came I into the world” — distinguished from His being “*born*” in the previous clause — was a direct hint that *He* was from *Heaven!* Moreover, the Lord would have it known that there had been no failure in His mission. The great design before Him at His first advent was not to wield the royal scepter, but to bear witness unto the truth; *that* He had faithfully done, yea, was doing, at that very moment. *This* was His answer, to Pilate’s “What hast thou done?” (John 18:35) — I have witnessed unto, not simply “truth” but, *the* truth; it was as “the *word*” He again spoke!

“Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice” (John 18:37).

He that is “*of* the truth” means, first, he that is true, honest and sincere; in its deeper meaning, he who is of God: compare John 8:47. It is only the one who has a heart for the truth who really hears Christ’s voice, for the Author of the truth is also the Teacher, the Interpreter of it. What a word was *this* for Pilate’s conscience. If you

are really seeking the Truth, which I came into the world to bear witness unto, you will listen unto Me!

“Would any one ask how he can know that *he* is ‘of the truth’? The Sacred Word supplies a direct answer, leaving none in doubt. ‘Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And *hereby* we know that we *are* of the truth’ (1 John 3:18, 19). Whoever shows himself to be a partaker of the Divine nature, evidenced by loving in deed and in truth, is of the truth, hears Christ’s voice, and will be found in His train among the armies of heaven, when He comes forth to deal with the apostate power on earth” (Mr. C. E. Stuart).

“Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out” (John 18:38).

There has been wide difference of opinion as to the spirit in which he asked this question. Clearly it was not that of an earnest inquirer, as his at once leaving Christ without waiting for an answer shows — only an awakened conscience is really desirous of knowing *what* is Truth. Many have thought it was more a wail of despair: *What is truth?*: “I have investigated many a system, examined various philosophers, but have found no satisfaction in them.” But apart from the fact that everything revealed about his character conflicts with an earnest, persevering quest after light, would he not rather have said, “Truth! there is no truth!” had that been his state of mind? Personally, we regard Pilate’s words here as an expression of scorn, ending them not with a question mark but an exclamation, the emphasis on the final word “What is *truth?*” It was the Light now manifesting the darkness. This expressed the settled conviction of a conscienceless politician. “Truth”! — is it for *that* you are sacrificing your life? We think his words in John 18:39 bear this out.

“And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and said unto them, I find in him no fault” (John 18:38).

Pilate was uneasy. The words of Christ had impressed him more deeply than he would care to admit. That He was innocent was clear; that Pilate was now guilty of the grossest injustice is equally patent. If the Roman governor found “no fault” in Christ he ought to have

promptly released Him. But instead of yielding to the voice of conscience he proceeded to confer with those who thirsted for the Savior's blood. Much is omitted by John at this point which is found in the Synoptics — the chief priest's remonstrance (Mark 15:3-12); Pilate sending Him to Herod; and the brutal treatment which He received at the hands of his soldiers, followed by Herod sending Him back to Pilate (Luke 23:5-18).

“But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the king of the Jews?” (John 18:39).

The nature of such a proposal at once reveals the unscrupulous character of him who made it. Pilate feared to offend the Jews (feared because an uprising at that time would have brought him into disfavour with Caesar, who had his hands full elsewhere) and so sought an expedient which he hoped would please them, and yet enable him to discharge the Lord Jesus. Remembering the custom which obtained at the passover of releasing a prisoner — a most striking custom it was, *grace, deliverance*, connected with the *passover!* — he suggests that Christ be the one to go free. It was as though he said, Let us suppose that Jesus is guilty; I am willing to declare Him a criminal worthy of death, providing He be freed. Luke tells us that he went so far as to offer to “chastise” Christ before he released Him (Luke 23:16). Little did he recognize the type of men he was dealing with, still less the One above who was directing all things.

“Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber” (John 18:40).

The Jews revealed themselves as worse than Pilate and demanded what he least expected. Thirsting for the blood of their victim, impatient or him to yield up to them their prey, they all “cried (the greek signifies ‘shouted’) not this man, but Barabbas.” Pilate's compromise not only showed plainly that he was not “of the truth” but only drew out the extent of their enmity. “Barabbas was a robber,” better “bandit” — one who used force; Luke says he was a murderer, How very striking: the Jews *chose* Barabbas, and plunders

and blood-shedders have ruled over them ever since!! In this their history is without a parallel.

“We have noticed elsewhere how strangely yet significantly this name Barabbas, ‘son of the father,’ comes in here. It was the Son of the Father — just as that — whom they were refusing now; but of *what* father was this lawless one the son? A shadow it is, surely, of the awful apostasy to come, when they will receive him who comes in his own name (the Antichrist, A.W.P.), true child of the rebel and ‘murderer from the beginning.’ Yet there is a Gospel side to this also. How good to see that here it is the question, *Shall the Savior or the sinner suffer?* and to remember that under the law, the unclean animal might be redeemed with a Lamb (Exodus 13), but the lamb could not be redeemed. Impossible for the Savior to be released in this way. But the sinner may” (Mr. F. W. Grant).

The following questions are to aid the student on John 19:1-11: —

1. Why did God allow Christ to wear “a crown of thorns,” verse 2?
2. Why “a purple robe,” verse 2?
3. How many times in the four Gospels “I find no fault,” verse 4?
4. What was Pilate’s aim in “Behold the man”! verse 5?
5. What is the meaning of verse 6 in the light of John 18:31?
6. What made Pilate “the more afraid,” verse 8?
7. Why did Jesus make no answer, verse 9?

JOHN 19:1-11

CHRIST BEFORE PILATE (CONCLUDED)

Below is an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: —

1. Christ scourged and mocked, verses 1-3.
2. Pilate re-affirms His innocency, verse 4.
3. Pilate appeals to the Jews' sympathies, verse 5.
4. The Jews' response, verses 6, 7.
5. Pilate's fear, verses 8, 9.
6. Pilate's boast, verse 10.
7. Christ's reprimand, verse 11.

Nowhere in Scripture, perhaps, is there a more striking and vivid demonstration of the sovereignty of God than Pilate's treatment of the Lord Jesus.

First, Pilate was *assured* of His *innocency*, acknowledging, no less than seven times, "I find *no* fault in him."

Second, Pilate *desired* to release Him: "Pilate therefore willing to release Jesus" (Luke 23:20); "I will let him go" (Luke 23:22); "Pilate *sought* to release him" (John 19:12); "Pilate was *determined* to let him go" (Acts 3:13), all prove that unmistakably.

Third, Pilate was *urged*, most earnestly by none other than his own wife, *not to sentence Him* (Matthew 27:19.).

Fourth, he actually *endeavored* to bring about His acquittal: he bade the Jews themselves judge Christ (John 18:31); he sent Him to Herod, only for Christ to be returned (Luke 23:7); he sought to induce the Jews to have him convict Barabbas in His stead (John

18:39,40). Yet in spite of all, Pilate *did* give sentence that Christ should be crucified!

What does man's will amount to when it runs counter to the will of God? Absolutely nothing. Here was Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, *determined* to release the Savior, yet prevented from doing so. From all eternity God had decreed that Pilate *should* sentence His Son to death, and all earth and hell combined could not thwart the purpose of the Almighty He would not be *all-mighty* if they could! Christ was "delivered up (Greek) by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). As God's servant fearlessly announced,

Both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together for to do *whatsoever* thy hand and thy counsel *determined before* to be done" (Acts 4:27, 28).

This is not simply "Calvinism," it is the explicit declaration of Holy Writ, and, woe be unto the one who dares to deny it. Christ *had to be* sentenced by Pilate because the eternal counsels of Deity had foreordained it. Moreover, Christ was dying for sinners *both* of the Jews and of the Gentiles, therefore Divine wisdom deemed it fitting that *both* Jews and Gentiles should have a direct hand in His death.

But, it will at once be objected, *This* reduces Pilate to a mere machine! Our first answer is, What of that? — better far to reduce him to a non-entity than to deny the Word of the living God! Away with the deductions of reason; our initial and never-ceasing duty is to bow in absolute submission to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. Our second answer is, The deduction drawn by the objector is manifestly erroneous. An honest mind is forced to acknowledge that the Gospel records present Pilate to us as a *responsible agent*. Christ addressed Himself to Pilate's conscience: "Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice" (John 18:37); God faithfully warned him that Christ was a *just* Man and to have nothing to do with Him (Matthew 27:19). Should it be asked, How could God *consistently* warn him when He had decreed that he should sentence Christ to death? Our reply is, His decree was a part of His own sovereign counsels; whereas the warning was addressed

to Pilate's responsibility, and he will be justly held accountable for disregarding it. Christ announced that Peter *would* deny Him, yet a few minutes later said to him, "Watch and pray, that ye *enter not* into temptation"! Finally, the Savior Himself told Pilate that he was *sinning* in holding Him: "he that delivered me unto thee hath the *greater sin*" (John 19:11) — therefore it follows that Pilate's failure to release *Him was a great sin!*

["Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him" \(John 19:1\).](#)

We believe that the real explanation of this awful act of the Roman governor is intimated in verse 4 — "Pilate *therefore* went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him." It was a desperate move, made against his better judgment, and, also made, we fully believe, *against* the strivings of his conscience. It was his third and last effort at a compromise. First, he had asked the Jews to judge Christ for themselves (John 18:31). Second, he had pitted against Him a notable outlaw, Barabbas, and made them take their choice. That having failed, he made a final effort to escape from that which he feared to do. He hesitated to speak the irrevocable word, and so scourged the Lord Jesus instead, and suffered the soldiers to brutally mistreat Him. We believe Pilate hoped that when he should present to the gaze of the Jews their suffering and bleeding king, their rage would be appeased. Luke 23:16 bears this out: "I will chastise him *and* release him." How entirely this wretched device failed we shall see by and by.

"Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him." "The cruel injury inflicted on our Lord's body, in this verse, was probably far more severe than an English reader might suppose. It was a punishment which among the Romans generally preceded crucifixion, and was sometimes so painful that the sufferer died under it. It was often a scourging with rods, and not always with cords, as painters and sculptors represent. Josephus, the Jewish historian, in his 'Antiquities,' particularly mentions that malefactors were scourged and tormented in every way before they were put to death. Smith's Dictionary of the Bible says that under the Roman

mode of scourging, ‘The culprit was stripped, stretched with cords or thongs on a frame, and beaten with rods’” (Bishop Rile).

“And the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, and said, Hail, king of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands” (John 19:2, 3).

“One question springs from the heart on reading this — How could it be! Where is the lauded Roman justice in this scourging of a bound prisoner of whom the judge says, ‘I find no fault in him!’ Why is an uncondemned one given into the rude hands of Roman soldiers for them to mock and smite at their pleasure? Where is the cool judgment of Pilate, that a little while ago refused to take action lest injustice be done? Why is Jesus treated in a way wholly unparalleled so far as we know? What is the secret of it all?” (Mr. M. Taylor).

Difficult as it would be, impossible perhaps, for unaided reason to answer these questions, the light which Scripture throws on them removes all difficulty.

First, *who* was this One so brutally, so unrighteously treated? He was Immanuel, “God manifest in flesh,” and fallen man *hates* God.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9).

“The carnal mind is enmity against God” (Romans 8:7).

“Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways” (Romans 3:13-16).

Never before or since did these awful facts receive such exemplification. Never were the desperate wickedness of the human heart, the fearful enmity of the carnal mind, and the unspeakable vileness of sin’s ways, so unmistakably evidenced as when the Son

of God was “*delivered into the hands of men*” (Mark 9:31). All Divine restraint was withdrawn, and human depravity was allowed to show itself in all its naked hideousness.

Second, this was *Satan’s hour*. Said the Savior to those who came to arrest Him in the Garden, “This is your hour, *and* the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53). On the day when sin entered the world, Jehovah announced that He would put enmity between the serpent and the woman, and between his seed and her seed (Genesis 3:15). That enmity was manifested when Christ became incarnate, for we are told,

“And the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to *devour* her child as soon as it was born” (Revelation 12:4),

and he it was who moved Herod to slay all the young children in Bethlehem. But God interposed and the dragon was foiled. But now God hindered no longer. The hour had arrived when the serpent was to bruise the Savior’s heel, and fully did he now avail himself of his opportunity.

Jews and Gentiles alike were “of their father, the devil.” and his lusts (desires) they now carried out with a will.

Third, Christ was on the point of making atonement *for sin*, therefore sin must be revealed in all its enormity. Sin is *lawlessness*, therefore did Pilate scourge the innocent One. Sin is *transgression*, therefore did Pilate set aside all the principles and statutes of Roman jurisprudence. Sin is *iniquity* (injustice), therefore did these soldiers smite that One who had never harmed a living creature. Sin is *rebellion against God*, therefore did Jew and Gentile alike maltreat the Son of God. Sin is an *offense*, therefore did they outrage every dictate of conscience and propriety. Sin is *coming short of the glory of God*, therefore did they heap ignominy upon His Son. Sin is *defilement*, uncleanness, therefore did they cover His face with vile spittle.

Fourth, Christ was to die *in the stead* of sinners, therefore must it be shown what was righteously due them. The Law required “an eye

for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” a *quid pro quo*. All sin is a revolt against God, a treating of Him with contumacy, a virtual smiting of Him; therefore was Christ *scourged by* sinners. Again, when man became a sinner the righteous curse of the thrice holy God fell upon him, hence Christ will yet say to the wicked. “Depart from me ye *cursed*”! Unto Adam God declared,

“cursed is the ground for thy sake... *thorns also* and thistles shall it bring forth to thee” (Genesis 3:17, 18);

therefore the last Adam, as the Head of those He came to deliver from the curse, was *crowned with thorns!* Again, by nature and practice we are defiled: our iniquities cover us from head to toot — sins which are “scarlet” and “crimson” (Isaiah 1:18); therefore was the Savior enveloped in “a *purple robe*” — Matthew actually terms it “a *scarlet robe*” (Matthew 27:28), and Mark says “they clothed him with *purple*” (Mark 15:17). Finally, they mocked Him as “*king of the Jews*,” for “sin hath *reigned* unto death” (Romans 5:21). Here then is the Gospel of our salvation: the Savior was scourged, that we might go free; He was crowned with thorns, that we might be crowned with blessing and glory; He was clothed with a robe of contempt, that we might receive the robe of righteousness; He was rejected as king, that we might be made kings and priests unto God.

“Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you that ye may know that I find no fault in him” (John 19:4).

The private interview which Pilate had had with Christ at least convinced him that He had done nothing worthy of death; he therefore returned to the Jews and re-affirmed His innocence. The “therefore” points back to what is recorded in John 19:1-3: he had gone as far as he meant to. “I bring him forth to *you*”: there is nothing more that I intend to do. “I find no fault in him”: how striking that the very one who shortly after sentenced Him to death, should give this repeated witness that the Lamb *was* “without blemish!” More striking still is it to observe that at the very time the Lord Jesus was apprehended and crucified as a criminal, God raised up one after another to testify of His guiltlessness. Of old the prophet had asked, “And *who shall declare* his generation? for he

was cut off out of the land of the living” (Isaiah 53:8). A *sevenfold* answer is supplied in the Gospels.

First, Judas declared “I have sinned in that I have betrayed *the innocent blood*” (Matthew 27:4)

Second, Pilate declared, “I find *no fault* in him” (John 19:4).

Third, of Herod Pilate said, “No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, *nothing* worthy of death is done unto him” (Luke 23:15).

Fourth, Pilate’s wife entreated, “Have thou nothing to do with that *just* man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream *because of him.*” (Matthew 27:19).

Fifth, the dying thief affirmed, “We receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man *hath done nothing amiss*” (Luke 23:41).

Sixth, the Roman centurion who glorified God, said, “Certainly this was a *righteous* man” (Luke 23:47).

Seventh, those who stood with the centurion acknowledged, “Truly this was *the son of God*” (Matthew 27:54)!

“Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe” (John 19:5).

“That our blessed Lord, the eternal Word, should have meekly submitted to be led out after this fashion, as a gazing-stock and an object of scorn, with an old purple robe on His shoulders, a crown of thorns on His head, His back bleeding from scourging, and His head from thorns, to feast the eyes of a taunting, howling, blood-thirsty crowd, is indeed a wondrous thought! Truly such love ‘passeth knowledge’” (Bishop Ryle).

“And Pilate saith unto them, ‘Behold the man!’” (John 19:5).

We fully believe that Pilate was here appealing to the Jews’ pity. See, saith he, what He has already suffered! He had no need to say more. The shame, the bleeding wounds, were tongues sufficiently

moving if only they had ears to hear. Pilate hoped that their wrath would now be appeased. Is He not already punished enough! It is surely striking that the Governor said not, “Behold *this* man,” but, “Behold *the* man.” It was the ungrudging testimony of an unprejudiced witness. Never before had any other who had stood before his bar carried himself as this One. Never before had Pilate seen such quiet dignity, intrepid courage, noble majesty. He was deeply impressed, and avowed the Lord’s uniqueness.

“When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify, crucify” (John 19:6).

Pilate’s scheming failed here as completely as had his previous attempts to avoid condemning our Lord; nothing short of His death would satisfy the Jews. The pitiful sight of the bleeding Savior softened them not a whir. Like beasts of prey that have tasted blood, they thirsted for more. The humiliating figure of their Messiah crowned with thorns by these heathen, instead of humbling, only infuriated them. They were “past feeling.” Solemn it is to observe that the *chief priests* were to the fore in demanding His crucifixion — the “officers” were the personal followers and servants of the priests, and would naturally take up the cry of their masters; the word for “cried out” signifies a boisterous shout. It is a painful fact that all through this dispensation the most cruel, relentless, and blood-thirsty persecutors of God’s saints have been the religious leaders — in a hundred different instances the “bishops” (?) and “cardinals” of Rome. Nor is it otherwise to-day. The form of persecution may have changed, yet is the opposition which comes from those who profess to be the servants of Christ the most relentless and cruel which God’s children have to endure. It is to be noted that the cry was not “Crucify him,” but “Crucify, crucify” — refusing *Him the “the man” of Pilate! It was Israel, all through, who* hounded Him to His death: how wondrous then that God shall yet have mercy upon them.

“Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify: for I find no fault in him” (John 19:6).

Pilate was disgusted at their lawless clamor, indignant at their challenging his decision, angry at their insistence. “Take ye him,” if

you want; “and crucify” if you dare. They had had the effrontery to appeal against the findings of *his* court, now he mocks them in regard to the impotency of their court, for according to their own admission, they were powerless (John 18:31). The Jews were insisting that Pilate should commit a judicial murder, now he challenges them to defy the Roman law. His “For I find no fault in him” was his challenge for them to continue opposing Caesar’s authority.

“The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God” (John 19:7).

Their words here show plainly that they discerned the satire in Pilate’s offer: had he really given them permission to crucify Christ, they would have acted promptly. They knew that he had not spoken seriously; they felt his biting irony, and stung by his sarcasm they now attempted some defense of their outrageous conduct. “We *have* a law” they insisted, much as you scorn us for wanting to act lawlessly. We have a law as well as *you!* “By our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God” — their reference was to Leviticus 24:16. Instead of re treating before Pilate’s outburst of indignation, they continued to press their demands upon him. We charge your prisoner with having broken our law, the punishment for which is death. Their aim was to make out Christ to be a dangerous impostor as well as a seditious person, opposed both to Jewish religion and Roman law. Pilate had challenged them; now they challenge him. You have dared us to defy the Roman law; we now dare you to refuse to maintain the Jewish law.

“We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.” It is indeed remarkable that as soon as Pilate said “Behold the *man*,” they proceeded to charge Him with “making himself the Son of God”! *Their* motive was an evil one, but how evident that a higher power was overruling!

Finding the charge of sedition had broken down, and that Pilate could not be induced to sentence Him to death on that score, they now accused Christ of blasphemy. But how their hypocrisy was manifested: they appealed to their own “law,” yet had no respect for

it, for *their* law called for *stoning* not crucifixion, as the penalty for blasphemy! A careful comparison of the Gospel records reveals the fact that the Jews preferred just seven *indictments* against Christ. First, they charged Him with threatening to destroy the temple (Matthew 26:61); second, with being a “malefactor” (John 18:30); third, with “perverting the nation” (Luke 23:2); fourth, with “forbidding to give tribute to Caesar” (Luke 23:2); fifth, with stirring up all the people (Luke 23:5); sixth, with being king” (Luke 23:2); seventh, with making Himself the Son of God (John 19:7). This sevenfold indictment witnessed to the *completeness* of their rejection of Him!

“When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid” (John 19:8).

The meaning of this is evident, yet, strange to say, many of the commentators have missed it. Some have supposed that fear of the Jews is what is intended; others, that Pilate was fearful lest it should now prove impossible to save Christ; others, lest he should take a false step. But the “therefore” is sufficient to show the error of these views: it was the declaration that Christ “made himself the Son of God” which alarmed the Roman Governor. Moreover, the “*he was the more afraid*” shows it was not an emotion which he now felt for the first time. The *person* of the Lord Jesus was what occasioned his fear. We believe that from the beginning there was a conscious uneasiness in his soul, deepened by an *awe* which the bearing and words of Christ had inspired. He had seen many malefactors, some guilty, some innocent, but never one like this. His “Ecce Homo” (John 19:5) witnesses to his estimate of Christ. The warning which he had received from his wife must also have impressed him deeply; and now that he is reminded his Prisoner called Himself the Son of God, he was the more afraid.

“And went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer” (John 19:9).

This was the sixth question Pilate asked Christ, and it is deeply interesting to follow his changing moods as he put them.

First, he had asked “Art thou the king of the Jews?” (John 18:33) — asked, most probably, in the spirit of sarcasm.

Second, “Am I a Jew?” (John 18:35) — asked in the spirit of haughty contempt.

Third, “What hast thou done?” (John 18:35) — a pompous display of his authority.

Fourth, “Art thou a king then?” (John 18:37) — indicating his growing perplexity.

Fifth, “What is truth?” (John 18:38) — asked out of contemptuous pity.

Sixth, “Whence art thou?” In what spirit did he ask *this* question? Much turns upon the right answer, for otherwise we shall be at a loss to understand our Lord’s refusal to reply.

“Whence art thou?” Not “Whom art thou?” nor, “Art thou the Son of God then?” but “Whence art thou?” Yet it is clear that Pilate was not asking about His human origin, for he had already sent Christ as a “Galilean” to Herod (Luke 23:6). Was it then simply a question of idle curiosity? No, the “mote afraid” of the previous verse shows otherwise. Was it that Pilate was now deeply exercised and anxiously seeking for light? No, for his outburst of scornful pride in the verse that follows conflicts with such a view. What, then? First, we think that Pilate was genuinely puzzled and perplexed. A man altogether unique he clearly perceived Christ to be. But was He *more* than man? The deepening fear of his conscience made him uneasy. Suppose that after all, this One were from Heaven! That such a thought crossed his mind at this stage we fully believe, and this leads to the second motive which prompted his question: — Pilate hoped that *here* was a way out of his difficulty. If Christ were really from Heaven, then obviously he could not think of crucifying Him. He therefore has Christ led back again into the judgment hall, and says, Tell me privately your real origin and history so that I may know what line to take up with thine enemies.

“We may well believe that Pilate caught at this secret hope that Jesus might tell him something about Himself which would enable him to make a firm stand and deliver Him from the Jews. In this

hope, again, the Roman Governor was destined to be disappointed” (Bishop Ryle).

“But Jesus gave him no answer.” Ominous “but”; perplexing silence. Hitherto He had replied to Pilate’s questions; now He declined to speak. At first our Lord’s silence surprises and puzzles us, but reflection shows that He could not have acted otherwise.

First, the fact that in John 19:11 we *do* find Christ speaking to Pilate, shows that His silence here in John 19:9 was no arbitrary determination to say no more.

“With *us*, when we would patiently suffer in silence, there may be some such arbitrary purpose of our own; or, to put a better construction upon it, *we cannot* actually speak and at the same time suffer in patience, for we have inwardly too much to do with our own spirits, in order to *maintain* our proper posture of mind. But Christ is in His profoundest humanity elevated above this human imperfection; in *His* lips (as we shall hear from the Cross) the Word of God is never bound” (Stier).

Second, Christ’s silence here makes evident the spirit in which Pilate had put his question: it was not the cry of an earnest soul, honestly seeking light, for our Lord never closed the door against any such!

Third, Pilate was *not entitled* to a reply. He had acted in grossest injustice when he refused to release One whom he declared was innocent; he had despised God’s warning through his wife; he had declined to wait for an answer to his “What is truth”; he had, against his own conscience, scourged the Savior and suffered his soldiers to mock and maltreat Him. Why then should Christ reveal to *him* the mystery of His person!

“Pilate had forfeited his right to any further revelation about his Prisoner. He had been told plainly the nature of our Lord’s kingdom,

and the purpose of our Lord's coming into the world, and been obliged to confess publicly His innocence. And yet, with all this light and knowledge, he had treated our Lord with flagrant injustice, scourged Him, allowed Him to be treated with the vilest indignities by his soldiers, knowing in his own mind all the time that He was a guiltless person. He had, in short, sinned away his opportunities, forsaken his own mercies, and turned a deaf ear to the cries of his own conscience.

“‘He gave him no answer.’ Most men, like Pilate, have a day of grace, and an open door put before them. If they refuse to enter in, and choose their own sinful way, the door is often shut, and never opened again. There is such a thing as a ‘day of visitation,’ when Christ speaks to men. If they will not hear His voice, and open the door of their hearts, they are often let alone, given over to a reprobate mind, and left to reap the fruit of their own sins. It was so with Pharaoh, and Saul, and Ahab; and Pilate's case was like theirs. He had his opportunity, and did not choose to use it, but preferred to please the Jews at the expense of his conscience, and to do what he knew was wrong. We see the consequence — ‘Jesus gave him no answer’” (Bishop Ryle).

In addition to what has been pointed out above, may we not say, that as it had been Divinely appointed Christ *should* suffer for the sins of His people, He declined to say anything which was calculated to *hinder* it! True, Pilate was morally incapable of receiving the truth: to make him a definite answer would simply have been casting pearls before swine, and this the Savior refused to do. Moreover, *had* He affirmed His Deity, it would have afforded Pilate the very handle he sought for releasing Him. Thus we may say with Bishop Ryle “Our Lord's silence was just and well merited, but it was also part of *God's counsels* about man's salvation.” Finally, let us learn from Christ's example here that there is “a time to be silent,” as well as “a time to speak” (Ecclesiastes 3:7)!

“Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?” (John 19:10).

Here the haughty, fierce, and imperious spirit of the Roman was manifested; the authoritative I asserting itself. We doubt not that all the emphasis was thrown upon the personal pronouns — Thou mayest keep silence before the Jews, the soldiers and before Herod; but *me* also? What lack of respect is this! It was the proud authority of an official politician displaying itself. Knowest Thou not in whose presence Thou standest! You are no longer before Annas and Caiaphas — mere figure-heads. I am the Governor of Judea, the representative of Caesar Augustus. “Speakest thou not unto me?” It was his seventh and last question to our Lord, asked in the spirit of sarcasm and resentment combined. Accustomed to seeing prisoners cringing before him, willing to do anything to obtain his favor, he could not understand our Lord’s silence. He was both perplexed and angered: his official pride was mortified.

“Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee!” How he condemned himself. How he revealed his true character. Here was one on the bench talking about his power to commit a judicial murder! Here was one who had, over and over again, affirmed the innocency of his Prisoner, now owning his power to release Him, and yet shortly after condemned Him to death. And this from a man holding high office, who belonged to the nation which prided itself in its impartial justice! Mark also his consummate folly. Here was a worm of the earth so puffed up with a sense of his own importance, so obsessed with the idea of his own absolute freewill that he has the effrontery to say that the Son of the Highest was entirely at *his* disposal! Mark too his utter inconsistency. He was boasting of his legal authority: but if the Lord were innocent he had *no* judicial power to “crucify” Him; if He were guilty, he had *no* judicial power to “release” Him! Out of his own mouth he stands condemned. Carefully analyzed his words can only mean — I am above the law: innocent or guilty, I can do with you as I please.

“This high-handed claim to absolute power is one which ungodly great men are fond of making. It is written of Nebuchadnezzar, ‘Whom *he* would he slew; and whom *he* would he kept alive; and whom *he* would he set up; and whom *he* would he put down’ (Daniel 5:19). Yet even when such men boast of power, they are

often, like Pilate, mere slaves, and afraid of resisting popular opinion. Pilate talked of ‘power to release,’ but he knew in his own mind that he was afraid, and so unable to exercise it” (Bishop Ryle).

“Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above” (John 19:11).

For His Father’s honor and as a rebuke to Pilate, the Lord once more spake, giving His last official testimony before He was crucified. Blessed it is to mark carefully the words of grace and truth which now proceeded from His lips. How easy for Him to have given the lie to Pilate’s boast by paralyzing the tongue which had just uttered such blasphemy! How easy for Him to have made a display of *His* power before this haughty heathen similar to what He had done in the Garden! But, instead, He returns a calm and measured answer, equally expressive of His glory, though in another way. A careful study of His words here will reveal both His voluntary lowliness and His Divine majesty — how wonderful that *both* should be combined in one brief sentence!

“Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me except it were given thee from above.” The Lord acknowledged that Pilate *did* have “power” but of quite a different kind, from quite a different source, and under different restrictions from what he supposed. Pilate had boasted of an arbitrary discretion, of a sovereign choice of his own, of a lawless right to do as he pleased. Christ referred him to a power which came from above, delegated to men, limited according to the pleasure of the One who bestowed it. Thus Christ, first, *denied* that Pilate had the “power” to do with Him as he pleased. Second, He maintained His Father’s honor by insisting that He alone is absolute Sovereign. Even so temperate a writer as Bishop Ryle says on this verse:

“Thou talkest of power: thou dost not know that both thou and the Jews are *only tools* in the hands of a higher Being: you are both, unconsciously, *mere instruments* in the hands of God”!

“Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivereth me unto thee hath the greater sin.” Our Lord conceded that Pilate

did have power: He acknowledged the authority of the human courts. To the very last Christ respected the law, nor did He dispute the power of the Romans over the Jews. But He insisted that Pilate's power came from above, for,

“There is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1)

and compare Proverbs 8:15, 16. Christ acknowledged that Pilate's power, extended over *Himself* — “no power against me except,” etc. — so thoroughly had He made Himself of no reputation. But it was because Pilate's “power,” both personal and official, was “from above,” that the Savior bowed to it. In His “he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin,” the Lord, as in Luke 22:22, shows us that God's counsels do not abolish the *guilt* of the men who execute them. And mark here, for it is most striking, that the same One who meekly bows to Pilate's (God-given) authority, manifests Himself as the *Judge* of men, apportioning the comparative guilt of Pilate and the Jews. Thus did He maintain His Divine dignity to the end. This, then, was our Lord's reply to Pilate's “Knowest thou not?” I know, first, that all the power you have is from above; second, I know the precise measure both of your guilt and of him who delivered Me to thee! This, we take it, is the force of the rather difficult “therefore.” Mark how, out of respect for Pilate's official personage, the Lord did not actually say “he that delivered me unto thee hath greater sin *than thee*”! — though plainly that was implied. Here, as in Luke 12:47, 48 Christ teaches *degrees* of sin and guilt, and therefore degrees of future punishment. The “he who delivered me up” refers not to Judas (*his* was the “*greatest* sin”) but Caiaphas, acting as the representative of the nation. Finally observe that the *last* word which Pilate heard from the lips of Christ was “*sin*”! — the next, in all probability, will be the sentence of his eternal doom.

Below are the questions for our next study: —

1. Why did the “chief priests” take the lead, verse 15?
2. Why was Christ “delivered to them,” verse 16?
3. Why “in the Hebrew,” verse 17?

4. Why were two others crucified with Him, verse 18?
5. Why the inscription, verse 19?
6. Why in three languages, verse 20?
7. What is the meaning of verse 23?

JOHN 19:12-24

CHRIST CONDEMNED TO DEATH

The following is an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us:

1. Pilate's effort foiled, verse 12.
2. Pilate on the Bench, verse 12.
3. The Jews' rejection of their Messiah, verse 15.
4. Christ delivered to the Jews, verse 16.
5. Christ crucified, verses 17-18.
6. The inscription of the Cross, verses 19-22.
7. The soldiers and Christ's garments, verses 23-24.

The death of Christ may be viewed from five main viewpoints. From the standpoint of *God* the Cross was a *propitiation* (Romans 3:25-26), where full satisfaction was made to His holiness and justice. From the standpoint of *the Savior*, it was a *sacrifice* (Ephesians 5:2), an *offering* (Hebrews 9:14), an act of *obedience* (Philippians 2:8). From the standpoint of *believers*, it was a *substitution*, the Just suffering for the unjust (1 Peter 3:18). From the standpoint of *Satan* it was a *triumph* and a *defeat*: a triumph, in that he bruised the heel of the woman's Seed (Genesis 3:15); a defeat, in that through His death Christ destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil (Hebrews 2: 14). From the standpoint of *the world* it was a brutal *murder* (Acts 3:15). It is with this last-mentioned aspect of the death of Christ that our present passage principally treats.

The ones who (from the human side) took the *initiative* in the slaying of the Lamb of God, were the Jews; the one who was *judicially* responsible was Pilate. In the introduction to our last

chapter we pointed out two things: first, that God had ordained Pilate *should* pass sentence upon His Son; second, that Pilate was, nevertheless, morally guilty in so doing. We shall not review the ground already covered, but would supplement our previous remarks by a few words upon Pilate's final actions.

From the very first move made by the Jews for Pilate to sentence their Messiah, it is evident that he had no relish for the part which they wished and urged him to play; and the more he saw of Christ for himself, the more his reluctance increased. This is apparent from his restless journeying back and forth from the judgment-hall; evidenced by his repeated protestations of Christ's innocence; evidenced by the compromises he offered them; evidenced by the appeals he made to them. If, then, he was unwilling to pass the death-sentence, how comes it that he, the Roman governor, was finally prevailed upon to do so? In seeking to answer this question we shall now confine ourselves to the *human* side of things.

In the first place, the Jews had charged Christ with perverting the nation, stirring up the people, teaching them to refuse to pay tribute, and claiming Himself to be the king of the Jews (Luke 23:2-5). These were charges which Pilate could not afford to ignore. It is true the preferring of such charges was one thing, and the proving of them quite another; but the Governor was too much of a politician not to know how easy it was to manufacture evidence and to hire false witnesses. In the second place, Pilate had himself incurred the hatred of the Jews by mingling the blood of certain Galileans with their sacrifices (Luke 13:1) — a thing not only morally wrong, but legally reprehensible. In the third place, when Pilate showed signs of weakening, the Jews *told* him that if he *did* let Jesus go, *he* was no friend of Caesar (John 19:12). Pilate was quick to perceive that if he released his Prisoner, complaint would at once be made to the Emperor, and under a charge of conspiracy and treason, he was likely not only to lose the governorship, but his head as well.

Here, then, was the issue which Pilate had to pass on: on the one hand he knew that Christ was innocent, that He was a unique Man, possibly more than man; on the other hand, he was threatened by the Sanhedrin with exposure before Caesar. In its final analysis, Pilate had to choose between *Christ and the world*. When the issue was

clearly defined, he did not hesitate; he decided to please the people and win their applause, rather than intensify their already fierce hatred against him and condemn him to Caesar.

“Here is the anticipative result of Pilate’s vacillation. When a man begins to temporize with his conscience, to trifle with sin — be it the love of applause, the fear of man, or whatsoever thing is contrary to sound doctrine and plain morality — it is easy to predict what is sure to follow. Sin is at the first like a tiny spark. Tread it out at once — that is your duty. But indulge, foster, toy with it, and it will kindle and spread, and lay waste in a fearful conflagration the very temple of the soul. So here with this unhappy Pilate, trying to join together what God hath forever put asunder — his carnal inclination and his duty; hoping all in vain to harmonize equity and injustice; to comply with the voice of wicked men without, and yet not offend the voice of God within him; thinking to serve two masters — God and mammon. Miserable, impossible compromise” (Mr. Geo. Brown).

“And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him” (John 19:12).

The time-mark here is significant. Following the Jews’ accusation that Christ had “made himself the Son of God” (John 19:7), Pilate, thoroughly uneasy, had retired within the judgment-hall, and asked the Savior, “Whence art thou?” (John 19:9). But the Lord returned him no answer. Thereupon Pilate said, “Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?” To this Christ made reply, “Thou couldest have no power against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.” That Pilate was deeply impressed, both by his Prisoner’s demeanor and words, we cannot doubt. Previously unwilling to condemn an innocent Man, he now resolves to make a real effort to save Him. Leaving Christ behind in the judgment-hall, Pilate returned once more to the Jews. What he now said to them John has not told us: all we know is that he must have made an earnest appeal to the Savior’s enemies, which they as decisively rejected.

“But the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar” (John 19:12).

The Jews knew their man, for hypocrites are usually the quickest to detect hypocrisy in others. They had reserved their strongest card for the last: with diabolic cunning they insinuated that no matter what the Governor’s personal feelings might be, no matter how unwilling he was to please them, he could not afford to displease the Emperor. For him this was a clinching argument. From this moment his hopes of escaping from his unhappy situation were dashed to the ground. It is hard to decide which was the more despicable: the duplicity of the Jews in feigning to care for Caesar’s interests, or the cowardice and wickedness of Pilate in conniving at a foul murder. On the one hand we see the descendants of Abraham, the most favored of all people, professing to be eagerly awaiting the appearing of the promised Messiah, now clamouring for His crucifixion. On the other hand, we behold a judge of one of the high courts of Rome, defying conscience and trampling upon justice. Never did human nature make such a contemptible exhibition. Never was sin more heinously displayed.

“When Pilate, therefore, heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha” (John 19:13).

“‘Pilate’s playing with the situation,’ observes Lange, ‘is now passed; now the situation plays with him!’ First he said, not *asked*, What is *truth!* Now his frightened heart, to which the Emperor’s favor is the supreme law of life, says, What is *justice!* He takes his place on the judgment-seat, therefore, and with what seems something between a taunt and a faint, final plea, says to the Jews, ‘Behold your King!’” (Numerical Bible.)

Pilate dared no longer oppose the bloody demands of the Jews. There remained nothing now but for him to take his seat publicly on the bench and pronounce sentence. It is striking to note that the trial of Christ before Pilate was in *seven* stages. This is seen by noting

carefully the following scriptures, which speak of the Governor passing in and out of the judgment-hall.

The **First** stage was on the outside: John 18:28-32.

The **Second** on the inside: John 18:33-37.

Third, on the outside: John 18:38-40.

Fourth, inside: John 19:1-3.

Fifth, outside: John 19:4-7.

Sixth, inside: John 19:8-11.

Seventh, outside: John 19:12-16.

“When Pilate, therefore, heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha.” Here, as everywhere in Scripture, if only we have eyes to see, there is a deep significance to the proper noun. The word for “Pavement” is found nowhere else in the New Testament, but its Hebrew equivalent occurs just once in the Old Testament, and it is evident that the Holy Spirit would have us link the two passages together. In 2 Kings 16:17 we read,

“King Ahaz cut off the borders of the bases, and removed the laver from off them; and took down the sea from off the brazen oxen that were under it, and put it upon a *pavement* of stones.”

In Ahaz’s case, his act was the conclusive token of his surrender to abject apostasy. So here of Pilate coming down to the level of the apostate Jews. In the former case it was a Jewish ruler dominated by a Gentile idolator; in the latter, a Gentile idolator dominated by Jews who had rejected their Messiah!

“And it was the preparation of the passover” (John 19:14).

There has been an almost endless controversy concerning this. The Lord and His disciples had eaten the passover together on the

previous night (Luke 22:15), and yet we read here of the “*preparation of the passover.*” Sir R. Anderson wrote much that was illuminating on the point. We can only give a brief selection:

“These writers one and all confound the Passover-supper with the feast which followed it, and to which it lent its name. The supper was a memorial of the redemption of the firstborn of Israel on the night *before* the Exodus; the feast was the anniversary of their actual deliverance from the house of bondage. The supper was not a part of the feast; it was morally the basis on which the feast was founded, just as the Feast of Tabernacles was based on the great sin-offering of the Day of Expiation which preceded it. But in the same way that the Feast of Weeks can now be commonly designated Pentecost, so the Feast of Unleavened Bread was popularly called the Passover (Luke 22:1). *That* title was common to the supper *and* the feast, including both; but the intelligent Jew never confounded the two. No words can possibly express more clearly this distinction than those afforded by the Pentateuch in the final promulgation of the Law: ‘In the fourteenth day of the first month is the passover of the Lord, and in the fifteenth day of this same month is the Feast’ (Numbers 28:16-17).”

But to what does “the *preparation of the passover*” refer? “Among the Jews ‘the preparation’ was the common name for the day before *the sabbath*, and it is so used by all the Evangelists. Bearing this in mind, let the reader compare with John 19:14, verses 31-42, and he will have no difficulty in rendering the words in question, ‘it was *Passover Friday.*’” (Sir Robert Anderson.) Let the reader also compare Mark 15:42, which is even more conclusive.

“[And about the sixth hour](#)” (John 19:14).

This expression has also occasioned much difficulty to many. It is supposed to conflict with Mark 15:25. “and it was the *third* hour, and they crucified Him.” But there is no discrepancy here whatsoever. Mark gives the hour when our Lord was crucified; John is speaking of the Passover Friday, i.e., the day when preparations were made for the sabbath (which began at Friday sunset) preparing food, etc., so that none would have to be cooked on the sabbath. It was about the sixth hour after *this* “preparation” had commenced.

This is the view which was taken by Augustine and Dr. Lightfoot. We believe the Holy Spirit has recorded this detail for the purpose of pointing a comparison and a contrast. For six hours the Jews had been working in preparation for the approaching sabbath; during the next “six hours” (compare Mark 15:25, 33-37), Christ finished His great work, which brings His people into that eternal rest of which the sabbath was the emblem! “And he said unto the Jews, Behold your king!” (John 19:14). This was evidently spoken in irony and contempt.

“But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him” (John 19:15).

As on the previous occasions of Pilate’s private appeals, so now this final and public appeal of his had no effect upon the Jews. Once more they raised their fierce, relentless cry, demanding the Prisoner’s death by crucifixion. Nothing but His blood would satisfy them. He *must* die: so had God decreed; so they demanded. The decree of the One was from love; the insistence of the other, was from hatred. The design of the One, was mercy unto poor sinners; the aim of the others, barbarous cruelty to Him who was sinless. This rejection of their Messiah by Israel fulfilled two prophecies:

“We *hid* as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isaiah 53:3);

“Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom *the nation* abhorreth” (Isaiah 49:7).

“Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your king?” (John 19:15).

As one has said, “Pilate speaks here with a mixture of compassionate feeling and mockery. For the last time the Roman governor put the decisive question to the Jews, giving them a final chance to relent, throwing the emphasis, we believe, on the word ‘crucify.’ It was a frightful mode of execution, reserved for slaves and the most abandoned criminals.

“The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar”
(John 19:15).

“They are entirely infidel, throwing off all allegiance to any but Caesar, and cry that they had no other king. It is purely of the Jews, the whole transaction, for *they* consign to the most cruel death Him whom the Roman governor would have let go. This is *man’s religion*, and it will, in the end, enthrone ‘the Wilful One’ and bow to his image” (Revelation 13). (Mr. M. Taylor).

“The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.” God took them at their word: they have been under their own verdict ever since. History repeated itself, though with a tragic addition. In the days of Samuel, Israel said, “Make us a king to judge us like all nations” (1 Samuel 8:5), and Jehovah’s response was, “Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have *rejected me*, that I should not *reign* over them.” So it was here with their rebellious descendants, when they rejected Christ the king. In consequence of their fatal decision, Israel has abode “many days *without a king*, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice” (Hosea 3:4). Bitter indeed have been the consequences. Jotham’s parable has received its tragic fulfillment: “And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come put your trust in my shadow; and if not, let fire come out of the bramble and *devour the cedars of Lebanon*” (Judges 9:15, and *see* verses 7-16).

“The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.”

“It was not the verdict of the Jews alone, and they have not suffered alone. The whole world has been lying under the yoke which they have preferred to the easy yoke of Christ. They have got very tired of Caesar — true; and, as we see by their fitful movements every now and then, would feign be rid of him. They are always crying, ‘Give us better government’; but all they can do is, with doubtful betterment, to divide him up into many little Caesars; better as they think, because weaker, and with divided interests, so that the balance of power may secure the even weights of justice. That is still an experiment some think; but this chronic war is never peace, nor can be; and the reason is, men have refused the Prince of Peace. Modify

it, rename it, disguise it as you please, the reign of Caesar is the only alternative” (Numerical Bible).

“Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified” (John 19:16).

Between John 19:15 and 16 comes in what is recorded in Matthew 27:24-25. Seeing that the Jews would not be turned from their purpose, and afraid to defy them, he took water and washed his hands before them (cf. Deuteronomy 21:1-6; Psalm 26:6), saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.” Thus did this cowardly, world- loving Roman betray his trust. Never was a name more justly handed down to the world’s scorn than Pilate’s. By his act he sought to cast the entire onus upon the Jews. Their terrible response was, “His blood be on us, and on our children.” Then, we are told,

“Pilate gave sentence that it should be as *they* required... He delivered Jesus to *their* will” (Luke 23:24-25).

Thus the Lord’s execution was now in Jewish hands (Acts 2:23), the centurion and his quaternion of soldiers merely carrying out the decision of the chief priests.

“Then *delivered* he him therefore unto them to be crucified.” Our Lord’s own estimate of Pilate’s act is recorded by the Spirit of prophecy through the Psalmist:

“Shall the *throne of iniquity* have fellowship with that which frameth mischief by a law? They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood” (Psalm 94:20, 21)!

Let us not forget, however, that behind the governor of Judea, who *delivered* the Lord Jesus unto the Jews, was the Governor of the Universe, who “spared not his own Son, but *delivered him up* for us all” (Romans 8:32). And why? Because He was “*delivered* for our offenses” (Romans 4:25). Christ was delivered to death, that we might be delivered from death.

“And they took Jesus and led him away” (John 19:16).

Observe the word “led” again. How often has the Holy Spirit repeated it! Christ was neither driven nor dragged, for He made no resistance. As prophecy had foretold long before, “He was *led* as a lamb to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7).

“And he, bearing his cross, went forth unto a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew, Golgotha” (John 19:17).

The Jews lost no time: Christ was taken straight from Gabbatha to Golgotha; from judgment to execution. The Savior “bearing his cross,” had been marvelously foreshadowed of old when

“Abraham took the *wood* of the burnt offering, and *laid it upon* Isaac his son” (Genesis 22:6).

“He, bearing his cross, *went forth*.” That is, *out of Jerusalem*, or as Hebrews 13:12 puts it, “Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered *without* [outside] the gate.” This, too, fulfilled an Old Testament type — every detail of the Passion fulfilled some prophecy or type. In Leviticus 16:27 we read,

“And the bullock for the sin-offering, and the goat for the sin-offering; whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place shall one carry forth *without the camp*.”

“Little did the blinded Jews imagine that when they madly hounded on the Romans to crucify Jesus *outside* the gates, that they were unconsciously perfecting the mightiest sin-offering of all!” (Bishop Ryle).

At this point the other Gospels supply a detail which John, for some reason, was guided to omit. In Matthew 27:32 we are told.

“As they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name; him they compelled to bear his cross.”

Almost all of the commentators, both ancient and modern, draw the conclusion that Simon was compelled to bear the Savior's cross *because* He was staggering and sinking beneath its weight. But there is not a word in the New Testament to support such a conjecture, and everything recorded about Christ after He was nailed to the tree decidedly conflicts with it. That Simon was "*compelled*" to bear His cross, shows there was not one in all that crowd with sufficient compassion and courage to volunteer to carry it for Him!

"Went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew, Golgotha." "The place of a skull — the place of the kingdom of *death*. This is plainly what *the world is*, because of sin — death being the stamp of the government of God upon it. For this the Lord sought it; here His love to men brought Him; only He could lift this burden from them, and for this He must come under it" (Numerical Bible).

"Which is called *in the Hebrew*, Golgotha." This expression — used twice in connection with the Savior's crucifixion (John 19:13, 17) — is found elsewhere only in John 5:2: "Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep- gate a pool, which is called *in the Hebrew tongue* Bethesda." What a contrast; there at Bethesda, we see *His* mercy; here at Golgotha, *their brutality!* Luke gives us the Gentile name, "Calvary" (Luke 23:33); John the Hebrew, "Golgotha," of the place where our Savior was crucified. Compare the same *double* name of the place of Pilate's judgment-seat (John 19:13).

"May it be that in these instances of double meaning that *God* is giving His in the words which He used with His people, and man is giving his in the language of the world? Moreover, this Death was for both Jews and Gentiles! There is a reason for every word which the Holy Spirit records" (Mr. M. Taylor).

["Where they crucified him, and two others with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst" \(John 19:18\).](#)

This one verse records the fulfillment of at least three Old Testament prophecies.

First, the *manner* in which the Savior was to die had been clearly foretold. A thousand years before this He had cried, by the Spirit of prophecy, “they *pierced* my hands and my feet” (Psalm 22:16); this is indeed most striking. The Jewish form of capital punishment was *stoning*. But no word of God can fall to the ground, therefore did Pilate give orders that Christ should be *crucified*, which was the Roman form of execution, reserved only for the vilest criminals.

Second, Isaiah had declared, “*He was numbered with the transgressors*” (Isaiah 53:12). The Jews’ object was to add a final indignity and insult to the Lord; it was a public declaration that He was counted no better than the scum of the earth. Little did they realize that this expression of their malice was but a means for the carrying out of Messianic prediction!

Third, it had been written that He should be “*with the wicked at his death*” (Isaiah 53:9 — literal translation). But why did God permit His Beloved to be so outrageously treated? To *show us* the place which His Son had taken. It was the place which was *due us* because of our sins — the place of shame, condemnation, punishment. Moreover, the Lord crucified between the two malefactors, gave Him the opportunity to work one more miracle ere He laid down His life — a miracle of sovereign grace. Let the reader at this point carefully ponder Luke 23:39-43, and there he will find that the One on the central cross clearly demonstrated that He *was* the Redeemer by snatching a brand from the burning, and translating from the brink of the Pit into Paradise, one of these very thieves as the first trophy of His all-sufficient sacrifice.

“And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, *Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews*” (John 19:19).

“He comes thus into death as King — ‘King of the Jews,’ indeed, but which in its full rendering implies so much. It faces the Jew, the Greek, the Roman, affirming to each in his own language, with a positiveness which His enemies vainly strive to set aside, a meaning for each one. Here is indeed God’s King — King in death as in life — here in a peculiar way affirmed; His Cross henceforth to be the very sign of His power, the scepter under which they bow, in

adoring homage” (Numerical Bible). Pilate’s reason for placing such a description of our Lord over His cross is not easy to determine; probably it was so worded in anger, and with the aim of annoying and insulting the Jews. Whatever his motive, it was clearly overruled by God. It is well known that the words of the four Evangelists vary in their several descriptions of this title. Enemies of the truth have pointed to this as a “contradiction.” But all difficulty is removed if we bear in mind that we are told Pilate wrote the inscription in three different languages — most probably not wording them alike. The Holy Spirit moved Matthew to translate one (most likely the Hebrew) and Luke another (most likely the Greek); Mark only quoting a part of what John had given us — most likely from the Latin. There is, therefore, no discrepancy at all, and nothing for an impartial reader to stumble over.

“This title then read many of the Jews; for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city” (verse 20).

No one could *fail to see who it was that hung upon the central Cross*. Even *in death* God saw to the guarding of His Son’s glory. Before He was born, the angel announced to Mary His “kingdom” (Luke 1:32, 33). In His infancy, wise men from the east heralded Him as “king” (Matthew 2:2). At the beginning of the Passion week, the multitudes had cried, “Blessed is the king of Israel” (John 12:13). Before Pilate, He Himself bore witness to His “kingdom” (John 18:36-37). And now His royal title was affixed to His very gibbet.

“And it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin” (John 19:20).

Note that the Holy Spirit has placed “Hebrew” first! Hebrew was the language of the Jews; Greek of the educated world; Latin of the Romans; hence all who were gathered around the cross could read the title in his own language. Remember that the *confusion of tongues* was the sign of Babel’s curse (Genesis 11). Significantly are we reminded of this here, when Christ was being made a curse for us! Hebrew was the language of *religion*; Greek of *science, culture* and *philosophy*; Latin of law. In each of these realms Christ is “king.” In the religious, He is the final revelation of the true God

(Hebrews 1:2; John 14:9). In science, He is the Force behind all things. “By him all things consist” (Colossians 1:17). “Upholding all things by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3); so, too, in Him are hid “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). In jurisprudence, He is supreme; the Law-giver and Law-administrator (1 Corinthians 9:21).

“Then said the chief priests of the Jews to pilate, Write not, The king of the Jews; but that He said, I am king of the Jews” (John 19:21).

It is noteworthy that this is the first and only time that they are termed “the chief priests of *the Jews*,” the Holy Spirit thereby intimating that *God* no longer owned them as *His* priests: having rejected their Messiah, Judaism was set aside, and therefore its official leaders are regarded as serving the Jews, but not Jehovah. The words of the priests here show that they resented Pilate’s insult. It was most humbling to their pride that this crucified criminal should be publicly designated *their* “king.” They desired the Governor to alter the wording of the inscription so that it might appear Christ was nothing more than an empty-boasting imposter.

“Pilate answered, What I have written, I have written” (John 19:22).

Pilate could be firm when it suited him. The haughty, imperious character of the Roman comes out plainly here. His decisive reply evidences his contempt for the Jews: Trouble me no further; what I have written must stand; I shall not alter it to please you.

“It, therefore, stands written forever. Caiaphas, as representative of the Jews proclaimed the Lord as Savior of the world; Pilate fastens upon the Jews the hated name of the Nazarene as their King” (Companion Bible).

The truth is that God would not allow Pilate to change what he had written. Unknown to himself he was the amanuensis of Heaven. This was part of the Word of God — the Scriptures, the Writings, and not a jot of it shall ever pass away. And wondrously was it manifested that very day that what Pilate had written *was* the Word of God. This

was the text used by the Spirit of Truth to bring about the regeneration and conversion of the repentant thief. His “Lord remember me when thou comest into thy *kingdom*,” shows that his faith rested on that which the Roman governor had written and placed on the cross, and which his Spirit — opened eyes read and believed!

“Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments and made four parts, to every soldier a part” (John 19:23).

“The soldiers having now finished their bloody work, having nailed our Lord to the cross, put the title over His head, and reared the cross on end, proceeded to do what they probably always did — to divide the clothes of the criminal among themselves. In most countries the clothes of a person put to death by the law are the perquisite of the executioner. So it was with our Lord’s clothes. They had most likely stripped our Lord naked before nailing His hands and feet to the cross, and had laid His clothes on one side till after they had finished their work. They now turned to the clothes, and, as they had done many a time on such occasions, proceeded to divide them” (Bishop Ryle).

There were four soldiers; some think this emblemizes the four quarters of the Gentiles’ world. It seems clear that they ripped His several garments to pieces, so as to divide them in equal parts. How this, once more, makes manifest the depths of humiliation into which the Son of God descended!

“And also his coat; now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us now rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be” (John 19:23, 24).

The deeper significance of this is not difficult to perceive. Garments in Scripture, speak of *conduct*, as a display of *character* — cf. Psalm 109:18; 1 Peter 5:5, etc. Now, the Savior’s “coat,” His outer garment, was of one piece — intimating the unity, the unbroken perfection of His ways. Unlike our “garments,” which are, at best, so much patchwork, His robe was “without seam.” Moreover, it was

“woven from the top throughout” — the mind of Him above controlled His every action! This “coat” or “robe” was a costly one, so owned even by the soldiers, for they declined to tear it to pieces. It spoke of the righteousness of Christ, the “*robe of righteousness*” (Isaiah 61:10), the “best robe” (Luke 15) with which the Father clothes each prodigal son. For this “robe” the soldiers cast lots, and we are told in Proverbs 16:33 that “The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” Thus the action of these soldiers declares that the “best robe” is not left to the caprice of man’s will, but the Lord Himself has determined whose it shall be! Note another contrast; the sinful first Adam was clothed by God; the sinless last Adam was unclothed by wicked men.

“That the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things *therefore* the soldiers did” (John 19:24).

Three things come out plainly: First, that God Himself was master of this whole situation, directing every detail of it to the outworking of His eternal counsels. Second, that no word of God’s can fail. A thousand years before hand it had been predicted that these soldiers *should* both divide the Savior’s raiment among them, and also cast lots for His vesture or coat. Literally was this fulfilled to the very letter. Third, that the One who hung there on the Tree was, beyond a shadow of doubt, the *Messiah of Israel*, the One of whom all the prophets had written.

Below are the questions on the closing section of John 19: —

1. Why “woman,” verse 26?
2. What perfections of Christ are seen in verse 28?
3. What was “finished,” verse 30?
4. Why “bowed His head,” verse 30?
5. What is the spiritual meaning of “blood and water,” verse 34?

6. What prophecy was accomplished in verse 38?
7. What type was fulfilled in verses 41, 42?

JOHN 19:25-42

CHRIST LAYING DOWN HIS LIFE

Below is an Analysis of John 19:25-42:

1. The mother of Jesus and the beloved disciple, verses 25-27.
2. The Savior's thirst, verses 28, 29.
3. The Savior's victorious death, verse 30.
4. God guarding the Savior's body, verses 31-33.
5. The piercing of the Savior's side, verses 34-37.
6. The boldness of Joseph and Nicodemus, verses 38, 39.
7. The Savior's burial, verses 40-42.

Each of the Evangelists treats of our Lord's death with more or less fullness of detail. The birth, the baptism, and the temptation of Christ are described in only two of the Gospels; several of His miracles and discourses are found only in one; but the Savior's Passion is recorded in all four, which at once denotes its supreme importance. But though each Evangelist devotes not a little space to the events of the last hours of Christ, there is a striking variation about their several narratives. Nowhere is the hand of the Spirit more evident than in what He guided each Gospel writer to insert and omit. Each of them was manifestly moved by Him to bring in only that which was strictly pertinent to the distinctive design before him.

The four Gospels are *not* four biographies of Christ, nor do the four together supply one. A harmony of the four Gospels reveals great blanks, altogether incompatible with the theory that they supply us with a "life of Christ." Only the briefest mention is made of His birth and infancy, and then *nothing* more is told us about Him till He had reached the age of twelve. After the few words relating to His

boyhood, we see Christ no more till He was about thirty. Even His public ministry is not given us with anything approaching completeness: a journey, a miracle, a discourse, here and there, and that is about all. What, then, are the four Gospels, and what was the *principle of selection* which determined what should have a place in each of them?

The four Gospels give us delineations of the Lord Jesus in four distinct characters: the principle of selection is, that only that which serves to illustrate and exemplify each of these characters was included. Matthew presents Christ as the Son of David, the king of Israel, and everything in his Gospel contributes to this theme. Mark portrays Him as God's Workman, and everything in his Gospel bears directly upon the Servant and His service. Luke depicts Him as the Son of man, hence it is His human perfections, sympathies, and relations which he dwells upon. John reveals Him as the Son of God incarnate, the Word become flesh, tabernacling among men; hence it is His *Divine* glories, the dignity and majesty of His person, which are most prominent here. Strikingly is this evidenced in what he has related and what he has omitted concerning the Redeemer's sufferings.

John says nothing about the Savior's agony in Gethsemane, but he and he only does mention the falling backward to the ground of those who came to arrest Him. John omits all details of what took place when our Lord appeared before Caiaphas, but he describes the trial before Annas. The fourth Gospel, and it alone, records our Lord's words to Pilate about His kingdom (John 18:36), of His coming into this world to bear witness unto the truth (John 18:37), of his having no power to crucify Him except what God gave (John 19:11). John alone makes mention of His seamless robe (John 19:23), His legs not being broken (John 19:33), and the blood and water which came from His pierced side. John omits altogether the awful cry, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" and in its place gives His triumphant "It is finished." John says nothing of His being numbered with the transgressors, but does tell us of Him being with the rich in His death. John alone mentions the costly spices which Nicodemus brought for the anointing of the Savior's dead body.

Clearer proofs of the *verbal* inspiration of the Scriptures we could not ask for.

Seven times *the Savior* spoke while He was upon the cross, thus exhibiting His perfections as *the Word*, in death, as in life.

The **first**, the word of *forgiveness*, for His enemies (Luke 23:34).

The **second**, the word of *salvation*, to the dying thief (Luke 23:42, 43).

The **third**, the word of *affection*, to and for His mother (John 19:25, 26).

The **fourth**, the word of *anguish*, to God (Matthew 27:46).

The **fifth**, the word of *suffering*, to the spectators (John 19:28).

The **sixth**, the word of *victory*, to His people (John 19:30).

The **seventh**, the word of *contentment*, to the Father (Luke 23:46).

The third, fifth and sixth of these cross-utterances are recorded by John, and will come before us in our present study.

“Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene” (John 19:25).

The Jews were present at the crucifixion to satisfy their fiendish craving for His death; the Roman soldiers were there from duty; but here is a group noticed by the Spirit who had been drawn there by affectionate devotion for the central Sufferer. They were not looking on from a distance, nor mingling with the morbid crowds in attendance. They stood “by the cross.” A pitifully small company, five in all; yet a deeply significant number, for five is the number of *grace*, and in contrast from the crowds which evidenced man’s depravity and enmity, these were the trophies of Divine favor. This

little company comprised four women and one man. The first was Mary, the Savior's mother, who now realized the full force of that prophetic word spoken by the aged Simeon more than thirty years before:

“Yet, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also”
(Luke 2:35).

The second was Mary the wife of Cleophas, of whom we read but little, yet in that little what a wealth of love! — here at the cross, in Matthew 28:1 at the sepulcher; called here “his mother's sister” — evidently her sister-in-law, sister of Joseph, for it is most unlikely that she was a full-blood sister with the *same* name as herself. The third was Mary of Magdala, out of whom Christ had cast seven demons, and to whom He appeared first when He was risen from the dead. How significant that each of them was named “Mary,” which means *bitterness*! What anguish of spirit was theirs as they beheld the dying Lamb! Equally significant is the *absence* of another Mary — the sister of Lazarus! A fourth woman was there — Matthew 27:56 — the mother of John, though she is not mentioned here. The fifth one was “the disciple whom Jesus loved” — so far as we know, the only one of the eleven apostles who was present.

“Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother.” “Neither her own danger, nor the sadness of the spectacle, nor the insults of the crowd, could restrain her from performing the last office of duty and tenderness to her Divine Son on the Cross” (Mr. Doddridge).

After the days of His infancy and childhood, we see and hear little of Mary. During His public ministry her life was lived in the background. But now, when strikes the supreme hour of her Son's agony, when the world has cast out the Child of her womb, she stands there by the cross! Baffled, perhaps, at the unprecedented scene, paralyzed at His sufferings, yet bound by the golden chain of love to the dying One, there she stands. His disciples may desert Him, His friends may forsake Him, His nation may despise Him; but His mother is there, where all might see her — near Him in death as in birth. Who can fully appreciate the *mother-heart*!

Marvelous fortitude was Mary's. Hers was no hysterical or demonstrative sorrow. There was no show of feminine weakness; no wild outcry of uncontrollable anguish; no falling to the ground in a swoon. Not a word that fell from her lips on this occasion has been recorded by any of the four Evangelists: apparently she suffered in unbroken silence. The crowds were mocking, the thieves taunting, the soldiers callously occupied with His garments, the Savior was bleeding — and there was His mother beholding it all! What wonder if she had turned away from such a spectacle! What wonder if she had fled from such a scene! But no! She did not crouch away nor fall in a faint. She *stood* by the cross. What tremendous courage! What love! What reverence for the Savior!

“When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son? (John 19:26).

Occupied with the most stupendous work ever done, not only on earth but in the entire universe; under a burden which no mere creature could possibly have sustained; the Object of Satan's fiercest malignity! about to drain the awful cup which meant separation from God Himself for three hours; nevertheless, even at such a time, the Lord Jesus did not deem natural ties as unworthy of recognition. To the very end He showed Himself both perfect Son of God and perfect Son of man. In boyhood He had “honored” His parents (Luke 2:52), so does He now on the cross. About to leave this world, He first provides a home for His widowed mother. First He had prayed for His enemies; then He had spoken the words of salvation and assurance to the repentant thief; now He addresses His mother.

“He saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!” Twice do we find our Lord addressing Mary as “Woman”: at the Cana marriage-feast (John 2:4), and here. It is noteworthy that both of these references are found in *John's* Gospel, the Gospel which treats specifically of His *Deity*. The Synoptics present Him in *human* relationships, but John portrays Him as the Son of God — above all; hence the perfect propriety of Christ here addressing His mother as “Woman.” That this term is neither harsh nor discourteous is clear from a comparison with John 20:13. But there was another reason why He would no longer call her “mother” — as, doubtless, He *had*

addressed her many a time. The death on the cross made an end of all His *natural* ties:

“Henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yet, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet *now* henceforth know we no more” (2 Corinthians 5:16)!

From now on, believers would be linked to Christ by a closer bond, by a *spiritual* relationship, and *this* is what the Savior would now teach both His mother and His beloved apostle. “Behold thy son!” I am *thy* “Son” no longer. It is a striking confirmation of this that Mary is not mentioned at all in connection with Christ’s resurrection: the only other time she is referred to in the New Testament is in Acts 1:14, where we see her taking her place among (not *over*) believers at a prayer-meeting.

“Here it is that our Lord lays aside His human affections. He sees His mother and His beloved disciple near the Cross, but it is only to commend them the one to the other, and thus to *separate Himself* from the place which He had once filled among them. Sweet, indeed, it is, to see how faithfully He owned the affection up to the last moment that He could listen to it; no sorrow of His own could make Him forget it! But He was not always to know it. The ‘children of the resurrection’ neither marry, nor are given in marriage. He must now form their knowledge of Him by other thoughts, for they are henceforth to be joined to Him as ‘one spirit’; for such are His blessed ways. If He takes His distance from us, as not knowing us in ‘the flesh,’ it is only that we may be united to Him in nearer affections and closer interests” (Mr. J. G. Bellett).

“Then saith he to the disciple” (John 19:27)

the one standing by “whom he loved.” In Matthew 26:56 we read concerning the Eleven, “They *all* forsook Him and fled.” This was the accomplishment of His own sad prediction, “all ye shall be *offended* because of me this night” (Matthew 26:31) — the Greek signifying “scandalized.” They were ashamed to be found in His company. But it is blessed to know that one returned to His side ere He died. And which one was it? *Who* of the little band shall manifest the superiority of *his* love? Even though the Sacred Narrative had

concealed his identity, it would not have been difficult for us to name him. But the fact that Scripture informs us that it was the writer of this fourth Gospel supplies one of the many silent but indubitable proofs of the Divine inspiration of the Bible.

“Woman behold thy son! Then said he to the disciple, Behold thy mother!” (John 19:27).

First, to His mother, Behold now this one who cares for you, who has taken his place by your side, who would not allow you to stand here alone.

Second, to John, Behold thy mother! — regard her henceforth with the tenderest affection; she is My living legacy to you! Thus did the Redeemer give to the apostle who had leaned on His breast, the one on whose breast He had once rested! Thus did He give to John the place which *He* had filled — a higher place than that which He gave to Peter! The order is indeed striking: Christ bade Mary look to John, *before* He commanded him to care for her — John was to be the stay of Mary, *not* Mary of John!

“And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home” (John 19:27).

First, the Savior’s act has forever set an example for children to honor their parents — to the end, not only while they are minors.

Second, it marked His tender compassion: He would graciously spare His mother the worst, and therefore made arrangements that she would not witness the awful darkness, hear His cry of agony, or be present when He died.

Third, it showed Him Son of God, the *Protector* and *Provider* of His people; it was the pledge of His equal care for *all* He leaves behind on earth — while we are here in the world He *will* supply our “every need.” Fourth, He here confirmed the law of love, under the shadow of the cross. He *united together* those who loved Him and whom He loved. There was no command, for love needs none; love will respond to a gesture, a glance. The beloved disciple at once understood his Lord’s mind. Fifth, He intimated that in providing *for*

His people, He would do so by *means of* His people; it was *John* who was to provide hospitality for Mary. Christ is still saying to us: “Behold thy son!... Behold thy mother!” — compare Matthew 25:40. How marvelously are the Divine and human perfections of Christ blended here: as Man, honoring His mother; as God, the Head of the family, making arrangements for the children!

“From that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.” Of old it had been predicted that the Lord Jesus should act discreetly: “Behold, my Servant shall deal *prudently*” (Isaiah 52:13). In commending His mother to the care of His beloved apostle, the Savior evidenced His wisdom by the choice of her future guardian. Perhaps there was none who understood Him so well as His mother, and it is almost certain that none had apprehended His love so deeply as had John. We see, therefore, how they would be most suited companions for each other, the intimate bond of spiritual love uniting them together and to Christ. None so well fitted to take care of Mary; none whose company she would find so congenial; none whose fellowship either would more appreciate.

“From that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.” Here, as ever, the Roman Catholics err — “not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.” From this verse they argue that Mary could have had *no other* children, otherwise Christ had never committed her, a widow, to John. But the Word of God plainly declares that she *did* have other children —

“Is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? and his sisters, are they not all with us?” (Matthew 13:55, 56).

The same Word of God also shows us that *they* were, at that time, ill-fitted to be Mary’s companions and guardians —

“I am become a *stranger* unto my brethren, and an *alien* unto my mother’s children” (Psalm 69:8),

were the Savior’s own words. How, then, could *they* take the Savior’s place, and be unto Mary what He had been!

“We surely need no stronger proof than we have here, that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was never meant to be honored as Divine, or to be prayed to, worshipped and trusted in, as the friend and patroness of sinners. Common sense points out that she who needed the care and protection of another, was never likely to help men and women to heaven, or to be in any sense a mediator between God and man? (Bishop Ryle).

How this incident also illustrates, once more, that spiritual bonds have the preference over natural ties! Moreover, what a heart-piercing rebuke to His unbelieving “brethren” (John 7:5) were His words here to Mary and John.

“After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst” (John 19:28).

What a sight is this — the Maker of heaven and earth with parched lips! the Lord of glory in need of a drink! the Beloved of the Father crying, “I thirst!” First, it evidenced His *humanity*. The Lord Jesus was not a Divine man, nor a humanized God; He was the God-man. Forever God, and now forever man. When the eternal Word became incarnate, He did not cease to be God, nor did He lay aside any of His Divine attributes; but He did become flesh; being made in all things like unto His brethren. He “increased in wisdom and stature” (Luke 2:52); He “wearied” in body (John 4:6); He was “an hungered” (Matthew 4:2); He “slept” (Mark 4:38); He “marvelled” (Mark 6:6); He “wept” (John 11:35); He “prayed” (Mark 1:35); He “rejoiced” (Luke 10:21); He “groaned” (John 11:33); and here, He “thirsted.” *God* does not thirst; there is no hint (so far as we are aware) that the *angels* ever do; *we* shall not in the Glory (Revelation 7:16). But *Christ* did, as man, in the depths of His humiliation.

This fifth Cross-utterance of the Savior, “I thirst,” followed right after the three hours of darkness, during which the light of God’s countenance had been withdrawn from the Sin-Bearer. It was then that the blessed Savior endured the fierceness of the outpoured wrath of a holy God. It was this which made Him exclaim, “My moisture is turned into *the drought* of summer” (Psalm 32:4). This cry, then, tells of the *intensity* of what He had suffered, the awful

severity of the conflict through which He had just passed. “He hath made Me desolate and faint,” He cried (Lamentations 1:13).

But unparalleled as had been His sufferings, great as was His thirst, it was not desire for the relief of His body that now opened His lips. Far different, far higher, was the motive which prompted Him. This comes out clearly in the first part of John 19:28. Carefully has the Holy Spirit guarded the Savior’s glory, with delight has He brought before us His unique perfections. First, the very fact that He *did* now “thirst” evidences His perfect submission. He that had caused water to flow from the smitten rock for the refreshment of Israel in the wilderness, had the same infinite resources at His disposal now that He was on the cross. He who turned the water into wine by a word from His lips, could have spoken the same word of power here, and instantly met His own need. Why, then, did He hang there with parched lips? Because, in the volume of that Book which expressed the will of God, it was written that *He should* thirst! He came here to *do* God’s will, and ever did He perfectly perform it.

In death, as in life, Scripture was for the Lord Jesus the authoritative Word of the living God. In the temptation He had refused to minister to His own need apart from that Word by which He lived; so now He makes known His need, *not* that it might be relieved, but that “the Scriptures might be fulfilled”! Observe that He did not Himself seek to fulfill it — God can be trusted to take care of that; but He gives utterance to His distress so as to provide occasion for the fulfillment.

“The terrible thirst of crucifixion is upon Him, but that is not enough to force those parched lips to speak; but it is written, ‘In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink’ — this opens them” (Mr. W. Grant)

Here, then, as ever, He shows Himself in active obedience to the will of God, which He came to accomplish. He simply says, “I thirst,” the vinegar is tendered and the prophecy is fulfilled. What perfect absorption in the Father’s will!

But mark how His *Divine* perfections come out here: “Jesus *knowing* that all things were now accomplished.” How completely self-possessed the Savior was! He had hung on that cross for six hours, and had passed through suffering unparalleled: nevertheless

His mind was perfectly clear and His memory entirely unimpaired. He had before Him, with perfect distinctness, the whole truth of God. He reviewed in a moment the entire scope of Messianic prediction. He remembered there was one prophetic scripture yet unaccomplished. He overlooked nothing. What a proof was this that He was Divinely superior to all circumstances! Finally, mark the wondrous grace here: *He* thirsted on the cross, that *we* might drink the water of life and thirst no more forever!

“Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar; and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth” (John 19:29).

The act recorded here must be carefully distinguished from that mentioned in Matthew 27:34, being the same as that found in Matthew 27:48. The first drink of vinegar and gall, commonly given to criminals to deaden their pains, the Lord refused; the drink of vinegar or sour wine, He here accepted — in obedience to His Father’s will. The ones who tendered the sponge were, most probably, the Roman soldiers, who carried out the details of the crucifixion. Little did they think that they were executing the counsels of God! In view of the context in Matthew 27 we believe that these Romans had been deeply impressed by the Savior’s words from the cross, and especially by that mysterious darkness for three hours, and that they now acted either out of compassion or reverence.

“When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished” (John 19:30).

“It is finished” — a single word in the original. It was the briefest and yet the fullest of His seven cross-utterances. Eternity will be needed to make manifest all that it contains. All things had been done which the law of God required; all things established which prophecy predicted; all things brought to pass which the types foreshadowed; all things accomplished which the Father had given Him to do; all things performed which were needed for our redemption. Nothing was left wanting. The costly ransom was given, the great conflict had been endured, sin’s wages had been paid, Divine justice satisfied. True, there was the committal of His spirit

into the hands of the Father, which immediately followed His word here; there was His resurrection, ascension, and session on high, but these are the fruit and reward of that work which He completed. Nothing more remained for Him to do; nothing more awaited its fulfillment; His work on earth was consummated.

“It is finished.” This was not the despairing cry of a helpless martyr. It was not an expression of satisfaction that the end of His sufferings was now reached. It was not the last gasp of a worn-out life. No, it was the declaration on the part of the Divine Redeemer that all for which He came from heaven to earth to do, was now done; that all which was needful to reveal the glorious character of God had now been accomplished; that everything necessary for the putting away of the sins of His people, providing for them a perfect standing before God, securing for them an eternal inheritance and fitting them for it, had all been done.

“It is finished.” The root Greek word here, “*teleo*,” is variously translated in the New Testament. A reference to some of its alternative renditions in other passages will enable us the better to discern the fullness and finality of the term here used by the Savior. In Matthew 11:1 “*teleo*” is translated as follows, “When Jesus had *made an end* of commanding His twelve disciples.” In Matthew 17:24 it is rendered, “They that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your Master pay tribute.” In Luke 2:39 it is translated, “And when they had *performed* all things according to the law of the Lord.” In Luke 18:31 it is rendered, “All things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be *accomplished*.” Putting these together we learn the scope of Christ’s sixth cross-utterance. “It is finished.” He cried — it is “made an end of,” it is “paid,” it is “performed,” it is “accomplished.” *What* was “made an end of”? — our sins, our guilt! *What* was “paid”? — the price of our redemption! *What* was “performed”? — the utmost requirements of God’s law. *What* was “accomplished”? — the work which the Father had given Him to do! *What was* “finished”? — the making of atonement!

“And he bowed his head, and gave up the spirit” (John 19:30).

The *order* of these two actions strikingly evidences the Savior's uniqueness: with us the spirit departs, and then the head is bowed; with Him it was the opposite! So, too, each of these actions manifested His Deity. First, He "bowed his head"; the plain intimation is that, up to this point, His head had been *held erect*. It was no impotent sufferer who hung there in a swoon. Had *that* been the case, His head had lolled helplessly on His chest, and He would have had no occasion to "bow" it. Weigh well the verb here: it is not that His head "fell forward," but He consciously, calmly, reverently, *bowed* His head. How sublime was His carriage even on the "tree!" What superb composure did He evidence! Was it not His *majestic bearing* on the cross that, among other things, caused the centurion to cry,

["Truly this was the Son of God" \(Matthew 27:54\)!](#)

"And gave up (delivered up) the spirit." None else ever did this or died thus. How remarkably do these words exemplify His own declaration in John 10:17, 18: "*I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again*"!

The uniqueness of Christ's action here may also be seen by comparing His words with those of Stephen's. As the first Christian martyr was dying, he prayed, "Lord Jesus *receive* my spirit" (Acts 7:59). In sharp contrast from Stephen, Christ "*gave up* the spirit"; Stephen's was taken *from* him, not so the Savior's,

["The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day \(for that sabbath day was an high day\), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away" \(John 19:31\).](#)

The day on which the Savior was crucified was "an high day": it was on the eve of the regular weekly sabbath and also of the first day of the feast of unleavened bread, from which the Jews reckoned the seven weeks to pentecost; the same day was also the one appointed for the presentation and offering of the sheaf of new corn, so that it possessed a treble solemnity. Hence the Jews' urgency here

— the breaking of the legs would serve the double purpose of hastening and ensuring death. Behind this motive and act of “the Jews,” zealous for the Law (Deuteronomy 21:22, 23), we may behold, again, the over-ruling hand of God. Seemingly, Pilate would have allowed the body of Christ to remain on the cross, perhaps for several days, after He was dead. But the Lord Jesus had declared He *would be* “buried” and that He would be in the grave *three* days. For the fulfillment of this He *must* be buried the same day that He died; therefore did God see to it that no word of His failed! Once again were the Lord’s enemies unconsciously executing the Divine counsels.

“Then came the soldiers, and break the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him” (John 19:32).

Why did the soldiers first give their attention to the two thieves? We cannot be certain, but most likely because they perceived that Christ was dead already. The Greek word for “break” here signifies to “shiver to pieces.” A heavy mallet or iron bar was used for this. On this verse Bishop Ryle says, “It is noteworthy that the penitent thief, even after his conversion, had more suffering to go through before he entered into Paradise. The grace of God and the pardon of sin did not deliver him from the agony of having his legs broken. When Christ undertakes to save our souls, He does not undertake to deliver from bodily pains and conflict with the last enemy. Penitence, as well as impenitence, must taste death (unless the Savior returns first, A.W.P.)” Yet it is blessed to know that these Roman soldiers were also the unwitting agents for fulfilling Christ’s promise “*Today* shalt thou be with me in paradise”!

“But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they break not his legs” (John 19:33).

This affords further evidence of the *uniqueness* of Christ’s death. The Lord Jesus and the two thieves had been crucified together. They had been on their respective crosses the same length of time. But now, at the close of the day, the two thieves were still alive; for, as it is well known, execution by crucifixion, though exceedingly painful, was usually a slow death. No vital member of the body was directly affected, and often the sufferer lingered on for two or three

days, before being finally overcome with exhaustion. It was not natural, therefore, that Christ should be dead after but six hours on the cross — observe how that “Pilate *marvelled* if he were *already* dead” (Mark 15:44). The request of the Jews to Pilate shows that they were not expecting the three to die unless death were hastened. In the fact that the Savior was “dead already” when the soldiers came to Him, though the two thieves still lived, we have a further demonstration that His life *was not* “taken from him,” but that He “laid it down of himself”!

“But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they break not his legs.” This was the first proof that the Son of God *had* really died. Trained executioners as these Roman soldiers were, it is quite unthinkable that they would make any mistake in a matter like this. Pilate had *given orders* for the legs of the three to be broken, and they would not dare to disobey unless they were absolutely sure that Christ *were* “dead already.” Infidels expose themselves to the charge of utter absurdity if they claim that Christ never died, and was only in a swoon. The Roman soldiers are witnesses against them!

“But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water” (John 19:34).

“That *blood* should flow from one now dead, that blood *and* water should issue together, yet separated, was clearly a miracle. The water and the blood came forth to bear witness, that God has given to us eternal life, and that this life is in His Son (1 John 5:8-12). We have not here the centurion’s confession, ‘truly this was the Son of God’; we have not Pilate’s wife, nor the convicted lips of Judas, bearing Him witness; Jesus does not here receive witness from men, but from God. The water and the blood are God’s witnesses to His Son, and to the life that sinners may find in Him. It was *sin* that pierced Him. The action of the soldier was a sample of man’s *enmity*. It was the sullen shot of the defeated foe after the battle; the more loudly telling out the deep-seated hatred *that* there is *in* man’s heart to God and His Christ. But it only sets off the riches of that *grace* which met it, and abounded over it; for it was answered by the love of God. The point of the soldier’s spear was touched by *the*

blood! The crimson flow came forth to roll away the crimson sin” (Mr. Bellett).

“But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.” Here was the second proof that our Lord *really* died. One of the soldiers determined to make sure work and leave nothing uncertain — in all probability directing his spear at the Savior’s heart. He was singled out from the others even while dead between the dying thieves.

“He has a place even here that belonged to Him alone!” (Mr. W. Kelly).

“Behold now the sleeping last Adam, and out of His side formed the evangelical Eve. Behold the Rock which was smitten, and the waters of life gushed forth. Behold the Fountain that is opened for sin and uncleanness” (Augustine).

“The blood and water signified the two great benefits which all believers partake of through Christ — justification and sanctification. Blood stands for remission, water for regeneration; blood for atonement, water for purification. The two must always go together.” (Matthew Henry).

“And he that saw it bear record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe” (John 19:35).

The reference is to what is recorded in the previous verse: John vouches as an eye-witness for the flowing of the blood and water from the Savior’s pierced side. It is evident that he had returned to the cross after conducting Mary to his own home, and it is equally evident that he must have remained there to the end. John’s solemn asseveration here plainly intimates that what is recorded in the previous verse is a notable miracle. We believe that the “record” of John includes *both* what he has written here and that which he says in his first Epistle:

“This is he that came by [i.e., was manifest by means of] water and *blood*” (1 John 5:6).

In the Gospel the blood is mentioned first, as satisfying God; then comes the “water” as applied to us. In the Epistle the order is the *experimental* one: we have to be regenerated *before* we have faith in the blood!

“For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken” (John 19:36).

The Holy Spirit here quotes Psalm 34:20: “He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.” Marvelously had this been fulfilled. God had kept all the bones of His incarnate Son. Notwithstanding Pilate’s order, the soldiers broke not *His* legs. All the legions of Caesar could not have broken a single bone: they, too, had “no power” except what was given them from above! The preservation of Christ’s bones was the fulfillment of an ancient type; “Neither shall ye break a bone thereof” (Exodus 12:46), i.e., of the paschal lamb. For fifteen hundred years Israel had punctiliously observed this item in the passover observance, and none of them (so far as we know) had any idea of its meaning. Now the Holy Spirit explains it.

“And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced” (John 19:37).

In a most striking way the piercing of the Savior’s side demonstrated the *sovereignty* of God — His absolute control over all His creatures and their every act. The soldier *had* received instructions to break the legs of Christ, but this he *did not*: had he done so, Scripture had been broken! The soldier *had not* received orders to pierce the Savior’s side, yet this he *did*: had he not, prophecy had failed of its accomplishment! The quotation is from Zechariah 12:10 and the reference is to a coming day, when Israel shall look upon Him whom they *pierced* — *they* pierced Him, though the act was performed by a Roman. Observe here the minute accuracy of Scripture: in John 19:36 the word “fulfilled” is suitably used; but here in John 19:37 it is significantly absent. And why? Because the *complete* “fulfillment” of Zechariah 12:10 is yet future, hence the “another scripture *saith*.”

“After this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he

might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore and took the body of Jesus” (John 19:38).

This, too, was in fulfillment of prophecy: “Men appointed his grave with the wicked, but he was with the rich in his death” (Isaiah 53:9, corrected translation). It is blessed to see the Holy Spirit here bringing Joseph to light in connection with the last offices of love to the precious body of the Lord; he was allowed a privileged part in the accomplishment of Isaiah’s prediction. How true it is that man proposes, but God disposes! Wicked men had prepared three graves for the occupants of the three crosses, but one of them was destined to remain unoccupied that day. Just as God would not suffer Christ’s bones to be broken, so He would not allow His body to be placed in a malefactor’s tomb; but instead, in a sepulcher prepared by one who loved Him. Hitherto, Joseph had, through fear of the Jews, been a secret disciple; but though afraid to own the Savior while He lived, now that He was dead, he went in “*boldly*” (Mark 15:43) and craved His body. What a witness was this to the *power* of the Redeemer’s death!

“And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight (John 19:39).

This also witnessed to the power of Christ’s death. Like Joseph, Nicodemus came out into the light but slowly. Timid by nature, yet grace

overcoming, here is Nicodemus the only one, apparently, who dared to help Joseph in the holy work of burying the Lord. How great the contrast between his conduct in John 3, when he crept into the Lord’s place of lodging under cover of night, and here, where he is not ashamed to openly show himself as one who loved the crucified Savior! The value of his gift testifies to the greatness of his love.

“Joseph and Nicodemus had done what they could. That service done for Christ has never been forgotten. The names of these two are embalmed in the volume of inspiration, and the amount in weight of the spices that Nicodemus brought is likewise recorded. Service

done to Christ, or in His name, is never by God forgotten” (Mr. C. E. Stuart).

“Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury” (John 19:40).

“They wrapped that incorruptible body in spices, for it is to be fragrant for evermore to all His people as the death like which there is no other” (Mr. F. W. Grant).

Here, too, a beautiful type was fulfilled. In 2 Chronicles 16:14 we read, “And they buried him in his own sepulcher, which he had made for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with *sweet odors* and divers kinds of *spices*.”

“Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulcher, wherein was never man yet laid” (John 19:41).

Beautifully suggestive is the reference to the “garden.” It was in a “garden” that the first Adam sowed the seed which issued in death; so here, in a “garden” was sown the Seed which was to bear much fruit in immortal life. In the “new” sepulcher “wherein was never yet man laid” we have the fulfillment of still another type:

“And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer (previously slain) and lay them up without the camp in a *clean place*” (Numbers 19:9).

“There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews’ preparation; for the sepulcher was nigh at hand” (John 19:42).

Here was the third conclusive proof that the Lord Jesus actually died — He was *buried*. He who had been born of a virgin mother, was laid in a virgin grave; there to remain for three days when He came forth as the mighty Victor.

The following questions are to prepare for our next study: —

1. Why was the “stone” removed, verse 1?
2. What is shown by Mary’s words, verse 2?
3. Why seek the two she did, verse 2?
4. Why went not John in, verse 5?
5. What is the significance of verse 7?
6. What was it he “saw” that made him “believe,” verse 8?
7. Why did they go “home,” verse 10?

JOHN 20:1-10

CHRIST RISEN FROM THE DEAD

Below is an Analysis of the first section of John 20: —

1. The stone removed from the sepulcher, verse 1.
2. Mary Magdalene's appeal to the two disciples, verse 2.
3. Love's race to the sepulcher, verses 3, 4.
4. John's hesitation and Peter's boldness, verses 5, 6.
5. The grave-clothes and John's conclusion, verses 7, 8.
6. The disciples' slowness of heart, verse 9.
7. Their return home, verse 10.

The resurrection of Christ was more than hinted at in the first Divine promise and prophecy (Genesis 3:15): if Christ was to bruise the serpent's head *after* His own heel had been bruised by the enemy, then must He rise from the dead. The passing of the ark through the waters of judgment on to the cleansed earth, foreshadowed this same great event (1 Peter 3:21). The deliverance of Isaac from the altar, after he had been given up to death three days before (see Genesis 22:4), is interpreted by the Holy Spirit as a receiving of him back, in figure, from the dead (Hebrews 11:19). The crossing of the Red Sea by Israel on dry ground, three days after the slaying of the paschal lamb, was a type of Christians being raised together with Christ. The emergence of Jonah after three days and nights in the whale's belly forecast the Savior's deliverance from the tomb on the third day. Prophecy was equally explicit:

“Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hades; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see

corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life” (Psalm 16:9-11).

We cannot make too much of the death of Christ, but we can make too little of His resurrection. Our hearts and minds cannot meditate too frequently upon the cross, but in pondering the sufferings of the Savior, let us not forget the glories which followed. Calvary does not exhaust the Gospel message. The Christian evangel is not only that Christ died for our sins, but also that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). He was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification (Romans 4:25). Had Christ remained in the sepulcher it had been the grave of all our hopes; “If Christ be not raised,” said the apostle, “then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” (1 Corinthians 15:14). To be a witness of His resurrection was a fundamental qualification for an apostle (Acts 1:22). That God raised up the One whom the Jews had crucified, was the central truth pressed by Peter in his pentecostal sermon (Acts 2:24-36). The same fact was urged again by the apostles in Solomon’s porch (Acts 3:15), and before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:10; Acts 5:30). This foundation-truth was proclaimed also to the Gentiles (Acts 10:40; Acts 13:34). Its prominence in the Epistles is too well-known to require quotations.

The 20th chapter of John records the appearances which the Savior made to some of His own after He was risen from the dead — we say “after,” for none of them witnessed the actual resurrection itself. “As no eye beheld what was deepest in the Cross, so only God looked on the Lord rising from among the dead. This was as it should be. Darkness veiled Him giving Himself for us in atonement. Man saw not that infinite work in His death; yet was it not only to glorify God thereby, but that our sins might be borne away righteously. We have seen the action of the world, and especially of the Jews, in crucifying Him; high and low, religious and profane, all played their part; even an apostle denied Him, as another betrayed Him to the murderous priests and elders. But *Jehovah* laid on Him the iniquities of us all; *Jehovah* bruised and put Him to grief; *Jehovah* made His soul an offering for sin; and as this was *Godward*, so was it invisible to *human* eyes, and God alone could rightly bear witness, by whom He would, of the eternal redemption

there obtained, which left Divine love free to act even in a lost and ungodly world.

“So with the resurrection of Christ. He was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father; God raised up Jesus whom the Jews slew and hanged on a tree; He had laid down His life that He might take it again, in three days raising the temple of His body which they destroyed. But if no man was given to see the act of His rising from the dead, it was to be testified in all the world, as well as His atoning death. Assuredly he who withholds His resurrection maims the glad tidings of its triumphant proof and character, and compromises the believers’ liberty and introduction into the new creation, as he immensely clouds the Lord’s glory; even as the denial of resurrection virtually charges God’s witnesses with falsehood and makes faith vain.” (Bible Treasury).

The resurrection of Christ was brought about by the joint action of the three Persons of the Trinity. Just as they cooperated in connection with His incarnation (Hebrews 10:5 for the Father; Philippians 2:7 for the Son; Luke 1:35 for the Spirit), just as they had each been active in connection with the atonement (Isaiah 53:6, 10 for the Father; Ephesians 5:2 for the Son; Hebrews 9:14 for the Spirit), so the whole Godhead was engaged on the resurrection-morning.

“Christ was raised up from the dead *by the glory of the Father*” (Romans 6:4):

“*I lay down my life, that I might take it again*” (John 10:17):
“But if *the Spirit* of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you” etc. (Romans 8:11).

“The first of the week” (John 20:1). All the ways of God express His perfect wisdom, and everything recorded of them in Scripture is written for our learning. Most fitting was it that the Lord Jesus, as head of the *new* creation, should rise from the dead on the *first* day of the week — intimating that a new beginning had been inaugurated. The full requirements of the moral law had been met; the shadows of the ceremonial law had all been fulfilled; the old system, connected with man in the flesh, was ended; a new and

spiritual dispensation had begun. It was this “first of the week” which the Spirit of prophecy had in mind when He moved the Psalmist to write,

“The stone which the builders refused is become the head of the corner. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. *This is the day* which the Lord hath made (appointed); we will rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:22-24).

Here is the reason why the Lord’s people are under obligations to keep Sunday as their day of rest and worship. * During Old Testament times the Sabbath was the memorial of God’s finished work in the old creation (Genesis 2:3; Exodus 20:11); in New Testament times the Sabbath is the memorial of Christ’s finished work from which issues the new creation.

“The first of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulcher” (John 20:1).

Mark tells us that Mary Magdalene was accompanied to the grave by Mary the mother of James, and Salome (Mark 16:1, 2); but John mentions them not. It is characteristic of this fourth Gospel to present *individual* souls to our notice; Nicodemus alone with Christ, the woman at the well, the blind beggar in chapter 9 being well-known examples. Another thing which is prominent in John is the heart’s *affection*, the soul finding a satisfying Object: the two disciples who abode with the Lord, on their very first meeting with Him (John 1:39); the bringing of others to the Savior, that they also might bask in His presence (John 1:41, 45); the words of Peter (John 6:68), the appeal of the sisters (John 11:3), and the devotion of Mary (John 12:3), are so many illustrations. It is *this* which Mary of Magdala so vividly exemplifies. To whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much (Luke 7:47), and abundant cause had this woman to love the Savior, for out of her He had cast seven demons (Luke 8:2).

It was “very early in the morning” (Mark 16:2) that Mary came to the sepulcher; as John tells us “when it was yet dark.” But though she had reason for expecting to find the Roman soldiers on guard there (Matthew 27:66), though there had just been “a great

earthquake” (Matthew 28:2), though there were no male disciples accompanying her, though this was the midst of the Feast, when thousands of strangers were most probably sleeping under any slight shelter near the walls of Jerusalem, *love* drew Mary to the place where the Savior’s body had been laid. How this devotion of hers puts to shame many of us, who perhaps have greater intelligence in spiritual things, but who manifest far less love for Christ! Few were as deeply attached to the Redeemer as was this woman. Few had received as much at His gracious hands, and her gratitude knew no bounds. How this explains the listlessness and half-heartedness among us! Where there is little sense of our indebtedness to Christ, there will be little affection for Him. Where light views of our sinfulness, our depravity, our utter unworthiness, are entertained, there will be little expression of gratitude and praise. It is those who have had the clearest sight of their de-servingness of hell, whose hearts are most moved at the amazing grace which snatched them as brands from the burning, that are the most devoted among Christ’s people. Let us pray daily, then, that it may please God to grant us a deeper realization of our sinfulness and a deeper apprehension of the surpassing worthiness of His Son, so that we may serve and glorify Him with increasing zeal and faithfulness.

“And seeth the stone taken away from the sepulcher” (John 20:1).

Matthew tells us that,

“Behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it” (Matthew 28:2):

Upon this Mr. John Gill has said, “This stone was removed by an angel, for though Christ Himself could easily have done it, it was proper that it should be done by a messenger from Heaven, by the order of Divine justice, which had lain Him a prisoner there.” The stone was rolled away from Lazarus’ sepulcher by human hands (John 11:41), the stone from Christ’s tomb by angelic — in *all* things *He* has the pre-eminence! We believe that God’s principal design in sending His angel to remove the stone was that these believers might see for themselves that the sepulcher was now

tenantless. The angel seated on the stone (later, inside the sepulcher) would demonstrate that God Himself had intervened. Apparently Mary was the first to perceive that the entrance to the grave was now open.

“Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him” (John 20:2).

There is no difficulty in reconciling this statement with the record of Matthew if the following points be kept in mind: First, either Mary was in front of the other women as they journeyed to the sepulcher, or else her vision was keener than theirs; at any rate, she appears to have been the first to perceive that the stone had been removed. Second, she was so excited over this that, instead of going right up to the sepulcher with her companions, she at once rushed off to acquaint the apostles — hence she missed seeing the angel. Third, after Mary’s hurried departure, the rest of the little party drew near the grave, hardly knowing what to conclude or what to expect. Fourth, Mary was, most probably, a long way on the road to John’s dwelling before the other women left the tomb.

Various reasons have been advanced as to why Mary sought out Peter and John. These two seem to have been nearer the Savior than the other apostles. They were among the highly favored three who witnessed the transfiguration, and whom He also took with Him further into the Garden than the others (Matthew 26:37). These two had also stuck more closely to Him after His arrest, following to and entering the high priest’s residence. Moreover, as another has said, “John alone of all the apostles, had witnessed Peter’s sad fall and observed his bitter weeping afterwards. Can we not understand that from Friday night to Sunday morning John would be lovingly employed in binding up the broken heart of his brother, and telling him of our Lord’s last words? Can we doubt that they were absorbed and occupied in converse about their Master on this very morning, when Mary Magdalene suddenly ran in with her wonderful news.” Mary, then, sought Peter and John because she knew that among the disciples *they* would be most likely to respond (at that early hour) to

the anxious inquiry that filled her own soul. It is indeed beautiful to see these two disciples now together:

“The love and tender nature of John’s character come out most blessedly in his affection for Peter, even after his denial of Christ... John clings to him, and has him under his own roof, wherever that was. When Judas fell, he had no friend to raise and cheer him. When Peter fell, there was ‘a brother born for adversity’ who did not despise him!” (Bishop Ryle).

“And saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher and we know not where they have laid him.” How this shows us that *love* needs to be regulated by *faith*. Mary’s affection for the Savior cannot be doubted, and most blessed it was; but her faith certainly was not in exercise. She had judged by the sight of her eyes. The stone had been removed, and she at once jumped to the conclusion that some one had been there and “taken away” the Savior’s body. The thought that He was now alive had evidently not entered her mind. She supposed that He was yet under the power of death. His own repeated declaration that He *would* rise again on the third day had made no impression. “Alas, how little of Christ’s teaching the best of us take in! How much we let fall!” What a strange mingling of spiritual intelligence and spiritual ignorance we behold here. “*They have taken away the Lord*”? How often we see the same confusion in ourselves and in others! Observe her “*we know not where they have laid him*” — agreeing with Matthew’s account that other women had accompanied her on the journey to the sepulcher.

“Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulcher” (John 20:3).

The announcement which Mary had made to them was so startling that the two disciples arose at once, setting forth to ascertain what this removal of the stone from the sepulcher really meant. It is most likely that they would first ask Mary, Are you sure the body is gone? But all she could tell them was that the stone was no longer in its place. Finding that Mary had not actually looked in the sepulcher, they deemed it best to go and inspect it for themselves. Strikingly may we behold here the over-ruling providence of God. According

to the Mosaic law a woman was not eligible to bear witness (note no mention of *them* is made in 1 Corinthians 15!), and the truth could not be established by less than *two* men. Here then we *have* the needed two in Peter and John, as eye-witnesses of the empty grave and the orderliness of the clothes which the Savior had left behind!

“So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulcher” (John 20:4).

Their *running* evidences that they were both excited and anxious. “We can well suppose that Mary’s sudden announcement completely overwhelmed them, so that they knew not what to think. Who can tell what thoughts did not come into their minds, as they ran, about our Lord’s oft-repeated predictions of His resurrection? Could it really be true? Could it possibly prove that all their deep sorrow was going to turn to joy? These are all conjectures, no doubt. Yet a vast amount of thoughts may run through a mind, at a great crisis, in a very few minutes” (Bishop Ryle).

As to the *physical* reason of John’s out-distancing Peter we cannot be certain, but the popular idea that John was the younger of the two is most likely correct, for he lived at least sixty years afterwards. As to the *spiritual reason*, we think they err who attribute to Peter a guilty conscience, which made him fearful of a possible meeting with the Savior. Had this been the case, he had hardly set out for the sepulcher at all, still less would he have gone there on the run! Moreover, the promptness with which he entered the tomb argues against the common view. Yet we cannot doubt that there is a moral significance to this detail which the Spirit has recorded for our *J*earning. Peter had not yet been restored to fellowship with the Savior. John, too, was the one of all the Eleven who was on most intimate terms with the Lord. This is sufficient to account for his winning love’s race to the sepulcher.

“And he stooping down, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in” (John 20:5).

Here again we are left to conjecture. The simple fact is recorded; *why* John entered not in we are not told. Some say, to prevent himself being ceremonially defiled; but that seems very far-fetched.

Others think it was out of reverence for the place where the Savior had lain; this, while being more plausible, seems negated by the fact that only a short while after he *did* enter the sepulcher (John 20:8). It appears to us more likely that, after looking in and seeing the sepulcher was empty, he waited for Peter to come up and take the lead — John being the younger of the two, this would be the most gracious thing for him to do. Whatever the motive which guided him, certainly we can see, again, the over-ruling hand of God two must be present to witness the condition of the grave so as to establish the truth!

“And he stooping down, saw the linen clothes lying.” What is the moral significance of John’s act here? Surely it is this: John would never see the risen Christ while he was “stooping down” and looking within the sepulcher! How many there are to-day who conduct themselves as John did! They wish to ascertain whether or not they are real Christians. And what is the method they pursue? How do they prosecute their inquiry? By self-examination, by introspection, by looking within! They attempt to find in their own hearts that which will give them confidence towards God. But this is like seeking to make fast a ship by casting the anchor within its own hold. The anchor must be thrown *outside* of the ship, so that, lost to sight beneath the waves, it pierces through the mud or sand of the ocean’s bed, and grips the rock itself. The surest way to discover whether or not I am trusting in Christ is not to peer within to see if I have faith, but to *exercise* faith, by looking away to its Object — faith is the eye of the soul, and the eye does not look at itself. If I look within, most likely I shall see only what John saw — the tokens of *death*! “Looking off *unto Jesus*” is what the Word says.

“Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulcher” (John 20:6).

“How this illustrates that there are widely different temperaments among believers! Both ran to the sepulcher. John, of the two, the more gentle, quiet, reserved, deep-feeling, stooped down, but went no further. Peter, more hot and zealous, impulsive, fervent and forward, cannot be content without going into the sepulcher, and actually seeing with his own eyes. Both, we may be sure, were deeply attached to our Lord. The hearts of both, at this critical

juncture, were full of hopes and fears, anxieties and expectations, all tangled together. Yet each acts in his own characteristic fashion! Let us learn from this to make allowance for wide varieties in the individual character of believers. To do so will save us much trouble in the journey of life, and prevent many an uncharitable thought. Let us not judge brethren harshly, and set them down in a low place, because they do not see or feel things as we see and feel. The flowers in the Lord's garden are not all of one color and one scent, though they are all planted by the One Spirit. The subjects of Christ's kingdom are not all exactly of one tone or temperament, though they all love the same Savior, and are written in the same book of life. The Church has some in its ranks who are like Peter, and some who are like John, but a place for all, and a work for all to do. Let us love all who love Christ in sincerity, and thank God that they love Him at all" (Bishop Ryle).

["And seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about His head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself" \(John 20:6, 7\)](#)

In the Greek the word for "seeth" is different from that for "saw" in the preceding verse: the word used in connection with John signifies to take a glance; the one used of Peter means that he beheld intently, scrutinized. The design of the Holy Spirit in this verse is obvious: He informs us that Peter found in the empty tomb the clearest evidences of a deliberate and composed transaction. There were no signs of haste or fear. What had taken place had been done "decently and in order," not by a thief, and scarcely by a friend.

"There they beheld, not their Object, but the trophies of His victory over the power of death. There they see the gates of brass and the bars of iron cut in sunder. The linen clothes and the napkin which had been wrapped around the Lord's head, as though He were death's prisoner, were seen strewing the ground like the spoils of the vanquished, as under the hand of death's Conqueror. The very armor of the strong man was made a show of in his own house; this telling loudly that He, who is the plague of death, and hell's destruction, had been in that place doing His glorious work." (Mr. G. Bellett).

“Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulcher, and he saw, and believed” (John 20:8).

There is wide difference of opinion as to the meaning of this verse. *What* was it that John “saw and believed”? Many say that John saw the grave was *tenantless* and believed what *Mary* had said, — “they have taken away the Lord.” But John had *already* looked into the grave and seen the linen clothes (John 20:5); what is said here in John 20:8 is clearly something different. But what alternative is left us? Only this, that John now believed that Christ had risen from the dead. But if this be the reference here, how are we to understand the next verse — “For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that He *must* rise again from the dead?” Does not this bar out the thought that John *now* believed that Christ was alive? We do not think so; the contrast pointed between John 20:8 and 9 is not between believing and not believing, but between the *grounds* on which faith rested!

We believe that the key to the meaning of this verse lies in the word “saw.” In the Greek it is a different one from that which is used either in John 20:5 or verse 6; the word here in verse 8 has the force of “perceived with the understanding.” But *what was it* that John now “saw”? In verse 5, when he looked into the sepulcher from the outside, he saw (by a glance) “the linen clothes lying”; but now, on the inside, he saw *also*

“the napkin that was about His head not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself” (John 20:7).

On this the late Mr. Pierson wrote: “‘Wrapped together,’ fails to convey the true significance. The original means *rolled up*, and suggests that these clothes were lying in their *original convolutions*, as they had been tightly rolled up around our Lord’s dead body. In John 19:40 it is recorded how they tightly wound — bound about — that body in the linen clothes; how tightly and rigidly may be inferred from the necessity of *loosing* Lazarus, even after miraculous power had raised up the dead body and given it life (John 11:44). This explains John 20:8: ‘And he (John) saw and *believed*.’ There was nothing in the mere fact of an empty tomb to compel belief in a miraculous resurrection; but, when John saw, on

the floor of the sepulcher, the long linen wrappings that had been so tightly wound about the body and the head, lying there undisturbed, in their original convolutions, he knew that nothing but a *miracle* could have made it possible.”

John “saw *and* believed” or understood: it was a logical conclusion, an irresistible one, drawn from the evidence before him. The body was gone from the sepulcher; the clothes were left behind, and the condition of them indicated that Christ had passed out of them without their being un-wrapped. If *friends* had removed the body, would they not have taken the clothes with it, still covering the honored corpse? If *foes* had removed the body, first stripping it, would they have been so careful to dispose of the clothes and napkin in the orderly manner in which John now beheld them? Everything pointed to deliberation and design, and the apostle could draw only one conclusion — Christ had risen. Our blessed Lord had left the grave-clothes just as they had rested upon Him. He had simply risen out of them by His Divine power. We believe that this shows there is a deeper significance than is generally perceived in the angel’s word to the women, “Come *see* the place where the Lord lay” (Matthew 28:6). The *clothes* themselves marked His resting-place, somewhat as one would leave the impression of his form upon the bed on which he had been lying — body, arms, head. Here then we have the first proof that the mighty Victor had risen from the sleep of death.

In leaving behind His grave-clothes an Old Testament type was strikingly fulfilled. *Joseph*, through no fault of his own, was cast into prison — the place of condemnation. While in prison he was numbered with transgressors — two, as Christ was crucified between the two thieves; to the one he was the means of blessing, to the other he was the pronouncer of judgment. All of this is so clear it needs no comment. But Joseph did not remain forever in the prison, any more than Christ continued in the tomb. Joseph’s place of shame and suffering was exchanged for one of dignity and glory. But before he left the dungeon “*he* shaved himself, and *changed his raiment*” (Genesis 41:14). So the Savior left behind Him the habiliments of death, coming forth clothed in immortality and glory. This was the pledge that at Christ’s second coming His people will also be rid forever of everything connected with the old creation —

“Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21).

“For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead” (John 20:9).

Very searching and humbling is this. For three years these two leading apostles had heard our Lord speak of His resurrection, yet had they not understood Him. Again and again had He told them that He *would* rise again on the third day, yet had they never taken in His meaning. His *enemies* had remembered what He said (see Matthew 27:63), but His friends had forgotten! What a piercing rebuke was that of the *angel's* — “He is risen, as *he said*” (Matthew 28:6)! And again,

“Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: *remember* how he spake unto you when He was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again” (Luke 24:5-7)!

But these words of Christ had fallen on unheeding ears. Moreover, the apostles had had the Old Testament Scriptures in their hands from the beginning, and such passages as Psalm 16:9-11, etc., ought to have prepared them for His resurrection. But wrong teaching in childhood, traditions imbibed in their youth (John 12:34), had prejudiced them and made void the Word of God. This statement of John's here brings out, once more, his *trustworthiness* as a *witness*.

“Hereby it appears that they were not only *honest men*, who would not deceive others, but *cautious men*, who would not themselves be imposed upon” (Matthew Henry).

“For as yet they knew not the scripture that he must rise again from the dead.” The Holy Spirit here contrasts a faith which rests on the Word of God, with an intellectual assurance which proceeds from mere external evidence. Much has been made by Christian apologists of the value of “evidences,” but it has been greatly overrated. Creation demonstrates a Creator, but the outward proofs of His hand do not move the *heart*, nor bring the soul into

communion with Him — the written Word, applied by the Spirit, alone does that! “Facts are of high ‘interest and real importance; and as the Israelite could Point to them as the basis of his religion, to the call of Abram by God, and the deliverance of the chosen people from Egypt and through the desert and into Canaan, so can the Christian to the incomparably deeper and more enduring ones of the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Son of God, with the consequent presence of the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven. But *faith* to have *moral value*, to deal with the conscience, to purify the heart, is not the pure and simple acceptance of facts on reasonable grounds, but the heart’s welcoming God’s testimony in His Word. This tests the soul beyond all else, as spiritual intelligence consists in the growing up to Christ in an increasing perception and enjoyment of all that God’s Word has revealed, which separates the saint practically to Himself and His will in judgment of self and the world.

“To ‘see and believe’ therefore is wholly short of what the operation of God gives us; as traditional faith or evidence answers to it now in Christendom. It is human, and leaves the conscience unpurged and the heart without communion. It may be found in him who is in no way born of God (John 2:23-25), but also in the believer as here; if so, it is not what the Spirit seals and in no way delivers from present things. And this it seems to be the Divine object to let us know in the account before us. Faith, to be of value and have power, rests not on sight or inference, but on Scripture. And as the disciples show the most treacherous memory as to the words of the Lord till He was raised up from the dead (John 2:22), so were they insensible to the force and application of the written Word: after that they believed both, they entered into abiding and enlarging blessing from above. This, as Peter tells us in his first Epistle (1 Peter 1:8), is characteristically the faith of a Christian, who, having not seen Christ, loves Him; and on whom, though not now seeing Him but believing he exults with joy unspeakable and full of glory. The faith that is founded on evidences may strengthen against Deism, Pantheism, or Atheism, but it never gave remission of sins, never led one to cry Abba Father, never filled the heart with His grace and glory who is the Object of God’s everlasting satisfaction and delight” (The Bible Treasury).

“Then the disciples went away again unto their own home”
(John 20:10).

“Here also we have the further and marked testimony of its powerlessness (John’s ‘believing’ A.W.P.). The fact was known on grounds indisputable to their minds but not yet appreciated in God’s sight as revealed in His Word, and hence they return to their own unbroken association” (Bible Treasury).

Doubtless this is one reason why the Holy Spirit recorded this detail, but are we not meant to link it up with John 19:27 as well “From that hour that disciple took her unto *his own home*.” Did not Peter and John now hasten to tell the Savior’s mother that He was risen from the dead!

The following questions are to aid the student for our next lesson: —

1. What is the typical picture in verses 11-23?
2. Why did not Mary recognize Him in verse 15?
3. Why did she recognize Him in verse 16?
4. Why “touch Me not,” verse 17?
5. Why refer to the ascension here, verse 17?
6. What do the last words of verse 19 prove?
7. Why the repetition in verse 21 from verse 19?

JOHN 20:11-23

CHRIST APPEARING TO HIS OWN.

Below is an Analysis of our present passage: —

1. Mary at the sepulcher, verses 11-13.
2. Christ revealing Himself to Mary, verses 14-16.
3. Christ commissioning Mary, verses 17-18.
4. The apostles in the upper room, verse 19.
5. Christ revealing Himself to the apostles, verse 20.
6. Christ commissioning the apostles, verse 21.
7. Christ enduing the apostles, verses 22, 23.

Our Lord had triumphed o'er the grave, "as he said." Before the sun of this world had risen upon the third day since the crucifixion, the Son of righteousness had already risen; the Bridegroom had gone forth from His chamber (Psalm 19:4). The One whose heel was bruised by the serpent had, through death, become the destroyer of him who had the power of death. The eye of no earthly watcher had beheld the actual resurrection of the body, the rising, and the going forth. That He *had* risen was evident by the stone rolled away, the empty sepulcher, and the condition of the grave-clothes which He had left behind; corroborated, too, by the witness of the angels. But now He was to appear in person unto His own: the manner in which He did so is very striking.

"Although the impulse of His love urged Him at once to the company of His own upon earth, who are still in the sorrow of death; yet He does not overwhelm them with sudden surprise at His glorious reappearance, but restrains Himself, yields Himself to their view by degrees, regulated by the highest wisdom of love. Their

minds are gradually prepared, each one according to its temperament and need” (Stier).

So far as our present light reveals, the Savior made *eleven* appearances between His resurrection and ascension.

First, to Mary Magdalene alone (John 20:14).

Second, to certain women returning from the sepulcher (Matthew 28:9, 10).

Third, to Simon Peter (Luke 24:34).

Fourth, to the two disciples going to Emmaus (Luke 24:13).

Fifth, to the ten apostles in the upper room (John 20:19).

Sixth, to the eleven apostles in the upper room (John 20:26-29).

Seventh, to seven disciples fishing at the sea of Tiberias (John 21).

Eighth, to the eleven apostles and possibly other disciples with them (Matthew 28:16).

Ninth, to above five hundred brethren at once (1 Corinthians 15:7).

Tenth, to James (1 Corinthians 15:7).

Eleventh, to the eleven apostles, and possibly other disciples on the mount of Olives at His ascension (Acts 1).

His **twelfth** appearance, after His ascension, was to Stephen (Acts 7).

His **thirteenth**, to Saul on the way to Damascus (Acts 9).

His **fourteenth**, to John on Patmos (Revelation 1). And this was the last — how profoundly significant. The *final* appearing was His *fourteenth!* The factors of fourteen are seven and two, seven being the number of *perfection*, and two of *witness*. Thus we have His own *perfect witness* to His triumph over the tomb!! His next appearing

will be unto His blood-bought saints all together, when He shall descend into the air with a shout, and catch us up to be with Himself for evermore (1 Thessalonians 4:16). *This* will be His *fifteenth* appearance. The factors of fifteen are three and five, three being the number of *full manifestation*, and five of *grace*. Thus, at His coming for us, His grace, His wondrous grace, will be *fully manifested!!*

It is with the first and the fifth of these appearances of the risen Savior that our present lesson is concerned. And here, too, the significance of these numerals holds good. One is the number of *God* in the *unity* of His essence. It speaks of His absolute sovereignty. The sovereignty of God comes out here most vividly and blessedly in *the character of the one selected* to have the high honor of being the first to gaze upon the triumphant Redeemer. It was not to the Eleven, not even to John, that Christ *first* showed Himself; it was to a woman, and she the one out of whom He had cast seven demons — one who had been the complete slave of Satan. And to her He revealed Himself as *God the Son* (see verse 17). And to whom was His *fifth* appearance made? To His mother? No. To Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus? No. It was to the *unbelieving apostles*, to those who had regarded as idle tales the testimony of the women who had seen Him. His *fifth* appearance was made to those who had least reason to expect Him, whose faith was the weakest. Wondrous *grace* indeed was this!

“But Mary stood without at the sepulcher weeping” (John 20:11).

This is the sequel to what was before us in the last lesson. At the beginning of the 20th chapter, we read, “The first of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulcher, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulcher. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him.” In the interval, the two apostles had been to the sepulcher, inspected the clothes within, and then returned to their home, to acquaint the Savior’s mother that He was risen from the dead. Meanwhile Mary, not knowing of this, had returned to the sepulcher, desolate and sorrowful. But soon her grief was to be turned into

gladness: in but a little while the One who had taken captive her heart and who now occupied her every thought would be manifested to her. Strikingly does this illustrate Proverbs 8:17: "I love them that love me; and those that *seek me early* shall find me." Mary, and the other women, were the *first* to *seek* the sepulcher on the resurrection morning, and *they* were the first to whom the Victor of death showed Himself (Matthew 28:9). Alas that so many put off the seeking of Christ till the last hour of life, and then never find Him!

"But Mary stood without at the sepulcher weeping." Here, once more, the Holy Spirit shows us that *love* needs to be regulated by *faith*. It was love for Christ that caused her to weep: she was weeping because the sepulcher was empty, yet in fact *that* was the very thing which should have made her rejoice. Had the Lord's body been still there, she might have wept indeed, for then His promise had failed, His work on the cross had been in vain, and she (and all others) yet in her sins.

The weeping manifested her affection, but it also showed her unbelief. "How often are the fears and sorrows of saints quite needless! Mary stood at the sepulcher weeping, and wept as if nothing could comfort her. She wept when the angels spoke to her: 'Woman,' they said, 'why weepest thou?' She was weeping still when our Lord spoke to her: 'Woman,' He said, 'why weepest thou?' And the burden of her complaint was always the same: 'They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him'! Yet all this time her risen Master was close to her! Her tears were needless. Like Hagar in the wilderness (Genesis 21:19), she had a well of water by her side, but she had not eyes to see it!

"What thoughtful Christian can fail to see that we have here a faithful picture of many a believer's experience? How often we mourn over the absence of things which in reality are within our grasp, and even at our right hand! Two-thirds of the things we fear in life never happen at all, and two-thirds of the tears we shed are thrown away, and shed in vain. Let us pray for more faith and patience, and allow more time for the development of God's purposes: let us believe that things are often working together for our peace and joy, which seem at one time to contain nothing but bitterness and sorrow. Old Jacob said at one time in his life 'all these

things are against me' (Genesis 42:36), yet he lived to see Joseph again, rich and prosperous, and to thank God for all that had happened" (Bishop Ryle).

"And as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulcher" (John 20:11).

Such is ever the effect of uncontrolled grief. When we sorrow, even as others who have no hope, when we walk by sight instead of faith, when we are moved by the flesh instead of the spirit, we stoop down, and are occupied with things below.

"Unto thee lift I mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens" (Psalm 123:1)

should ever be the believer's attitude. Mary points a timely warning for us. We are living in days when "men's hearts are failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" (Luke 21:26), and the more *we* are occupied with the evil around us, the more will our hearts fail. Heed then the Savior's admonition,

"When these things begin to come to pass, then *look up and lift up* your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28).

Let us, instead of looking down like Mary, say with the Psalmist,

"I will *lift up mine eyes* unto the hills. From whence cometh my help? My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1, 2).

"And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain" (John 20:12).

How long-suffering is our God! How patiently He deals with our dulness! Where the *heart is* really engaged with Christ, even though faith be weak and intelligence small, God will bear with us. Here were two messengers from Heaven ready to re-assure Mary! Their

presence in the sepulcher was proof positive that God had not suffered it to be rifled by wicked hands. Their very *posture* signified that all was well. Their *number* indicated a testimony from on High, if only this sorrowing woman had eyes to see and ears to hear.

“And seeth two angels in white sitting.” The sepulcher was not so deserted as it seemed. Luke tells us of two angels appearing to the other women a little earlier, and it is instructive to note the several points of difference.

“And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments” (Luke 24:4).

Luke calls them “two men” — from their appearance, we suppose. John is more explicit: “two angels.” When these other women saw the two angels, they were on the outside of the sepulcher; but when Mary looked down they were now within. In Luke 24 the angels were “standing,” here in John 20 they are “seated”! Nowhere are we told the names of the two angels, but some have thought that they were Michael and Gabriel, arguing that the supreme importance of our Lord’s resurrection would call for the presence of the *highest* angels. Probably the same two appeared to the disciples at Christ’s ascension (Acts 1:10).

“And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet.” This is the only place in Scripture where we see angels *sitting*. The fact that they *were* sitting in the place where “the body of Jesus had lain” was God’s witness unto the *rest* which was secured by and proceeds from the finished work of the Lord Jesus. It is in striking accord with the character of this fourth Gospel that it was reserved for John to mention this beautiful incident. Who can doubt that the Holy Spirit would have us link up this verse with Exodus 25:17-19 —

“And thou shalt make a mercy-seat of pure gold.... and thou shalt make *two* cherubims of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, *in the two ends* of the mercy-seat.”

More remarkable still is the final word which Jehovah spake unto Moses concerning the mercy-seat:

“And *there* I will *meet with thee*, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat from between the two cherubims” (Exodus 25:22).

Here, then, in *John's* Gospel, do we learn once more that Christ is the true meeting-place *between God and man!*

The question has often been asked, Why did not Peter and John see these two angels when they entered the sepulcher? It seems clear that they must have been there, though invisible. In view of Psalm 91:11 we are satisfied that they had been about that sepulcher from the first moment that the sacred body was deposited there: “For he shall give his angels *charge over thee*, to keep thee in *all thy ways*” — this was God's promise to *Christ*. From the general teaching of the Scripture we learn that the angels of God are visible and invisible, appear and disappear, instantaneously and supernaturally, according as God commissions them. Most probably they are near to each believer every moment of his existence (Hebrews 1:14), though we are unaware of their presence. Yet, while they are of a higher order of beings than humans, not the smallest particle of worship is to be given them; for, like ourselves, they are but the *creatures* of God.

That the angels were “in white” denotes purity and freedom from defilement, which is the character of all the inhabitants of heaven. White was the color of our Lord's raiment in the transfiguration; it is the color in which the angels ever appeared; it will be the color of our garments in glory (Revelation 3:4). The late Bishop Andrews drew a timely moral from the positions occupied by the two angels in the sepulcher. “We learn that between the angels there was no striving for places. He that sat at the feet was as well content with his place as he that sat at the head. We should learn from their example. With us, both angels would have been at the *head*, and never one at the *feet!* With us, none would be at the feet; *we* must be *head-angels* all!”

“And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou?” (John 20:13).

We have no reason for supposing that the angels were ignorant of the occasion of Mary’s lamentation, therefore, we understand their words here as a gentle inquiry, made for the purpose of stirring her mind. *Why* weepest thou? Have you any just cause for those tears? Search your heart! Does not the fact that Christ is *not* here afford ground for rejoicing! It is to be noted that the angels used precisely the same language as the Savior does in John 20:15, thereby intimating that *their* words are ever spoken by the command of God. Observe that their words to the disciples at the ascension of Christ also began with a “Why?” No doubt our unbelief, our fears, our repinings, our lack of obedience and zeal, afford much ground of surprise to these unfallen beings.

“She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him” (John 20:13).

Before the angels had time to add the comforting assurance, “He is not here; he is risen, as he said,” Mary interrupts by explaining *why* she was so heart-broken — How can I do anything else *but* weep, when *He* is not here, and I know not where they have taken His body! A strange mingling of faith and unbelief, of intelligence and ignorance, of affection and fear, was hers. “Lord,” she owned Jesus of Nazareth to be, and yet imagined that some one had taken Him away! It is indeed striking that she replied so promptly and naturally to the angels: instead of being awe-struck at their presence, she answered as though they were nothing more than men. She was so swallowed up with her grief, so occupied with her thoughts about Christ, that she paused not to gaze upon these Heavenly visitors. Mark the change of her language here: to Peter and John she had appropriately said, “They have taken away *the Lord*”; but to the angels she (now alone) says “*my Lord*,” thus expressing the depths of her affections. And how blessed that each individual believer may speak of Him as “*my Lord*.” “The Lord is my Shepherd” said David (Psalm 23:1). “*My beloved is mine, and I am his*” (Song of Solomon 2:16). “Who loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*” (Galatians 2:20) said the apostle Paul.

“And when she had thus said she turned herself back” (John 20:14).

Very, very, striking is this. Christ meant so much to her that she turned her back on the angels to seek His body! *He* was the One her affections were set upon, and therefore, even these angels held no attraction for her! How searching is this: if Christ really occupied the throne of our hearts, the poor things of this world would make no appeal to us. It is because we are so little absorbed with Him, and therefore so little acquainted with His soul-satisfying perfection, that the things of time and sense are so highly esteemed. O that writer and reader may be able to say with the Psalmist, and say with ever-increasing fervor and reality, “Whom have I in heaven but *thee?* and there is none upon earth that I desire beside *thee.*”

“And when she had thus said she turned herself back and saw Jesus standing” (John 20:14).

Such devotion as Mary’s could not pass unrewarded: to her who loved Him so deeply does the Savior first appear.

“Those who love Christ most diligently and perseveringly, are those who receive most privileges at His hands. It is a touching fact, and one to be carefully noted, that Mary would not leave the sepulcher, even when Peter and John had gone to their own home. Love to her gracious Master would not let her leave the place where He had lain. Where He was now she did not know, but love made her linger about the empty tomb; love made her honor the last place where His precious body had been seen by mortal eyes. And here love reaped a rich reward. *She* saw the angels whom Peter and John had not observed. *She* heard them speak. *She* was the first to see our Lord after He had risen from the dead, the first to hear His voice. Can any one doubt that this was written for our learning? Wherever the Gospel is preached throughout the world, this little incident testifies that those who honor Christ will be honored by Christ” (Bishop Ryle).

“And saw Jesus standing.” Very blessed is this. *Why* was the Savior standing there, beside His own sepulcher? Ah, was it not the

response of His heart to one who loved Him! He was there for the purpose of meeting and comforting this sorely-wounded soul!

“And saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus”
(John 20:14).

It is strange how many of the commentators have erred on this point. The popular idea is that Mary failed to recognize Christ because her eyes were dimmed with tears. But how comes it, we ask, that when she looked into the sepulcher she *saw* the two angels and the respective positions which they occupied? No; we believe there is far more reason for us to conclude that her eyes were “holden” supernaturally, like the two disciples walking to Emmaus, so that she did not distinguish the figure before her to be that of our Lord. The condition of His resurrection body was very different from that of His body before the crucifixion. Moreover, He was to be known no more “after the flesh” (2 Corinthians 5:16), but, as the head of the new creation. Yet, as others have pointed out, this incident was a striking emblem of the spiritual experience of many Christians. “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee” is His promise; yet how often are we unconscious of His presence with us!

“Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?” (John 20:15).

These were the first words of our risen Savior, and how like Him! He came here to bind up the brokenhearted (Isaiah 61:1), and in the end He will wipe away tears from off the faces of all His people (Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 21:4). This was His evident design here: He would arouse Mary from the stupefying effects of her sorrow. His first question was a gentle reproof: Ought you not to be rejoicing, instead of repining? His second question was still more searching; *Who* is it you are seeking among the dead? Hast thou forgotten that the crucified One is the Lord of life, the resurrection and the life, the One who laid down His life that He might take it again! Devoted and affectionate as she was, had she not forgotten those words of His which had so often been spoken in her hearing! “*Whom* seekest thou?” — it was only in really finding *Him* that the ever-flowing fountain of her grief could be stayed.

“She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away” (John 20:15).

Notice, first, her artless simplicity. Three times over in these few words did Mary speak of “him” without stopping to define or mention His name. She was so wholly absorbed with Christ that she supposed every one would know *whom* she sought — like the Shulamite crying to the watchman, “Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?” (Song of Solomon 3:3). Note also her, “I will take him away.” He was all *her own*; what depth of affection! What a sense of her *title* to Him! But mark how there may be much ignorance even in a devoted believer — she supposed Him to be the “gardener”! And yet, as one has said, “Devout Mary, thou art not much mistaken. As it was the trade of the first Adam to dress the Garden of Eden, so is it the trade of the last Adam to tend the Garden of His Church: He digs up the soil by reasonable affliction; He sows in it the seeds of grace; He waters it with His Word” (Bishop Hall).

“Jesus saith unto her, Mary” (John 20:16).

This was the second utterance of the risen Christ to this devoted soul, and it is important to note that it was the second. *Before* He addressed her by name, He first called her “woman”! In addressing her as “woman” He spoke as *God* to His creature; in calling her “*Mary*” He spoke as *Savior* to one of His redeemed. The former gave her to know that He was exalted high above every human relationship; the latter intimated His love for one of His own.

“I know thee by name, and thou hast found grace in my sight” (Exodus 33:12),

said Jehovah in the Mount. So here, Jehovah, now incarnate, knows this woman by name, for she, too, had “found grace” in His sight. In Christ addressing Mary by name we have a beautiful illustration of His own words in John 10:3, “And he calleth his own sheep *by name*.” It was the *seal of redemption*:

“But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have *redeemed*

thee, I have called thee *by thy name*; thou *art mine*” (Isaiah 43:1)!

“She turned herself, and saith unto him, *Rabboni*; which is to say, *Master*” (John 20:16).

This shows that Mary now recognized Him. “The sheep follow him, for they *know his voice*” (John 10:4), and here was one of the sheep responding to the call of the Good Shepherd. One word only did He utter, “*Mary*”! But that was sufficient to transform the weeper into a worshipper. It shows us, once more, the power of *the Word!* “*Rabboni*,” she exclaimed, as she fell at His feet — a Hebrew term signifying “*my Master*.” Here was the rich reward for her devotion, her faithfulness, her perseverance. The One who had before cast the demons from her, now addressed Himself to her heart. She knew now that the fairest among ten thousand to her soul had triumphed over the tomb: her sorrow was ended, her cup of joy overflowing. There is one little detail in the picture here, most lovely, which is usually overlooked. As soon as Christ addressed her by name, she “*turned herself*,” and saith unto Him, “*Rabboni*.” After His first word, when she supposed Him to be the gardener, she had turned *away from* Him, her attitude still toward the tomb; but now that He called her by name, she turns her back on the tomb and falls at His feet — it is only as *He is known* that we are delivered, experimentally, from the power of death!

“Jesus said unto her, *Touch me not*; for I am not yet ascended to my Father” (John 20:17).

We believe that these words have a *double* significance and application. First, the “*Touch me not*,” in its *direct* force, is clearly explained by Christ Himself — “for I am not yet ascended.” Mary had, we think, fallen at His feet, and was on the point of embracing them — remembering, perhaps, the words of the Shulamite,

“I found him whom my soul loveth: I *held* him, and would not let him go” (Song of Solomon 3:4).

But the Lord instantly checked her: “*Touch me not*, for I am not yet ascended.”

“On this very day, the morrow after the Sabbath, the high priest waved the sheaf of the first fruits before the Lord while He, the First-fruits from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:23), would be fulfilling the type by presenting Himself before the Father” (Companion Bible).

This we are satisfied supplies the key to the *primary* meaning of our Lord’s words to Mary, for He who was so jealous of the types would not neglect this one in Leviticus 23:10, 11. Yet, we do not think that this exhausts the scope of what Christ said here. Everywhere in this Gospel there is a fullness about the Lord’s utterances which it is impossible for us to fathom; and beyond their force to those immediately addressed is ever a wider application. So here.

“Touch me not.” These words are not found in the Synoptics and therein lies the key to their deeper meaning and wider application. In Matthew 28:9 we read,

“As they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and *held him by the feet.*”

How sharp the contrast here, yet how perfectly in keeping with the particular scope of each Gospel! Matthew presents Christ as the Son of David, in Jewish relationships. But John portrays Him as the Son of God, connected with the sons, as head of the new creation, the members of which know Him *not* “after the flesh” (2 Corinthians 5:16). Therefore in His “Touch me not” to Mary, the Lord was giving plain intimation that the Christian would know Him only *in spirit*, as the One with the Father on high; hence His “*for* I am not yet *ascended*”! It was the first hint — abundantly amplified in the sequel of the *new* relationship into which the resurrection of Christ has brought us, linking us with Himself as the Son of God in the Father’s House! How significant that this was His *third* word to Mary — the number which speaks of *resurrection*!

“But go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend [the proper present “*I am ascending*”] unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17).

Mary was to be the *first* witness of Christ's resurrection. This illustrates a truth of great practical importance. A woman — more devoted, perhaps, than any of the Twelve — had anointed Him for His burial (John 12), and now a *woman* is the first to whom Christ revealed Himself in resurrection glory. How this tells us that the *heart* leads the mind in the apprehension of God's truth. The men were quicker to grasp, *intellectually*, the meaning of the empty tomb, but Mary was the more devoted, and this Christ rewarded. Mary exemplifies the case of those whose hearts seek Christ, but whose minds are ill-informed. It is the *heart* God ever looks at. We may know much truth intellectually, but unless the heart is absorbed with Christ, He will not reveal Himself to such an one in the intimacies of love and communion.

“Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend.” This is the *first* time that the Lord Jesus addressed the disciples as “brethren.” How blessed! It is on resurrection-ground that we are *thus* related to Christ.

“Except the corn of wheat fell into the ground and died, it had abode alone” (John 12:24),

but now that He has emerged from the grave, He is “the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29). Of old had the Spirit of prophecy expressed the language of the Messiah thus: “I will declare thy name unto my *brethren*” (Psalm 22:22). Like Joseph after he was delivered from the prison and raised to a position of dignity and honor (Genesis 45:16), so Christ “is not ashamed to call us brethren” (Hebrews 2:11). The blessedness of this comes out in the closing words of John 20:17: “I ascend unto my Father, *and* your Father; and to my God, *and* your God.” ‘Believers are, by amazing grace, brought into the same position with Himself before God His Father. It was in view of *this* that the Lord said to Mary, “*Touch* [Greek ‘cling to’] *me not*” — we are *detached* from Him by all earthly contact, and instead commune with Him by faith, in spirit, on High.

“Go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and my God and your God.” The terms of this message to His brethren deserve the closest notice. He did not bid Mary say to them “*I have risen,*” but “*I ascend.*” True, the one necessarily

presupposed the other, but it is clear He would have them understand that His resurrection was only a step toward His return unto the Father. That which the Savior would impress upon His beloved disciples was the fact that He had not left the grave simply to *remain* with them here on earth, but in order to enter Heaven as their Representative and Forerunner. In saying, “I ascend unto my Father and *your* Father, and my God, and *your* God,” He was conveying a message of real comfort. He is *your* Father and God, as well as Mine; all that He is to Me, the Head, He is also to you, the members. But mark His precision: He did not say “*Our* Father, and *our* God.” He still maintains His pre-eminency, His uniqueness, for God is *His* Father and God in a singular and incommunicable manner. Finally, note the contrast between Mary’s commission here and the one given to the other women in Matthew 28:10: there the message was for the disciples to meet Him in *Galilee*, and accordingly they did so; here, He names no place on earth, but simply tells them that He is going to Heaven, there in spirit to meet them before the Father.

“Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and that he had spoken these things unto her” (John 20:18).

“As by a woman came the first message of death, so by a woman came also the first notice of the resurrection from the dead. And the place also fits well, for in a garden they came, both” (Bishop Andrews).

Observe that Mary told the disciples that she had “seen *the Lord*,” not simply “Jesus”! Mark records the immediate effect of her message:

“She went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not” (Mark 16:10,11).

What a tragic forecast of the general reception which the Christian evangelist meets with! How few he finds that promptly receive the glad tidings of which he is the bearer! Often the ones he deems most

likely to welcome the good news, are the very ones whose unbelief will be the most outspoken.

“Then the same day at evening, being the first of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst” (John 20:19).

Observe in the first place how the Holy Spirit here emphasizes the fact that what follows is a *first-day* scene. On this first Christian Sabbath the disciples were *assembled*” in separation from the world, and from this point on to the end of the New Testament the first day of the week is stamped with this characteristic: Sunday, not Saturday, was henceforth to be the day set apart for rest from the work and concerns of the world, and for occupation with the things of God. Note in the next place, *that* from the beginning non-Christians have manifested their opposition to and hatred of these holy exercises. Observe that those gathered together are here called “disciples,” not “apostles.” It is striking that never once are they termed “*apostles*” in John’s Gospel. The reason for this is not far distant: the word “apostle” means “one sent forth”; but here, where it is the family which is in view, they are always seen *with* Christ!

“Then the same day at evening, being the first of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst and saith unto them, Peace be unto you” (John 20:19).

Very striking is this. John is the only one who mentions the doors being “shut” (Greek signifies “*barred*”). But no closed doors could keep out the Conqueror of death. There was no need for Him to knock for admission, nor for an angel to open to Him as for Peter (Acts 12:10); nor do we consider what a miracle was wrought, in the ordinary meaning of that term. Our resurrection-body will not be subject to the limitations of the mortal body: sown in weakness it will be raised in *power* (1 Corinthians 15:43).

Most blessed is it to ponder our Lord’s greeting to the Ten — Thomas was absent. Very touching and humbling was the Lord’s gracious salutation. Peter had denied Him, and the others had

forsaken Him. How, then, does He approach them? Does He demand an explanation of their conduct? Does He tell them that all is now over, that henceforth He will have no more to do with such unfaithful followers? No, indeed. Well might He have said, “*Shame* upon you!” But, instead He says, “*Peace* be unto you.” He would remove from their hearts all fear which His sudden and unannounced appearance might have occasioned. He would quiet each uneasy conscience. Having put away their sins He could now remove their fears. Be not afraid: I come not as judge, to reckon with your perfidy and unbelief; nor do I enter as One who has been injured by you, to utter reproaches. No; I bring from My sepulcher something very different from upbraidings: “*Peace* be unto *you*” was the blessed greeting of the Prince of peace, and none but He *can* speak peace to any. “*Peace*” was the subject of the angel’s carol in the night of the Lord’s nativity; so “*Peace*” is the first word He pronounced in the ears of His disciples now that He is risen from the dead. So will it be when *we* meet Him face to face — we, with all our miserable failures, both individual and corporate; we with all our sins of omission and commission; we, with all our bitter controversies, and deplorable divisions. Not “*Shame! shame!*” but “*Peace! peace!*” will be His greeting. How do we *know* this? Because He is “*The same* yesterday and to-day and forever.” Almost His last words to the disciples on the “yesterday” were “these things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have *peace*” (John 16:33); so here His first word to them in the “to-day” was *peace*; and *this* is the pledge that “*Peace*” will be His word to us at the beginning of the great “forever.”

“And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side” (John 20:20).

This was, first, to assure the astonished disciples that it was really their Savior who stood before them. He bade them see with their own eyes that He had a real material body, that it was no ghost now appearing to them. He would have them recognize that He was indeed the *same* person whom they had known before the crucifixion, that He had risen in His incorruptible humanity. Significant is the omission here: Luke tells us that He said,

“Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: *handle me, and see*” (Luke 24:39).

It was most appropriate that *this* word should be recorded in the third Gospel, which portrays Him as the Son of man; and it was most suitable to omit this detail in the Gospel which speaks of His Divine dignity and glory. Observe here, “He showed unto them his hands and his *side*.” Luke says “his hands and his *feet*.” This variation is also significant. Here His word in John would presuppose His “feet,” for they, in common with His hands, bore the imprint of the nails. But there was a special reason for mentioning His “side” here — see John 19:34: through His pierced side a way was opened to His *heart*, the seat of the affections! In John we see Him as the Son of *God*, and God is love.

“And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side.” The “so” indicates there is a close connection between this act of Christ’s and His *words* at the end of the preceding verse. The marks in His hands and side were shown to the disciples not only to establish His identity, not only as the trophies of His victorious fight, but principally to teach them, and us, that the *basis* of the “peace” He has made, and which He gives, is

His death upon the cross. In saying “Peace be unto you” He announced that enmity had been removed, God placated, reconciliation effected; in pointing to the signs of His crucifixion, He showed what had accomplished these. These marks are *still* upon His holy body — Revelation 5:6. These marks our great High Priest shows to God as He intercedes. In a coming day the sight of them will bring Israel to repentance — Zechariah 12:10. In the Day of Judgment they will confront and condemn His enemies.

“Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord” (John 20:20). What must have been their feelings! Their fears all gone; their hopes fulfilled; their hearts satisfied. Now indeed had the Lord made good His promise:

“And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your hearts shall *rejoice*” (John 16:22).

But observe an important distinction here:

First, Christ said, “*Peace* be unto you, and when he had *so* said, he showed *unto them his hands and his side.*”

Second: “Then were the disciples *glad* when they saw *the Lord.*” Peace comes through His perfect *work*; joy is the result of being occupied with His blessed *person*. This is a precious secret for our hearts. There are many Christians who suppose that they *cannot rejoice* while they remain in *circumstances of sorrow*. What a mistake! Observe here that Christ did not *change* the circumstances of these disciples; they were still “shut in for fear of the Jews,” but He drew out their hearts unto Himself, and thus raised them *above* their circumstances! We see the same principle exemplified in 1 Peter 1. There we read of saints of God enduring a great fight of afflictions: they were persecuted, scattered abroad, homeless. But what of their spiritual condition? This — “Wherein ye greatly *rejoice*, though now for a season if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.” And then, having mentioned the person of the Savior, he at once adds,

“Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye *rejoice* with joy unspeakable” (verse 8).

Their circumstances had not been changed, but their hearts were lifted above them. This then is the great secret of joy — occupation and fellowship with Christ.

“Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (John 20:21).

This was no mere repetition. Just as the first “Peace be unto you” is interpreted by the Lord’s act which at once followed, so this second “Peace” is explained by the next words. The first peace was for the *conscience*; the second for the *heart*. The first had to do with their *position* before God; the second with their *condition* in the world. The first was “peace *with* God” (Romans 5:1); the second was “the peace of God” (Philippians 4:7). The first is the consequence of the atonement: the second is that which issues from communion. These

disciples were not going to Heaven with Christ, but were to remain behind in a hostile world, in a world which provides no peace. He therefore communicates to them the secret of *His* peace, which was that of communion with the Father in separation from the world.

“As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.” He now does formally what He contemplated in that wondrous address to the Father:

“As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world” (John 17:18).

Let it be remembered that it was in immediate connection with this that He said

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which *shall believe on me through their word*” (John 17:20).

The mission He announced there was not peculiar to the company He then addressed: it defined the mission of *all* His people in that world which has rejected Him. And what a marvellous mission it is — *to represent* our Lord here below, as He represented the Father. What a wondrous dignity to show in our life and by our words how *He* would speak and walk. *This* is the standard of practical holiness — nothing lower,

“He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, *even as he walked*” (1 John 2:6).

But how unspeakably blessed to observe that the Lord *first* said “Peace be unto you” *before* “I send you.” We are constantly disposed to look for peace as the earned reward of service: what a travesty! and how worthless! Such “Peace” is but a transient self-complacency which cannot deceive any one but the self-deluded hypocrite. The truth is that peace is the *preparation* for service: “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). The order in John 20:21 is most significant: “Peace... send I you.”

“The *sons* of peace are not to retain it for themselves; its possession makes them also *messengers* of peace” (Stier).

Note the *Son* is a “Sender” in equal authority with the Father. “As my Father hath sent me, *even so* send I you.” Christ was sent to manifest the Father, and with a message of grace to this sinful world; we are sent to manifest the Son, and with a similar message. Yet observe how carefully He guarded His glory; two *different* words are here used for “send” — Christ was God, we men; He came to atone, we to proclaim His atonement: He did his work perfectly, we very imperfectly!

“And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22).

The first key to the Receive ye the Holy Spirit, lies in the “*And* when he had said *this*” — “even so send I you.” Christ had entered upon His ministry as One anointed by the Holy Spirit, so should His beloved apostles. *This* was the final analogy pointed by the “as... so.” The second key is found in the “He *breathed* on them *and* saith, Receive ye the Holy Spirit”: the Greek word here used is employed nowhere else in the New Testament, but is the very one used by the Septuagint translators of Genesis 2:7:

“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and *breathed* into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

There, man’s original creation was completed by this act of God; who, then, can fail to see that here in John 20, on the day of the Savior’s resurrection, the *new creation* had begun, begun by the Head of the new creation, the last Adam acting as “a quickening spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45)! The impartation of the Holy Spirit to the disciples was the “firstfruits” of the resurrection, as well as a proof that the Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as the Father — wonderful demonstration of the Savior’s Godhead! In Genesis 2:7 we have Jehovah “breathing” into Adam; in John 20:22 the Savior “breathing” upon the apostles; in Ezekiel 37:9 the Spirit “breathing” upon Israel. Finally, it is solemn to contrast Isaiah 11:4: “With the *breath of His lips* shall he slay the wicked.”

“Receive ye the Holy Spirit.” This was supplementary to “Go tell my brethren.” They were, before this, born from above; but the heir,

as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all. But the time appointed by the Father had now come. He who came to redeem them that were under the law, that they might receive the adoption of sons, had accomplished His undertaking. They were no more servants but sons; yet it was only by the Spirit of adoption that they could be made conscious of it or enter into the joy of it. From this moment the Spirit *dwelt* within them. We have been accustomed to look upon the change which is so apparent in apostles as dating from the day of pentecost, but the great change had occurred *before* then. Read the closing chapter of each Gospel and the first of Acts, and the proofs of this are conclusive. Their irresolution, their unbelief, their misapprehensions, were all gone. When the cloud finally received the Savior from their sight, instead of being dispersed in consternation “they worshipped him” and “returned to Jerusalem with great joy” (Luke 24:52) — this was “joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17): Moreover, they continued “with one accord in prayer and supplication” (Acts 1:14) — this was “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Peter has a clear understanding of Old Testament prophecy (Acts 1:20) — this was the Spirit guiding into the truth (John 16:13). And these things were *before pentecost*. What happened at pentecost was the baptism of *power*; not the coming of the Spirit to indwell them!

“Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained” (John 20:23).

Upon this controverted verse we cannot do better than quote from the excellent remarks of the late Bishop Ryle:

“In this verse our Lord continues and concludes the commission for the office of ministers, which He now gives to the Apostles after rising from the dead. His work as a public teacher was ended: the Apostles henceforth were to carry it on. The words which formed this commission are very peculiar and demand close attention. The meaning of these words, I believe, may be paraphrased thus: ‘I confer on you the power of *declaring* and *pronouncing* authoritatively whose sins are forgiven, and whose sins are not forgiven. I bestow on you the office of pronouncing who are

pardoned, and who are not, just as the Jewish high priest pronounced who were clean and who were unclean in cases of leprosy. I believe that nothing more than this *authority to declare* can be got out of the words, and I entirely repudiate and reject the strange notion maintained by some that our Lord meant to depute to the Apostles, or any others, the power of *absolutely* pardoning or not pardoning, absolving, or not absolving, any one's soul.'

“(a) The power of forgiving sins, in Scripture, is always spoken of as the special prerogative of God. The Jews themselves admitted this when they said, ‘Who can forgive sins but God only?’ (Mark 2:7). It is monstrous to suppose that our Lord meant to overthrow and alter this great principle when He commissioned His disciples.

“(b) The language of the Old Testament shows conclusively that the Prophets were said to do certain things when they *declared* them to be done. Thus Jeremiah's commission runs in these words, ‘I have this day set thee over the nation and over the kingdom, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant’ (Jeremiah 1:10). This can only mean to *declare* the rooting out and pulling down, etc. So also Ezekiel says I came to destroy the city’ (Ezekiel 43:3).

“(c) There is not a single instance in the Acts or Epistles of an Apostle taking on himself to absolve, or pardon, any one. When Peter said to Cornelius. ‘Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins’ (Acts 10:43), and when Paul said, Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins’ (Acts 13:38), they pointed to Christ *alone* as the Remitter.”

So Calvin:

“When Christ enjoins the apostles to forgive sins, He does not convey to them what is peculiar to Himself. It belongs to *Him* to forgive sins — He only enjoins them, in His name, to *proclaim* the forgiveness of sins.”

Add to these the fact that Peter and John were sent down to Samaria to inspect and authorize the work done through Philip (Acts 8:14), that

Peter said to Simon Magus, “I *perceive* that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:23), and that Paul wrote

“To whom ye forgive anything, I also: for if I forgave anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it *in the person of Christ*” (2 Corinthians 2:10),

we have clear evidence of the unique authority and power of the apostles. The question has been asked, Was this ministerial office and commission conferred on the apostles by Christ transferred by them to others? Again we quote Bishop Ryle,

“I answer, without hesitation, that in the strictest sense the commission of the apostles *was not* transmitted, but was confined to them and St. Paul. I challenge any one to deny that the Apostles possessed certain ministerial qualifications which were quite peculiar to them, and which they could not, and did not, transmit to others.

1. They had the gift of declaring the Gospel without error, and with infallible accuracy, to an extent that no one after them did.
2. They confirmed their teachings by miracles.
3. They had the power of discerning spirits. In the strictest sense there is no such thing as apostolic succession.”

In closing let us admire together the lovely typical picture which our passage contains. Here we have a wondrous portrayal of the essential features of *Christianity*:

1. Christ is known in a new way, no longer “after the flesh,” but in spirit, on High. “Touch me not... ascended” (John 20:17).
2. Believers are given a new title — “brethren” (John 20:17).
3. Believers are told of a new position — Christ’s position before the Father (John 20:17).
4. Believers occupy a new place — apart from the world (John 20:19).

5. Believers are assured of a new blessing — “peace” made and imparted (John 20:19, 21).
6. Believers are given a new privilege — the Lord Jesus in their midst (John 20:19).
7. Believers have a new joy — through a vision of the risen Lord (John 20:20).
8. Believers receive a new commission — sent into the world by the Son as He was sent by the Father (John 20:21).
9. Believers are a new creation — indicated by the “breathing” (John 20:22).
10. Believers have a new Indweller — even the Holy Spirit (John 20:22); How Divinely meet that all this was on the “first of the week — indication of a new beginning, i.e., Christianity supplanting Judaism!!

The following questions are to aid the student on the closing section of John 20: —

1. What does the absence of Thomas teach us, verse 24?
2. What do his words in verse 25 prove?
3. What is the difference between the “Peace” of verse 26 and verses 19, 21?
4. Why the great similarity between verses 19 and 26?
5. What practical lesson does verse 28 teach?
6. What is the meaning of verse 29?

JOHN 20:24-31

CHRIST AND THOMAS

Below is an Analysis of our present passage: —

1. The absence of Thomas, verse 24.
2. The scepticism of Thomas, verse 25.
3. Christ appears to Thomas, verses 26, 27.
4. The confession of Thomas, verse 28.
5. Christ's last beatitude, verse 29.
6. The signs of Jesus, verse 30.
7. The purpose of this Gospel, verse 31.

In our last chapter we were occupied with the appearing of the Lord unto the apostles as they were assembled together in some room, probably the “upper-room” in which the Lord's Supper was instituted. But on this occasion one of the Eleven, Thomas, was absent. We are not expressly told *why* he was not present with his brethren, but from what we learn of him in other passages, from his words to the Ten when they told him of their having seen the Lord, and from Christ's own words to Thomas when He appeared unto the Eleven, it is almost impossible to avoid the conclusion that *unbelief* was the cause of his absence. In three different passages Thomas is mentioned in this Gospel, and on each occasion he evidenced a gloomy disposition. He was a man who looked on the darker side of things: he took despondent views both of the present and the future. Yet he was not lacking in courage, nor in loyalty and devotion to the Savior.

The first time Thomas comes before us is in chapter 11. At the close of 10 we read how the enemies of Christ “sought again to take him; but he escaped out of their hand, and went away again beyond

Jordan.” While there, the sisters of Lazarus sent unto Him, acquainting Him with the sickness of their brother. After waiting two days, the Savior said unto His disciples, “Let us go into Judea.” The disciples at once reminded Him that it was there the Jews had, only lately, sought to stone Him; so they ask, “Goest thou thither again?” At the end of His colloquy with them, He said, “Let us go.” And then we are told,

“Thomas, which is called Didymus, said unto his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16).

These words throw not a little light on the character of him who uttered them. First, they reveal Thomas as a man of morbid feeling — *death* was the object which filled his vision. Second, they indicate he had an energetic disposition, “Let us *go*.” Third, they exhibit his courage — he was ready *to go* even to death. Fourth, they manifest his affection for Christ — “Let us *also* go, that we may die *with him*.”

The next time Thomas is brought to our notice is in chapter 14. The Lord had announced to the apostles that in a little while He would leave them, and whither He was going, they could not come. In consequence, they were filled with sadness. In view of their grief, the Lord said, “Let not your heart be troubled,” supporting this with the comforting assurances that He was going to the Father’s House, going there to prepare a place for them, and from which He would come and receive them unto Himself: ending with “Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.” Thomas was the first to reply, and his doleful response was,

“Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” (John 14:5).

Ignoring the precious promises of the Savior, Thomas saw in His departure only the extinction of hope. Thus we behold, once more, his gloomy nature, and, in addition, his sceptical turn of mind. He reminds us very much of John Bunyan’s “Fearing,” “Despondency,” and “Much Afraid,” in his *Pilgrim’s Progress* — types of a large class of Christians who are successors of doubting Thomas.

The third and last time that Thomas occupies any prominence in this Gospel is in the 20th chapter. Here the first thing noted about him is that he was not with the other disciples when the Lord appeared unto them. In view of what has been before us above, this is scarcely to be wondered at.

“If the bare possibility of his Lord’s death had plunged this loving yet gloomy heart into despondency, what dark despair must have preyed on it when that death was actually accomplished! How the figure of his dead Master had burnt itself into his soul, is seen from the manner in which his mind dwells on the prints of the nails, the wound in His side. It is by these only, and not by well-known features or peculiarity of form, he will recognize and identify his Lord. His heart was with the lifeless body on the cross, and he could not bear to see the friends of Jesus or speak with those who had shared his hopes, but buries his disappointment and desolation in solitude and silence. Thus it was that, like many melancholy persons, he missed the opportunity of seeing what would effectually have scattered his doubts!” (Mr. Dods).

“But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came” (John 20:24).

The “But” is ominous and at once exposes the folly of the inventions which have been made to excuse Thomas. The disciples convened in the evening of that first day of the week under most unusual circumstances. John, at least, was satisfied that the Savior had risen; of the others, some were sceptical, for they believed not the report of the women who had seen Him that very morning. No doubt the apostles assembled with mingled feeling of suspense and excitement. That Thomas was absent can only be accounted for, we believe, by what the other passages reveal of his gloomy and sceptical disposition. Note how the Holy Spirit has here added “Thomas called Didymus,” which is evidently designed as a connecting link cf. John 11:16. On the resurrection day *he* least of all believed the tidings of the women, isolating himself in the sorrow of death in wilful unbelief — the wilfulness of it is seen in the next verse.

The state of Thomas' soul coincided with his absence on that memorable evening. He resisted the blessedness of the resurrection, and therefore did not join his brethren, and thus share the joy of the Master's presence in their midst. Slow of heart to believe, he remained for a whole week in darkness and gloom. One important lesson we may learn from this is, how much we lose by our failure to cultivate the fellowship of Christian brethren.

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is” (Hebrews 10:25)

is the word of Scripture. Two warnings against disobeying this were furnished in connection with Christ's resurrection. In Luke 24:13 we read, “And *behold*, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was *from Jerusalem* about three score furlongs”: mark the words in italics. These two disciples had turned their backs on their brethren in Jerusalem. Little wonder, then, that when the Lord Himself drew near to them “their eyes were holden that they should not know Him” (Luke 24:16). Yet even to them the Lord manifested His long-suffering grace by making Himself known (verse 31)! And what was the effect upon them? This: “They rose up the same hour, and *returned to Jerusalem* and found the eleven” (verse 33)! When Christians are in fellowship with Christ, they desire and seek the fellowship of His people; conversely, when they are out of fellowship with the Lord they have little or no desire for communion with believers. It was thus with Thomas. Out of fellowship with Christ, through unbelief, he forsook the assembly. And how much he lost! God's blessing, Christ's presence, the Holy Spirit's power, joy of heart, and in addition, a whole week spent in despondency. What a warning for us!

“The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord” (John 20:25).

This is most blessed. The Ten were not callously indifferent to the welfare of their erring brother. They did not say, “O, well, there is no need for us to be troubled; *he* is the loser; if he had been in his proper place, he, too, would have seen the Savior, heard His blessing of ‘Peace be unto you,’ and received the Holy Spirit; but he was not here, and it only serves him right that he should suffer for his

negligence; let us leave him alone.” O, no. The selfish world may reason and act thus; but not so those who are truly constrained by the love of Christ. The more we love Him, the more shall we love His people. So it was here. As soon as the Ten had been favored with this gracious visit from the risen Redeemer, they *sought out Thomas* and communicated to him the glad tidings. How this rebukes some of us! If we were more in fellowship with Christ, we should have more heart for His wayward and wandering sheep. It is those who are “spiritual” that are exhorted to restore the one “overtaken in a fault” (Galatians 6:13)

“But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe” (John 20:26).

This illustrates the same principle so sadly exemplified in John 20:18. Those who know Christ will bear testimony of Him to others, but they must be prepared for the unbelief of those whom they address. The Ten spoke to Thomas, but he believed them not. This also shows how that the best of men are subject to unbelief. Thomas had witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus, he had heard the Lord’s promises that He *would* rise again on the third day, yet believed not now that He was risen. What point this gives to the admonition in Hebrews 12:1, where we are exhorted to lay aside “*the sin (unbelief) which doth so easily beset us!*” Thomas refused to accredit the testimony of ten competent witnesses who had seen Christ with their own eyes, men who were his friends and brethren, and who could have no object in deceiving him. But he obstinately declares that he *will not* believe, unless he himself sees and touches the Lord’s body. He presumes to prescribe the conditions which must be met before he is ready to receive the glad tidings. Thomas was still sceptical. Perhaps he asked his brethren. Why did not Christ remain with you? Where is He now? Why did He not show Himself to *me*? He implied, though he did not say it directly, that they were laboring under a delusion. And were *they* altogether blameless? They told Thomas “We have *seen* the Lord,” but apparently they said nothing of the gracious and wondrous *words* which they had *heard* from His

lips! Is there not a lesson, a warning, here for us? It is not *our experiences* which we are to proclaim, but *His words!*

“Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.” This is the only place in the New Testament where the “nails” which pierced the Savior’s hands and feet are actually mentioned. The Romans did not always use nails when crucifying criminals. Sometimes they bound the victims hands and feet to the cross by strong cords. The fact that “nails” *were* used in connection with the Savior, and the express mention of them here by Thomas, witnesses to the actual and literal fulfillment of Psalm 22:16: “they *pierced* my hands and my feet.”

“And after eight days again, his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you” (John 20:26).

“After eight days” signifies, according to the Jewish manner of reckoning time (who counted any part of a day as a whole one), after a week. It was, therefore, on the second Christian sabbath that the Eleven assembled together, this time Thomas being present. Observe that the Holy Spirit mentions the fact that again the doors were shut, for He would emphasize once more the supernatural character of the resurrection — body. The close similarity between this and John 20:19 makes it plain that *this* visit of the Savior was for the special benefit of Thomas. But mark a significant omission here: nothing is now said of their “fear of the Jews!” His “Peace be unto you” (John 20:19) had calmed their hearts and taken away their fear of men. It is one more witness to the power of the Word.

“And Thomas was with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst and said, Peace be unto you.” Marvelous grace was this. As we have said, this second manifestation of Christ unto the apostles was expressly made for the special benefit of Thomas. The Savior made the same mysterious entrance through the closed doors and came with the same comforting salutation. There is much for us to learn from this. How patient and tender is the Lord with *dull* and *slow* believers! Forcefully does this come out here.

Christ did not excommunicate His unbelieving disciple, but addressed to him the same word of “Peace” as He had previously saluted the Ten. O, how graciously does He bear with the waywardness and infirmities of His people. Timely are the admonitions of Bishop Ryle: “Let us take care that we drink into our Lord’s spirit and copy His example. Let us never set down men in a low place, as graceless and godless, because their faith is feeble and their love is cold. Let us remember the case of Thomas, and be very pitiful and of tender mercy. Our Lord has many weak children in His family, many dull pupils in His school, many raw soldiers in His army, many lame sheep in His flock. Yet He bears with them all, and casts none away. Happy is that Christian who has learned to deal likewise with his brethren. There are many in the Family, who, like Thomas, are dull and slow, but for all that, like Thomas, are real and true believers.”

“And said, Peace be unto you.” This is the third time that we find the precious word on the lips of the Savior in this chapter, and on each occasion it was used with a *different* design. The first (John 20:19), tells of the glorious *consequences of His atoning work*: peace has been made with God, peace is now imparted to those whose sins have been put away. The second (John 20:21), is His *provision for service*, using that word in its largest scope. It is this which supplies power for our walk, and it is only to the extent that the peace of God *is* ruling our hearts that we are able to rise above the hindrances of our path and the opposition of the flesh. But the third “Peace” is the *means of recovery*. This comes out most strikingly in the next verse. “Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and *behold my hands*” — compare the “when he had so said (‘Peace be unto you’ John 20:19) he showed unto them his hands and his side” (John 20:20).

“Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless but believing” (John 20:27).

Thus the Lord did for Thomas what He had done for the Ten — He pointed out that which memorialized the *ground* on which true “peace” rests. The Lord went back to first principles with this erring

disciple. Thomas needed to be re-established in the truths taught by the pierced hands and side of the Savior, and therefore he got just what was required to restore his wandering soul. What a lesson for us! When we have gone astray, what is it that recalls us? Not occupation with the intricacies of prophecy or the finer points of doctrine (important and valuable as these are in their place) but the great foundation truth of the Atonement. It was the sight of the Savior's *wounds* which scattered all Thomas' doubts, overcame his self-will, and brought him to the feet of Christ as an adoring worshipper. So it is with us. Have we grown cold and worldly; are we out of communion with the Lord Jesus — He recalls us to Himself by the same precious truth which first won our hearts. This is what breaks us down: —

“And yet to find Thee still the same —

‘Tis this that humbles us with shame.”

Was it not for this reason the Lord appointed the loaf and the cup for the Feast of remembrance! It is the emblems of His broken-body and poured- out blood which move the heart, quicken the spirit, thrill the soul, and rekindle the joy which we tasted when we first looked by faith upon His hands and side. This, then, we believe, is the force of the *connection* between John 20:27 and what immediately precedes. What a lesson for us: the most effective way of dealing with backsliders is to tenderly remind them of the dying love of the Lord Jesus!

“Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless but believing.” While the link between this and the verse before is unspeakably blessed, yet the actual contents of it are most searching and solemn. The language which the Savior here employed affords positive proof that He had heard the petulant and sceptical words of Thomas to his fellow- apostles — cf. John 20:25. No one had seen the Lord as visibly present when Thomas gave utterance to his unbelief. None had reported his words to Christ. Yet was He fully acquainted with them! He had listened to the outburst of His disciple, and now makes Thomas aware of it. Wondrous proof was this of His omniscience! Searching warning is it for us! The

One who died on Calvary's cross was "God manifest in flesh," and being God, He not only sees every deed we perform, but also hears every word that we utter. O that we might be more conscious, hour by hour, that the eye of Divine holiness is ever upon us, that the ear of the omnipresent One is ever open to all that we say, that He still stands in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks! To realize *this* is to walk "in the fear of God."

"Reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side." What solemn light this casts upon what we read in John 19:34. It must have been a *large wound* for the Lord to tell Thomas to thrust in his *hand*.; What indignities the Savior suffered for our sakes! Again, do not these wounds of Christ throw light upon the character of the resurrection body? Do they not argue strongly that our personal identity will survive the great transformation? It needs to be borne in mind that the bodies of those who sleep in the dust of the earth are not going to be re-created, but resurrected! And grand and glorious as will be the change from our present mortal bodies, yet it seems clear from several scriptures that our personal identity will be so preserved that recognition will not only be possible but certain.

"Be not faithless, but believing."

"This is a rebuke and an exhortation at the same time. It is not merely a reproof to Thomas for his scepticism on this particular occasion, but an urgent counsel to be of a more believing turn of mind for the time to come. 'Shake off this habit of doubting, questioning, and discrediting every one. Give up thine unbelieving disposition. Become more willing to believe and trust.' No doubt the primary object of the sentence was to correct and chastise Thomas for his sceptical declaration to his brethren. But I believe our Lord had in view the further object of correcting Thomas' whole character, and directing his attention to his besetting sin. How many there are among us who ought to take to themselves our Lord's words! How faithless we often are, and how slow to believe!" (Bishop Ryle).

["And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God" \(John 20:28\).](#)

How blessed! In a moment the doubter was transformed into a worshipper. Like Paul (Acts 26:19), Thomas “was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” There was no room for scepticism now, no occasion for him to put his finger “into the print of the nails,” and thrust his hand “into his side” (John 20:25). The language of Christ in the next verse — “Because thou hast *seen* me, thou hast believed” — makes it clear that Thomas *did not do* as he had boasted. There was no need for him to handle Christ now: his *intellectual* doubts had vanished because his *heart* was satisfied! The words of Thomas on this occasion gave evidence of his faith *in* Christ, his subjection to Him, and his affection *for* Him.

“And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.” This is the only time in the Gospels that anyone owned Christ as “*God*.” And what was it that evoked this blessed testimony? The context tells us. The fact that Christ knew the very words which he had used, satisfied Thomas that Immanuel stood before him; hence his worshipful confession. And when we meet Him in the air, see the glory streaming through His pierced hands and side (“He had bright beams out of His *side!*” Habakkuk 3:4), when we hear His “Peace be unto you,” when we perceive that He knows all about us, we too shall cry “My Lord and my God.”

How marvelous are the ways of Divine grace. Doubting Thomas was the one who gave the strongest and most conclusive testimony to the absolute Deity of the Savior which ever came from the lips of a man! Just as the railing thief became the one to own Christ’s Lordship from the cross, just as timid Joseph and Nicodemus were the ones who honored the dead body of the Savior, just as the women were the boldest at the sepulcher, just as unfaithful Peter was the one whom Christ bade “Feed my sheep,” just as the prime persecutor of the early church became the apostle to the Gentiles, so the sceptical and materialistic Thomas was the one to say “My Lord and my God.” Where sin abounded, grace *did* much more abound!

“And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.” Mark the word “said unto him.” It was no mere ejaculation. Thomas was not here speaking to the Father nor of the Father, *but* to and of the Son. The fact that Thomas addressed Him as “*my Lord*” evidences that he too had now “received the Holy Spirit” (cf. John

20:22), for “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3). It is very striking to contrast what we read of in 1 Kings 18:39. When Elijah met the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, and in response to his faith and prayer, Jehovah was pleased to manifest Himself by sending fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice and lick up the water; the people exclaimed, “The Lord, he is the God, the Lord, he is the God.” But Thomas here did far more than this: he not only acknowledged that Jesus of Nazareth was Lord and God, but he confessed Him as “*my* Lord and my God.” And how striking that *this* is recorded in connection with the *third* notice of Thomas, and the third appearance of the resurrected Christ in this Gospel — it is only as risen from the dead the Lord Jesus could be our Lord and God!

“And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.” “This noble confession of Thomas admits of only one meaning: it was a blessed testimony to our Lord’s Deity. It was a clear, unmistakable declaration that Thomas believed Him, when he saw Him that day, to be not only man, but God. And, above all, it was a testimony which our Lord received and did not prohibit and a declaration which He did not say one word to rebuke. When Cornelius fell down at the feet of Peter and would have worshipped him, the apostle refused such honor at once: ‘Stand up; I myself am a man’ (Acts 10:26). When the people of Lystra would have done sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, ‘they rent their clothes and ran in among the people, saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We are men of like passions with you,’ Acts 14:15. (When John fell down to worship before the feet of the angel, he said unto him, ‘See thou do it not’: Revelation 22:8, 9. — A.W.P.). But when Thomas said to Jesus, ‘My Lord and my God,’ the words do not elicit a syllable of reproof from our holy and truth-loving Master. Can we doubt that these things were written for our learning?

“Let us settle it firmly in our minds that the Deity of Christ is one of the grand foundation truths of Christianity, and let us be willing to go to the stake rather than deny it. Unless our Lord Jesus is very God of very God, there is an end of His mediation, His atonement, His priesthood, His whole work of redemption. These doctrines are useless blasphemies unless Christ is God. Forever let us bless God

that the Deity of our Lord is taught everywhere in the Scriptures, and stands on evidence that can never be overthrown. Above all, let us daily repose our sinful selves on Christ with undoubting confidence, as one that is perfect God as well as perfect man. He is man, and therefore can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He is God, and therefore 'is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by him.' That Christian has no cause to fear who can look to Jesus by faith and say with Thomas, 'My Lord and my God.'" (Bishop Ryle).

“Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

Christ accepted Thomas' confession, but reminded him that it was occasioned by outward signs, the appeal to his sight. What a warning against the modern craving for “signs” — a tendency upon which Satan is now trading in many directions. And how it condemns those materialists who say they will not believe in anything which they cannot examine with their physical senses! Thomas had insisted upon *seeing* the risen Christ, and the Lord graciously granted his request. The result was he believed. But the Lord pointed out to His disciple that there is a greater blessedness resting on those who have never seen Him in the flesh, yet who have believed — an expression which looked back to the Old Testament saints as well as forward to us! This was the last of our Lord's beatitudes.

“Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” What a precious word is this for *our* hearts. *We* have never seen Him in the flesh. Here, then, is a promise for us. Should it be asked: How do you *know* that the rejected One is now in the glory? the answer would be, Because of His own word that when He went there He would send down to His people the Holy Spirit. Therefore, every joy in God which we now have, every longing for Christ, manifests His Spirit's presence in our souls, and this is a precious testimony to the fact that Christ is now on High. These manifestations of the Spirit *here* are the proofs that Christ is *there*. They are the antitype of the “bells” on the robe of the high priest when he went unto the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement (see Exodus 28:33- 35.). As the

people listened on the outside, they *heard* the unseen movements of their representative within; so we are conscious of the presence of *our* High Priest in the Holiest by the *tongues of* the “bells” — the sweet testimony now borne to us by the Holy Spirit. And *why* is there a greater blessedness pronounced on us than upon those who saw Christ during the days when He tabernacled among men? Because we own Him during the day of His rejection, and therefore He is more honored by such faith! It is *faith* in Himself, faith which rests alone on the Word, which Christ pronounces “blessed.”

“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book” (John 20:30).

This and the following verse comes in parenthetically. The whole of chapter 20 is occupied with a recountal of the appearance of the risen Christ unto His own, and this is continued in chapter 21 as the very first verse shows. We take it that the “many other signs” refer not to what the Lord had done through the whole course of His public ministry, but to the proofs which the risen Christ had furnished His apostles. This is confirmed by the words “Many other signs truly did Jesus *in the presence of his disciples*,” whereas, most of His ministerial signs were performed before the general public. There *were* other signs which the Savior gave to the Eleven which proved that He had risen from the dead, but the Holy Spirit did not move *John* to record them. Some of them are described in the Synoptics. For example, His appearing to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:15), His eating in the presence of the Eleven (Luke 24:43), His opening their understandings to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45), His appearing to them in Galilee (Matthew 28:16), His declaration that all power was given unto Him in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18), His commissioning them to make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the triune God (Matthew 28:19, 20). Others of these “signs” are recorded in Acts 1, 1 Corinthians 15, etc. When John says that these “other signs” which Jesus did are not written in *this* book [the fourth Gospel], he implies that they are in some other book or books. On this, one has quaintly said, “St. John generously recognizes the existence of other books beside his own, and disclaims the idea of his Gospel being the only one which Christians ought to read.

Happy is that author which can humbly say ‘My book does not contain everything about the subject it handles. There are other books about it. Read them.’“

“But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31).

Here the Holy Spirit tells why the resurrection-signs of Christ mentioned by John *are* recorded in this Gospel. They are written not merely to furnish us with historical information about the Lord Jesus, but that we might *believe* on Him! They are written that we might believe on Him as “the Christ,” the Messiah, the anointed One — Him to whom the Old Testament prophets pointed. They are written that we might believe on Jesus *as* “the Son of God,” the second Person of the Godhead incarnate, the One whose Divine glories are unfolded more particularly in the New Testament. And they are written that we might believe on Him thus in order that we might have “life through his name.” It is *faith* in the *written* revelation which God has given of His Son which brings “life” and all that is included in that word — salvation, immortality, eternal glory. Reader, hast *thou* “believed”? Not *about* Christ, but *in* Him? Have you received Him as your Lord and *Savior*? If so, the blessing of Heaven rests upon you. If not, you are, even now, “under condemnation,” and if you remain in your wicked unbelief there awaits you nought but “the blackness of darkness forever.”

The following questions are to help the student on John 21:1-14.

1. Why did not the disciples recognize Christ, verse 4?
2. Why did Christ ask the question in verse 5?
3. What does Peter’s act denote, verse 7?
4. Why mention the “fire of coals,” verse 9?
5. Why was not the net broken, verse 11?
6. What is the spiritual significance of verses 12, 13?

JOHN 21:1-14

CHRIST BY THE SEA OF TIBERIAS

The following is an Analysis of our present passage: —

1. Christ's third appearing to the apostles, verses 1, 14.
2. The seven on the sea, verses 2, 3.
3. Their dulness and emptiness, verses 4, 5.
4. The miracle of the fishes, verse 6.
5. John's recognition and Peter's response, verse 7.
6. The landing of the six, verses 8, 9.
7. Christ's welcome, verses 10-13.

The opening verses of this Gospel are in the nature of a Prologue, so the closing chapter is more or less an Epilogue. In the former, the Holy Spirit has set forth what Christ was *before* He came forth from the Father; in the latter He has shown, in mystical guise, how He now rules the world *after* His return to the Father.

“The prologue is intended to exhibit the external life of Christ as it preceded His manifestation in the world; the epilogue appears to have for its scope, to exhibit His spiritual sway in the world as it would continue after He had left it” (Lange).

All here has a profound significance. The disciples are on the sea; the Lord, no longer with them, directs from the shore, manifesting His power by working with them in their seemingly lonesome toil, and exhibiting His love in providing food for them. Then the charge is left to “feed his sheep.” His final word was a reference to His coming again.

The varied details of chapter 21 supply a most instructive and marvelously complete lesson on *service*. In the previous chapter we have seen the Savior establishing the hearts of the apostles by His word of “Peace,”

endowing them with the Holy Spirit, and then commissioning them to proclaim remission of sins. Here we have, in symbolic form, the apostles engaged in active ministry. The *order* is most suggestive. What we receive from the Lord Jesus is to be used for the good of others. Freely we have received, freely we are now to give. The key to the practical significance of the scene here portrayed lies in the almost identical circumstances when the apostles received their first ministerial call — Luke 5.

The chapter as a whole falls into *seven* parts as we analyze it from the viewpoint of its teaching on *service*.

First, we see men serving in the energy of the flesh (John 21:2, 3). Peter says, “I go a fishing.” He had received no call from God to do so. His action illustrates self-will, and the response of the other six men acting under human leadership.

Second, we are shown the barrenness of such efforts (John 21:3-5). They toiled all night, but caught nothing, and when the Lord asked if they had any meat, they had to answer, No.

Third, the Lord now directs their energies, telling them where to work (John 21:6): the result was that the net was filled with fishes.

Fourth, we learn of the Lord’s gracious provision for His servants (John 21:12, 13): He had provided for them, and invites them to eat.

Fifth, we are taught what is the only acceptable motive for service — love to Christ (John 21:15, 17).

Sixth, the Lord makes known how that *He* appoints the time and manner of the death of those of His servants who die (John 21:18, 19).

Seventh, the Lord concludes by leaving with them the prospect of His return; not for death, but *for* Himself they should look (John 21:20, 24).

The miracle in John 21 stands alone: it is the only recorded one which Christ wrought after His resurrection, and most fittingly is it the last narrated in this Gospel. Its striking resemblance to the first miracle which some of these disciples had witnessed (Luke 5:1-11) must have brought to their remembrance the very similar circumstances under which they had been called by Christ to leave their occupation as fishermen and become fishers of men. Thus they would be led to interpret this present “sign” by the past one, and see in it a *renewed summons* to their work of catching men, and a renewed assurance that their labor in the Lord would not be in vain. Suitably was it the last miracle which they witnessed at the hands of their Master, for it supplied a symbol which would continually animate them to and in their service for Him. It was designed to assure them *that* just as He had prospered their efforts while He was with them in the flesh, so they could count on His guidance, power, and blessing when He was absent from them.

This *final* miracle of the Savior was performed in Galilee, so also was His *first* (i.e., the turning of the water into wine), and it seems clear that the Holy Spirit would have us use the law of comparison and contrast again. The author of “The Companion Bible” has called attention to quite a number of striking correspondences between the two miracles: we mention a few, leaving the interested reader to work out the others for himself. In both miracles there is a striking background: in the one we have the confession of Nathanael (John 1:49); in the other, the confession of Thomas (John 20:28). The first miracle was on “the third day” (John 2:1); the latter was “the third time” the Lord showed Himself to the apostles (John 21:14). The one was occasioned by them having “no wine” (John 2:3); the other, by them having no fish (John 21:3, 5). In both the Lord uttered a command: “Fill the waterpots” (John 2:7); “Cast the net” (John 21:6). In both Christ furnished a bountiful supply: the water pots were “filled to the brim (John 2:7); the net *full* of great fishes (John 21:11). In both a number is mentioned: “six waterpots” (John 2:6); “one hundred and fifty and three fishes” (John 21:11). In both Christ

manifested His Deity (John 2:11; 21:12, 14). How much we lose by not carefully *comparing* scripture with scripture!

“After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiber, as; and on this wise showed he” (John 21:1).

“After these things” always marks off a distinct section in John’s writings. The earlier appearances of the risen Savior were in view of the then condition and need of the apostles to establish their faith and assure their hearts. But here, what the Lord did and said, had a prophetic significance, anticipating and picturing His future relations to them.

“Jesus showed himself,” not presenting Himself, but *manifested* His presence, power, and glory. It was not simply that the disciples saw him, but that he *revealed* Himself.

“His body after the resurrection was only visible by a distinct act of His will. From that time the disciples did not, as before, *see* Jesus, but He *appeared* unto them. It is not for nothing that the language is changed. Henceforth, He was to be recognized not by the flesh, but by the spirit; not by human faculties, but by Divine perceptions: His disciples were to walk by faith, and not by sight” (Chrysostom).

When we are told in Acts 1:3 that the Lord Jesus was “seen of them forty days,” it does not mean that the Lord was corporeally present with them throughout this period, nor that He was seen by them each day. He was visible and invisible, appeared in one form or another, according to His own pleasure.

“At the sea of Tiberias.” In John 6:1 we read, “The sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias,” the latter being its Roman name. In Matthew 28:10 we learn that the risen Savior had said to the women at the sepulcher, “Go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and *there* shall they see me.” This, then, explains the presence of the seven disciples here in Galilee. Where the other four were, and why they had not yet arrived, we do not know. But it seems clear that these seven had no business there at the sea, for Matthew 28:16 distinctly says, “The eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a

mountain where Jesus had *appointed* them.” It looks very much as though Peter was restless, and while waiting the coming of the other apostles he said, “I go a fishing” — to the last we see his energetic nature at work. Others have suggested that the reason they went a fishing was in order that they might obtain food for a meal, and possibly this did supply an additional motive — cf. John 21:12.

“There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples” (John 21:2).

Peter being mentioned first intimates that the enumeration here is the order of *grace*. “Thomas” occupying the second place in the list is a further indication of this. The removal of his doubts had restored the Eleven to unity of faith, and prepared them for mutual fellowship again. “There were *together* Simon Peter and Thomas,” which is a beautiful contrast from John 20:24 — “But Thomas was *not with* them!” Thomas is named next to Peter, as if he now kept closer to the meetings of the apostles than ever. “It is well if losses by our neglect make us more careful afterwards not to let opportunities slip” (Matthew Henry). Of “Nathanael” we read elsewhere only in John 1:45-51: probably he is the “Bartholomew” of Matthew 10:3. Next come the “sons of Zebedee,” emphasizing their *fishermen-character*. This is the only place where John *does not* refer to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved”: the absence of this expression here being in full accord with the fact that it is the order of *grace* which is before us. Who the other two disciples were are not told.

“Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing” (John 21:3).

That Peter is here seen taking the lead is in full accord with what we read elsewhere of his impulsive and impetuous nature. Most of the commentators consider that the disciples were fully justified in acting as they did on this occasion. But the Lord had not given them orders to fish for any but *men*. It seems to us, therefore, that they were acting according to the promptings of nature. The fact that it

was *night-time* also suggests that they were not walking as children of light. Nor did the Lord appear to them during that night: they were left to themselves! The further fact that they “caught nothing” is at least a warning hint that servants of the Lord cannot count on His blessing when *they* choose the time and place of their labors, and when they run, unsent. These beloved disciples had to be taught in their own experience, as we all have to be, the truth which the Lord had enunciated just before His death — “Without me, ye can do nothing” (John 15:5); not, a little, but *nothing!* The further fact that we are told, “*They* went forth, and entered into a ship *immediately*” as soon as Peter had said, “I go a fishing,” instead of first looking to God for guidance, or weighing what Peter had said, supplies further evidence that the whole company was acting in the energy of the flesh — a solemn warning for each of God’s servants to wait on the Lord for their instructions instead of taking them from a human leader!

“But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus” (John 21:4).

The “But” here adds further confirmation to what we have said above on John 21:3. That these disciples now failed to recognize the Savior indicates that their *spiritual* faculties were not then in exercise. It seems evident that they were not expecting Him. And how often He draws near to us and we know it not! And how often our acting in the energy of the flesh and following the example of human leaders is the cause of this! In the Greek, the dosing words of this verse are identical with those found at the end of John 20:14: “and [Mary] knew not that it was Jesus.” She was immersed in sorrow, occupied with death, and she recognized not the Savior. These men had returned to their worldly calling, and were occupied with their bodily needs and recognized Him not. Surely these things are written for our learning!

“Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No” (John 21:5).

Our Lord’s form of address here is also searchingly suggestive. He did not use the term of endearment employed in John 13:33, “Little

children,” but employed the more general form of salutation, which the margin renders “Sirs.” He spoke not according to the intimacies of love, but as from a distance — a further hint from the Spirit as to how we are to interpret John 21:2, 3. But why did He ask: “Have ye any meat?” He knew, of course, that they had none; what, then, was the purpose of His enquiry? Was it not designed to draw from them a confession of their failure, ere He met their need? And is not this ever His way with His own? Before He furnishes the abundant supply, we must first be made conscious of our emptiness. Before He gives strength, we must be made to feel our weakness. Slow, painfully slow, are we to learn this lesson; and slower still to *own* our nothingness and take the place of helplessness before the Mighty One. The disciples on the sea picture *us*, here in this world; the Savior on the shore (whither we are bound) Christ in Heaven. How blessed, then, to behold Him occupied with us below, and *speaking* to us from “the shore!” It was not the disciples who addressed the Lord, but He who spoke to them!

“And He said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find” (John 21:6).

How this evidences the Deity of the One here speaking to these disciples! *He* knew on which side of the ship the net should be cast. But more, did it not show them, and us, that He is sovereign of the sea? These men had fished all their lives, yet had they toiled throughout that night and taken nothing. But here was the Lord telling them to cast their net but once, and assuring them they *should* find. Was it not He, by His invisible power, that *drew* the fishes into their net! And what a striking line is this picture of Christian *service*. How He tells the servants that success in their ministry is due not to their eloquence, their power of persuasion, or *their* any thing, but due alone to His sovereign drawing-power. A most blessed foreshadowment did the Savior here give the apostles of the Divine blessing which should rest upon their labors for Him. In full and striking accord with this was the fact that the Lord bade them “Cast the net on the *right* side of the ship” — cf. Matthew 25:34: “Then shall the king say unto them on his *right* hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from *the foundation of the world!*”

“They cast, therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes” (John 21:6).

This is very striking. The Lord was a hundred yards away from them (John 21:8), yet they heard plainly what He said. Again: He was, so far as their recognition of Him at the moment, an entire stranger to them. Moreover, notwithstanding the fact that they had fished all night and caught nothing, and had already drawn up the net into the boat, as being useless to prolong their efforts; nevertheless, they now promptly cast it into the sea again. How strikingly this demonstrated once more the power of *the Word* — in making them hear His voice, in overcoming whatever scruples they may have had, in moving their hearts to prompt obedience. Verily, “all power in heaven and in earth” is His. In the abundant intake the disciples were taught that in “keeping his commandments there is great reward” (Psalm 19:11). And what a lesson for those who seek to serve: *His* it is to issue orders, *ours* to obey — un murmuringly, unquestioningly, promptly.

“Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord” (John 21:7).

This is in perfect keeping with what we read elsewhere about John — the most devoted of the apostles, *he* possessed the most spiritual discernment. He was the one who leaned on the Master’s breast at the supper, and to whom the Lord communicated the secret of the betrayer’s identity (John 13:23-26). He was the one that was nearest to the cross, and to whose care the Savior committed His mother (John 19:26, 27). He it was who was the first of the Eleven to perceive that the Lord had risen from the dead (John 20:8). So here, he was the first of the seven to identify the One on the shore. How perfectly harmonious are the Scriptures!

“The tenderest love has the first and surest instincts of the object beloved” (Stier).

And what a lesson is here again for the Lord’s servants: when He grants success to our labors, when the Gospel-net in our hands gathers fishes, let us not forget to own “It is the *Lord!*” To how much more may and should this principle be applied. As we admire the beauties of nature, as we observe the orderliness of her laws, as

we receive countless mercies and blessings every day, let *us* say “It is the *Lord!*” So, too, when our plans go awry, when disappointment, affliction, persecution comes our way, still let us own “It is the *Lord!*” It is not blind chance which rules our lives, but the One who died for us on the cross.

“Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher’s coat unto him (for he was naked) and did cast himself into the sea” (John 21:7).

This was in full keeping with Peter’s character: if John was the first to recognize Christ, Peter was the first to act! Nor do we believe that it was mere impulsiveness which prompted him — his collectedness in first girding himself with the outer garment makes decisively against such a superficial conclusion. Peter, too, was devoted to Christ, deeply so, and it was *love* which here made him impatient to reach Christ. Peter’s action makes us recall that night on the stormy sea when the Savior walked on the waves toward the ship in which the disciples were. Peter it was, then, who said unto the Lord, “Bid me come unto thee on the water” (Matthew 14:28), for he could not wait for his Beloved to reach him. Beautiful it is now to observe that there was no *reserve* about *Peter*. In the interval between Matthew 14 and John 21, he had basely denied his Master; but in the interval, too, and after the denial, he had heard His “Peace be unto you,” and, plainly, this reassuring word had been treasured up in his heart. Observe that Peter left the net full of fishes for Christ, like the Samaritan woman who left her waterpot. The “girding” of himself evidences the deep reverence in which he held the Savior!

“And the other disciples came in a little ship (for they were not far from the land, but as it were two hundred cubits) dragging the net with fishes” (John 21:8).

Love does not act uniformly; it expresses itself differently, through various temperaments. John did not jump out of the ship, though he was equally devoted as Peter, nor did the other five. The six remained in the skiff or punt which usually accompanied the large fishing vessels, so as to draw the net full of fishes safely to land; illustrating the fact that faithful evangelists will not desert those who have been saved under their preaching, but will labor with them,

care for them, and do all in their power to ensure their safely reaching the shore. The parenthetical remark seems to be brought in here to emphasize the miraculous character of this catch of fish, and to teach us that sometimes converts to Christ will be found in the most *unlikely* places — the net was cast *close in* to the shore!

“As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread” (John 21:9).

This is most blessed. It illustrates once more the precious truth that Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday, and to-day and forever.” Even in His resurrection-glorious He was not unmindful of their physical needs. Ever thoughtful, ever compassionate for His own, the Savior here showed His toiling disciples that He cared for their bodies as well as their souls:

“For he knoweth our frame; he *remembereth* that we are dust” (Psalm 103:14).

We doubt not that this provision of His was miraculously produced: the fire, the fish on it, and the bread by its side, were the creations of Him who has but to will a thing and it is done. It is surely significant that the food which Christ here provided for the disciples was of the same variety as that with which He had fed the hungry multitude close by the same sea. The *fish* and the bread would doubtless recall the earlier miracle to the minds of the apostles.

“They saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.” What is the deeper significance of this? First, it tells us of the Lord’s care for His servants, and is the concrete pledge that He *will* supply all their need. Second, the Lord has left us an example to follow: if the Son of God condescended to spread this table for His children after their night of toil, let us not think it beneath us to take loving forethought whenever we have the opportunity of ministering to the physical comfort of His servants: even a cup of water given in His name will yet be rewarded. Third, it signifies that in the midst of laboring for others, our own souls need warming and feeding — a lesson which many a servant of God has failed to heed. Fourth, the fact that there were fish already on the fire *before* the disciples drew their full net to land, intimates that the Lord is not *restricted* to the

labors of His servants, but that He can and does save souls altogether apart from human instrumentality — another thing we need to take to heart these days when man is so much magnified. Finally, does not this gracious provision of Christ forecast the refreshment and satisfaction which will be ours when our toiling on the troublous sea of this world shall be ended, and we are safely landed on the Heavenly shore!

“Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught” (John 21:10).

“*In* this verse our Lord calls on the disciples to bring proof that, in casting the net at His command, they had not labored in vain. It was the second word that He spake to them, we must remember, on this occasion. The first saying was, ‘Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.’ The second saying was, ‘Bring of the fish which ye have now caught,’ with a strong emphasis on the word ‘now.’ I believe our Lord’s object was to show the disciples that the secret of success was to work at His command, and to act with implicit obedience to His word. It is as though He had said, ‘Draw up the net, and see for yourselves how profitable it is to do what I tell you.’ Fish for food they did not want now, for it was provided for them. Proof of the power of Christ’s blessing, and the importance of working under Him was the lesson to be taught, and as they drew up the net they would learn it” (Bishop Ryle). This also is in full accord with the fact that the *practical* teaching of this chapter is instruction upon service.

“Bring of the fish which ye have now caught.” Is there not also a *spiritual* hint in this verse? The “fish” symbolize the souls which the Lord enables His servants to gather in. In bidding them bring of the fish *to Him*, He intimated they would have fellowship together, not only in laboring, but also in enjoying the fruits of it! It reminds us of His words in John 4:36:

“*He* that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may *rejoice together.*”

The Lord delights in *sharing* His joy with us. Beautifully is this brought out again in Luke 15:6:

“When he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice *with me*; for I have found my sheep which was lost.”

How marvelous the grace which here said to the disciples: “Bring of the fish which ye have now caught?”

“Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three; and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken” (John 21:11).

Peter drew the net to land: how remarkable is this in view of what is said in John 21:6: “*They* were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.” Surely this points another important lesson in connection with *service*. What six men had been unable to do in their own strength, one man now did when he went to his work from the feet of Christ! Peter was weaker than gossamer thread when he followed his Lord afar off; but in His presence, a sevenfold power came upon him! A similar example is found in Judges 6:14: “The Lord looked upon him [Gideon] and said, Go *in this* thy might.” The place of strength is still at the feet of the Savior, and strength will be imparted exactly in proportion as we are in conscious fellowship with Him and drawing from His infinite fullness.

“*He* giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:29-31).

How much each of us need to heed that word,

“Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord” (Psalm 27:14).

How lamentable, and how humbling, that we are so slow to avail ourselves of the unfailing strength which is to be found in Him; found for the feeblest who will wait on Him in simple faith and earnest entreaty.

“Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three; and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.” There are two details here upon which the ingenuity of many

have been freely exercised: the number of the fish, and the not breaking of the net. There is little room to doubt that Peter would recall the miraculous draught of fishes on a former occasion, when the net *did* break (Luke 5). On that occasion the miracle was followed by the Lord saying unto Simon, “From henceforth thou shalt catch *men*.” There it is the work of the *evangelist* which is in view, and therefore there is *no* numbering, for it is impossible for him to count up those who are saved under his Gospel message. Following this second miraculous draught, the Lord said unto Simon, “Feed my *sheep*.” Here it is the work of the *pastor* or *teacher* which is in view, and hence there is numbering, for he ought to be able to determine which are sheep and which are goats. In the former the net breaks, for though many profess to believe the Gospel, yet few really do so to the saving of their souls. In the latter, the net breaks not, for none of the *elect* (the “right” side of the ship) shall perish. As for the *spiritual* meaning of the numbering of the fish here, observe that they were not counted *till the end*, not in John 21:6, but in John 21:11; not while in the ship, but *after* “the land” is reached! Not till we come to Heaven shall we know the number of God’s elect!

“Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine” (John 21:12).

How beautifully this evidenced the fact that He was still the same loving, gracious, condescending One as in the days of His humiliation! The disciples were not kept at a distance. They were invited to draw near, and partake of the provision which His own compassion had supplied. So He still says to the one who responds to His knocking,

“I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me”
(Revelation 3:20).

Here for the last time we hear His blessed and familiar “Come.” “Come” not “Go.” He did not send them away, but invited them to Himself.

“And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou?
knowing that it was the Lord” (John 21:12).

“This statement is by no means to be understood as implying any doubt, but on the contrary a full persuasion that it was Christ Himself. Yet may we infer from it the change which had passed upon *Him*, and the awe which possessed *them*, after His resurrection. He was the same, and yet not the same. There was so much of His former appearance as to preclude doubtfulness; there was so much of change as to prevent all curious and carnal questioning. They sat down to the meal in silence, wondering at, while at the same time they well knew, Him Who was thus their Host” (Mr. G. Brown).

It was reverence for Him which suppressed their inquiries.

“Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise” (John 21:13).

As Master of the feast, as Head of the family he now dispensed His mercies. But we may observe that no longer does the Lord give thanks before meat with His guests, as formerly He did (John 6:11). Then, it was as the perfect Man, the Servant ministering, that He gave thanks to God, with and for and before them all, for what God had given them: but now, as God, He Himself gives, and requires them to recognize Him as the Lord. There, it was His humanity which was the more prominent; here, His Deity. Yet how unspeakably blessed to observe that this One who is now “crowned with glory and honor” was still their Minister, caring for them! Not only was this the emblem of that spiritual fellowship which it is our unspeakable privilege to enjoy with Christ even now, but also the pledge of the future relations which will exist. Even in a coming day

“He will ‘gird’ Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them” (Luke 12:37).

He will yet give us to “eat of the tree of life” (Revelation 2:7), and of the “hidden manna” (Revelation 2:17).

“This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead” (John 21:14).

This does not mean that the Lord made but three appearances in all, but the third that John was led to record: the other two he mentions, are found in chapter 20. It should be remembered that during the “forty days” of Acts 1, which intervened between His resurrection and ascension, Christ did not consort with His disciples as before, but only showed Himself to them occasionally.

It is deeply interesting to compare the record found in Luke 5 of the earlier miraculous draught of fishes; there are a number of comparisons and contrasts. Both took place at the sea of Galilee; both were preceded by a night of fruitless toil; both evidenced the supernatural power of Christ; both were followed by a commission to Peter. But in the former, the Lord was in the ship; here, on the shore: in the one the net broke, in the other it did not: the one was at the beginning of Christ’s public ministry; the latter, after His resurrection: in the former, Peter’s commission was to fish for “men”; in the latter, to feed Christ’s “sheep”; in the one the number of fishes is not given; in the latter it is.

The following questions are to aid the student on our final section:

—

1. Why after “they had dined” did Christ speak, verse 15?
2. Why did Christ ask Peter verse 15?
3. What is the difference between Peter’s three commissions, verses 15, 16, 17?
4. What is meant by grieved, verse 17?

5. Why did Peter turn around, verse 20?
6. What should Christ's rebuke teach us, verse 22?
7. What is the force of verse 25?

JOHN 21:15-25

CHRIST AND PETER

The following is an Analysis of our final section: —

1. The threefold question, verses. 15, 17.
2. The threefold reply, verses 15, 17.
3. The threefold commission, verses 15, 17.
4. Christ's prophecy concerning Peter's death, verses 18, 19.
5. Peter's question concerning John, verses 20, 21.
6. Christ's reply, verses 22, 23.
7. John's final testimony, verses 24, 25.

The final section of this truly wondrous and most blessed Gospel contains teaching greatly needed by our fickle and feeble hearts. The central figures are the Lord and Simon Peter, and what we have here is the sequel to what was before us in chapter thirteen, the Lord washing the feet of His disciples. There, too, Peter was to the fore, and that because he occupies the position of a representative believer; that is, his fall and the cause of it, his restoration and the means employed for it, illustrate the experiences of the Christian and the provisions which Divine grace has made for him. Before we take this up in detail let us add that, just as in the first part of John 21 we have, in symbol, the confirmation of the calling of the Apostles to be fishers of men, so in this second section we have the final establishment of the one to whom the keys of the kingdom were entrusted.

The first thing recorded in connection with Peter's fall is our Lord's words to him before it took place:

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:31, 32).

This is very solemn and very blessed. Solemn is it to observe that the Lord prayed not to keep Peter from failing. In suffering His apostle *to* fall, the Lord’s mercy comes out most signally, for that fall was necessary in order to reveal to Peter the condition of his heart, to show him the worthlessness of self-confidence, and to humble his proud spirit. The need for Satan’s “sifting” was at once made manifest by the Apostle’s reply,

“And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death” (Luke 22:33).

“This is a condition which not only exposes one to a fall, but from which the fall itself may be the only remedy. We have to learn that when we are weak only are we strong; and that Christ’s strength is made perfect in our weakness. Peter’s case is a typical one; and thus it is so valuable for us.

“The Lord Himself, in such a case as this, cannot pray (“cannot” *morally* do so — A.W.P.) *that* Peter may not fall, but that he may be ‘converted’ by it, turned from that dangerous self-confidence to consciousness of his inability to trust himself, even for a moment. Here Satan is foiled and made to serve the purpose of that grace which he hates and resists. He can overpower this self-sufficient Peter; but only to fling him for relief upon his omnipotent Lord. Just as the ‘messenger of Satan to buffet’ Paul (2 Corinthians 12), only works for what he in nowise desires, to repress the pride so ready to spring up in us, and which the lifting up to the third heaven might tend to foster. Here there had been no fall, and all was over-ruled for fullest blessing; in Peter’s case, on the other hand, Satan’s effort would be to assail the fallen disciple with suggestions of a sin too great to be forgiven — or, at least, for restoration to that eminent place from which it would be torture to remember he had fallen. What he needed to meet this with was *faith*; and this, therefore, the Lord prays, might not fail him.

“How careful is He to revive and strengthen in the humbled man the practical confidence so needful! The knowledge of it all given him *beforehand* — of the prayer made for him — of the exhortation addressed to him when restored, to ‘strengthen his brethren’ — all this would be balm indeed for his wounded soul; but even this was not enough for his compassionate Lord. The first message of His resurrection had to be addressed specially ‘to Peter’ (Mark 16:7), and to ‘Cephas’ himself He appears, before the Twelve (1 Corinthians 15:5). Thus He will not shrink back when they are all seen together. When we find him at the sea of Tiberias, it is easy to realize that all this has done its work. Told that it is the Lord who is there on the shore, he girds on his outer garment, and casts himself into the sea, impatient to meet his Lord. But now he is ready, and only now, for that so necessary dealing with his conscience, when his heart is fully assured” (Numerical Bible).

When the Savior washed the feet of Peter, he said,

“What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter” (John 13:7).

This cleansing, as we saw, has to do with the *maintenance* of a “part *with*” Christ (John 13:8). It tells of the Lord’s gracious work in restoring a soul which has become defiled and out of communion with Him; the “water” figuring the means which He uses, the Word. Now, at that time Peter had not fallen, and therefore he perceived not the significance of the Savior’s (anticipatory) act. But now he is to learn in his conscience the holy requirements of Christ, and experience the purifying power of the Word and the recovering grace of our great High Priest.

In John 21:9 we learn that the first thing which confronted the Apostle when he joined the Lord on the shore was “a *fire* of coals,” an expression found again in John’s Gospel only in John 18:18. There we read of “a *fire* of coals” in the priest’s palace, and that Peter stood by its side with Christ’s enemies “warming himself.” It was *there* that he had denied his Master. How this “fire of coals” by the sea of Tiberias would prick his conscience: a silent preacher, but a powerful one, nevertheless! Christ did not point to it, nor say anything about it; that was unnecessary. Next we read of the seven

disciples partaking of the food which the Savior had provided, showing that the Lord's attitude toward Peter had not changed. The meal being over, He now turned and addressed Simon. It was there by the side of this "fire of coals" that the Lord entered into this colloquy with him, the purpose of which was to bring the Apostle to *judge* himself, for "fire" ever speaks of judgment.

["So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" \(John 21:15\).](#)

Mark carefully how the Lord began: not with a reproach, still less a word of condemnation, nor even with a "Why did you deny Me?" but "*Lovest* thou me more than these?" Yet, observe that the Lord did not now address him as "Peter," but "Simon son of Jonas." This is not without its significance. "Simon" was his original name, and stands in contrast from the new name which the Lord had given him:

["And when Jesus beheld him, he said, thou art Simon the son of Jonas: that shalt be called Cephas \(Peter\), which is by interpretation, A stone" \(John 1:42\).](#)

The way in which the Lord now addressed His disciple intentionally called into question the "Peter." Mark how that in Luke 22:31 the Lord said, "*Simon, Simon*, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." Christ would here remind him of his entire past as a *natural man*, and especially that his fall had originated in "Simon" and not "Peter!" On only one other occasion did the Lord address him as "Simon son of Jonah," and that was in Matthew 16:17, "Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon son of Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." But note that the Lord is quick to add,

["And I say *also* unto thee, that *thou art Peter*, and upon this rock I will build my church: and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto *thee* the keys of the kingdom."](#)

Thus this first word of the Lord to His disciple in John 21:15 was designed to pointedly remind him of his glorious *confession*, which

would serve to make him the more sensitive of his late and awful *denial*.

“Lovest thou me more than these?” This was still more searching than the name by which Christ had addressed His Apostle. He would not heal Peter’s wound slightly, but would work a perfect cure; therefore, does He as it were, open it afresh. The Savior would not have him lose the lesson of his fall, nor in the forgiveness forget his sin. Consequently He now delicately retraces for him the sad history of his denial, or rather by His awakening question brings it before his conscience. Peter had boasted, “Though *all* shall be offended, yet will not I”: he not only trusted in his own loyalty, but congratulated himself that *his* love to Christ surpassed that of the other Apostles. Therefore did the Lord now ask, “Lovest thou me *more* than these?” i.e., more than these apostles love Me?

“He said unto him, Yea Lord; thou knowest that I love thee”
(John 21:15).

An opportunity had graciously been given Peter to retract his former boast, and gladly did he now avail himself of it. First, he began with a frank and heartfelt confession “*thou* knowest.” He leaves it to the Searcher of hearts to determine. He could not appeal to his ways, for they had reflected upon his love; he would not trust his own heart any longer; so he appeals to Christ Himself to decide. Yet observe, he did not say “thou knowest if (or *whether*) I love thee,” but “thou knowest *that* I love thee” — he rested on the Lord’s knowledge *of* his love; thus there was both humility and confidence united.

“It was as though he said, ‘Thou hast known me from the beginning as son of Jonah; drawn me to Thee, hast kindled love in my soul, hast called me Peter; Thou didst warn of my blindness, and pray for my faith, and hast since forgiven me; Thou hast looked, both before and since Thy death, into my heart, with eyes of grace, so *Thou* knowest all! What I feel concerning my love is this, that I am far from loving Thee as I ought and as Thou art worthy of being loved; but Thou, O Lord, knowest that in spite of my awful failure, and notwithstanding my present weakness and deficiency, *I do* love Thee’” (Stier).

“He saith unto him, Feed my lambs” (John 21:15).

What marvelous grace was this! Not only does the Lord accept Peter’s appeal to His omniscience, but He gives here a blessed commission. Christ was so well satisfied with Peter’s reply that He does not even confirm it with, “Verily, I *do* know it.” Instead, He responds by honoring and rewarding his love. Christ was about to leave this world, so He now appoints others to minister to His people. “Feed my lambs.” The change of figure here from fishing to shepherding is striking: the one suggests the evangelist, the other the pastor and teacher. The order is most instructive. Those who have been saved need shepherding — caring for, feeding, defending. And those whom Christ first commends to Peter were not the “sheep” but the “lambs” — the weak and feeble of the flock; and these are the ones who have the first claim on us! Note Christ calls them “*my* lambs,” denoting His authority to appoint the under-shepherds.

“He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?” (John 21:16).

The Lord now drops the comparative “more than these” and confines Himself to love itself. This question is one which He is still asking of each of those who profess to believe in Him.

“Lovest thou me?” is, in reality, a very searching question. We may know much, and do much, and talk much, and give much, and go through much, and make much show in our religion, and yet be dead before God for want of love, and at last go down to the Pit. Do we *love* Christ? That is the great question. Without this there is no vitality about our Christianity. We are no better than painted wax-figures: there is no life where there is no love” (Bishop Ryle).

“He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love thee” (John 21:16).

In this passage there are two distinct words in the Greek which are translated by the one English word “love,” and it is most instructive to follow their occurrences here. The one is a much stronger term than the other. To preserve the distinction the one might be rendered “love” and the other “affection” or “attachment.” When the Lord

asked Peter, “*Lovest thou me?*” He used, both in John 21:15 and 16, the stronger word. But when Peter answered, what he really said, each time, was “*thou knowest that I have affection for thee.*” So far was he now from boasting of the superiority of his love, he would not own it as the deepest kind of love at all! Once more the response of Divine grace is what Peter receives: “*He saith unto him, Feed my sheep*” (John 21:16). The word for “*feed*” here is more comprehensive than the one which the Lord had used in the previous verse, referring primarily to rule and discipline. Observe the Lord again calls them “*my sheep,*” not “*thy sheep*” — thus anticipating and refuting the pretensions of the Pope!

“*He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?*” (John 21:17).

Here the Lord Himself uses the weaker term —

“*Hast thou affection for me? Grace reigns through righteousness*” (Romans 5:21).

Three times had Peter *denied* his Master; three times, then, did the Lord *challenge* his love. This was according to “*righteousness.*” But in thus challenging Peter, the Lord gave him the opportunity of now thrice confessing *Him*. *This was according to “grace.” In His first question the Lord challenged the superiority of Peter’s love. In His second question the Lord challenged whether Peter had any love at all. Here, in His third question the Lord now challenges even his affection! Most searching was this! But it had the desired effect. The Lord wounds only that He may heal.*

“*Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me?*” (John 21:17).

Here we are shown once more the power of *the Word*. This was indeed the sequel to John 13. That Peter was “*grieved*” does not mean that he was offended at the Lord because He repeated His question, but it signifies that he was touched to the quick, was deeply sorrowful, as he re- called his *threefold* denial. It is parallel with his “*weeping bitterly*” in Luke 22:62. This being “*grieved*” evidenced his perfect *contrition!* But if it was grievous for the

disciple to be thus probed and have called to remembrance his sad fall, how much more grievous must it have been to the Master Himself to be denied?

“And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee” (John 21:17).

Beautiful is it to behold here the transforming effects of Divine grace. He would not now boast that *his love* was superior to that of others; he would not even allow that he had *any love*; nay more, he is at last brought to the place where he now declines to avow even his affection. He therefore casts himself on Christ’s omniscience. “Lord,” he says, “*thou* knowest *all* things.” *Men* could see no signs of any love or affection when I denied Thee; but *Thou* canst read my very heart; I appeal therefore to Thine all- seeing eye. That Christ knew *all* things comforted this disciple, as it should us. Peter realized that the Lord knew the *depths* as well as the *surfaces* of things, and therefore, that He saw what was in his poor servant’s *heart*, though his *lips* had so transgressed. Thus did he once more own the absolute Deity of the Savior. Thus, too, did he rebuke those who would now talk and sing of *their* love for Christ!

“His self-judgment is complete. Searched out under the Divine eye, he is found and owns himself, not better but worse than others; so self-emptied that he cannot claim *quality* for his love at all. The needed point is reached: the strong man converted to weakness is now fit to strengthen his brethren; and, as Peter descends step by step the ladder of humiliation, step by step the Lord follows him with assurance of the work for which he is destined” (Numerical Bible).

“Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep” (John 21:17).

Does this, after all, warrant, or even favor, the pretensions of the Pope? No, indeed. “The Evangelist relates in what manner Peter was restored to that rank of honor from which he had fallen. The treacherous denial, which had been formerly described, had undoubtedly rendered him unworthy of the Apostleship; for how could he be capable of instructing others in the faith, who had basely revolted from it? He had been made an Apostle, but from the time

that he had acted the part of a coward, he had been deprived of the honor of Apostleship. Now, therefore, the liberty, as well as the authority of teaching, is restored to him, both of which he had lost through his own fault. That the disgrace of his apostasy might not stand in the way, Christ blots it out and fully restores the erring one. Such a restoration was needed both for Peter and his hearers; for Peter, that he might the more boldly exercise himself, being assured of the calling with which Christ had again invested him; for his hearers, that the stain which attached to him might not be the occasion of despising the Gospel” (John Calvin). We may add that this searching conversation between Christ and Peter took place in the presence of six of the other Apostles: his sin was a public one, so also must be his repudiation of it! Note that in Acts 20:28 *all* the “elders” are exhorted to feed the flock!

“Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.” If you love Me, *here* is the way to manifest it. It is only those who truly *love* Christ that are fitted to minister to His flock! The work is so laborious, the appreciation is often so small, the response so discouraging, the criticisms so harsh, the attacks of Satan so fierce, that only the “love of Christ” — His for us and ours for Him — can “constrain” to such work. “Hirelings” will feed the *goats*, but only those who love Christ can feed His *sheep*. Unto this work the Lord now calls Peter. Not only had Christ restored the disciple’s *soul* (Psalm 23:3), but also his official *ministry*; another was not to take *his* bishopric contrast Judas (Acts 1:20)!

“Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.” Marvelous grace was this. Not only is Peter freely forgiven, not only is he fully restored to his apostleship, but the Lord commends to him (though not to him alone) that which was dearest to Him on earth — *His sheep*! There is nothing in all this world nearer the heart of Christ than those for whom He shed His precious blood, and therefore He could not give to Peter a more affecting proof of His confidence than by committing to his care the dearest objects of His wondrous love! It is to be noted that the Lord here returns to the same word for “feed” which He had used in John 21:15. Whatever may be necessary in the way of rule and discipline (the force of “feed” in John 21:16), yet, the first (John 21:15) and the last (John 21:17) duty of the under-

shepherd is to *feed* the flock — nothing else can take the place of ministering spiritual nourishment to Christ’s people!

It is striking to observe that in connection with Peter’s restoration he received a threefold commission which exactly corresponds with our Lord’s threefold “Peace be unto you” with which He saluted the disciples in the previous chapter. “Feed my lambs” (John 21:15) answers to the first benediction in John 20:19: it is Gospel-exposition needed by the young believer to establish him in the foundation truth of redemption. “Shepherd” or “discipline” My sheep (John 21:16) answers to the second “Peace be unto you in John 20:21, which relates to service and walk. “Feed my sheep” (John 21:17) answers to the third “Peace be unto you” in John 20:26, spoken for the special benefit of Thomas, and has to do with the work of restoring those who have gone astray. Compare also the threefold written ministry of the Apostle John unto the “fathers, young men, and “little children” (1 John 2:13).

“Verily, verily I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkest whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not” (John 21:18).

Here, too, the grace of Christ shines forth most blessedly. Not only had Peter been forgiven, restored, commissioned, but now the Lord takes him back to the fervent declaration which he had made in the energy of the flesh:

“Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death” (Luke 22:33),

and assures him that this highest honor of all *shall* be granted him. “Peter might still feel the sorrow of having missed such an opportunity of confessing Christ at the critical moment. Jesus assures him now that if he had failed in doing that of his own will, he should be allowed to do it by the will of God: it should be given him to die for the Lord, as he had formerly declared himself ready to do in his own strength” (Mr. J. N. Darby).

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself and walkest whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not” (John 21:18).

The connection between this verse and those preceding is as follows: the Lord here warns Peter that his love to Him would be sorely tested, that caring for His sheep would ultimately involve a martyr’s death — for thus do we understand His words here. A more direct link is found in that Peter had just said, “Lord, thou knowest *all* things”: Christ now gave proof that He *did* indeed, for He speaks positively and in minute detail of that which was yet future, and could be known only to God. The beloved disciple again would be placed in such a position that he would have to choose between denying and confessing Christ. As the reward for his good confession here, and to supply an encouragement for the future, the Lord assures him that he *shall* confess Him even to death.

“This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God” (John 21:19).

This is a parenthetic remark by John, made for the purpose of supplying a key to the meaning of the Lord’s words in the previous verse. When Christ said, “When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkest whither thou wouldest,” He signified that during his earlier days Peter had enjoyed his natural freedom. When he said, “But when thou shalt be old thou shalt stretch forth thy hands,” He meant that Peter would do this at the command of another. When He added, “And another shall gird thee,” He meant that Peter should be bound as a prisoner with cords — cf. Acts 21:11 where Agabus took Paul’s girdle and bound his own hands and feet, to symbolize the fact that the Apostle would be “delivered into the hands of the Gentiles.” In His final words, “and carry thee whither thou wouldest not,” the Lord did not mean that Peter would resist or murmur (“what death he should *glorify* God” proves that), but that the death he should die would be contrary to nature, disagreeable to the flesh. Peter was to die a death of violence, by crucifixion. In the “thou wouldest not” the Lord further intimated that He does not

expect His people to *enjoy* bodily pains, though we are to endure them without murmuring.

“But the Pope (to whom Peter says in vain, Follow me, as I follow Christ!) is the reverse: the older he grows the more arbitrarily will he gird and lead others whither *he* will” (Stier).

“This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God.” It is not only by acting, but chiefly by suffering, that the saints glorify God. Note how the Lord says to Ananias concerning Saul,

“I will show him how great things he shall *suffer* [not “do”] for my name’s sake” (Acts 9:16)!

Note how that when the Apostle would strengthen the wavering Hebrews, instead of reminding them of their works, He said,

“Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illumined, ye *endured* a great fight of afflictions” (Hebrews 10:32).

But what sweet consolation to realize that our whole future has been fore-arranged by Christ — by Him who is too wise to err and too loving to be unkind.

“This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God.” What a lesson is there here for us. True, it is the Lord’s return, not death, for which we are to look and wait. Nevertheless, all who have gone before us have died, and we may do so before the Savior comes. Let us remember, then, that should this be the case, we may “glorify” God in *death* as well as in life. We may be patient sufferers as well as active workers. Like Samson, we may do more for God in our death than we did in our lives. The death of the martyrs had more effect on men than the lives they had lived.

“We may glorify God in death by being ready for it when it comes... by patiently enduring its pains... by testifying to others of the comfort and support which we find in the grace of Christ” (Bishop Ryle).

It is a blessed thing when a mortal man can say with David,

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me” (Psalm 23:4).

“And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me” (verse 19). Here was the final word of grace to the fallen, and now recovered disciple. Now that Peter had discovered his weakness, now that he had judged the root from which his failure had proceeded, now that he had been fully restored in heart, conscience, and commission, the Lord says, “Follow me.” This was what he had pretended to do (John 18:15), when the Lord had told him he could not (Luke 22:33, 34). But now Christ says, You may, you can, you shall. To “follow” Christ means to “deny self” and “take up the cross.” In other words, it means to be “conformed to his death.” This, *in spirit*; with Peter, in bodily experience, too. This word of Christ supplies one more link with what is found in chapter 13. There the Savior said to Peter,

“Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards” (John 13:36).

This is the sequel:

“It was a call on him to follow the Lord, through death, up to the Father’s House. And upon saying these words to him, the Lord rises from the place where they had been eating, and Peter, thus bidden, rises to follow Him” (Mr. Bellett).

The Lord evidently accompanied this final word with a symbolic movement of going on before.

“Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following, which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?” (John 21:20).

What a line in the picture is this, and how true to life! How humbling! Here was a believer, fully restored to communion, there in the presence of Christ, bidden to follow Him; yet here we find

him taking his eye off Christ, and turning round to look at John! There is only one explanation possible — *the flesh* still remains in the believer, and *ever* lusts against the spirit! Though fully restored, the old Simon still remained. Christ had told him to “follow,” not look around. Stier suggests that there was here “a side-glance once more of comparison with others,” hardly that we think, rather the old tendency of taking his eye off Christ was manifested. In beautiful contrast from the fleshly turning of Peter, is the spiritual “following” of John. Christ had not commanded him to do so, nor had He even directly addressed him; but true love was ever occupied with its object, and here the Apostle of love could do no other than follow Christ. Blessed is it to mark how the Holy Spirit now refers to him, not only as “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” but also as the one who “leaned on his breast at the supper.” At the beginning of this Gospel (John 1:18) *Christ* is seen in the bosom of the Father, here at the end, a redeemed sinner is referred to as one who leaned on the bosom of the Savior!

“Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?” (John 21:21).

This too, evidenced the flesh in Peter. Christ had announced what awaited him, now the apostle is anxious to know how John — the one with whom he was most intimate and between whom there was a very close bond — should fare. The same curiosity which made him beckon to John that he should “ask who it should be” that would betray Christ (John 13:24), now causes him to say, “what [of] this man?”

“Peter seems more concerned for another than for himself. So apt are we to be busy in other men’s matters, but negligent in the concerns of our own souls — quick-sighted abroad, but dim-sighted at home — judging others and prognosticating what they will do, when we have enough to mind our own business. Peter seems more concerned about events than duties” (Matthew Henry).

“Jesus saith unto him, if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me” (John 21:22).

The Lord rebukes Peter's curiosity about John, and presses upon him his own duty. There is an old saying, Charity begins at home, and there is not a little truth in it. We are naturally creatures of extremes, and it is a hard matter to preserve the balance. On the one side is uncharitable selfishness, which makes us indifferent to the interests of others; on the other side is altruism carried to such an extent that we neglect the cultivation of our own souls. Both are wrong. Let us not be weary in well doing to others, but let us also heed that word of Paul's to Timothy, "Take heed *unto thyself*" (1 Timothy 4:16). Unhappily there are not a few who have reason to say,

"They made me the keeper of the vineyards; *mine own vineyard have I not kept*" (Song of Solomon 1:6).

It was to correct this tendency in Peter that the Lord spoke. His business was to attend to his own duty, fulfill his own course, and leave the future of others in the hands of God — cf. Luke 13:23, 24. What good would it do Peter to know whether John was to live a long life or a short one, to die a violent death or a natural one? — cf. Daniel 12:8, 9. A warning is this to us not to be curious about the decrees of God concerning others — cf. Deuteronomy 29:29. "Follow me" is also His word *to us*: we are to follow Him as Leader of His people, as Shepherd of His flock, as Exemplar for His saints, as Lord of all.

"Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (John 21:23).

What plain proof does this afford that the Lord's coming does not refer to the decease of His people. How strange that any should have supposed that it did! Death is the believer going to be with Christ, the Lord's return is His coming to be with us. Yet how curious, that even from the beginning, the Lord's word "I come again" in connection with John, was misunderstood and wrested. Another thing which these words of Christ made evident was that His return is an *impending* event, that is, one which *may* occur at any time, and one which we should be constantly expecting. Note the "If I will": a

majestic declaration was this that *Christ* is now the Disposer of men's lives: He did not say, if God, or if the Father, wills, but if I will. Mark how this verse furnishes *us* with a warning against following *human traditions*, even though they came from "the brethren": how blessed to have the unerring standard of God's written Word!

"If I will that he tarry till I come." What was the deeper meaning in this word of Christ's? First, are we not intended to see in Peter and John *representatives* of the Church in the early and latter days of this dispensation? Peter, who died a death of violence, points to the first centuries, when martyrdom was almost the common experience of believers. John, who is given the hope that he may (though not the promise that he *shall*) live on till the Lord's return, points to this last century, when the truth of the Lord's coming has been so widely made known among His people! But this is not all. The *ministry* of John actually goes on to the end, for in the Revelation he treats at length of those things which are to usher in the Lord's return to the earth, aye, and beyond to the new heaven and the new earth!

It is most blessed to observe that there is no account given in this Gospel of the Lord's *ascension*, and this is in most perfect keeping with the Spirit's design here. The departure of Christ left the disciples behind on earth. But here it is the family, in which — now in spirit, soon in the body there are to be *no* separations. The last sight we have of the Savior in John's Gospel, the sons are *with* Him! So shall we be "forever with the Lord."

"This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen" (John 21:24, 25).

These verses call for little comment. The Gospel closes with the personal seal and attestation of its writer. John, without mentioning his name, vouches for the veracity of what he had recorded, and then adds an hyperbole (cf. Matthew 11:23; Hebrews 11:12; for others) to emphasize the fact that it was not possible for him to fully tell out

the infinite glories of that One who is the central figure of his Gospel. The final “Amen” — found at the end of each Gospel — is the Holy Spirit’s imprimatur.

“The Apostle closes his Gospel with another reminder of the inadequacy of all human words to tell out His glory, of whom he has been speaking. If it were attempted to tell out all, the world would be unable to contain the books that would be written. It would be an impracticable load to lift, rather than a help to clearer apprehension. How thankful we may be for the moderation that has compressed what would be really blessing to us into such a moderate compass! which yet, as we all must know, develops into whatever largeness we may have capacity for. Our Bibles are thus the same, and quite manageable by any. On the other hand, are we burning to know more? We may go on without any limit, except that which our little faith or heart may impose. May God awaken our hearts to test for themselves the expansive power of Scripture, and whether we can find a limit anywhere! Like the inconceivable immensity of the heavens, ever increasing as the power of vision is lengthened, we go on to find that the further we go only the more does the thought of infinity rise upon us; but this infinity is filled with an Infinite Presence; in every leaf-blade, in every atom, yet transcending all His works; and ‘to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ. by whom are all things, and we by Him’” (Numerical Bible).

CONCLUSION

Our happy task is finished, and it is with a real sense of regret that we take up our pen to add an appendix. Before he commenced this commentary the author devoted ten years of special study to John's Gospel, having gone through it three times in the course of as many pastorates, and since then he has taught it in different Bible classes. For six years more we have labored hard in preparing a chapter each month. Over forty commentaries and expositions have been read through and their interpretations of each verse carefully weighed, and the endeavor has been made to supplement our own searchings by culling from them what struck us as being most helpful.

Amid many labors and calls upon our time, our gracious God has enabled us to continue and complete this Exposition of John's Gospel, and it is with fervent thanksgiving to Him that we begin these concluding paragraphs. The instruction, the help and blessing which we have received personally, while preparing each chapter, has been a rich compensation for the time, prayer, and work we have put into them. Our own faith in the inerrancy and perfection of the Scriptures has been strengthened, and the conviction we had at the outset, that every verse contains a mine of spiritual wealth, has been confirmed again and again. That our production is very far from being perfect we are fully aware; but such as it is, we lay it before the Lord, and humbly entreat Him to use, own, and bless it to many of His dear people.

One of our aims in prosecuting this work has been to stimulate others to the personal *study* of the Word. The Bible is not only a book to be read devotionally, but it is also a mine of spiritual riches to be worked (Proverbs 2:1-5), and the more diligently we seek after its hidden treasures, the greater will be our reward. God does not place a premium on laziness. His call is,

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Alas! most of His people have never been taught *how* to study. In this work we have sought to suggest one method which we have personally found to be very beneficial — the *interrogative* method: asking the Bible questions, drawing up a list on each passage as a preliminary to its careful examination.

The point at which so many readers of the Bible fail the worst is that of *concentration*. Their energies are scattered too much. Suppose a man inherited a thousand acres of arable land, and that he found it impossible to hire laborers. It would be useless for him attempting to farm the whole piece. But if he fenced off, say, five acres, devoted himself to this small section, and went in for *intensive* farming, he would be far more likely to succeed. It is thus with the Bible. While every Christian ought to read three or four chapters daily, and thus go through it once each year; it is impossible to really *study* the whole of it within the brief span of a life-time. In addition to extensive reading, there should be *intensive study*. Pray for guidance in your selection and then concentrate on a single book or chapter. If the Christian reader would spend fifteen minutes each day for a whole year on a single chapter — say, Exodus 12, Matthew 13, John 17, Romans 8, or Ephesians 1 — he would, most probably, be surprised at the fruitful results. The necessity and the importance of *concentration* and its invaluable returns are realized by but few.

If sixty-six Spirit-taught Bible expositors would each of them concentrate on one book in the Bible, devoting the whole of their special studies to it for ten years, at the end of that time (should the Lord not return before) the people of God at large would be enriched immeasurably. No one man is competent to write on *all* the books of Scripture; that is why the condensed commentaries on the Bible as a whole are so disappointing and comparatively worthless. Do not be too ambitious, dear friend. Aim at quality rather than quantity. One chapter thoroughly *studied* will yield more to your soul than a hundred chapters which are read but not studied.

Again, other students of Scripture fail through their lack of *perseverance*. Because a passage does not open up to them at the first or second examination of it, they become discouraged. God often tests our earnestness. It is not the dilatory, but the *diligent* soul that is made fat (Proverbs 13:4). “Rest in the Lord, and *wait*

patiently for him” (Psalm 37:7) applies as much to Bible-study as it does to prayer. Regular, persistent stick-to-itiveness (to use a word of Spurgeon’s) is what counts. Note how one of the marks of the good-ground hearers is that they “bring forth fruit *with patience*” (Luke 8:15). If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.

When Jehovah gave food to His people Israel in the wilderness, He did not furnish them with loaves ready made. Instead, He sent them manna as “*a small round thing*” (Exodus 16:14). Much time and labor were required to gather a sufficient quantity for a day’s supply. After the gathering, it had to be “ground” and then “baked.” This was a parable in action. It has a voice for us to-day. The way in which most of us learn is precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a *little*, and there a *little*” (Isaiah 28:10). Be not disheartened, then, if you appear to get small returns from your Scriptural labors. No time spent in the prayerful study of the Word is ever really lost. To familiarize yourself with the letter of it counts for something, and later (if you keep at it) you *will* reap the benefit.

Oftentimes Christians are almost discouraged when the Spirit of God enables a well-instructed scribe to bring out of his treasures things new and old. They say, “*I have read that passage again and again, but never saw such beauties in it as he has pointed out, or such wonders as he has brought forth.*” Ah! you may not realize that, probably, he has given that passage special study for years past, that he has prayed over it scores of times, that he examined it again and again and saw no more in it than you did till, ultimately, God rewarded his patience, and now he rejoices as one that “findeth great spoil” (Psalm 119:162).

But something more is needed than concentration and perseverance. We may focalize our attention, be very diligent and patient, but unless the Holy Spirit illumines our understanding, the wonders and beauties of the Word will remain hidden from us. The Bible is addressed not so much to the intellect as it is to the heart. *Prayer* is an essential prerequisite. Before we open the Bible we need, every time, to get down on our knees and humbly beseech God, for Christ’s sake, to

“open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psalm 119:18).

Mysteries of grace which are hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed to “babes,” i.e., the simple, humble, dependent ones. It is written,

“The meek will he guide in judgment: and the *meek* will he teach His way” (Psalm 25:9).

Have no confidence in your own powers: remember that

“a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven” (John 3:27).

Yet God is ever ready *to* give to those who ask in faith.

When the chapter for your *study* has been selected, begin by asking, What is there here *for my own soul*? — what warnings, what encouragements, what exhortations, what promises? Examine it first of all from the *practical standpoint*, with a view to your own personal needs. Ask God to make the passage speak unto your own soul, and to grant you the hearing ear. Next, and closely related to the former, in fact seeking God’s answer to your first question, ask, What is there here *about Christ*? What is there that I can learn about Him, what example has He here left me, what perfections of His are portrayed, what typical picture of Him can I discover? From this, pass on to its *evangelical* message, its gospel bearing. Ask, What does this chapter teach me about sin, about the depravity of man, about the grace of God, about the way of salvation, about the blessedness of the redeemed? Every chapter in the Bible leads, ultimately, to Calvary. Then you may ponder its *doctrinal* bearings, its theological instruction. This will require you to look up marginal references from parallel passages. Ask, What is there here about the sovereignty of God, or the responsibility of man? What of the important truths of justification, sanctification, propitiation, preservation, glorification? This will require you to note the setting of the chapter which you are studying — its relation to those which precede and which follow; its bearing on the other chapters in the Epistle.

These are but hints, yet if heeded, Bible-study will cease to be an irksome duty and become a profitable delight. It is from these angles that the writer has endeavored to examine each chapter in the Gospel of John, and these are the methods which, under God, he has found yield the best results. In addition to the general principles of study named above, we have also sought to give attention to some of the laws which regulate the interpretation of the Scriptures. God is a God of order, and the God of creation and the God of written revelation are one and the same. Just as we may discern "laws of Nature," so are there "laws of the Bible." Some of these have been pointed out during the course of our exposition: the laws of first mention, of progressive unfolding, of comparison and contrast, of parallelism, of numerics, etc.

In connection with the spiritual arithmetic of the Bible we have been deeply impressed with the constantly recurring *seven* in the Gospel of John, and it is surely not without significance that there are twenty-one chapters or 3×7 , in it. It is true that the chapter divisions are of human origin, and that man does nothing perfectly, yet we believe that in the providence of Him who has "magnified his word above all his name" (Psalm 138:1, 2), He has not only superintended the placing of the different books in the Canon of Scripture, but has also guided, or at least overruled, many or most of its chapter divisions. Obviously is this so, we are fully assured, in connection with the Gospels.

Matthew has twenty-eight chapters, 7×4 . Now, four is the number of the earth and seven of perfection. How appropriate that the Gospel which most directly concerns God's earthly people and the earthly kingdom of Christ, *should be* thus divided; for no perfection on earth will be witnessed until the Son of Man returns and sets up His throne upon it. Mark has sixteen chapters, 2×8 . Two is the number of witness and eight of a new beginning. Most suitably are those numbers here, for in this second Gospel Christ is portrayed as the faithful and true Witness, the perfect Servant of God, laying the foundations of the new creation. Luke has twenty-four chapters, 6×4 , or 2×12 . Whichever way we divide the twenty-four, the result is in striking accord with the subject of this third Gospel. In Luke Christ is presented as the Son of man, the last Adam. Thus 6×4

would speak of *man* connected with the *earth*; or, 12x2 would tell of that *perfect government* which awaits the return to this earth of the “second Man” (1 Corinthians 15:47). John has twenty-one chapters, 7x3. How striking this is! For seven speaks of *perfection* and three is the number of *Deity*. Thus, the very number of chapters in this fourth Gospel intimates that here we have revealed *the perfections of God!* These are what have occupied us as we have gone through it chapter by chapter.

Everything in Scripture, clown to the minutest detail, has a profound significance. Of course it has, for its Author is Divine. The same God who has expended so much care over the formation and adaptation of every member of our physical bodies — e.g., the eye or the hand — has not devoted less to that Word which is to endure forever. In the Bible God has written a Book *worthy of Himself*. If this fact be firmly grasped, the devout student will *expect* to find in every passage depths, wonders, beauties, such as only the Allwise could produce. But let it not be forgotten that the Inspirer of Holy Writ alone can interpret it to us.

To the reader who has, under God, been helped and blest by this Exposition, we would say, Do everything in your power to make this work known to others. You owe it to your fellow-Christians so to do. Why should not many of them be instructed and gladdened, too? These books are not published as a commercial venture. The demand for this class of literature is tragically small. It takes from five to ten years to sell sufficient for the publisher to get back the bare costs of printing and binding. Nor is advertising of much avail. It is the *personal* word that counts. If you can do so conscientiously, earnestly recommend these volumes both by word of mouth and by letters, to your Christian friends, to your Pastor, to Sunday school teachers and other Christian workers. Bear them in mind when making a present to a friend. Another good way of interesting others is to *loan* your own copies, thus others may be induced to purchase for themselves.

And now, dear reader, my work in composing this commentary and yours in going through it (the first time, at least) is now finished; but there remains *the improvement* which ought to be made of it, and *the account* which must yet be given to God, for He “requireth that

which is past” (Ecclesiastes 3:15). It is by attending to the former that we shall be prepared for the latter. I have not written for the sake of providing mere religious entertainment, and we trust that you have read with some higher motive than simply to fill in a few spare hours. Unless each of our hearts has been drawn out in warmer love, deeper devotion, and purer worship unto Him whose manifold glories give lustre to every page of Holy Writ; unless the result of our studies of John’s Gospel leads both writer and reader to clearer visions of and more whole-hearted obedience unto the Word made flesh, our labors have been in vain.