NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

ON THE

EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS.

BY

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"The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple."
PSALM CXIX. 130.

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CONTENTS.

	Page
PREFACE	vii
CHAPTER I.	1
CHAPTER II.	92
CHAPTER III.	157
CHAPTER IV.	198
CHAPTER V.	257
CHAPTER VI.	300

PREFACE.

THE plan of the present Work is, in its general character, very similar to that which has been followed in my earlier Volumes on the Epistles to the Romans and the Hebrews.

Like the Epistles just mentioned, that to the Ephesians has its own distinctive peculiarities as an exposition of the doctrine of Christ; and very rich and marvellous are the treasures of Divine wisdom which the Holy Ghost has there laid open to the view of the believer. To set these leading doctrines clearly before the reader has been my principal desire in the preparation of these Notes; while I have not allowed this object to divert me from my original purpose of commenting practically upon each verse of the Epistle in its natural order.

Critical notes have now and then been found necessary to the elucidation of those few passages which contain difficulties of construction, or where

varieties of reading may occur. These, however, will not stand in the simple reader's way. Other notes there are, and in greater number, which have a bearing more or less direct upon the subjects treated in the text. These last often contain matter which might have been easily incorporated in the general page; but the desire of interrupting as little as possible the natural connexion of the expository remarks, has induced me to resort more frequently to the method of annotation.

A book of this description is valueless to any but a sincere lover of the truth. For such it has been written; and, I am persuaded, not entirely in vain. It is with thankfulness and pleasure that I now send it forth a second time, not without some few additions and corrections, but substantially in its original shape.

A. P.

October, 1862.

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CHAPTER I.

VERSES 1, 2. "Paul, an apostle," &c. The introductory greeting contained in these verses differs but little in its terms from that which prefaces the Epistle to the Colossians, except in its omission of the associate name of Timotheus. In accordance with the general habit of the Apostle, when writing under the direct inspiration of God, both his own name and office, and the descriptive character of those whom he addresses, are expressed. It is, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God," who writes, while they who receive his epistle owe their privilege to the grace which has already made them "saints and faithful brethren in Christ."[1]

The words of an Apostle are the utterance of the Spirit of truth. But the Holy Ghost is the Comforter and Teacher, not of the world, but of the Church of God. This truth, so obvious to the estab-

[1] I shall assume, in favour of the ordinary reading, the still open question as to the persons originally addressed in this Epistle. It is a point of no practical importance, and its discussion would be here quite out of place.

lished Christian, is not unfrequently lost sight of by the weak believer, who, in ignorance of the finished love of God, is thus induced to seek, by a careful study of the contents of the Epistles, to strengthen his ground of hope in the way of practical attainment, unmindful of the fact that all God's letters are addressed, not to strangers, but to His own children, whom He has already begotten by the word of His truth.[2] Nor is this to be wondered at; for it is one of the Enemy's favourite devices, to endeavour to lay upon men's consciences the burden of Christian *responsibility*, before the real nature of the Christian *standing* is perceived. But to serve God acceptably, we must first be established in His grace. We must be brought into the liberty of sons, before we can be yoke-fellows of Christ in the way which glorifies the Father. Until therefore we have come to Jesus in our sins, and received, through faith, *His* peace into our hearts, the attempt to serve Him is but a delusive snare to our souls. Our first act of real obedience will be, to *submit ourselves to the righteousness of God*.[3] When our conscience has been purged from dead works through the blood of Christ, we are both free and willing to serve the living God.[4]

It is by a reference to the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, that the heart of a sincere believer is enabled to free itself from the mischievous effects of this and other spiritual illusions. What these precious doctrines are, will be examined more at length in the progress of these Notes. At present, it is enough to remark generally with respect to the descriptive expressions employed by the Apostle in this

[2] Gal. iii. 26. [3] Rom. x. [4] Heb. ix. 14; Rom. vi. 17, 18.

prefatory greeting, that, in the language of Scripture, a "saint" is a sinner saved by grace; and both justified and *sanctified* through faith in Jesus Christ.[5] Such are *God's* saints. *Men*, it is true, confer the saintly title on each other upon very different grounds. But no room is found for these in Scripture. What nature canonizes, God condemns. Nothing is holy in His eyes but Christ, in whom alone His people stand accepted in His sight. Believers, then, are *saints*. On the other hand, "faithful" (or believing)[6] "brethren in Christ," are the same persons when described with reference to the living Object of their faith, just as they are styled "saints" with reference to the mighty efficacy of that work which has been wrought both *for* them and *upon* them by the grace of God.

The God of true Christian worship is the God who *has reconciled* His people to Himself.[7] "The will of God," which made Saul of Tarsus an apostle of His Son, had first been fully wrought through the obedience of Jesus, for the perfecting of all who should believe on Him.[8] The Father's glory thus becomes the rock of sure salvation to all who look upon its brightness in the face of Jesus Christ. His love reveals itself in Him whom He gave up so freely for our sakes. And it is that they may know that love in the new and holy intimacy of filial communion, that the Spirit has been given to believers as the Spirit of *adoption*. Their worship, their service, their conversation in the present world, are all viewed in Scripture as the fruit of that new

[5] Acts xxvi. 18; 1 Cor. i. 30; Heb. x. 10.
[6] πιστοί.
[7] 2 Cor. v. 18; John iv. 23, 24.
[8] Heb. x.

life which has been given them in Christ, and by means of which they know that they are no longer of the world, but of the Father. It is in the recognition of this their new and holy standing, that the Comforter here greets the saints at Ephesus with peace and favour, in the joint names of the Father and the Son.

Verse 3. In conformity with the principle already stated, the Apostle, after his brief but emphatic salutation of his fellow-saints, proceeds at once to open to them, as a helper of their joy, the rich abundance of that treasure which had been committed to him, as a steward of the mysteries of God.[9] He accordingly enters on the true subject of his epistle by an ascription of adoring praise to the Almighty Blesser of His people. Although at the time of writing he was a prisoner in the hands of those who sought his life, his heart, full fraught with Christ, instead of lamenting his condition, flows over with the pure joy of the Lord. Knowing, too, that they whom he addressed had steadily continued in the grace of God, he is under no necessity of mingling reprehension with instruction, as he was constrained to do in so many other instances. He is able, therefore, in the fullest liberty of the Spirit, to display before them the unsearchable riches of Christ. Like a dew of rich spiritual increase,[1] his doctrine flows downward from the primal Fountain of all blessedness. "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" is the paramount Object which the Holy Ghost here presents to the believer's contemplation, that, by a right appreciation of that Name, he may understand the

[9] 1 Cor. iv. 1. [1] Deut. xxxii. 2.

true nature and extent of the blessing which he is called to inherit by the Gospel.[2]

In this characteristic Name, which declares to the Christian the supreme and eternal origin of good, as well as the stability and final rest both of his faith and hope,[3] two titles have to be distinguished, which indicate respectively the double relation which subsists between the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent. He was the *God* as well as *Father* of His incarnate Son. Of these titles, the *latter* is the elder of the two, belonging, as it does, to a relationship which subsisted always in the mystery of Godhead. "The form of God" was alone visible amid the glory which the Son had with the Father before the worlds were made.[4] The Father *had* a Son before He sent Him into the world. The Word was with God in the beginning, and was God. By Him were all things made. But in due time this eternal relationship became, by the incarnation of the Son, the occasion of the former title. The Father *sent* the Son; but His arrival among men was in the form of man. It was the Only-begotten of the Father who thus became the Son of man.[5] The Word was

[2] 1 Pet. iii. 9. [3] 1 Pet. i. 21.

[4] Phil. ii. 6; John xvii. 5; Heb. i. 3.

[5] It is very far from a harmless error, which leads some Christians, through a wrong apprehension of such texts as Gal. iv. 4, to date the beginning of Christ's filial relationship from the moment of His incarnation. The relation of the Son to the Father is an *essential* relationship; and, like everything else pertaining to the Godhead, is both eternal and unchangeable. "The Only-begotten of the Father" has no other connexion with *time* than as its Creator. He was always known and always loved by the Father, who sent Him, at the time appointed, to be the Saviour of the world (John xvii. 24). It is plain that He who accepted and undertook such a mission, stood already in the filial relationship described. He who *came* is the same that was also *sent*. The passage (often misapplied) from Psalm ii., "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee,"

made flesh; and so the personal glory of the Son of God became visible to our eyes.[6] New titles, therefore, with a corresponding increase of glory, accrued both to the Father and the Son, by the advent of the latter into the world. God, who before had been entirely dishonoured in His fallen image, was perfectly glorified by the obedience of the Man Christ Jesus. That obedience, which extended unto death, received its recompense in resurrection. And so the human name which, to the former Adam and his seed, was become through sin but a stigma of vanity and shame, was made excellent and glorious in Him who carried it triumphantly from earth to heaven, after having merited for man, and in his likeness, all the honour that man ever can receive from God.[7]

It is only when the import of this twofold title is perceived, that God is known effectually as a Saviour. To confess God apart from Him whom He hath sent, is not to know Him truly, but to mock Him. Eternal life is in the knowledge of the Sender *and* the Sent.[8] To refuse the Son, is to deny the Father. The true God is known only in His Christ.[9] The position, therefore, and the standing of the Christian, are to be referred to what that God is, who is the supreme Object

is addressed to Jesus, not at the hour of his birth into the world, but on his resurrection from among the dead (Acts xiii. 33; Heb. v. 5). The Old Testament itself might have guarded us from such an error; for the Holy Ghost has intimated there also (though with the dimness characteristic of a yet unfinished revelation), this essential relationship. Christ is the wisdom and the power of God; and, in connexion with both these characters, the mystery of His eternal generation is set forth. Compare Prov. viii. 25, with xxxiv. 4.

[6] John i. 14. To the eyes, that is, which God had opened. "*We* beheld His glory," says the Apostle—while to the natural heart and eye, the Light of life was then, and still is, as a "lamp despised."

[7] John xiii. 31, 32. [8] John xvii. 3. [9] 1 John v. 20.

of his worship, according to the fulness of His glory as it shines forth on us in this new and perfect Name. It is also evident that two distinct species of blessing, corresponding in their quality and description with the double sense in which Christ is the Heir of blessing, attach to the believer by virtue of his union with Christ. Now Christ is doubly blessed; first, as the natural Inheritor, in love, of all the Father's things; and secondly, as the Receiver, by righteous award, of all that glory and dominion which is the declared recompense of His obedience. And it is into the fellowship of *both* these blessings that the believer enters by virtue of the grace which makes him a joint heir with Christ.[1] Hence, when the Blessed One becomes in person the Herald to His own of His abiding triumph over the power of darkness, as the Captain of their salvation, His words are, "I ascend unto my Father and *your* Father, and to my God and *your* God."[2]

We shall find the Apostle distinguishing these names, and the relationships which they imply, in a very striking manner, when we come to examine in their order the two prayers which he offers for his brethren in this chapter and the third. Our present subject is, rather, the certainty of the believer's blessing, and its fulness. Sovereign goodness and Divine affection are shown to be the never-failing source of this. The worship of God's people, in its simplest and purest sense, is nothing but the grateful recognition, by their faith, of this great principle. We bless God, who has first blessed us; even as the believing recognition of His love creates its apt

[1] Rom. viii. 15—17. [2] John xx. 17.

response in our hearts.[3] That God should bless, has been from the beginning the natural flow of the Divine goodness. What He creates for the enjoyment of that goodness, He also blesses. He pronounced His blessing upon Adam when He had formed Him at His will. Being made in the image of God, the first man was, so long as he continued in a state of innocence, the pre-eminently fit receiver of his Maker's kindness; but from the time of sin's entrance into the world, *that* ground of blessing has been entirely removed. God, indeed, whose very name is blessed,[4] has not failed to manifest Himself, and has never therefore ceased to bless; but His benediction has descended only on the family of *faith*. The children of promise thus become the heirs of blessing.

God always has a people upon whom His favour rests. But it is important to remember that His blessing, so far as respects any particular expression of it, has always been in keeping with the *names* under which He has been pleased, at different periods, to declare Himself to His people, as the Object of their faith. Thus, in the blessing which, as the ALMIGHTY, He pronounced on Abraham, God spake according to the fulness of a promise which reached onward to the future operations of His power. The mystery of godliness, and its results, were comprehended in the general benediction then bestowed upon the friend of God. The name of the *Almighty* was the sufficient pledge, to His believing worshipper, of an assured fulfilment of the word of promise in His time. That He whom Abraham confessed and

[3] 1 John iv. 19. [4] 1 Tim. i. 11, and vi. 15.

honoured as his Portion while a stranger in the land of promise, was the Most High God, Possessor of heaven and earth, would be gloriously vindicated in the coming day of Christ. So Abraham, who saw in spirit that which he *believed*, rejoiced to see that day.[5] Again, as the God of Israel, the natural seed of Abraham, JEHOVAH blessed His people with a bounteous abundance of earth's choicest treasures, when He glorified His title as "the Lord of all the earth" by redeeming Jacob for Himself among the nations. Having chosen them to be His witness, as a people settled in the earth, He dealt with them in such wise as to make manifest the greatness of His name among the heathen. By His abundant blessing on their obedience, or His desolating curse on their rebellion, He would constrain the nations of the world to hear and speak of *Him*.

It is in a manner quite analogous to this that the Christian is now blessed in Christ. Having glorified the rejected Son of David through the resurrection from the dead, and declared Him openly to be His *own* true Son,[6] God now reveals Himself in the Gospel of His grace under the new and perfect title of "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." His people, therefore, are from thenceforth those and those only whom (through faith in that Name) He has called effectively in grace, and quickened by the Spirit from their natural death in trespasses and sins. As to the calling of that people, it is expressed in

[5] The day not only of His gracious humiliation, but also, and more especially, of His reigning power, when, the veil being removed from Israel's heart, the natural seed of Abraham shall share at length their father's joy. Compare John viii. 56, with 2 Cor. iii. and Rom. xi. 26.

[6] Rom. i. 3, 4.

Scripture to be distinctively a *heavenly* calling;[7] while the manner of their blessing is in exact agreement with the order of their vocation. Accordingly, they are said in the present verse to be blessed, (1), "with all spiritual blessings," (2), "in heavenly places," and, (3), "in Christ."

Commencing with the *last* of these expressions, it is evident that we are to consider it with immediate reference to those which precede it in the same verse. For it is settled firmly, as a fundamental principle in every believer's heart, that *out of Christ* God's blessing of any kind is unattainable. It is also true that in its essential quality the blessing which belongs, in Christ, to the generation of God's children is always the same, without reference to dispensational variety, or even to distinctions of a more enduring kind. LIFE is the blessing which forms the common portion of the family of faith.[8] But upon that single basis God has founded, in the riches of His grace and wisdom, diversities of a highly important as well as interesting description. To define the nature and effect of some of these distinctions, and by so doing to bring more readily within the grasp of our faith the peculiar portion of the Church of God, is manifestly one great object of the Spirit in the present epistle.

It is known to every Christian, that the Christ from whom he has his name, and in whom he is

[7] Heb. iii. 1.

[8] Life, whether as now known to the believer in its Divine hiding-place (Col. iii. 3), or when manifested in its outward effects on earth, when the land of Immanuel will be filled with the united tribes of the resuscitated nation. Compare Ps. cxxxiii. 3; Ezek. xxxvii., *passim*.

supremely blessed of God, is a *rejected* Christ. The position of Jesus at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens results from His repudiation by mankind, whether Jew or Gentile, upon earth. Had the *world* acknowledged Him, it would have shown itself capable of knowing and reverencing God. Had *Israel* received Him, they would have evinced their fitness to enjoy the long-promised blessings of Messiah's reign, and that reign would have at once commenced. But the Scripture was not to be so fulfilled. The Stone of Israel must be first rejected, that it might afterwards become the Head-Stone of the corner. The sure promises of God remain indeed unchanged; and, therefore, the seed of Jacob will not fail to enter, at the time appointed, on their father's portion. But while Israel remains in blindness, all such national promises are in suspense. The day is yet to come when "Israel shall rejoice in Him that made him, and the children of Zion shall be joyful *in their King*."[9] When that day comes, it will bring with it a rich and exact fulfilment of that sure word of prophecy which places the remotest limits of the earth under the acknowledged sceptre of the King of kings. It will be the day of regeneration, of restitution; the day of the *Lord*, and of His manifested kingdom; in contrast to the present day of *man*, and, therefore, of evil and sorrow to all who are the children of the Light.[1]

[9] Ps. cxlix. 2; compare also Ps. cxviii. The present spiritual application of such Scriptures may be fully admitted, without prejudice to their ultimate prophetic bearing. An attempt has been made to illustrate this principle in my *Notes on the Psalms*.

[1] As it is impossible to attempt an argumentative proof from Scripture of the doctrine here affirmed, without an inconvenient departure from the plan of the present work, I may refer the

But while the day of the earth's jubilee is still a prophecy, there is ministered to the believer by the Spirit a yet richer portion as a *present truth*.[2] God blesses *now* in Christ the people whose calling is to suffer for His sake, and that in a manner worthy of His more excellent name as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is with a full and overflowing measure, that the heirs of salvation are already blessed in Christ. As it respects the quality of their blessings, they are distinctively *spiritual*. They are aptly bestowed, therefore, upon those whose description as partakers of the risen Christ is, that they are no longer in the flesh, but in the Spirit.[3] The sphere of their enjoyment is not earth, but heaven. We are blessed in *heavenly* places, because blessed in Christ, who is in heaven. The realization, therefore, of true Christian blessedness

reader who desires such proof to what I have written on the subject, in chapters ix.—xi. of my *Notes on the Epistle to the Romans*.

[2] 2 Pet. i. 2.

[3] Rom. viii. 9. This seems the proper moment for anticipating a possible misconception on the reader's part of the principle stated in the text. Beyond all question, *temporal* blessings are to be expected at the Father's hands, as well as spiritual ones. God withholds from them who love Him nothing that is really in the nature of a blessing. But what is or is not such, in our case, must be determined by His wise discretion, who does not withdraw His care from His own children to bestow it on the lily of the field (Luke xii.). *All* things are ours, if we are Christ's. The earth and its fulness are to be enjoyed, in the conscious liberty of redemption, according to the bounty of that grace which gives us all things richly to enjoy. Yet the difference is surely *very* wide between a grateful use of wayside mercies and the diligent pursuit of temporal objects on *their own account*. Things which the world seeks after naturally, are shunned by those whom the Spirit of the Father leads. We are called, indeed, to liberty, but warned not to use that liberty as an occasion to the flesh. The wise reader may be left to determine, in his own conscience, how far the Church has, in the course of her strange history, given heed to such warnings of the Spirit.

belongs only to that faith which joins the believer, in the mystery of spiritual oneness, to Him who is already crowned in heaven as the appointed Heir of all things.[4]

The contrast between such an order of blessing, and that to which reference has recently been made, is too complete and striking to be easily overlooked. It has only to be clearly stated, in order to be felt in its full force. While Jesus sits in heaven, the affections of His brethren are directed thither by the Spirit.[5] When the throne of His dominion is established upon earth, that which is now to be dreaded by the Christian as a snare of destruction, will be to the regenerated Israelite a chief ornament of grace.[6] The practical importance of the distinctions here briefly noticed will appear more manifestly as we proceed. It may be well, perhaps, before quitting the present verse, to look at it again for a moment in its actual bearing on our faith.

"*All* spiritual blessings *in Christ.*" Such is the tenor of that rich endowment with which God is now pleased to bless the believing vessels of His mercy. The chief of all these blessings, and which contains the rest, is, as we have seen, ETERNAL LIFE. Of the moral qualities of that life, together with its glorious destinies, the Spirit speaks at large in this epistle. Here it is only necessary to remember that, as the means of its eventual manifestation

[4] 1 Cor. vi. 17; Heb. i. 2.

[5] Col. iii. 1—3.

[6] Let the inquiring reader compare the Apostle's solemn warning against the minding of *earthly* things, in Phil. iii. 19, with the rich promises of temporal increase as the effect of spiritual blessing, when that blessing is poured upon Jerusalem in the latter day. Isaiah lxi. may be cited as a sample of what is indeed the constant burden of Jewish prophecy.

and complete enjoyment, a spiritual *body* is also promised us, which is presently to supersede the natural one, in which we groan. He in whom we are blessed is essentially the Quickening Spirit; while He does not cease to make Himself known to us as the *Resurrection* and the Life, by retaining for ever the flesh in which He suffered for our sins.[7] Spiritual blessings are in their nature eternal also. And, although their Fountain is in heaven, and there also will be enjoyed their fullest realization, yet in their manifested effect the whole creation will participate at the appointed time. That, which now sends up to the ear of God one universal groan, is waiting for "the manifestation of the sons of God."[8] Meanwhile, it is in the Name, and according to the moral comeliness, of *Christ*, that we are blessed. For the blessing of the righteous God can rest only upon that which is found to be worthy of it in the judgment of His holiness. And this we are in Him, who is our Righteousness. Now, blessing in all possible fulness is the natural ornament of Jesus, as it is written: "Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into Thy lips: therefore God hath blessed Thee for ever."[9] And it is of His fulness that believers have received, and grace for grace. We are blessed in Christ as creatures and as sons. Naturally heirs of wrath because of sin, we are honoured in the Saviour with the rich rewards of righteousness, and accepted in the freeness of paternal love. The God of all grace has found His pleasure in arraying our nakedness in the costly garments of His great salvation. Moreover,

[7] Luke xxiv. 39. [8] Rom. viii. 19—22. [9] Ps. xlv. 2.

being *born* of God through the effective power of His word, we come to our own in Jesus, as joint heirs with *Him*. The causes, both immediate and remote, by means of which this consummation is attained, the Apostle opens presently in detail. What has already been affirmed is, the absolute completeness of the believer's blessedness, as the subject of almighty grace and power, independently of all that can operate for good or evil on his natural condition in the world. Our blessings, as our life, are all IN CHRIST.

Verse 4. "According as He hath chosen us in Him," &c. The blessings which God bestows upon His creature are in their nature absolute. To think otherwise, would be to imagine in the creature an independent claim on the Creator. This is a clear and necessary principle, irrespective of the doctrine of redemption. But, morally considered, the blessing of God is His sanction of the state of him on whom the blessing is conferred. What God *approves* He blesses. It is clear that He never can bless what is at variance with Himself. Nor, on the other hand, can the creature occupy an acceptable position in the sight of God, except as the effect of His own will, who formed the creature for Himself. These essential conditions of blessing were found in the first man, Adam, before he sold himself to sin. As an unfallen creature he stood in natural perfection. But from the moment of His fall, not creation, but regenerative grace, has commended man to God as a recipient of blessing. And that grace, being in its nature free and voluntary, becomes the effective expression of the *choice* of Him who saves His people

by its means. God was not *man's* choice, as we have seen, even while man was wholly free to choose. Having chosen sin he is become sin's slave, until recovered from that bondage by a mightier power than his own. Because, therefore, the will of fallen man is found to be naturally alien from God, the effecting *for* him of the great work of sacrificial atonement was insufficient in itself to save the objects of Divine mercy. They must be rendered personally *willing* to acknowledge and obey that sovereign love, which made itself manifest in redeeming grace. Power, therefore, must create effectively the vessels of that mercy which is God's good pleasure; or the gospel, although flowing in its freeness as the full river of eternal life, would invite the lips of man in vain.

To the well-taught Christian, the doctrine of Divine election is as simple as it is necessary. For the moment *sin* is scripturally understood, the grace which meets it is perceived to be an active decision of the will of God. The love which is God's true nature, is free and sovereign in its operation; and to the believer all things are of God. *He* calls, *He* begets, *He* creates anew, *He* saves, *He* opens the blind eyes, and pours on them at will the light of life. It is *He* who causes that which once was loved to be abhorred, and the Name which once had no real value in our eyes to become the Rock of our salvation, the sole confidence and joy of our hearts. It is *God* who justifies the sinner by His grace, and who makes him know that he is passed from death to life. Instead, therefore, of finding difficulty in the scriptural assurance, that they were chosen in

Christ before the foundation of the world, those who through grace are simple in the faith find nothing but an increase of their joy. They are well assured that the God with whom they have to do is the *Eternal* God. That His counsels, therefore, should precede His works, is no strange thought to them. A little reflection is sufficient to establish in the hearts of such the sweet conviction, that long before God suffered them to reach their natural birth of sorrow, He had known them, and provided for them in His purpose of redeeming love. For it is *in Christ* that God thinks upon His people; and Christ is God's *eternal* Son. His choice was *there*. Foreseeing the long drama of sublunary and sinful human life, He devised beforehand the sure means of setting His elect before His face for ever in holiness and peace, when a guilty and unbelieving world should find itself excluded from His presence by the righteous judgment of that truth which it despised.[1]

[1] Rom. ii. The testimonies of Scripture lead us sometimes to the verge of that mystery which all minds wish to penetrate, but which God has hitherto revealed to none. God has *His* matters, as to which He gives as yet no explanation, even to the children of His love. The origin of evil, the necessity of its introduction and development in His creation, who is only Good—the nature and *rationale* of the Divine government, &c. These, and many other topics equally beyond the measure of the human understanding, may, indeed, sometimes present themselves to the believer's mind among the numerous methods of distraction, by means of which the Adversary seeks to turn our souls from Christ, and so to spoil us of our peace and glory (Col. ii. 8). But it is evident, that a certain degree of ignorance on our parts is essential to our spiritual well-being. The word of God is the true mine of our knowledge; and by *faith* we draw its treasures to the surface. If we knew all things, in a purely intellectual sense,* we should cease to be morally in that dependent position which now constitutes our distinctive

* In another and far happier sense, we have an unction from the Holy One, and know *all things* (1 John ii. 10).

The *power* of God, not less than His sovereign goodness, is declared in His election of His saints. For it is in opposition to all that is naturally characteristic of man, that He works the work of their salvation. Holiness and blamelessness are declared to be the qualities essential to Divine acceptance. And where should man naturally seek for either of these things, but in himself? He knows well that he ought to be holy; and that if blame attaches to him, it is his reproach. Accordingly, while the heart remains unbroken, self-justification is ever found to be its strongest instinct. But the Spirit of truth, when acting in regenerative power, effectually withers *all* confidence in the flesh. Bringing the word of God to bear with quickening keenness upon the conscience, He thus reduces the awakened sinner to a just estimate of his intrinsic guiltiness as well as helplessness. Reasonings and querulous debatings are stilled into an uneasy silence, both by the native force of truth, and by the dread of One who cannot be escaped from, and to whom all power belongs. It is then that an opening is found for grace to act. In the hour of man's conscious wretchedness, God speaks to him in friendliness and peace. He makes him understand, that if power be His glory, *mercy* is also His delight and loudest praise. When we submit ourselves to God, He lets us know that He

blessing as believers. Doubtless, God's election of His saints is to be numbered among those things which only He as yet can understand. He knows His own mind perfectly. We learn it partially as He is pleased to make it known to us in grace. When we know Him as we are known of Him, it is *possible*, though by no means certain, that the reason of His conduct may be brought within our comprehension. In the meanwhile, His *secret* is His people's life and strength.

is purely LOVE. He preaches *peace* to us by Jesus Christ.

Verse 5. "Having predestinated us," &c. Predestination marks the lot of those who are the objects of election. The love which chose, in Christ, lost sinners for salvation, defined beforehand both the place and title which the saved were to enjoy. God desired to surround Himself with *many sons*. ONE Son He always had, and never could another naturally share His right. But in the fulness which belongs to the Only-Begotten, there exist the means of manifold impartation and of multiplied resemblance. Sonship, therefore, is the state and quality into which the power of elective love would bring its objects. By Jesus Christ, the Father, who surrendered Him to death for our sakes, would thus accomplish the good pleasure of His will. It is important to remember that the Apostle, in addressing Christians on the subject of their proper standing and its attendant blessings, is strictly confining his view to the *Church* of God's election. For not one result, but many, were contemplated by the Divine good pleasure, in sending Christ to be the Saviour of the world. We shall have large proof of this a little further on. At present we are dealing exclusively with the origin and calling of "the Church of God." Nor is it the future blessedness of the redeemed that the Apostle here describes, but their conscious position *as believers*. Glory will adorn hereafter that which grace already has effected. But while walking still by faith and not by sight, the Spirit of adoption is sent forth into our hearts, and thus are we emboldened to cry "Abba, Father," unto Him who, in

the finished work of Jesus, has attained the measure of His will. Accordingly it is added, in the verse which follows, that all things are,

Verse 6. "To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us to be accepted[2] in the Beloved." The grace of God is glorified as the effective means by which the purposes of electing love are compassed. That conscious sinners should be encouraged to assume the place of sons of God, is indeed a triumph of His grace. The language of this verse is most significant. We are viewed with acceptance *in the Beloved.* But since the Beloved of the Father is also the despised of men, the manifestations of His love to usward are according to the tenor of our calling, as confessors of THE CROSS. We are not, therefore, brought, as a token of the Father's favour, into the fatness of an earthly portion. Instead of riding on the high places of the earth, which is the heritage of *Jacob*, we are invited by the Gospel to look upwards into *heaven;* to view *there* the Pattern of our blessedness in the Person of the ascended Son of man.[3] Instead of being spread visibly before us in the multitude of outward blessings, the love of God is shed abroad in *our hearts* by the power of the Holy Ghost.[4] Christ glorified is the living assurance to His brethren, that they for whom He suffered in the flesh are loved in Him, as He is loved of God. The Father hath bestowed *that* manner of love on us.[5] As, therefore, the Beloved is in heaven, so are

[2] ἐχαρίτωσεν. This term appears to express, 1st, our being favoured absolutely in Christ, according to the sovereignty of Divine election, and, 2nd, our subjective investment with the comeliness of Him who alone is acceptable in the Father's sight.

[3] Acts vii. 56. [4] Rom. v. 5; see page 12, note [3]. [5] 1 John iii. 1.

we also, in the eyes of God's affection, even in the midst of our conflicts and afflictions in the world.[6] The Person of the Beloved becomes thus the all-absorbing Object of true Christian faith. We love Him whom the Father loves; knowing and loving the Father in the Son. On the other hand, we are loved in Him according to the strength of an affection which none but Jesus can yet worthily appreciate. If, therefore, we would learn the manner of our blessedness, we must surrender our hearts to the direction of that Comforter who expounds to God's children the secret of their joy, by declaring to them what the Father knows to be in Jesus. Both what we *are* and what we *have*, must be learned by immediate reference to Him in whom we stand.

Grace, then, which gives its efficacy to the sovereign will of God, becomes, for that reason, a theme of glorious praise to Him. But who are to minister this praise? Assuredly, the fulness of creation will consent with gladness to its Maker's glory in the coming day. And in that general anthem the ransomed Church will have pre-eminence, in praises as in place. She will lead, instead of following, the choir of heaven.[7] But already grace is glorified in praise wherever faith has *tasted* that the Lord is gracious. To show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light, is the proper occupation of those who already are a royal priesthood through electing grace. By the Spirit, Jesus the First-born moves the celebration

[6] 1 John iv. 17.

[7] Rev. v. 8—14; where the gradations of this universal homage are strikingly expressed.

of the Father's praise among the brethren of His love.[8] It is the glory of our calling to offer a *continual* sacrifice of praise to God, by the steadfast confession of Jesus, as the only hope of our souls.[9] True Christian worship dates its beginning from our consciousness, through faith, of our personal acceptance in the Beloved. For they who worship God in the Spirit, "rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."[1]

Verse 7. "In whom we have redemption, through His blood," &c. If grace, in its eventual results, redounds in glory to the God of grace, its *riches*, on the other hand, become the overflowing cup of our salvation. And it is faith in Christ, as the Propitiation for our sins, that places that cup in our hands. Accordingly the Apostle, after declaring the acceptable standing of the believer to be the effect of Divine election and predestinating mercy, brings forward now the doctrine of redemption, as that which furnishes the door of conscious entrance on our parts into the assured enjoyment of that grace wherein we stand. That believers have *received*, is no less true than that God has *given*. And it is in the Name of Him whom God has set before us as the object of our faith that we obtain this gift. In His Beloved, we already HAVE redemption: not completely, as it respects its ultimate effects, for otherwise its power would already have been felt in the transformation of our *bodies* also, into their predestined likeness to His glorious body;[2] but we have it most really and effectually, so far as it relates to our

[8] Heb. ii. 12. [9] Heb. xiii. 15. [1] Phil. iii. 3.
[2] Rom. viii. 29; Phil. iii. 21; 1 Cor. xv. 49.

deliverance from sin and its final consequences. As to the price of this full ransom, it was the Redeemer's sacrificial death. In Him "we have redemption, *through His blood*, the forgiveness of sins."[3] The shedding of that precious blood is the complete and necessary remission of our sins.[4] Such is the present truth enjoyed by the believing sinner. Faith thus becomes the link which binds the receiver of mercy to the God who blesses him; and Jesus *crucified* is the immediate Object of that faith.

The doctrine of sacrificial redemption is a truth which addresses itself to man as he naturally is. For it is the appointed medium through which alone he can become acquainted with God as a Saviour. While, therefore, God reserves the treasures of His wisdom as the especial portion of His children, He publishes the tidings of salvation to the world. Christ is set forth freely, as His unveiled Mercy-seat, accessible to all who will approach. Predestination and election are not the truths which *demonstrate* the love of God to sinners. Gracious atonement is its standing proof. Redemption by blood speaks *intelligibly*, though yet marvellously, to a guilty conscience. It is at the Cross that the meeting-point is found, between the sovereign holiness of Him who chose us in His love, and ourselves, when most keenly sensible of our natural unfitness for His presence. The relation in which these several doctrines stand to each

[3] *τῶν παραπτωμάτων.* A word more usually rendered by "trespasses" or "offences." See further, as to the distinction between trespasses and sins, the explanatory foot-note on chap. ii. 1.

[4] The dying of the Lamb being the righteous vindication, in triumphant grace, of that solemn oracle of judgment which declares that "without shedding of blood there is no remission." Compare Heb. ix. 22 with x. 18.

other is very plain. A believing knowledge of redemption converts a sinful man into a saint. The worshipper, once purged, has no more conscience of sins. It is after we have bowed our hearts, through grace, to the glad tidings of the Gospel, that we are brought within the Father's house, to learn there, more perfectly, the origin and eternal stability of our joy. Redemption by blood is the sinner's first necessity, even as sounding the depths of the Redeemer's love, is the saint's chief wonder and delight.

Since the Apostle does not now reason on this doctrine, but only states it in its order, as the palpable evidence to the believer of the saving love of God, it cannot be enlarged on here.[5] It should, however, be well remembered that it is in pointed connexion with the Person of Christ that it is regarded in this passage. It is *in Him* that we have redemption. He *is* our redemption.[6] By the shedding of His blood He wrought our ransom. By His resurrection from the dead, He proved the completeness of His work. Having resumed His life by the same right by which He laid it down, He abides for ever as the Witness of redemption to His own. But it was by the grace of God that Jesus died. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. The *riches* of His grace are appreciated by the heart of each believer, in proportion to his personal knowledge of the Saviour. That the Holy One is also rich in grace, could be shown in no way so convinc-

[5] The subject has been treated more fully in chap. ix. of my *Notes on the Epistle to the Hebrews.*

[6] 1 Cor. i. 30.

ingly as by the surrender of His Son to death, for the redemption of those whom His own righteous sentence against sin had made captive to the power of death. Sin being mortal in its effect, without shedding of blood there could be no remission. And only He who had imposed this hard though just condition, could fulfil it. For sinners could not work their own atonement; nor could an angel pay man's debt to God. Between the guilty and the Judge of sin, there could arise no independent mediator of salvation. And so, when Jehovah saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor, His own arm brought salvation. He spared not His own Son, but gave Him freely up to die, the Just One for the countless multitude of sinners who should be thus brought nigh to Him in love.[7] The knowledge of redemption, as a fact accomplished, is the standing proof to the believer that there is nothing, and can be nothing, charged against him on the side of God. It is God who justifies. Having willed the death of Jesus for our sins, He is content with that one Offering. It is the God of judgment who commends His love to sinners in the cross of Jesus. Very abundant, and, to the self-judging spirit, hard to be believed, is that grace which deals with sinners after such a sort. But its rich abundance does but the more compel us to look at Christ as the only explanation of its reality. It is in Him who alone is *worthy* that we have redemption, even the forgiveness of our sins.

The weak believer is entreated to remember that orgiveness of sins in Christ is *a definitive release from*

[7] Isa. lix. 16; 1 Pet. iii. 18.

blame.[8] The things here placed in contrast are our sins and the *riches* of Divine grace. The comparison is not equal, but unequal. By a rich preponderance, the grace of God overbalances, in Christ, the utmost measure of our guilt. In forgiving us, God glorifies His Son. But *partial* forgiveness would shed no glory on the name of Jesus. For He is a SAVIOUR. *Conditional* forgiveness, on the other hand, would be no longer grace, but law. But the Gospel is the ministration, not of sin and condemnation, but of righteousness and life.[9] God's free forgiveness of our sins is founded on *His* view of the redemption which was wrought for us by Jesus. All is made to depend exclusively upon *His blood*. And that precious blood is declared by the Spirit to have in His eyes the value of an *eternal redemption*.[1]

Verse 8. "Wherein He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence." The free forgiveness of our sins in Christ is far from exhausting the riches of the grace of God. He who saves us is the only *wise* God, and in the method of His present work, as the Creator of His Church, He makes manifest to faith both the glory of His wisdom and the deep perfection of His counsel. God had a definite intention[2] in the calling of His Church.

[8] As a *man*, that is, under the original responsibilities of his birth and position before God. A *Christian* has new responsibilities which attach to his vocation. Blame may be justly incurred by him in this new character and relationship. Alas! it is so continually. "In many things we all offend." But this does not at all affect the believer's standing in Christ. We are complete *in Him*. As to the restorative grace and mercy which meet the Christian in the power of Divine faithfulness, their mediate display, and practical application to our need, are in the ministry of the great High Priest of our profession. See *Notes on the Hebrews—passim*.

[9] 2 Cor. iii. 7—9. [1] Heb. ix. 12. [2] Φρόνησις.

To know that purpose and enjoy the amazing wealth of blessedness which it contains, is even now the portion of the saints. Wisdom and prudence are exemplified in all God's works: whether in the varied marvels of Creation or in the preparation of a vessel of salvation, He is perfect in his way. But the true *knowledge* of that way is possessed by those only who have been quickened by His grace, and established in perfection through the faith of Jesus. Natural sagacity is powerless to reach the mysteries of God. They are open only to the spiritual man. There are varying measures, too, of spiritual progress. A babe in Christ may, if humbly walking in the faith, grow rapidly to the strength and stature of a man. On the other hand, a lack of humble-mindedness or diligence may entail a long and discreditable minority upon those who are not the less secure, through grace, in the abiding love of God.[3] But undoubtedly the purpose of our calling is to know the God who blesses us. Not only is it given us to be assured that He whose power is almighty is our Shield and ultimate Reward, but, as a present exchange for the vanities which fruitlessly exercise the natural mind, we are invited to seek out our pleasure in the study of His way.

Wisdom and prudence, which in truth are attributes of the Divine glory, are also, by wrongful pretension, the crown of human pride. To know, was man's first lust. To raise himself by knowledge to

[3] Heb. v. 12: compare 1 Cor. i. 5 with iii. iv. of the same Epistle, for a striking instance of the compatibility of rich spiritual endowment with extreme spiritual foolishness. The reader is requested to keep in his remembrance, while reading the observations on the present verse, the whole of 1 Cor. ii.

the appointed limit of his pride, will be the fatal fruit of his desire. When he mistakes himself for God, he will be consumed by the Truth he has so long defied.[4] Between lust's first conception in the garden and the finishing of sin in the coming day of wrath, the cardinal events of human history on which the Holy Ghost has placed some special stigma of Divine disapprobation, have been the deliberate result of human counsel. It is not needful to cite instances to illustrate to the Christian reader the truth of that solemn saying, that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." It is enough to remind him that they who were masters in it showed its value when they crucified the Lord of glory. And now that grace has triumphed through that deed, and God entreats men to be reconciled to Him in Christ, the wise and prudent of this world continue to be those whose hearts are hardest closed against the message of His love.

But, to the justified believer, Christ is Light as well as Life. Knowledge of *all things* is bestowed (according to the measure of their faith and diligence) on those who have the mind of Christ;[5] and all have that mind who have Him as their Life. We have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God. Christ is the wisdom of God; and they who are saved in Him are called to know Him in His fulness. Now that wisdom touches *all* that is of God. Things present or to come, in earth or heaven, stand each in its

[4] 2 Thess. ii.; Rev. xiii.; xvi.; 13, 14; xix. 11—21.
[5] 1 John ii. 20; 1 Cor. ii. 12—16.

appointed relation to the Heir of all things;[6] but the nature of that relation, though published as a truth to the whole world, is at present only understood by the believer. To the world, God's wisdom is a hidden thing; it is in a mystery,[7] and therefore accessible to none but the initiated. The things of Christ can be known and appreciated only by those who by faith have knowledge of *Himself*. Not only therefore is the Christian nourished by the Comforter upon the flesh and blood of Jesus, as his daily spiritual sustenance, and in the strength of that meat led onward, by the same gracious Conductor, to nearer and richer views of the heavenly inheritance, but he is also enabled to form right ideas as to all that is already visible. The friends of Jesus are admitted into the fellowship of all His purposes.[8] The true character and end of the course of this world is intelligible only to the spiritual man, for the Spirit of God is wiser than the spirit of the age. Gospel light shows plainly to the child of God things hidden from the wariest eye of sense. Where statesmen and philosophers can only calculate or theorize, the Christian *judges* with a full knowledge of results. He has been lifted up upon the Rock of life, not only to know that he is safe, but that, from the holy summit of the mount of God, he might look both backward and forward upon the works and ways of God. Rich and wide indeed is the view thence commanded into the fields of time and of eternity.

Verse 9. One great example of this abounding of grace in wisdom is now stated: "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according

[6] Heb. i. 2. [7] 1 Cor. ii. 7. [8] John xv. 15.

to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself." Things hidden from the wise and prudent, are revealed in Christ to the Father's little ones.[9] It may be necessary, in the first place, to remark, that the language of this verse by no means refers exclusively to the Apostle and his fellow-labourers, but is the common portion of the saints. We have been renewed for such knowledge after the image of Him that created us.[1] God, who refuses to impart to His children the knowledge of many a mystery, their ignorance of which is an intended bridle upon natural high-mindedness, has freely disclosed to them all that pertains to life and godliness. To know His will is the privilege of those whom He hath chosen.[2] They are called to make their pilgrimage towards the promised rest, in the clear shining of a light which makes plain the way of their feet. By the sure word of prophetic testimony, they are enabled to speak of things, yet future and unseen, with holy confidence and full assurance: for the Spirit witnesses of things to come.[3]

The particular mystery to which reference is here made is described in the ensuing verse. But before proceeding further, it will be useful to observe in what respects the believer, in this present dispensation, differs, in regard to his knowledge of the things of God, from a saint of old. In a general sense, the mysteries of God have always been the property of God's elect; for to be in His secret has, from the

[9] Matt. xi. 25. This passage exhibits, in a deeply interesting manner, the moral connexion which subsists between the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and initiation into the mysteries of God.

[1] *εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν* (Col. iii. 10). [2] Acts xxii. 14.

[3] 2 Pet. i. 19—21; John xvi. 13.

beginning, been the privilege of faith. To Enoch, to Noah, to Abraham, as well as, later, to the Jewish prophets, God revealed, not only the great promise of salvation, but the certainties of His future administrative dealings as the Governor of the nations, whether in judgment or in grace. The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus.[4] In gracious suffering or in reigning power, Messiah was constantly before the vision of the holy men of old. Faith lived and suffered hopefully through its appropriation of the word of God, while an unbelieving people was growing in blindness and obduracy of heart by the neglect of the same word. When the vision of all was become as a sealed book to the rebellious house,[5] its open page still cheered the patience of God's prisoners of hope. With respect to the limits within which their knowledge was confined, it may be stated generally that, while the Incarnation was a futurity, the Light which lightens every man had not yet risen, though it dawned with a constantly increasing clearness, through the prophetic Scripture, as it drew toward the horizon. The birth of Jesus was the welcome rising of that Light upon those who waited for redemption in Israel. But it is certain that the prophets, whose words were the depositary of God's hidden wisdom, although fully conscious of the paramount subject of their testimony, were unable to receive, as "present truth," the things to which the Spirit testified.[6] He who moved them to a true utterance of the Divine counsel, was not bestowed on them as the indwelling power of Divine communion. The Spirit *acted* but was not yet *given*. He

[4] Rev. xix. 10. [5] Isaiah xxix. 11, 12. [6] 1 Pet. i. 11, 12.

could be no seal of an unfinished work. Until Messiah came and had fulfilled the Scripture, neither His sufferings nor the glories which should follow, could be otherwise apprehended than by a faith which kept the eye of God's true seers fixed upon them as their covenanted hope.

But Israel's Hope is now become the Portion of the Church. The fulfilment of the one great mystery of godliness[6] has brought the partakers of the heavenly calling into the fellowship of *other* mysteries, some of which were hidden entirely from them of old.[7] The disappointment of proper Jewish expectation, is the beginning of true Christian hope. We receive a kingdom now through *faith* in Him who is the King of kings. Instead of such a present revelation of Messiah's sceptre, as must fill all earth as well as heaven with His praise, the true discernment of the kingdom and its destinies is the exclusive portion of those who are companions of Christ's patience until the day of His appearing. The *mysteries* of the kingdom are their present study,[8] even as its manifested glory is their promised hope. Neither the mystery of Christ[9] nor the mystery of iniquity[1] was presented to the contemplation of the Jewish saint. The long and yet unfinished interval which divides, in the New Testament, the ascension of Jesus into heaven from His re-appearance in the glory of His power, was hidden, there is every reason

[6] 1 Tim. iii. 16.

[7] *Infra*, chap. iii. 5—9. In Rom. xi. 25 we are shown a mystery of inversion; *i.e.*, the postponing of Israel's hope to the incoming of the fulness of the Gentiles, such as no Jewish prophet ever contemplated.

[8] Matt. xiii. 11 [9] Col. iv. 3. [1] 2 Thess. ii. 7; Rev. xvii. 5.

to believe, from all who waited for Him as the Nation's hope. With them the redemption of Israel and their prosperous enjoyment of the kingdom upon earth, were always viewed *together* as inseparable truths. How the Lord's disciples felt and hoped with reference to these things, even after He had given them a right understanding of the Jewish Scriptures, is well known to the attentive reader of the Word.[2] That redemption was an anterior purpose to creation—that Christ stood from eternity before the mind of God as the pre-eminent and all-containing object of His counsel—that *in Christ* the Church of His election was the anticipative receiver of His promise—these and similar truths, which form now the very fatness of the Christian's portion, were none of them *distinctly* seen, and some of them concealed entirely from the view of faith, until the Holy Ghost came down from heaven to announce, as the Witness of a glorified Christ,[3] the passing away of the time of darkness, and to become Himself, to the blood-cleansed believer in Jesus, the indwelling Light of life and knowledge. It is, therefore, in the fact of the communication of the Spirit of adoption to the latter, that the true cause is to be found of the difference, in point of realized Divine knowledge, between the Jewish and the Christian saint. The Spirit, who spake by the former, and who often cheered their hearts with comfortable words, never took possession of them as God's living temples, nor made them understand that they and the Lord they worshipped were mystically one. But, as we have seen, to the Christian the entire field of truth is open.

[2] Acts i. 6. [3] 1 John ii. 8.

The Holy Ghost is not sent only to clear up to our minds some prophecies of difficult interpretation, but to guide the brethren of Jesus into *all the truth*. What we are called by faith to inherit, we are already taught to understand. The mystery of the will of God is now made known to us, as a consequence of the new and filial relationship in which, through grace, we stand to Him in Christ.

Verse 10. The specific declaration of Divine purpose is now stated: "That in (or with a view to)[4] the dispensation of the fulness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Him." Although the language of this verse is not in itself ambiguous, it is likely that some difficulty may be experienced by the reader in determining the nature of the epoch here contemplated by the Apostle, and characterized as the "dispensation of the fulness of times." As, therefore, it is of importance to endeavour to define with precision the meaning of this expression, it will be well to devote a little space to its consideration.

There is only one other passage in the New Testament where a somewhat similar expression occurs. But in turning to Gal. iv. 4, it will be presently seen that, while they bear to each other a certain verbal resemblance, the two passages do not otherwise coincide. They are, in fact, of widely different signification. The Apostle, in the passage just referred to, is speaking of the incarnation and its effects, so far as they relate to the redemption of those who were naturally under law. The Son of God was

[4] εἰς

sent forth for their redemption "when the fulness of *the time*[5] was come," an expression having obvious reference both to the antecedent legal dispensation and to the original promise, which the giving of the law could not deprive of its effect.[6] In the present verse, however, both the term employed and the nature of the general argument are materially different. As to the former, it is not the arrival of an epoch in the ordinary flow of time that is described, but the completion of that series of distinctive periods, which in popular language we call dispensations.[7] The expressions themselves, then, although for the English reader they resemble each other, are by no means identical; while the present argument relates not, like the former, to the moral effect of the work of redemption in bringing the believer into spiritual liberty, but to its eventual and manifested triumph through the establishment, in all-prevailing power, of the universal sovereignty of Christ.

Quite independently, however, of the meaning of any isolated passage, a mature consideration of the Apostle's general testimony will, it is believed, show conclusively that he does not here refer to the existing dispensation, but to one to come. For nothing less is contemplated in this verse, than a consummation of God's dispensational government, by bringing under the acknowledged headship of Christ, both

[5] τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου.

[6] Compare the whole reasoning of the Apostle in the previous chapter.

[7] εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν. A comparison of this with the former quotation will convince the reader that their verbal difference is much more than imaginary. It is not, however, upon literal criticism, but on the general tenor of the Spirit's testimony, that the view given in the text is based.

things in heaven and things in earth. It has, no doubt, been thought by many Christians, that the Gospel dispensation is the final one. But that this is an erroneous impression has been partly shown already in what has been remarked as to the distinctive position of the Church. In further proof of this, the Christian reader may he now reminded, that the constant burden of the Spirit's testimonies to the Church describes the existing dispensation as one, both of uncertain duration and of ceaseless trial to the faithful disciple. The opposing powers of flesh and spirit, of light and darkness, of Christ and Belial, stand arrayed against each other until its close. An essential difference must surely be recognized between a period, during which SATAN is the acknowledged prince and god of this world, and one in which CHRIST reigns not more supremely and effectively in heaven than on earth. It is a promise to the saints, that God will *shortly* bruise Satan under their feet.[8] The hour of his bondage, and of the creature's liberty, is declared to be at hand. But in the meanwhile, the course of the professing world is affirmed to be one of steady deterioration, until what once owned *ostensible* subjection, at least, to the name of Jesus, is found arrayed for the last conflict under the banners of the Beast.[9] In a word, the present dispensation, which in one sense may be said to have begun at the moment of our Saviour's disappearance from the eyes of His disciples, is necessarily one of patient expectation and desire to those to whom it has been promised, that He shall again return in like manner as He went.[1]

[8] Rom. xvi. 20. [9] Rev. xix. 19. [1] Acts i. 9—11.

It has already been remarked, that among the things which, in the present dispensation, the Spirit of God sets in opposition to each other, earth and heaven stand in very conspicuous contrast. To set one's heart now upon earthly things is to be following the way of destruction. Few things are placed more frequently and vividly before the Christian in the word of truth, than the great principle that the believer has done with present things, except as he can use them to the Lord. It is *in heaven* that our life is hid with Christ in God. It is there also that *we know* that our inheritance is laid up. We are citizens in heaven but strangers upon earth. Our home is there, while we are pilgrims here. Moreover, the house which we are to abide in everlastingly is not only prepared for us in heaven, but we are taught to await the moment, not when we shall rise to enter it, but when it shall descend upon us from above; that instead of being unclothed we may be clothed upon, and that mortality may be swallowed up of life.[2] And both to comfort us in our tribulation, and to warn us amid the unceasing temptations to which both faith and patience are exposed, we are constantly reminded that the Lord is near to come, and that the end of all things is at hand.[3]

But the dispensation[4] of the fulness of times,

[2] 2 Cor. v. 1—4. [3] 1 Pet. iv. 7.

[4] The word thus translated is not of very frequent use in the New Testament. In four instances of the eight * in which it occurs, it is so rendered. Thrice, in Luke xvi., it is translated "stewardship," and once, in 1 Tim. i. 4 (though by no means exactly) "edifying;" the translators seeming to have followed in

* Or nine, if the reading now generally adopted at chap. iii. 9 of this Epistle be preferred.

instead of separating earth from heaven, and making the name of Jesus the effective barrier which divides them, is destined to unite them in the closest bonds. Instead of tribulation following as its shadow all true confession of the Cross, the only name *then* honoured and exalted among men will be the Name of Jesus. The Lord alone shall be exalted in *that day!*[5] The heavens shall declare His righteousness, and all the nations shall behold His glory. The place allotted to the *Church* in the coming dispensation, will appear more distinctly in the sequel. The verse now under consideration is confined to a general statement of the Divine purpose, so far as it relates to the setting up, by the God of heaven, of a kingdom, which is to reduce under the immediate sway of His anointed, both things in heaven and things on earth. Grace and judgment will be united in the sceptre of that King; His administration will be the reign of righteousness, while its effect will be to change the present groaning of creation into the joyful utterance of Jehovah's praise.[6]

the latter passage, the inferior reading, *οἰκοδομήν*. There is no real difficulty about the word. It means simply the administration of a household, of which meaning Luke xvi. affords a perfect example. Its application, by extension, to the government of God, is both obvious and natural. It is also plain that, having this general signification, the word may be used with reference either to the Supreme *Source* of power, to the *subject* about which it is exercised, or to the *person* to whom it is entrusted. Thus, when Paul says (1 Cor. ix. 17) that a dispensation of the gospel is committed to him, we feel no difficulty in understanding this expression in its manifest reference to his labour as an apostle of Christ. Again, in Col. i. 25, he speaks of a dispensation of *God;* thus indicating, in addition to the object of his ministry, the source from whence his power was derived. The word, in short, has a fixed and steady meaning, and when used in immediate relation to God, it signifies the ordered administration of His will, whether in grace or power, or both.

[5] Isaiah ii. 17. [6] Psalm xcvi.; lxxxiii. 18.

And now, lest it should suggest itself to any mind, that this prospective dispensation of general blessedness is no other than the everlasting state, wherein the *new* heavens and the *new* earth will be the acceptable rest of their Creator, and God's tabernacle will abide eternally with men, it is needful to repeat, that it is *in Christ* that the future government of peace is to be established. And, if some sound-hearted believer hasten to object, that the Son is to be equalled in honour to the Father, and that if God dwells with His people in that changeless state, He will not cease to be the same true God and eternal Life, as He is now known and worshipped by the true worshippers, who confess Him in His Son,[7] it will be sufficient, in order to clear up the seeming difficulty, to refer such an objector to what is written in 1 Cor. xv. For in verses 23—28 of that chapter, there is announced distinctly, among other things, the double truth—first, that at the coming of Christ, His people will be raised to meet Him; and, secondly, that at the subsequent conclusion of His reign, He will Himself be subject to the Father.[8] Nothing can establish more convincingly than that passage does, the important fact, that between the expected coming of the Saviour and the final state, when God is all in all, an interval occurs, which is occupied by a *terminable* kingdom, under the immediate sway of

[7] 1 John v. 20.

[8] The care taken by the Apostle in this passage, to express, by appropriate particles of temporal sequence, the gradations in the order of resurrection, has often been noticed, but may again be stated. It runs thus: "Every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits, *afterward* they that are Christ's at His coming: *then* (εἶτα) cometh the end," &c., &c.

the Lord Christ. The expression, "Then cometh the end," excites a natural inquiry as to the time appointed for the *commencement* of that kingdom; and this question not only receives in verse 23 of the same chapter a distinct and obvious reply, but the corroborative testimony of the other scriptures is as clear as it is abundant.[9]

Much has already been advanced in proof that the hour of the kingdom is *not yet* come. To go at full length into the evidence of Scripture on this subject would be unsuitable, as the doctrine in question, important as it is, receives a passing notice only in this Epistle. Mention may, however, be made of the well-known parable of postponement in Luke xix., which was spoken by the Lord to those who looked for an immediate *appearing* of the kingdom; a passage, not only of the simplest meaning to the believer, but of the most momentous import in a moral point of view. Rev. xix. has been already quoted in illustration of the time and manner of Christ's assumption of the kingdom in the glory of His power; while in Rev. xx., the order, duration, and effect of that kingdom, are expressly stated and described in immediate connexion with the doctrine of the first resurrection; the chapter closing with a description of the *final* act of Christ's judicial power, which immediately precedes His surrender of the kingdom to the Father, as expressed in 1 Cor. xv. 24, 28. The prophecy of Daniel, quoted as it was by the Lord in the presence of the high priest,[1] His

[9] *e.g.*, Matt. xix. 28; 1 Cor. vi. 2, 3; Lev. iii. 21.
[1] Dan. vii. 14; Matt. xxvi. 54. "*Hereafter* ye shall see," &c.

own good confession before Pontius Pilate,[2] and more especially, His words of prophetic consolation to the first who discovered and confessed the true glory of His Person as the *Son of God*, the King of Israel,[3] all tend directly to the same conclusion. Until Christ returns from heaven, to receive His waiting people, He acts for them as their great High Priest in heaven, repelling, moreover, as their righteous Advocate, the charges of the Accuser, and saving to the uttermost, in faithfulness and mercy, all who come to God by Him. But neither He nor they whose calling is to share His throne, are reigning *yet* over the kingdoms of this present world.

Enough, it is hoped, has now been said to justify the previous assertion, that the Apostle is here leading us to contemplate a future dispensation, of which the existing earth and heaven are the subject. And if such be the mystery of the Father's will, it is assuredly made known to us for our practical guidance, as well as our consolation. It is hardly necessary to point out the important bearing of such a doctrine on the subject of Christian testimony; since it must be evident that we are in danger of becoming false witnesses for God, if our views on such questions are at variance with the recorded mystery of His will. And now, bearing this in mind, let us examine the moral relation in which this doctrine stands, to what has been hitherto manifested of the administrative government of God.

[2] John xviii. 36. "*Now* is my kingdom not from hence."
[3] John i. 49—51. "*Hereafter* ye shall see the heaven open," &c. Compare with this, as to its bearing on the national hope of Israel, Hos. ii. 21, 22.

On a retrospective survey of the dispensational history of the earth, it must at once appear, to an attentive observer, that sovereign supremacy, vested in an individual, has been the form in which God has been pleased, from the beginning, to delegate His own authority. Between the first Adam and the second—the figure of human perfection and its glorious Reality—the principle of headship, or paramount lordship, has been formally sanctioned in many striking instances. Adam in the garden was its primal type. He becomes, therefore, a figure of Christ, not only in respect to his generative headship, as the beginning of humankind,[4] but also as the receiver of a kingdom from His Creator.[5] In a less perfect sense, Noah was also constituted the sovereign of the earth. Without dwelling on the terms of the Abrahamic promise, or noticing what relates exclusively to the internal government of Israel, we may come at once to Solomon, who swayed his sceptre over the full breadth of Abraham's promised portion, and received a ready homage from all the adjacent kingdoms. In his person, we are presented with a new and remarkably perfect type of the Messianic glory of Jesus. He was the beloved of Jehovah, as well as David's son. Having been especially designated to the kingdom, as the anointed ruler of Israel, he sat as Jehovah's delegate upon *His* throne.[6] Short-lived and transient, indeed, was this figure of

[4] Rom. v. 14—19.

[5] Gen. i. 26; Ps. viii.; Heb. ii. 5—9. The deeply interesting fact that the woman was already in association with the man, when this dominion was conferred, will be noticed more fully in its place, as to its typical import, in connexion with that other and *great* mystery described in chap. v.

[6] 1 Chron. xxix. 23.

royal excellency. Dust and ashes cannot worthily sustain the weight of human government. A second Child[7] must first be born, and stand up in the stead of him who, in the midst of his glory, was the slave of sin and death.

The lamp of David was not, indeed, extinguished by the sin of Solomon, but upon the demonstrated failure of his natural house to keep the ordinance of God,[8] a transfer of the earth's dominion was solemnly made to the head of Gentile power, in the person of Nebuchadnezzar. Other potentates had lived and been renowned before this mighty one; but it was he whom God acknowledged (after having first employed him as His rod of chastisement against the house of David), as the *supreme monarch* of the nations. A striking proof of this change of the seat of divinely recognized earthly supremacy, is given in Dan. ii., where a *quasi*-Adamic extent of dominion is expressly granted to Nebuchadnezzar by the God of heaven, whose prophet was then sharing His people's captivity in Babylon. In the same chapter, a very clear prophetic description is afforded, both of the progressive alterations in point of form and quality, which this newly-delegated power was to undergo, as well as of its eventual result. Israel's sin had been the occasion of its establishment, and Israel's repentance will be the signal of its overthrow. When that hour comes, it will be found, that by their abuse of the trust committed to them, the heads of Gentile power have ripened for the long-threatened jugdment of Him who, as the Avenger of His ancient people, will be but asserting the glory of his own most holy

[7] Eccles. iv. 15. [8] 2 Kings xxi. 11, *seq.*

Name.[9] It is, meanwhile, the part of Christian faith to acknowledge with alacrity that the powers now existing are ordained of God.[1]

Dispersion and moral confusion have attended each of these successive delegations of Divine authority. For while God has permitted the sanction of His name to each of them in turn, He has found in none of them a just reflection of Himself. God cannot be duly represented by mortality, and is not satisfied by sin. The throne of His approval has yet to be set up. He that ruleth over men must be *just*, ruling in the fear of the Lord.[2] Until such an one appear, God ceases not to overturn all dynasties of human structure. The rise and fall of kingdoms are phenomena which men of the world acknowledge, rather than account for. It is in the word of God alone that their true causes are to be discovered. God sifts the nations with the sieve of vanity, and shakes with violence the throne of kingdoms, until He come whose right it is, and who has received, by a sure decree, the heathen for His inheritance, and the utmost bounds of the earth as His possession.[3] He will rule the nations with a rod of iron; while His gracious hand is open to fill to overflowing every obedient vessel of His will.[4]

The expression chosen by the Spirit to describe in this verse the coming supremacy of God's Anointed, is perfectly expressive of the grand idea which it represents.[5] To regather all dispersions, and to place the creature, both in its higher and its lower spheres,

[9] Ps. lxxiv. 22, 23. [1] Rom. xiii. [2] 2 Sam. xxiii. 3.
[3] Ps. ii. [4] Rev. iii. 26, 27; Ps. cxlv.
[5] ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι. "*Ut recolligeret*," as Calvin justly renders. "*Wiederzusammenzufassen*."—De Wette.

in a new condition of stability and tranquil blessedness, is God's design. The times of restitution will have come. What had bloomed for a moment, only to be withered (because sin had entered) by the holy truth of God, will revive at His presence, and put on a new and more enduring comeliness. The Repairer of the breach of Zion will dispel the darkness of that cloud, which must, alas! first spread even yet more thickly over the professing nations of the world.[6] The brightness of His coming will destroy the yoke of the Oppressor, and consume the great Corrupter of the earth.[7] Holding and combining in Himself the several rights of Adam, of Abraham, and of David, He will exercise them all in the paramount title of Divine Sonship. In the dispensation of *commencing* time, man held *for* God, as well as from Him, a full terrestrial supremacy. In the dispensation of time's *fulness*, God *in* man will claim and exercise a sovereignty commensurate with the whole creation which His hands have made.[8]

Verse 11. "*In whom* we also have obtained an inheritance."[9] Having now stated generally that part of the mystery of the Divine will which is presently to receive its accomplishment in the universal monarchy of Christ, the Apostle goes on in the present verse to speak of the same mystery in its exclusive application to the Church. Accordingly, we are here shown the place allotted to the believer, as an heir of salvation, according to the wisdom and prudence of Him, whose grace abounds towards us

[6] Isa. xxv. 7, 8; 1 Cor. xv. 54. [7] 2 Thess. ii. [8] Col. i. 16.
[9] ἐκληρώθημεν. More exactly, perhaps, "have been taken as an inheritance." (See the following note.)

in His Son. It is *in* this glorious Head of Creation that we have obtained an inheritance. That the Ruler of the nations is the Portion of His saints, has, indeed, been a standing truth for faith from the time that God owned a people upon earth. But the Gospel puts this truth in a new and widely different light. In the language of the Old Testament, to join oneself to the Lord implied that union of dependence which attaches the believer to the Divine Object of His faith. But the fulfilment of the mystery of godliness has established for the Christian a new and far more intimate union with the Saviour. The Sanctifier is now of one nature with the sanctified. The glory which now shines forth from the Person of the Lord, reveals Him to our faith as the First-born among many brethren. He that is joined to the Lord is thus one spirit. The Church has been so united to the Object of its worship as to become mystically His own body; and enters, as a consequence of that union, into a prospective participation of His sovereign rights. This doctrine is more fully stated at the close of the present chapter. What we are taught in the verse before us is, that the predestinating will of God has formed the believer in Jesus for the fellowship of Christ's own blessedness and honour. *His* inheritance is also *ours*. What He receives in righteousness, we have obtained through grace. We are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. The Christian, as a partaker of Christ, becomes thus distinguished from those things, whether in heaven or in earth, which constitute the wide and varied realm of His dominion. It is because of this mystic union with the Lord of all, that the believer

can hear without wonder that the Church is called to judge both angels and the world.[1]

The present verse stands in a close moral connexion with verse 5. The effect of Divine predestination was there shown to be our filial adoption. Here, the same truth is viewed rather with reference to what we are to inherit as a consequence of that adoption. In the former, we are contemplated as partakers of the Divine nature; in the latter, we are regarded as sharers of the Father's things, which He has given to His Son. The effective operation of God is also here brought into clearer distinctness as the alone security for the accomplishing of His purpose; a doctrine hereafter more fully stated,[2] and which must always lie at the bottom of the true believer's confidence. The same power which presently will gather all things in subjection to His Christ, already gives us an inheritance in Him. He was willing to bless us, and is competent to work His own intent.[3]

Verse 12. "That we should be to the praise of His glory, *who first trusted* in Christ." Nothing glorifies God but the fulfilment of His will; and, as we have already seen, He is Himself the Pledge of its fulfilment. The elevation of the Church to the position which sovereign grace has bestowed on her, will be purely and simply to the praise of His glory.

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 2, 3. [2] Chap. ii. 5, *seq.*

[3] The remarks in the text are founded on the E. V. If, as suggested in the previous note, we take the verb in its passive rather than its middle sense, the doctrine of this verse will contemplate, not the joint-heirship of the believer with Christ (as in Rom. viii. 17), but the assumption of the Church as an inheritance of God, a view of the subject quite in harmony both with earlier Scriptural analogies, and with the same apostle's doctrine in Titus ii. 2, 14. Compare Deut. xxxii. 9; Ps. cxxxv. 4. See also *infra*, verse 18.

But a characteristic description is found attaching in this verse to those vessels of mercy, who are thus prepared unto glory. They are described as having first trusted (or hoped)[4] in Christ. It can scarcely be admitted, that the Apostle means only by this expression to distinguish himself, and his fellow-Israelites in the faith, from the Gentiles who afterwards were grafted in. The general predicate, "That we should be to the praise of His glory," refers to the saints without any reference to Jew or Gentile. They who are here spoken of are the same who are, from the beginning of the chapter, kept before us as the chosen objects of blessing. We shall find him, in the verse which follows, addressing himself more pointedly to the Ephesian saints; and, in the progress of the Epistle, the effect of Gospel truth upon the Gentile, viewed comparatively with the Jew, is very fully shown. But he is thus far dealing with the doctrine of grace, and its effects, as they relate to the heirs of salvation *generally*, according to the mystery of the will of God.

God's saints are, in the present dispensation, said to have *forehoped* in Christ, because their faith in a rejected and invisible Saviour is in anticipation of the day of His manifested glory. Israel in *that day* will *see* and believe. The Church, believing without sight, rejoices in the power of a hope that maketh not ashamed, the hope of *glory*. One of the titles of the Church in Scripture is, that it consists of *firstborn sons*.[5] The children of God, during this dispensation, are also said to be a kind of *first-fruits* of His crea-

[4] τοὺς προηλπικότας.
[5] ἐκκλησία πρωτοτόκων (Heb. xii. 23).

tures.[6] Both these expressions, like the one now before us, have clearly a relative force; and *as* clearly, their relation is to something distinct from what is so described, and that *follows* it in the order of its manifestation. As, then, it is evident, from the foregoing verse, that there is a dispensation yet to come, which, relatively to the one now present, is one of Christ's manifest triumph and prevalent dominion, there can be no difficulty in our recognizing the propriety and significance of such a descriptive epithet as is here applied to the expectant Church. Hope is the standing character of our position till the Saviour comes. We are saved *by hope*. But the Hope we wait for is the coming Light of Israel and the nations. When He appears in His glory to rebuild the wastes of Zion,[7] and to make His name terrible among the heathen,[8] His fellows will be with Him: "When Christ who is our Life shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory."[9] While, therefore, the veil remains on Israel's heart, and the more abundant tide of Gentile blessing which is to flow mediately through their restoration,[1] is restrained by reason of their unbelief, the remnant according to the election of grace are blessed in Christ with a heavenly inheritance. What that inheritance is, in its unsearchable richness, will be presently more fully shown. It is only needful here to bear in mind, that it is all *in Him*. The love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, is a richer endowment to the quickened soul than even the unbounded glory of

[6] ἀπαρχήτις τῶν αὐτοῦ κτισμάτων (Jas. i. 18).
[7] Ps. cii. 16. [8] Micah iv. 3; 2 Thess. i. 10. [9] Col. iii. 4.
[1] Rom. xi. 12.

His kingdom. But they are inseparable; and both are compassed in the breadth of that rich expectation which belongs to those who trust beforehand in the hidden Christ.

Verse 13. "In whom ye, also," &c.[2] The practical bearing of this verse, first upon those immediately addressed, and secondly upon all who are partakers of like precious faith, is very obvious. The true Christian's position and attitude having been characteristically described in the foregoing verses, such an application of the doctrine to the special case was only to be expected, and is quite after the general manner of the Spirit in His teaching. In stating the great truths of Christian doctrine, the Apostle knew that he was speaking to those who could appreciate his words. As wise men, they could judge the truth of what he said. For they, too, had trusted in this heavenly Christ, and were partakers of that better portion which the wisdom and prudence of the God of grace had allotted to His saints. They were ready, therefore, to respond to this appeal. And here let the doubting Christian notice carefully the plain and simple manner in which their possession of an interest in such a portion is recognized by the Apostle.

They were in Christ, through having heard the word of truth, the Gospel of their salvation. By a justifying faith, they had received the glad tidings

[2] The reader will not fail to notice that the word "trusted" in the E. V. has no equivalent in the original, which is simply ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς—"in whom also are ye." The Apostle's object seems to be not simply to acknowledge them as believers, but to include them specifically (as an effect of their faith) in the fellowship of the blessings already stated generally as the heritage of God's elect. They also were *in Christ*.

of the grace of God. And upon that faith the seal of God had been effectually set. They had, as believers, received the Holy Spirit of promise, as the seal of their adoption. In Christ they trusted, and in Christ they were sealed. The single tie which connected them experimentally with all their blessings, was *their faith in Jesus* as the Righteousness of God. With respect to the sealing here described, it is of importance to distinguish accurately the operations of the Spirit in relation to the believer. It is a fundamental doctrine of Divine truth, that every real believer is *born* of the Spirit. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." But the quickening of a dead sinner must not be confounded with the sealing of a living saint. The latter is a second act of God, confirmatory of the former, and attesting its efficacy. The grace that saves us make us sons in Christ, and because we *are* sons, the Spirit of adoption is sent forth into our hearts.[3] We were, moreover, a part of Satan's goods; but are now become the property of Him who has redeemed us. God seals His own, to distinguish them from the world, which He disowns. He separates His people for Himself, by Himself becoming their indwelling Occupant.[4]

The completeness of the believer's identification with Christ, in point of moral standing before God, is shown in the most emphatic manner by this doctrine of the sealing of the Spirit. For it was even thus that the true Sonship of Immanuel was attested. The Holy Ghost descended as a dove, to certify the Holy One of God, while the Father's voice from

[3] Gal. iv. 6. [4] 1 John iv. 15.

heaven declared the true meaning of that sign. The Branch of Jesse was thus shown to be the Son of God.[5] And such is now the effect of faith, in joining the believer to the Lord, that the same Spirit now finds rest in the purged vessels of God's grace, thus testifying to the virtue of that precious blood of Christ, which has changed what was naturally but a leprous chamber of pollution, into an acceptable temple of the living God.

It is *in Christ* that we are sealed. What the Holy Ghost attests and ratifies, is God's triumphant attainment, in the person of the Saviour, of the predestinating purpose of His love. Hence, this doctrine is of universal application to the Church. It cannot be scripturally questioned that *every* believer is thus sealed in Christ. As it is elsewhere written, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."[6] On the other hand, it can no doubt be testified by many a Christian, that his conscious appreciation of this truth has been separated by a wide interval from the beginning of his faith in Christ. To affirm that such an interval must needs occur, would be to contradict the plainest testimonies of Scripture. Yet it is probable that, in the majority of instances, Christians awaken but gradually to a complete assurance of the grace in which they stand. It is indeed a sad reflection, and proves but too evidently the feebleness and indistinctness, with which the fundamental doctrines of grace are handled in much of the teaching of the day. For the reception of the Spirit of promise[7] is,

[5] Matt. iii. 15—17; Isaiah xi. 1. [6] Rom. viii. 9.
[7] The expression, "Spirit of promise," has probably a double

in Scripture, connected immediately with our apprehension of the work of Jesus on the cross. That believing sinners might receive that Spirit, Christ became a curse for their transgressions.[8] It is as the Glorifier of Jesus that the Holy Ghost becomes the seal of God.[9]

Verse 14. "Which is the earnest of our inheritance," &c. The Spirit is a seal to God, an earnest to the believer. His presence, therefore, is the new and eternal spring of life and joy within the soul. It is as a well of water springing up into everlasting life.[1] Among men, the earnest of anything is commonly some portion of the thing promised. With God it is much more than this; He is Himself the Earnest of His promise. If glory be the hope of our calling, it is also Christ Himself who is the power of that hope. He is in us as the Hope of glory.[2] It is He who has returned to be His people's Comforter in the person of the Spirit. The Lord is that Spirit. Liberty of conscience, in the sight of God, is the sweet effect of His presence in us, when ungrieved by our carelessness or unbelief.

meaning. 1st. He is the promised Comforter, of whom Jesus spake to His disciples, but whose presence could not be enjoyed until the Son had returned to the Father, even as the promise of His future outpouring had been primarily part of the prophetic testimony. 2nd. In His office, the Spirit is the Revealer and Minister of all the promises of God which are secured to us in Christ (2 Cor. i. 20—22).

[8] Gal. iii. 13, 14.

[9] *Sealing* by the Spirit stands, as a doctrine, in close connexion with *baptism* by the Spirit. The idea of fitness and power for acceptable service seems rather to be associated with the latter (Acts i. 5), while the former relates more especially to the absolute property which the Redeemer enjoys in His own, and implies a responsive ability on our part to enjoy the grace in which we stand.

[1] John iv. 14. [2] Col. i. 27.

Shedding the love of God abroad in our hearts, He fills us with that peace which passeth knowledge. Through His sustaining power the believer is enabled to seek patiently the attainment of that for which he knows himself to have been apprehended in Christ Jesus. Salvation is our inheritance; the living Saviour is its earnest. If it be a fervent aspiration of believing desire to be set as a seal upon the heart and arm of Jesus,[3] such desire is produced within us by the energy of that indwelling Spirit who reveals to us the boundless riches of His love. It is a reciprocation of that mightier and firmer seal by which the Lord knoweth them that are His own.[4]

With respect to the continuance of the Spirit in this character, it is declared to be "until the redemption of the purchased possession."[5] A further distinction may here be noticed between the seal and the earnest. God's seal abides eternally upon His children; but the Holy Ghost will of course no longer act as an earnest when the time of full possession is arrived. Known then in His all-pervading energy, He will be the strength and very nature of those who shall enjoy in spiritual bodies the unclouded glory of God and of the Lamb. He will abide according to the promise of the Lord, *for ever*.[6]

"The purchased possession"[7] embraces, in its

[3] Cant. viii. 6. [4] 2 Tim. ii. 19, 20.

[5] εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν, τ.π., "unto" or "with reference to the redemption," &c.; *i. e.*, the presence of the Spirit is the pledge of that promise of eternal life, which is to be completely realized in the day of Christ's appearing. Compare, for a fuller elucidation of the doctrine of this verse, Rom. viii. 11—23.

[6] John xiv. 16.

[7] Περιποίησις. The proper meaning of this word is "acquisi-

widest sense, all that will eventually result from the one ransom of the Cross. It has plainly, however, a more limited signification in this verse. For it is a correlative to the seal of God already set upon the saints. That seal, as we have seen, is the witness to us both of forgiveness of sins through the redemption already wrought for us in Christ, and of our personal acceptance in Him. The Church is thus *effectually*, and by triumphant grace, what Israel was *conditionally* under the former covenant.[8] For it was to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto Himself a peculiar people, that Jesus gave Himself for our sins. What the fleshly nation could not be, because the flesh can never be acceptable to God, believers now are, because born of God.[9] Finished redemption already places the believer, in spirit, in God's tabernacles of peace and praise.[1] But although predestined to be conformed to the image of the risen Christ, we still bear outwardly the image of the earthy. The body is dead because of sin, though the spirit is life because of righteousness. We shall receive the image of the Heavenly when that power shall have been applied to our bodies which belongs to the Redeemer of our souls.[2]

A few additional remarks of a practical kind may here be made, before quitting the present subject. It is as the seal of God that the Holy Ghost becomes,

tion." This, its original idea, may easily be traced in all the differences of signification which it has received from our translators. It may be remarked that this term stands in a direct relation to ἐκληρώθημεν in verse 11, and will be modified in its meaning according to the sense in which the latter word is taken. See the note at p. 45.

[8] Exod. xix. 5. [9] 1 Pet. ii. 9.

[1] Psa. lxxxiv. 4; Heb. x. 19—22.

[2] Phil. iii. 21; 1 Cor. xv. 49.

in a practical sense, the Sanctifier of the believer. A believer and a saint are, as has been shown already, convertible expressions.[3] Sanctification of the Spirit, therefore, in its primary and vital sense, is identical with regeneration. It is through such sanctification that the elect of God are brought to the obedience of faith.[4] But it is as the Spirit of *promise*—the Spirit both of the Father and the Son—that He separates to that new fellowship[5] those whom Jesus has delivered from the wrath to come. But in doing this He works no change in our flesh, though He is of almighty power to subdue it while we yield ourselves to His control. For He leads us straight to Jesus, where the flesh is dumb and powerless. What Scripture calls the flesh, as the opposing principle of evil in us, is no other than our natural will. It *lusts* against the Spirit. It is by leading us through faith into the fulness of Christ, as our assured portion, and reminding us that already we are risen with Him, that the Spirit arms us with a new and stronger energy by which the natural will is disallowed. The Spirit *lusts against* the flesh. Most plainly, then, the fond idea of such a gradual assimilation of our nature to the moral perfectness of Christ, as may make the prospect of *personal* perfection a stimulus to a more complete attainment of such an end, involves an erroneous estimate both of the true nature of sin in the flesh, and (as a necessary consequence) of the work of redemption which delivers from it.

Perfection and shortcoming are true of the same

[3] *Ante*, pp. 2, 3.
[4] 1 Pet. i. 2; 2 Thess. ii. 13.
[5] 1 John i. 3; iii. 24.

person, and at the self-same time. In Christ the believer has, by one Offering, been perfected for ever by the grace of God.[6] To *stand fast* in the liberty with which Christ has made him free, and, by walking by *faith*, to hold fast that which they have heard from the beginning,[7] is to be characteristically "perfect," as distinguished from one less established in the grace of God.[8] On the other hand, although it be true that "he that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also so to walk even as He walked;"[9] yet the attempt to follow Jesus as our example, and to run, without stumbling, in the way of God's commandments, never fails to reveal to us the faultiness and defectiveness of our best endeavours. The Apostle—who gloried in the cross of Christ, and gave thanks to God, who led him in continued triumph as a minister of His grace[1]—confesses that in this latter sense he had come to no perfection.[2] Yet he did not joy the less in Jesus. Knowing whose battle he was fighting, and reposing confidently in the love of Him who had saved him from his sins, he is anxious for nothing but that his walk might be worthy of the grace in which he stood.[3]

True practical sanctification can only be attained by complete subjection to the will of God. Its basis must be *truth*, as that truth is both seen and loved in

[6] Heb. x. 14. [7] Gal. v. 1. [8] 1 Cor. ii. 6.
[9] 1 John ii. 6. [1] 1 Cor. ii. 14.
[2] Phil. iii. 12. In verse 15 of the same chapter, he invites those who considered themselves perfect to run with him towards the mark of his desire. There is a similar tone in Rom. xv. 1: "We that are strong," &c. Spiritual feebleness and inactivity are often the effect of mere *doctrinal* progress. We are called to know *Him*, and the *power* of His resurrection.
[3] Phil. i. 19, 20.

Jesus. Its immediate instrument is the name of the *Father*, by the confession of which alone can we be fully reminded of the nature and completeness of our disconnection from the world. The true effect of this sanctification is an uncompromising separation from all that denies either the Father or the Son. In the power of redemption, a Christian may use, with holy liberty, the earth and all its fulness. But spiritual filthiness begins to defile him the moment he allows himself to acquiesce, in willing association, with anything with which he dare not readily connect the name of Christ.

A holy walk must needs be a contradiction of our natural wills. On the other hand, the new nature has to suffer many a weariness while traversing the way of pilgrimage. Sweet it is to remember, that to the Spirit, who is the Leader of God's ransomed children, there are ascribed in Scripture, among His varied attributes, these three, which, more than all, we find to be needful for our comfort. He is the Spirit of *truth*, the Spirit of *grace*, and the Spirit of *glory*. In the first of these characters, He is the Light of the believer, and the Helper of his joy, as the rich Revealer of Jesus and His things.[4] He is, moreover (while we humbly own His mastery), our mighty Guardian from the snares of the Deceiver.[5] In the second, He sustains the weakness of God's people, and confirms their feeble knees, making perfect intercession for them in their conflicts, and groaning in sympathy with all their grief.[6] In the third, He rests, in cheering and reanimating power, upon those who in any way are counted worthy to

[4] John xvi. [5] 1 John iv. 4. [6] Rom. xv. 13; viii. 26, 27.

suffer for the name of Jesus.[7] The Lord is that Spirit; and *with* Him it is that we are called to suffer. He suffers *in* us as He once has suffered *for* us.[8] The afflictions of the Gospel are endured according to the *power of God*.[9]

Returning now to our chapter, we find, in verse 15, the Apostle, who for a while had been hidden from view by the magnitude of his subject, coming forth again into the happy prominence which belongs to him, as an active helper of his brethren's joy. To comfort and encourage them, he tells them the effect upon his own spirit of their obedience to the truth. His own faith and love are strengthened by the good report of theirs. He had heard of their "faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints." We may remark here how inseparably these things are joined together in the mind of the Spirit. For faith is but an empty name unless it fructifies in love. Love is of God; and is, therefore, the natural effect of that faith which finds, through Christ, its rest in God. Love in the Spirit, then, must ever wax or wane with faith. Joy in the Lord is its true fountain of supply. The abundance of that joy makes poor saints rich in love.[1] It is thus that the genuine energy of the Spirit in the heart may be distinguished from that operose activity, which often yields so barren a return, because the zeal which stimulates it is not moved by the constraining love of Christ. But if faith really *works*, it works by love. This is a standing principle, which nothing can weaken or displace. It is, moreover, one of seasonable remem-

[7] 1 Peter iv. 13, 14. [8] Acts ix. 4.
[9] 2 Tim. i. 8. [1] 2 Cor. viii. 2.

brance in the present day of much spiritual affliction. The lowest imaginable condition of the Church here below can never frustrate the working of a faith which is kept pure and fresh by the habitual maintenance of Divine communion. Nor can any multiplication of sectarian dissensions, nor any sad experience of the judicial hand of God in winnowing His people, deprive the heart that still abides in Jesus of the holy and joyful privilege of praying for all saints. Faith sees them all in Him, who is their common Life; and loves them with a fervency in exact proportion to its own enjoyment of His love.

Verse 16. In the Apostle's case, the joy which he experienced at hearing of his brethren's faith and love found its first vent in thanksgiving to God. That they were what they were, he joyfully ascribes to Him who had called them by His Gospel. He was bound to thank God for such,[2] finding large increase to his own joy, as a labourer in God's vineyard, at every fresh proof of the effectual working of His power. To thanksgiving succeeded prayer, as is wont when joy is in the Spirit. For faith cannot rest satisfied with any present measure of blessing, nor can it cease to cleave, with increase of desire, to the God whose power to bless is thus acknowledged. He prayed for the furtherance of their spiritual progress, in the confidence of one who both knew the real secret of such progress to consist in unfeigned dependence upon God, and could reckon on the faithfulness of Him, who, having begun a good work in them, was both able and resolved to perfect it until

[2] 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.

the day of Christ.[3] *How* he prayed we shall have presently to consider. It is worth noticing, first, as an important general principle, that prayer in the Epistles always presupposes conversion to God on the part of him who offers it. It belongs to those who know Him, and confide in Him, to make known to Him their requests. The beginning and sustaining power of such prayer, is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.[4]

We come now to consider, in the remaining verses of this chapter, the several topics which formed the subject of the Apostle's intercession for the saints. Before examining them in their order, it should be remarked, that God is addressed in this prayer under the first of the two specific titles which have already been ascribed to Him as the Supreme Object of spiritual worship. Or it may, perhaps, be more correct to say, that prominence is given to that title, than that it is exclusively mentioned. For when we find "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" invoked by the additional title of "Father of glory," the heart of every believer is able to recognize, beneath this altered style of address, the self-same fulness of Divine majesty that has already been set forth. The Father of glory is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. For Christ is the Glory of God. Glory belongs to God; and was from eternity the

[3] Phil. i. 6

[4] Hence the serious injury often inflicted upon souls, as well as the dishonour done to the Lord, by those who exhort unconverted people to pray as a duty, instead of leading them to Christ crucified alone for the remission of their sins. God's ear is quick to listen to the faintest cry of a really contrite heart, and Jesus is His ready answer of peace. Before they cry His answer is prepared. But prayer as a *duty*, while faith in the Lamb is postponed, is only a methodical continuance in sin.

reflection of His essence. And He, who is the brightness of that glory, is also the express image of His Person.[5] The peculiar fitness of the titles here addressed to God is readily perceived, when we consider that the Object contemplated by the Spirit throughout this prayer is, the revealed display of the Divine glory in and through Christ. What HE *is*, declares the Father's glory; whether in the saving of a sinner now through grace,[6] or in the day of His enthronement in the promised kingdom. Jesus while on earth ascribed, and taught His disciples to ascribe, "the glory" to the Father. He will openly display the honour and glory which He has received from God the Father, and in which faith sees Him even now arrayed, when the vision on the mount shall be forgotten in its realization at the coming day.[7] But in the kingdom, not less than in the day of His temptations, He will both confess and make it evident that "power belongeth unto God."

The brightness of the "excellent glory" is now become the temple of inquiry for Christian faith. To know God in His perfections, as He declares Himself in Jesus, is the portion of His children; while the means of that knowledge is the active power of the Holy Ghost. Accordingly, we find that both in this prayer, and in that which follows in chapter iii., the Spirit, in His Divine operations, is the primary Object of the Apostle's desire for the saints. This is a fact of much practical interest; and which the Christian will do well to ponder. Spiritual blessings can only be apprehended by the Spirit. Nor does our being definitively sealed by that

[5] Heb. i. 3. [6] Phil. ii. 11. [7] 2 Peter i. 16—18.

Spirit, as the earnest of our inheritance, set us above the necessity of seeking, through prayer, the several manifestations of His gracious energy. Such prayer, instead of *ceasing* with our knowledge of complete acceptance in the Beloved, properly *commences* then. For all true prayer is in the Spirit, and with the enlightened understanding. The natural tendency of the renewed mind is towards the God who has created it.

Seven Spirits are before the throne of God; and all are in the power of the Lamb.[8] It is according to the varied perfection of Divine energy, thus symbolized, that the Holy Ghost now works His blessed work as the Comforter and Teacher of the saints. Accordingly, the Apostle, whose present aim is the advancement of His brethren in the truth, desires, as his first request on their behalf, that God would give them "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him."[9] He had before spoken of the wisdom and prudence in which God has abounded in the manifestation of His grace towards the Church. The Spirit of wisdom is now sought for, that those treasures may be more completely made our own.

While Jesus tarried upon earth with His disciples, they received from Him the blessing of His doctrine, chiefly by means of question and reply. Yet He dwelt among them, and His presence with them was their security and their delight. And it is in a manner somewhat analogous to this that the Lord, who now dwells in His chosen by the Spirit, has still to be inquired for and sought, that the varied

[8] Rev. iv. 5; v. 6. [9] Verse 16.

and blessed activities of His grace may be practically apprehended and enjoyed. It is with reference to this that the Lord appears to speak when, in Luke xi. 13, He assures His disciples of the Father's readiness to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.[1] Thus, prayer *in* the Spirit, may also be praying *for* the Spirit; for those special operations of His power, which we feel to be needful for the progress of our souls in the knowledge and service of the God with whom we have to do. As to the particular manifestations of the Spirit here desired, it is well to remember, that a saint is a *learner* from the date of his conversion. Disciples must, in order to become such, have been first summoned, by the voice of Jesus, from their previous condition of spiritual darkness. Ignorance of God being characteristically our state by nature, we begin to *know* only when we taste the sincere milk of the word. And it becomes us to *desire* that word, that we may grow thereby. It would fare but ill with that Christian, who, under the delusive idea that, because he has *all* in Christ, he therefore *knows* all that he is called to learn, should cease to sit lowly at the feet of Jesus. It is because we are called to know *God*, and not the letter of His doctrine only, that we need these manifestations of the Spirit. He only can reveal Himself. Our knowledge at the best is but

[1] In Matt. vii., it is for "good things" that the disciples are encouraged to ask the Father. The believer is characteristically *spiritual*, and prays in the Spirit for spiritual things. *Temporal* blessings are rather to be reckoned on as surely-following mercies, than earnestly desired. Our Heavenly Father knoweth we have need of such. The Holy Ghost, as the full Revealer of Christ, is the sum and completeness of those good things which the Father, who has already given Jesus, has now to bestow upon His children.

inceptive here below; and the more wisely we have appreciated the riches of the grace in which we stand, the more conscious we shall be of the deficiency of our knowledge, and the more eager in our desire for its increase. Nothing, indeed, is a stronger proof of spiritual dulness, and practical distance from God, than when we flatter ourselves that we have yet learned anything as we *ought* to know.[2]

Verse 18. "The eyes of your understanding[3] being enlightened," &c. The effects which were to be looked for, from the fuller measure of the Spirit, are now described. The first of these is an increase of their power of Divine communion. Neither knowledge, nor power, is inherent in man, even when born of God. Capacities are conferred on us, but they must be filled and exercised by Him who gave them. What we have we receive from God, who does not fail to give to those who ask. There are things which it behoves the saints to know, and which the Spirit is ever ready to impart. Chief among these is, the knowledge of the "hope of His calling," who has called us into the fellowship of His Son. Now He who hath called us is the Father of glory. *The hope* of His calling, then, is glory. The God of all grace hath called us to His *eternal* glory by Christ Jesus.[4] The power and verification of this calling is, "Christ in us the Hope of glory." The expectation of those who are partakers of this grace, being according to their standing as accepted in the Beloved, is nothing less than to share in all

[2] 1 Cor. viii. 2.

[3] Or, perhaps, "heart;" τῆς καρδίας being the reading generally preferred.

[4] 1 Peter v. 10.

that has been awarded to the First-born as the appointed Heir of all things. We shall see His glory, and partake His joy.[5] The aspirations, therefore, of the Christian are not limited, for he hopes for that which is not measurable by the heart of man. The Spirit of *revelation* must be given, to enable us to know our hope. On the other hand, the Spirit of *wisdom* is also requisite, that we may rightly use the knowledge we receive. Had the Corinthians been possessed of the Spirit of wisdom, they would not have been subjected to the Apostle's penetrating censure, which they drew upon themselves by foolishly desiring to reign *now* as kings, instead of waiting patiently for Christ.[6] If we do not know the *time*, as well as the event, of our calling, we shall not walk worthy of it.[7] To be like Christ, in person, in affection, and in place, is the sure and precious promise that sustains our hope. And, because that expectation can be realized only by the glorious appearing of the Saviour, it is to that, as to our "blessed hope," that we are taught to look by the grace which has already brought salvation to our souls.[8]

It is not, therefore, temporal prosperity that is to be desired, nor need temporal affliction be an object of our dread. Both one and the other are to be met by the believer in the power of a faith which makes him, as the object of Divine affection, independent of the creature under all its forms.[9] Instead of the fallacious prospects of a natural hope, we behold as in a glass the glory of the God of

[5] John xvii. 24, 13. [6] 1 Cor. iv. [7] Rom. xiii. 11.
[8] Titus ii. 13. [9] Rom. viii. 31—39.

truth. Earth and its delights are no longer our care; for *Christ* is in heaven, not on earth.[1] The glory of Jehovah has removed its seat from the earthly to the heavenly Jerusalem. It is there that His honour dwelleth now; and thither has His grace already brought our hearts.[2] The spiritual circumcision have their access to a temple, which the Lord pitched, and not man.[3] The sanctifying effect of a true knowledge of our calling is abundantly insisted on in Scripture. It is, indeed, in exact proportion to the fervency of our hope that conformity to the will of God is produced: "He that hath this hope in *Him*, purifieth himself even as He is pure.[4]"

In close connexion with the hope of God's calling, we are exhorted, also, to seek the knowledge of "the riches of the glory of *His* inheritance in the saints." We have seen already after what manner, and in what overflowing measure, the cup of salvation has been filled for us in Christ. According to the opulent abundance of a love which has no limits, we are blessed in Him with all spiritual blessings. But *God* has His heritage as well as we. In verse 11, the subject treated is our own inheritance in Him;[5] its converse is here presented to our prayerful study. That God should inherit a people, is a familiar idea in Scripture. He always had a people; and in grace He called His chosen His inheritance.[6] It is by this expression that the true position of God's elect people, in the midst of a repudiated

[1] Col. iii. 1—3. [2] Heb. xii. 22, *seq.* [3] Heb. viii, 1, 2.
[4] 1 John iii. 3 [5] See however the note at page 45.
[6] Deut. xxxii. 9.

world, is made evident to faith. All souls are His. But He is ashamed of all, save those only which He has fashioned by His power as vessels of elective mercy for Himself. The application, in a dispensational sense, of the same expression to the fleshly nation of Israel, as distinguished from its vital appropriation to the family of faith, creates no difficulty for the Christian mind. But it is quite clear that the Apostle is speaking in this verse of the relation in which God stands to those whom His Spirit now addresses, as "saints and faithful brethren in Christ."[7] To such it is made known that God has *now* an inheritance in His saints, and that this inheritance is one of more abundant glory.

It was a glory to Jehovah that He made Himself a name as the Deliverer of Israel out of Egypt. He divided the sea to make Himself a glorious Name.[8] As Israel's God, He inhabited the praises of His nation until Israel would none of Him, and He turned to be their Enemy. He gave them up to their own lusts, that *in judgment* His name might still be glorified among them, though their own perverseness might have turned the full river of His kindness into the bitter portion of His sore displeasure.[9] He will again have mercy upon Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, as His own peculiar praise among the nations, when the once rejected Stone of Israel shall have become, for the regenerate people,

[7] If the reader prefer to give a wider meaning to the word "saints," in the verse now under consideration, so as to comprise within its intention all the foregone family of faith, I shall not question his conclusion. See *Notes on the Hebrews* xi. *ad fin.*, and xii. 23, and the remarks at the close of the present chapter.

[8] Isa. lxiii. 12—14.

[9] Isa. lxiii. 10; Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12; lx. 3.

the Head-Stone of the corner.[1] But, in the meantime, He has marked out for Himself the lines of a new and fairer heritage. In the many sons whom He is bringing to glory, by the faith of His rejected Son, He takes a richer and deeper interest, than in those for whom He once searched out the pleasant land of Canaan. What He now assumes as His inheritance, is both new in kind and paramount in title and appointment. Neither Jew nor Gentile is found among the people whom He now claims as His own. God glories in the saints as His inheritance according to the pleasure which He takes in *Jesus*. For it is as members of His body that we are sanctified in Him. It is this which distinguishes the Church, on the one hand, from angels; and, on the other, from the generation which shall yet be born.[2] Yet both these last are holy. But as it respects the angels, their holiness is by original creation, though election only kept them in their first estate.[3] Now to be created holy, and upheld in holiness by the unfailing word of Divine power, is a state very different from being personally of one nature with the Sanctifier. But this last is true of all redeemed *men*. In this respect, all the redeemed stand on one common ground before the God of their redemption. Yet it is certain, that the Sovereign good pleasure has established orders and gradations in the one great family of redemption.[4] It is not

[1] Isa. xiv. 1; lxi. 7—9. [2] Ps. xxii. 31. [3] 1 Tim. v. 21.

[4] Race and kin are not identical. The Redeemer of a lost race must be of like nature to those for whom He gives Himself as a ransom. This condition is fulfilled in the mystery of Godliness. But Jesus is, after the flesh, of kin to Israel, but not to other men. Salvation is of the *Jews*. His title, Son of David, will hereafter be glorified according to its proper signification and appropriate

needful to enlarge here further on what has been already stated, at an earlier page, respecting the distinctive calling of the Church, especially as the subject has to be examined again, and under new aspects, in the chapters which follow. It is enough now to remind ourselves, for our comfort, that the Father of glory will *openly* possess this heritage in the soon-coming day, when He will receive, at the hands of Jesus and in Him, the multitude of those who are to be presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.[5]

Verse 19. "And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe," &c. It is the power of God that executes His counsel. Hence, to the excellency of the knowledge of Christ and His fulness, as the glory of the Divine inheritance now revealed to us by the Spirit of promise, is to be added a remembrance of that which is presently to crown our hope. The power of God has always been the confidence and glory of His saints. That He has a mighty arm, is the security of their salvation. His power is their praise, whether in heaven or in earth.[6] That power belongs to Him *alone*, while man is less than vanity, is the standing confession of their lips.[7] They whom the Spirit leads go only in that strength.[8] The power of God is in exact proportion with His promise. "Exceeding

glory. But in the meanwhile, we know not Christ after the flesh, but after the Spirit. We do not participate in the mystery of Jewish kinship, nor are we only interested in Him as the one Life and Righteousness of all who taste redemption. By another mystery, the Church is become the body and fulness of Him, who wears all crowns upon His head.

[5] Jude 24.
[6] Rev. iv. 8; Ps. xxi. 13.
[7] Ps. lxii. 9—11.
[8] Ps. lxxi. 16.

great and precious" are the things which He has promised us;[9] and we are taught to reckon on the exceeding greatness of His power for their sure attainment in due time. What He has promised, He is able also to perform.

The power of God is to *us-ward* who *believe*. Two things are taught us here. First, that this power is in *present* operation, as well as in readiness to be signalized at the coming day of the redemption of our bodies; and, secondly, that it is to be known and realized in proportion to our faith. There is a day at hand when the mighty power of the Saviour will subdue all things unto Himself. But, in the meanwhile, the self-same power now works by the Spirit in the hearts of those who walk by faith, and it is by means of truth that this effective energy proceeds. The word of God is quick and powerful. Doctrine *alone* is weak; when mixed with faith, it is the power of God. Faith holds nothing in the abstract. All its knowledge is connected immediately with the Person of Christ; and is warm and living with the true perception of His love. God's purposes are not so near to us as God Himself, who dwells in His believing people. It is in the remembrance of this that faith finds its needed strength for everything. Power, being acknowledged to belong to God alone, is already known to be on our side. The simple Christian walks in strength and joy, because he walks in God. It is thus that the really spiritual man is distinguished from one whose secret confidence is in the flesh.

But it is not only the inward energy of this power,

[9] 2 Pet. i. 4.

in maturing us from day to day, that is here contemplated, but, in close and inseparable connexion with it, we are led to look onward to the day which is to put it openly to the proof. Christian faith has always a double aspiration: "That I may know Him, *and* the power of His resurrection," was the daily longing of the Apostle's heart. It was because he was by faith conformed already to the death of Christ, through a practical confession of the cross, that the attainment of the resurrection from the dead became the near aim and all-absorbing desire of his soul.[1] Dying daily by the faith of Him who died for him, he tasted a daily joy both in the present power of the risen life, and in the bright anticipation of the surely-coming day of glory. While he lived securely, in the solemn but happy consciousness of the almighty power of the God in whom he trusted, he would have his fellow-saints to seek quiet resting-places for their souls beneath the same secure shadow. They had been taught to expect that God would shortly act in power. The support of their patience, in the meanwhile, was to be sought for in the recollection of what He had *already done*. It is in remembering the power of His hand, that weakness and readiness to faint are changed to new confidence and joy.[2] The power of God to us-ward is the same that has already given proof of saving omnipotence for our sakes. It is "according to the working of His mighty power," which

Verse 20. "He wrought in *Christ*, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places." The resurrec-

[1] Phil. iii. [2] Ps. lxxvii. 10—12.

tion of Christ is here regarded exclusively as the act of God. He was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father.[3] It is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, that is the Object of adoration throughout this prayer. The intrinsic Divinity of Him who was thus raised, is not here the prominent consideration. Christ is viewed only as the *Receiver* of blessing and glory, and is thus placed in immediate moral connexion with those who are by grace His fellows. The power which is to *us-ward* has wrought its decisive work of triumph in raising Jesus from the dead. We receive, therefore, from the present passage, impressions of a materially different kind from those which are produced by other passages which respect more immediately the proper majesty of His Deity. In the latter, the power of resurrection is referred to Him who vindicates His claim to it by *rising* from the dead.[4] In the course of this Epistle, we shall find the Apostle bringing into more distinctness the personal glory of Jesus in connexion with the work of redemption.[5] At present it is the operation of God who raised Him from the dead, that is in question. This is stated first absolutely, by a reference to the fact of His resurrection, and then Christ, so raised, becomes, in His awarded glory, both the triumphant Witness of the victory of Divine power over the

[3] Rom vi. 4.

[4] The number of such passages, as well as their inestimable value, is well known to the diligent lover of the word, who finds the well-springs of salvation, the marrow and fatness of his portion, in the mystery of the Saviour's Person (John ii. 19).

[5] *Infra*, ii. 14, &c.; iii. 8—10; v. 25, &c. For a view of the counterpart of the doctrine of Christ's resurrection, *vide infra*, chap. iv. 8—10.

power of darkness, and also the new Standard of comparison to which all orders and degrees must be referred.

The act of God in raising Jesus was the answer of the "righteous Father" to the dying appeal of His rejected Son. He committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.[6] As the great Umpire in the controversy between His own Anointed and the world which had disowned Him, God has awarded glory to the Just One. He has declared openly, by means of His resurrection from the dead, that all that Jesus said was true, and all that contradicts His power or disallows His claims, is false. The resurrection, therefore, condemns the world by justifying Jesus. The Man whom Jew and Gentile agreed to disallow is now at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. The resurrection of Jesus was then, in a sense (since triumphant redemption constitutes the only foundation of an indestructible creation), *the beginning* of God's work. Accordingly, the Lord, who Himself created all things, is called *the Beginning*, the First-born from the dead; the reason being added: "that in all things He might have the pre-eminence."[7] He who is the faithful and true Witness, is also "the Beginning of the Creation of God."[8] In a similar sense, He is the second Adam; the previous creation having fulfilled its purpose, and being already superseded, for the believer, by the new. We date all things, not from God who hath *created* us, but who hath *reconciled* us to Himself by Jesus Christ.[9] By the assumption

[6] 1 Pet. ii. 23.
[7] Col. i. 18.
[8] Rev. iii. 14.
[9] 2 Cor. v. 17, 18.

into glory of the Man Christ Jesus, God now reveals Him from His heavenly exaltation, as the sole Pattern of human worthiness, as well as the only rightful Lord and Heir of all things.

It is because the new work of redemption was earlier in purpose, and is more abiding in result, than original creation, that the *power* of God is here said to be pre-eminently signalized in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Power produced creation. Power also, of a mightier kind, has brought forth from the ultimate extreme of ruin, the beginning of a new and faultless work. To create originally was glorious, and displayed the power and Godhead of the Creator. To be able so to work, as out of the acknowledged wreck of that creation to produce a more excellent result, was much more glorious. But physical results of an outward and ocular demonstration, such as will hereafter be exhibited, inasmuch as they will flow from the *moral* triumph of redemption, are in Scripture placed in subordination to it. The great and decisive token, therefore, of Divine power, is justly affirmed to be the resurrection of Him who will administer all power, and fulfil all purpose, as the manifested Head and Saviour of His Church.

A curse has thus become the cradle of a never-ending blessing. For Christ was made a curse for us, whom we now see made of God, "most blessed for ever."[1] Down to the grave, the power which prevails is that of death. It is thus that the universal empire of sin has been attested. "Sin reigned in death."[2] Resurrection proves the more excellent power of righteousness by the triumphant re-entrance

[1] Ps. xxi. 6. [2] Rom. v. 21, ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ.

of the once slain "Just One" into life—He liveth unto God. He who is the Righteousness of God, having tasted death by the *grace of God for us*, has now risen in His native strength from that last sleep. Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him. And it is with His liberty that we are freed. Man, who naturally obeys the pressure of that resistless power which bows him into the dust, now finds himself, through faith, upraised in Christ from that last dissolution, to abide in life and light for ever. The power which destroyed him was sin. The power which revives him is righteousness. *Grace* is indeed the mode of its administration, but righteousness is the triumphant necessity which makes life eternal to be the certain portion of the believer in the Son of God. Christ was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God *in Him*. Now God's righteousness is not the spoil of death, but the essence and power of eternal life.

Nothing could more emphatically declare to the whole intelligent creation, both the majesty of the power of God, and the sovereign supremacy of His will, than this elevation of the Man Christ Jesus to the throne of heaven. For the natural place of man is *earth*. The first man was not heavenly. He was of the earth, earthy.[3] He was formed out of the dust, for the possession and enjoyment of sublunary things. He stood upon a level essentially different, as well as comparatively *below*, the heavenly intelligences. Angels are greater in power and might than man.[4] But Jesus is now made higher than

[3] ἐκ γῆς χοϊκός, 1 Cor. xv. 47. [4] 2 Pet. ii. 11.

the heavens.[5] Not only supremacy of place, but of name also, is conferred on Him. For the Name of Jesus is now named in Heaven as well as in the Church below, with the worship due to God alone. The Son is there honoured as the Father. He is acknowledged, under His new form of manhood, to be the same who was always over all, God, blessed for ever.[6] Angels, who saw and ministered to the Son of man in the day of His humiliation, have only partly learnt as yet the meaning of the mystery of godliness. Meanwhile they worship, rendering glad homage to the Name which, though it be none of theirs, belongs to Him who is above all envy or comparison, as the only Lord of all.[7] This excellent supremacy is more fully expressed in what follows.

Verse 21. "Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." The Lord had passed by those principalities and powers, when in love He hastened downwards through the spheres of heavenly glory and dominion, to assume the lowly form and name which He had chosen for our sakes. Jesus of Nazareth was a lowly name on earth. In heaven it is one of the designations of that Light whose brightness is above the brightness of the sun.[8] God has glorified His *Servant*,[9] as well as openly

[5] Heb. vii. 26.
[6] Rom. ix. 5.
[7] Heb. i. 11.
[8] Acts xxii 8.
[9] Acts iii. 13. τὸν παῖδα αὐτοῦ. The expression is exactly equivalent to that which, when quoted in Matt. xii. 18, from the prophet Isaiah, is justly rendered, in our version, "Behold my Servant," &c.

confessed His *Son*. When "received up into heaven," the Son of Man was reinstated in His former place,[1] amid the adoring welcome of the heavenly powers. It is most important to remember that the supremacy of Christ is not here affirmed with *reference* only to the coming manifestation of His power, but is in active operation as a present truth. His Name is exalted above every name in *this* world (or age),[2] as well as in that which is to come, Men, it is true, may now, with a present impunity, dispute His title, and deride His glory; but the Gospel still proclaims Him as the only Lord of all, with a distinctness which leaves the gainsayer without excuse.

It is at this point that the practical force of this verse becomes felt. For the present world is full of names; there are high and reverend titles among men. Flattering distinctions are not the least conspicuous among the "evil things," of which fallen man is the inventor. But true honour comes from God alone, and He has given all to Jesus. It is His own solemn testimony, that, while men consent to receive honour one from another, they cannot believe.[3] The proud variety of titular distinctions,

[1] John vi. 62. [2] τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ.

[3] John v. 44. The reader will not mistake the true drift of this paragraph. Orders and degrees exist, and are recognized of God in the world. The powers that be are ordained of God. The Christian, therefore, is to honour all men in their place. Nay, even in the Church of God this is to be observed. "Most excellent Theophilus," is the greeting of the Holy Ghost to one of rank, who loved the Lord; while an epistle is addressed by Him to an elect Lady in the faith (Luke i. 3; 2 John). The grace of God deranges nothing violently in the outward structure of human society, though the rich Christian who discerns his calling, will rejoice in that he is made low, since it was by the discovery that flesh is grass that he awoke to the knowledge of a better heritage

which are the coveted prize of natural ambition, is just one of the means by which the prince of this world seeks, by dazzling the eyes of men, to blind them to the light of God's true glory, in the face of Jesus Christ. The question now, with respect to the powers and respectabilities of this world, is very simple. Do they bow the knee to Jesus in believing confession that He alone is Lord? In other words, are the kingdoms of this world already become the kingdoms of Jehovah and His Christ? It is idle to address such an inquiry to any one who knows the Lord. Yet they will assuredly become such; but it will be, as we have seen, in a dispensation entirely distinct from the present one. What is now a warning claim, will then be a victorious truth, a proved and experienced reality. The bearing of such a verse as this upon the actual state of nominal Christendom is both obvious and solemn. For the duty of obedience must ever accompany a professed knowledge of the will of God. With the assumption of the Christian name, the rulers and nations of the civilized world have received the obligations which belong to Christ's professing people.

The distinction taken in this verse between the present age and that which is to come, is very marked, and in strict keeping with the doctrine stated in verse 10. It is not a comparison of time with eternity, but of one limited period with another. Hereafter, we shall find him speaking of "*ages* to come," but in a different connexion, and with another

(Jas. i.). It is when honour is given and received by men, on the score of personal merit that it becomes a badge of sinful pride, and is in its principle a rivalry of Him who alone is worthy.

meaning.[4] His subject now is the appointed supremacy of Christ, and this relates in a peculiar sense to the present age, and that which is immediately to succeed it. As to the character of the present age, its moral condition, and the springs which regulate its course, they are depicted by the Spirit with a distinctness and power which belong only to the word of God. In the chapter which follows, we shall find these things set in their appropriate contrast to the things of Christ. The truth enforced upon our minds by the present description of Christ's position at the right hand of the Father, is, that God has bestowed on Him a name and place of such universal pre-eminence, as to give to every assumption of independent power or action, the definite character of rebellious enmity against God. Whether confessed or denied, He is "the Head of all principality and power."

Verse 22. "And hath put all things under His feet," &c. The correlative truth to the elevation of Jesus, is the subjection of all created things to Him as Lord of all. This is accordingly now stated by means of a quotation from Psalm viii., a passage mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament for a similar purpose.[5] The subjection here spoken of, is by the same hand that raised up Jesus from the dead. It has been already shown that this subjection of all things, though complete in promise and secure in title, is during the present age but partially realized in fact. "We see *not* yet *all* things put under Him," says the Apostle, "but we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour." And if we see not yet with our

[4] *Infra*, cha 7. [5] 1 Cor. xv. 27; Heb. ii. 8.

eyes the manifest submission of creation to its Lord, we have, nevertheless, full entrance by faith into the kingdom, which in Him we already have received.[6] For Christian faith, which calls things by the names which God has given them, can bring together by anticipation the ultimate results of promise. He who has awarded glory and dominion to His Beloved, is the *God of hope* to those who wait the day of "His appearing." This spiritual realization of the kingdom is accordingly intimated in the words which follow:

"And *gave* Him to be Head over all things *to the Church*." He has received Him into glory, and now bestows Him, with the glory which adorns Him, on the Church of His election as her Head. It is evident that the passage now before us may be looked at from two different points of view. First, we learn from it what the practical effect should be upon the faith of a Christian individually, of his knowledge that Christ is thus Supreme; but, secondly, and more especially, what *Christ* really is to the *Church*, with the effects which flow from the establishment of the mystic union here described. With respect to the first of these, little further need be said, than to remind the believer that his faith confers upon him the inestimable privilege of seeing and dealing with everything in Christ. Things which are not yet, are present things to faith. In that sense, therefore, those Christians are quite right who comfort one another by the assurance that the Lord already reigns; though doubtless this expression is often the exponent of inaccurate ideas as to the dispensational

[6] Heb. xii. 28.

wisdom and purpose of God. It is in the consciousness that the Head of the Church is likewise the Lord of creation, and the actual Possessor of all power, both in heaven and on earth,[7] that the believer is enabled to walk here below, not only in the sure hope of the glory which is ready to be revealed, but in the confidence of being perpetually in the vigilant and tender keeping of the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. The light and glory of redemption fill all space for the believing eye. We walk as strangers, and are called upon to suffer; but we walk *in Christ*. The Lamb's blood has been shed for us, and the Lamb Himself is now upon the throne. He views from thence in silence the progress of this present world, though the time is coming when, as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, He will arise and seize upon the prey.[8] Meanwhile He is the active Preserver of His saints, and rules according to the fulness of His power, within the house which is *His own*.[9] While the Church longs earnestly for the expected moment, when He shall appear, to take openly His great power and to reign,—knowing well her promised place and share in that dominion,—she is called to submit, for His sake, to every ordinance of man, expecting Him in patient well-doing, while He tarries yet the moment of the Father's will.[1]

The second point now claims our attention. It is declared to be an object of the Divine counsel, that Christ should be not only the Head over all things, but also, in a more especial and appropriative sense, the Head of the *Church*. This counsel has already

[7] Matt. xxviii. 18. [8] Zeph. iii. 8; Joel iii. 16; Jer. xxv. 30, *seq.*
[9] Heb. iii. 6. [1] Heb. x. 13; Acts i. 7.

been accomplished, though its demonstrative effects remain to be discovered in the coming day of glory. But already God, who raised Christ from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand, has given Him to the Church, as her appointed Head. The doctrine stated here and in the following verse, is one which is intended to bear on the heart of a believer not as a prophetic hope only, but with the effective power of a finished truth. That the great principle of the union of the Saviour and the saved, is one of peculiar interest to the Spirit of God, may be inferred from the frequency as well as variety of its mention in the word of God. In the present epistle, we have it presented under several aspects, which we should be careful not to confound with one another. We have already seen what Christ is representatively for His saints—that we are accepted in Him, blessed in Him, and endowed in Him with the fulness of that inheritance, which the Father of lights has purposed to bestow upon His Son. Hereafter we shall see the same truths exhibited, first, under the figure of the Foundation and its superstructure, and secondly, under that of the Husband and His wife. But in this passage (the doctrine of which is more fully explained in chap. iii.), we have presented to us, the mystic *unity* of Christ and His Church, each being first viewed separately, that the perfection of the whole might more strikingly appear.

The announcement that God has given Christ as a Head to the Church, makes it necessary that the Church should be so described as to render clearly intelligible the sense in which this Headship is to be taken. This is, accordingly, done in verse 23,

where it is said of the Church that it is "His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." Let us first remark, that our attention is now, for the first time, called to the Church as a specific object of Divine counsel. What Christ is to the Church has been already shown. But the Church, also, stands in a definite relation to Christ. When, therefore, it is said to be "His body," the expression implies, in the strongest manner possible, the inseparable nature of that mystic union which subsists between the First-born and the many brethren. For to obtain the idea of completeness, the Head and the body must be united in our minds. Either may be contemplated separately, and reasoned on, but as *parts* only of a truth, which in its completeness is but *one*. It must be admitted, that the language of this passage, wonderful as it surely is, presents no difficulty in point of distinctness. It is both definite and precise. In its meaning it amounts to this: that although other results may and do flow from the one work of redemption, there is a body called the Church, which stands in such a relation to Christ as to be mystically identified with Him, who is its Head. Accordingly, we find the same Apostle applying elsewhere the Name of "Christ" to the Church in its essential unity![2] The constituent elements of this unity, and the mode in which the mystic body is formed to the stature of perfection, will be shown further on. The doctrine is here broadly and briefly stated at the close of this striking intercessional summary of those great articles of Christian faith, a right apprehension of which on

[2] 1 Cor. xii. 12.

our parts renders necessary the special operation of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God.

The Church is, 1, the *body*, and, 2, the *fulness*, of Christ. Neither of these mystical expressions is comprehensible by our understandings; while both are received, with a joyful assurance of their reality and preciousness, by our faith. The Christian has to do with truth, not visibly, but through the word of God. The mystic oneness of Christ and His living members is a truth, which, by the faith of its present accomplishment in Him, is a principal source of the believer's joy. To *hold the Head* is the distinctive mark of a genuine and intelligent faith.[3] But the counterpart of our confession, that in Him all fulness dwells, is that we are ourselves complete in Him.[4] Christ is *our* fulness as the Lord of life and grace. He is All and in all. He is for His saints both Life and all that appertains to life. The Church is, on the other hand, *His* fulness, as it is by means of the glory which His grace has put on her, that what *He is* will be hereafter manifested.

The Church in its fulness is as impalpable to our natural sense as Christ its glorified Head. But the nature and destinies of that one body are revealed to us by the same Divine Witness, who declares to us the pre-eminence of the First-born. The same faith that casts the weight of our sins on Jesus, and

[3] Col. ii. 18, *seq.*

[4] Col. ii. 10. Και ἐστε ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι. This is more than an assurance of the believer's individual acceptance in the Beloved. It describes, in addition, the filling to its predestined measure, of that which is mystically His body. Compare Col. i. 24.

emboldens us to say, "of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace," can also bear, without staggering, the addition of that exceeding weight of glory, which is made to rest upon the Church by virtue of its mystical identity with Christ. It is obvious that a close connexion subsists between the doctrine of this verse and that already stated at verse 10. When the time is come for finishing the mystery of God,[5] and for the revelation of the kingdom which is over all, the fulness and perfection of the Lord of glory will be demonstrated irresistibly by the order and accompaniments of His appearing. The eyes that see *Him* will also see His *glory*. But the radiance of that glory will be manifested in the Church. He will come to be glorified *in His saints*, and to be admired in all them that believe.[6] This is one sense, though not the only one, in which the Church may be said to be the fulness of an all-filling Christ. It will then be fully known, both who He is and what He is, when the truth of the Gospel, which is now but a fable to the natural man, will be glorified in power in that day.

Let it be remembered that our subject is still the wisdom and power of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has purposed that Christ should be supremely glorified. It is as a part of this purpose, that His actual work of calling the elect Church, or making it ready for the day of glory, is being carried on. The world has not yet seen the *risen* Christ. Faith only can behold that sight. Testimony has been borne to Him from heaven by the Holy Ghost sent down from thence. The first effect of that

[5] Rev. x. 7. [6] 2 Thess. i. 10.

testimony has been to quicken those whom God has not appointed unto wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.[7] Its second consequence has been to form a living testimony to the Lord, through the common confession of believers. The true body of Christ consists of these. But from almost the commencement of this work of God, that body has been lost to every eye but that of faith. The world saw it for a moment when it stood as a monument both of the grace and power of Him who is its Head. But that lamp has long since waned, through the original neglect of those who should have tended it with jealous care. Instead of Christ reflected from the living and heavenly Church in its undivided spiritual unity and power, the world sees *Christianity*. It has an eye for that, though blind to Christ. For Christianity, in its popular sense, is no true child of God. It is a thing of words, and ordinances, and opinions. Under its spreading shadow, God's true saints indeed are found, but its existence and flourishing estate have no necessary connexion with living faith in Christ. Its name in Scripture is not Jerusalem, but Babylon—its description, not that of a chaste virgin, but a harlot. It is a thing of earth;[8] but our mother is *above*, where our hope and our treasure are.

Down to the present moment, though God has saved His people and has many a time revived His work in faithfulness and mercy, during the progress of the evil day, the Name of Jesus has quite failed to establish its supremacy in the earth. Social blessings and advantages have flowed in rich abundance from

[7] 1 Thess. v. 9. [8] Matt. xiii. 38; Jude 4.

the diffusion of His doctrine. For God's blessed truth, even when most disregarded in its vital meaning, bears Him witness still. The Lord will feed the multitude with loaves and fishes, even though they may despise the better Bread of life. But as, in the days of His patience, He refused to be the people's King, because He had come into the world to do the will of *God*,[9] so now the false flattery of a world which lauds the blessings of Christianity as a means of civilization, while it stops its ears against the only doctrine which reveals God truly—the doctrine of the Cross—instead of deferring the day of vengeance, does but hasten it. A form of godliness, while its power is denied, is the last phase[1] under which the Spirit presents apostate Christianity when ripe for the advent of the Antichrist. It was so in the Saviour's day of sorrow. Never was Jerusalem so outwardly religious as when they said, "Not this man, but Barabbas." Synagogues and teachers overspread the land. But the untiring energy[2] which moved all that machinery of outward godliness, was the unbroken spirit of a mind which God had already blinded in His righteous judgment.

His delusions are coming also on the present age. They have indeed been partially sent already. Symptoms of spiritual blindness present themselves on every side. Great swelling words of vanity have already been accepted to a large extent in preference to the sober testimonies of the Holy Ghost. But the sheep of Christ, dazzled as they often are for a moment by the sparks which men are kindling for themselves, shall never lose sight utterly of Him who is

[9] John vi. [1] 2 Tim. iii. 3—5. [2] Matt. xxiii. 15.

the bright and Morning Star. The work of God is perfect, and will stand. And it is as a faultless vessel of Divine perfection, that the Church will show forth in the coming day the full glory of the King of kings. The world will *then* know that the brethren of Jesus share equally with Him the Father's love.[3] Angels know it now, and marvel, whilst delighting, at this mystery of gracious love.[4] The careless world rolls on, seeking a portion more to its liking in the things which perish in the using; dreaming of peace and safety, while judgment lingers not, and sudden destruction is at hand. By such the rich pearls of the treasury of God are contemptuously cast aside, or ignorantly trampled in the mire.[5]

The Church is then to reign with Christ. Her position and appointed destinies are indissolubly bound up with His own. This subject will receive some further treatment when presented again in chap. v., under the new figure of the marriage state. It may be as well to notice, before closing this chapter, an interesting and not altogether unimportant question[6] which has been raised, and to which some slight allusion has already been made at an earlier page; the question, namely, as to whether, in strictness of scriptural language, the saints who lived and died before the foundation of the Church was laid by the death and resurrection of the Saviour, can properly be comprehended in the above description. The reader to whom this question may be entirely new,

[3] John xvii. 23. Chap. iii. 10. [5] Jude 10, 15, 16.

[6] No question capable of godly discussion, in the light of Scripture, can be such. We cannot possibly know too much of what God has taught us in His word. The warning caution of His Spirit is to "prove all things."

need feel no alarm at its being raised. For it is one which affects in no degree the doctrine of the common justification or glorifying of believers. What is really involved is the sovereignty of the Divine good pleasure as exemplified in the modes in which the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may be pleased to distribute or display the riches both of His wisdom and His grace. We have already seen that dispensational diversities of an important kind are made known to us in the mystery of the Divine will. There is, then, room for inquiry at least, how far the distinctive limits of the Church in the existing dispensation are to be regarded as permanently exclusive. It is clearly a subject of *secondary*, though real interest; it is therefore one as to which, so long as we forbear to dogmatize, we may safely and profitably search the word of God. We shall have fuller teaching from the Apostle on the subject of the Church, in the chapters which follow, the effect of which may be, under God's blessing, to set this question in a clearer light. It is enough for the present to have had it brought thus plainly before our minds. Let us, however, while suspending our judgment upon doubtful disputations, rejoice in the assured possession of a doctrine which sets the Church of God's election (define its limits as we may), in so strict a union with its living Head, as that He who filleth all things in the fulness of His Godhead,[7] yet makes, in another sense, His own com-

[7] That the Eternal God is everywhere present, and can neither be contained in space nor known by natural sense, is a fundamental principle of truth. But He is to be *fully known* in Christ. The day of glory will declare this; and the diffusive brightness of that glory will not only in the millennial age be discovered mediately

pleteness to consist in union with His chosen. We are complete in Him; His fulness is completed in His Church. Such is the work of God, whose grace now abounds towards us in all wisdom and prudence, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory.

through the Church, which is His body, but (as I infer from Rev. xxi. 3), the same Church will be *eternally* a tabernacle of expression by means of which the otherwise "Invisible"* will have His dwelling among men, and be their God.

* 1 Tim. i. 17, and vi. 16.

CHAPTER II.

THE prayer of the Apostle, in the foregoing chapter, was closed by a celebration of the mighty triumph of Divine power, as it is now displayed to the believer through the glorified supremacy of Christ. As Head over all things to the Church, He is recognized and worshipped by our faith, according to the fulness of that glory with which He is already crowned in heaven, and which is presently to be revealed. In the present chapter the same subject (the power of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory) is continued. But as it is in immediate relation to the Church that the active power of God has now to be considered, it is no longer regarded absolutely, but in subordination to the *grace* which exerts it for our sakes. The general assertion already made, of the distinctive position of the Church as the mystic body of Christ, leads naturally to a description, in more minuteness of detail, of the positive operation of God in the creation of the constituent members of that body. The prime origin of the Church has been referred, in the preceding chapter, to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will. We are now to view the Builder at His work; to note the quarry out of which the grace of the only wise God has chosen its materials, and to have expounded to us more abundantly the manner

and intent of that Almighty Love which is preparing for itself an everlasting habitation, through the patient operation of its own creative energy. It is a chapter overflowing with both grace and truth.

Verse 1. "And you *hath He quickened*,[8] who were dead in trespasses and sins." These words stand in a close and evident connexion with the end of the previous chapter. The Ephesian saints were a part of that Church whose relation to its glorified Head had been there described. And as time and place have no modifying effect upon God's truth, which is eternal, it is plain that what we here read is of universal application to the Church of God.[9] We have, then, an account of the origin of the Church (and, by consequence, of each believer) when considered with reference to the efficient power of Divine mercy, just as in the first chapter its blessings are referred to the sovereignty of Divine good pleasure. Death in sins being declared to be man's natural condition since the fall, the existence and standing of the Christian as an acceptable man in Christ, is affirmed to be the result of a decisive act of God, by means of which

[8] There is an incompleteness in the expression here supplied by our translators, which, indeed, was hardly to be avoided. For the absence of the verb in the original conveys to our minds, much more forcibly than any single expression could have done, the fulness of the Spirit's meaning. The verse is a condensed assertion of the completeness of the Saints in Christ. Resurrection, therefore, with the glory and blessing which belong to it, is clearly included in the Apostle's thought (compare chap. i. 3). When, after describing in the intervening verses the saints in their unconverted state, he returns to the original subject, and the doctrine of salvation is opened more at large, the several operations of God are stated in their order (verses 4, *seq.*).

[9] This is evident both from the nature of the doctrines stated, and also from the change to the first person in verse 3. "We all," &c. It is not until verse 11, that the case of the Gentile believer begins to be examined in comparison with that of his Jewish brother in the faith.

he has become fitted for associations and destinies altogether new in their character, and with which he naturally could have no concern. The power of God, which raised Christ from the dead, and set Him far above comparison in heaven, has also created for the believer a new standing and relationship, *entirely distinct* from all that ever belonged to him as a man in the flesh.

The work of God is the confidence of faith. It is, therefore, of the utmost practical importance, that the fundamental doctrine, here laid down by the Apostle, should be distinctly apprehended. For it is certain that just views of Christ and of His blessed work are incompatible with a faulty perception of what the Spirit teaches as to the natural man. Now with respect to this, the testimony of Scripture has been the same from the beginning; declaring the heart of man to be completely evil, his practical sinfulness is its constant theme, relieved, indeed, by a more than compensating testimony to the goodness of God. Thus much is evident upon the surface of the Scriptures even to the natural understanding, and conscience does not fail to ratify to every mind that thinks at all, a conviction of personal imperfection. But sinfulness, which most men are ready to admit in general terms, is a very different thing from *death in sins*. The one expression acknowledges a *habit*, and by its very confession half implies, at least, the possibility of its correction on our parts. The other describes a *state* or condition, any change of which (except by the immediate power of God) is seen to be impossible from the terms of its description. If dead men live, it is by the power of Him

who quickeneth the dead. In the language which God uses, sin and death are but different names for the same truth. For the things are themselves inseparable. What sin begins death ends. But with the seed of Adam sin begins with life; rather, it produces it. The woman's conception is both in sin and because of it.[1] We were shapen in iniquity, though God be our Creator still.

Life in its activity produces conduct, and conduct must be governed by some principle by which its quality may be determined; moreover, what is good or bad, must be ascertained by reference to some decisive standard. In the language of the present verse, action and conduct are comprehended in the Spirit's definition of man's natural estate. The master-spring which governs these, is disclosed a little further on; as the resulting effect, he is found to be dead in *trespasses* and *sins*. These are the names by which God calls whatever is not wrought in *Him*.[2] He is Judge Himself, and by Him actions are weighed. But, on looking at the hearts of men, His brief but conclusive decision is, that "there is none righteous, there is none that doeth good." The *source* of evil conduct is exposed in the same passage, by a declaration of the natural ignorance and alienation of our hearts—"there is none that under-

[1] Ps. li. 5; Jer. iii. 16.

[2] John iii. 21. παραπτώματα καὶ ἁμαρτίαι. The first of these terms appears to relate to the *actions* of an offender; the second, rather to his *will*. Thus in 1 John iii. 4, we have the general and convertible proposition, ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία—"sin is lawlessness," or "lawlessness is sin;" while in Rom. v. 15, where the *fact* of Adam's sin and its consequences is the subject treated, παράπτωμα is the word employed. See also the closing verse of that chapter where the same word has a meaning equivalent to παράβασις, a transgression. But inasmuch as actions take their

standeth, there is none that seeketh after God."[3] Ignorance and enmity are thus found to form the basis of natural human *character*. That "trespasses" and "sins" should be a just summary of human *conduct*, when estimated in the sanctuary of God, is therefore but an obvious result.

The will of God is the true standard of His creature's way. Infractions of that will are trespasses and sins. *Perfect* obedience to it is righteousness, *partial* obedience, or neglect, is disobedience and sin. A just measure is God's delight; He can accept no other. Now the will of God may be suggested to us by natural conscience, or may be especially revealed. In both these ways it has been unceasingly declared to man, and in every case has been violated by the natural will. It was a *Stranger's* voice that said, on coming into the world, "I come to do Thy will, O God."[4] He said it, and He kept His word.

Ignorance can excuse no sin. Man is bound to inquire and to know his Maker's mind. But spiritual ignorance is viewed in Scripture as God's judicial stigma upon an alien will.[5] When men plainly showed *dislike* of God, He suffered them to run, at the bidding of a reprobate mind, far out of the sphere of real light and knowledge. Darkness became man's portion, when he willingly refused the Light.

quality from the motives which produce them, it is not surprising that the above expressions should be sometimes used interchangeably by the Spirit of truth. Accordingly, in chap. i. 7, of this epistle, we find the former, and in Col. i. 14, the latter of the above terms, in the same connexion and with a perfect identity of signification. Their *combination* in the passage now under consideration, is forcibly expressive of the completeness of the moral ruin of the natural man.

[3] Ps. xiv; Rom. iii. 11. [4] Heb. x. [5] Rom. i. 21, 28.

If, therefore, the state of fallen humanity be examined, it is found to be one of universal reprobation. Physical mortality is but the seal and consequence of that deeper and all-pervading spiritual death, which sin has brought into the soul. The fulness of natural intelligence and feeling is still but an utter destitution of life to God. But this truth, although among the plainest of the oracles of God,[6] is invariably rejected by the world. It is known, indeed, by all, that natural existence is circumscribed by natural death, a cloud which lowers, more or less threateningly, each day of our life, and may spend its fatal bolt at any moment. But men do not care to ask themselves the cause of this. Scripture alone expounds the mystery. God only can account for death, or show the way of life, and He does both in His blessed word of grace. He lets us know that sinful existence is *no life at all* to Him, and that the bodily decease, which naturally closes it, leads the despisers of His goodness to a more bitter and eternal death.[7] But he shows, meanwhile, to those who will receive His word, another and a better way.

To be just with God is to be obedient to His will. But the nature of such obedience must depend upon the special revelation of that will. Law and grace are its two great expressions. Under the former, to *do righteousness* by fulfilment of the law, was to be obedient. Man wrought for life as the reward of his own work. To fail in this was to incur a hopeless curse. But this obedience was never rendered, save by One who had no need of it for Himself. The law, therefore, which was ordained

[6] Isa. xl. 6, 7; John vi. 63. [7] Heb. ix. 27.

to life, brought death. Condemnation, and not justification, was its effect upon its subjects; for by the law is the knowledge of *sin*. But that ministry of death is passed, and now God speaks to us in the Gospel of His grace. His will is still the standard, but its requirements are wholly changed. To *confess sin* as our natural condition is now the beginning of an acceptable obedience; coupled as such confession always is, when genuine, with faith in Him who is set forth as the Propitiation for our sins. By the obedience of faith, we become possessors of the Righteousness of God. Prior, therefore, to such confession and justifying faith in Jesus, human life, when passed within the sound of the Gospel, is, whether grossly licentious or religiously precise, no better than an aggregate of sins. Without faith it is impossible to please God, and the truth which now declares to us His will is the saving Gospel of His Son.

The sweeping condemnation which the word of God pronounces upon all human conduct that is not "of faith," is the necessary result of its viewing man, not as we naturally do, from his own level, and in comparison with himself, but from the side of *God*, and as the creature of His power. The effect of natural conscience, as a regulator of human conduct, is not overlooked in such an estimate. Practical consequences of an important kind arise among men from a recognition or neglect of this general monitor of God. But natural conscience never rises in its warnings to the measure of Divine requirement; for, as we have seen, *ignorance* is a family characteristic of a fallen race. Moreover, God's great question is with the natural bent of the human mind and will, which

His word declares to be *constitutionally* at variance with Himself.[8] The existing proof of this is the natural insubjection of the heart of man to the doctrine of the Cross. It is to them that perish foolishness. If to any other it be, instead of foolishness, both the wisdom and power of God, it is to them only whom *He has called* effectually by His grace.[9]

Natural human life being intrinsically reprobate, particular instances of sin augment, indeed, but do not originally procure, the sinner's condemnation. Man should be *sinless*. Failing in this, he is judged as a sinner. Worse, therefore, than vain is the attempt, on man's part, to draw meritorious distinctions in his estimation of a nature which its outraged Creator and Judge has pronounced to be only evil.[1] But it is to be remembered, that although death in sins is the natural condition of the world, and private iniquities do all but add weight to a verdict already damnatory, yet the one great issue on which the hearers of Gospel testimony must ultimately stand or fall, is their obedience or disobedience to the faith of Christ. "This is the condemnation, that Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the Light."[2] The world, because it has rejected Jesus, lies already under that just condemnation. To escape from its effects, there is but one door of refuge—"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God *abideth* on him."[3]

[8] Rom. viii. 7. [9] 1 Cor. i. 18, 24. [1] Gen. vi. 5; viii. 21.
[2] John iii. 18, 19. [3] John iii. 36.

It is a low level to which the testimony of the Holy Ghost reduces man. But it is the needful preliminary to his attainment of true moral elevation as a new creature in Christ. Ignorance of God, and hatred of Him who is Goodness itself, are not the marks of a *noble* nature. And these, as we have seen, are found lying at the bottom of natural human character. But if the Spirit of truth convinces the world of sin and judgment, as its existing state in the eye of God, He does so that the glory of that great salvation may appear the more brightly and attractively, which He now declares as the witness of the ascended Son of man. He convinces of righteousness, by testifying to Jesus, whom the world has numbered with transgressors. If therefore, as it is, *all* wilfulness is sin, and submission to the truth the only way of righteousness, most surely the form of sin which, next to positive atheism, offends most proudly against the truth and holiness of God, is the attempt to establish our own righteousness. For it is the setting up of a lie against the only Truth. We make God a liar if we believe Him not. Yet this aggravation of iniquity is naturally man's religious trust. For not only does the pride of nature refuse to accept God's testimony against itself, but the sincerest intentions of an unrenewed mind are formed upon an entirely false estimate of God, not less than of itself. Thus ignorance of God conspires with natural enmity to keep men at a distance from the way of peace. What God is, and what is due to Him, are considerations which lie beyond the compass of an unawakened conscience; while the glory of His infinite perfections, as the God and

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, are discoverable only through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Nature, while conscious of much that is faulty in the building as it stands, never doubts the soundness of her own foundation. Men will own that they are guilty, but not that they are *lost;* that they are sinners, but not that they are *dead* in sins. In their eyes, such a phrase is but a mischievous extravagance of speech; a style of language tending to weaken virtue, rather than encourage it. For it is a crowning token of the madness which is in man's heart, that virtue should still occupy the highest pedestal in the chambers of his imagery; while the God who made him has declared him to be dead in trespasses and sins. He lives in sin, as a worshipper of virtue, until his eyes are opened to perceive that *imperfection* makes the case of a responsible being desperate in the presence of One, who judges the secrets of all hearts according to the inflexible severity of Divine holiness. But for the believer virtue takes another place. It is found in the happy train of those effects which follow living faith in Jesus.[4] It is this radical inadequacy of all merely natural conceptions of God, coupled as it is, in the sight of God, with the intrinsic weakness and unprofitableness of a sin-ruined nature, that renders necessary that second birth, without which none can see or enter into the kingdom of God.[5] The first effect, therefore, of regeneration, and a decisive proof that it has taken place, is the rectification of our previous notions both of God and of ourselves. When we can accept unfeignedly those testimonies of God, which (like the

[4] 2 Peter i. 5; Phil. iv. 8. [5] John iii. 3, 5.

present verse) condemn without reserve the natural condition of man, we can willingly submit ourselves to the righteousness of God in Christ.[6]

Verse 2. "Wherein in time passed ye *walked*," &c. They walked in that in which they were already dead. Sin leading irresistibly to death, destruction and misery are in the sinner's ways. The former verse affirmed the universality of the sinful *state* of man. In the present, we have a picture of the activities of sinful life. "The course of this world" stands opposed in Scripture to "the way of life;" and expresses, in a manner plainly intelligible to faith, the ordinary flow of natural human life, in contradistinction to the way of those who, as partakers of the risen Christ, have ceased to be *of* the world, though, as strangers and pilgrims, *in* it still. Reference has been made, in the former chapter, to the present world or age,[7] in connexion with the supremacy which the Spirit claims for Christ, as the appointed Heir of all things.[8] We are now instructed as to the true character of the present world, by a disclosure of the governing energies which regulate its course. That there is corruption in the world through lust, is confessed by all who know the difference between holiness and sin; but the present verse reminds us of a power superior to the human will, and which acts on it tyranically, though with subtlety, by means of sensible objects or by spiritual hallucinations, in such a manner as to keep it in its natural condition of ignorance and

[6] If the remarks on this opening verse seem to any to have been disproportionately extended, the importance of the subject must serve as my apology.

[7] Κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου. [8] Chap. i. 21.

sin. The doctrine of this verse deserves much more attention than it usually receives in the current evangelical teaching of the day.

The first thing to be noticed is the broad statement of the Apostle, that the course of the present world is under the immediate control of a power which is not of God. We have already been reminded, that *all* power *belongs* to God; and that, in its fulness, it has been assigned to the glorified Man, Christ Jesus. But the certainty of that blessed truth does not alter the fact, that there is, during the absence of the Lord in heaven, another power, who is variously recognized in Scripture as "the prince[9] of this world," "the *god*[1] of this world," and, in the passage now before us, as "the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience."[2] We shall find the same power again mentioned, at the close of the Epistle,[3] under a somewhat different description, as the enemy with whom the Christian has to urge a ceaseless warfare. Here we have to view him as the source and energetic wielder of an all-pervading influence in the world, by means of which the progress of human affairs is governed, though (thanks be to God) in necessary subjection to Him, who is the alone true Governor of the nations. In assigning to him the distinctive title of "prince of the power of the air," it seems evidently intended, that our

[9] John xiv. 30. [1] 2 Cor. iv. 4.

[2] κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξ. τ. ἀ., τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ νῦν ἐνεργ. κ. λ. The language of this verse is peculiar, and seems to convey the doctrine of Satan's supremacy over the world of darkness, the powers of evil, inferior spirits, &c., which are here expressed collectively, as "a power" and "a spirit." In chap vi. 12, we have "powers" and "spirits." *Infra in loc.* [3] Chap. vi. 10, *seq.*

ideas of his presence and activity should be co-extensive with those which we form as to the limits of natural human existence. Where man breathes the spirit of evil works, exerting, without cessation, his baleful influence on the natural heart of man.

The doctrine of Satanic existence and power is gradually unfolded in the word of God, and with a certain analogy, in point of progressive development, to that of Christ. The serpent appears from the beginning as man's tempter, and the enemy of God; while, in the same chapter,[3] Christ is, as the Deliverer and Avenger, revealed in promise. That *old* serpent is the devil and Satan.[4] But, subsequently to the record of his first great work of destruction, he is but rarely mentioned in connexion with the general course of the world, though the effect of his influence, as the fountain of iniquity and the father of lies, is everywhere manifest, in the overspreading of wickedness and idolatry which the word of God describes. As the *god* of this world he is recognized, if not yet distinctly as its prince. The way of the nations was to do sacrifice unto *devils*.[5] It is in the book of Job that we have the clearest view afforded us of Satan's general influence and power over sublunary things. In most of the remaining instances in which he is distinctly mentioned in the Old Testament, he appears, in an exclusive relation to the people of God, as their watchful tempter and adversary. But the fulness of truth, on this point as on every other, is to be found only in the New Testament. There, as we read: "The darkness is passed,

[3] Gen. iii. [4] Rev. xii. 9. [5] Ps. cvi. 36, 37.

and the true light now shineth."[6] It is a light in which the great principles both of good and evil are revealed to the believer. In that sense, facts in the Old Testament become doctrines in the New.[7] Thus Cain, in the former, is the murderer of his brother; but it is in the latter that the deed is referred to its ultimate source: "he was of that Wicked One."[8] With respect to the specific titles of prince and god of the present world, they stand in an obvious relation to Him, to whom both titles *rightfully* belong. The first of these was applied to Satan by the Lord Jesus, when His own rejection, on the world's part, was on the eve of its consummation.[9] The second title was assigned to him by the Holy Ghost, when, as the Witness of the glory of Jesus, He thus placed the seal of an emphatic reprobation, upon a world which had rejected its true God.[1] The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ thus disowns the world, by refusing to be called its God. Since the world would none of Him when He came to it in the Person of His Son, He makes it over—judicially—to another god. Man is thus the willing slave of his destroyer, until the power of elective mercy brings him out of darkness into light.[2]

The application of this solemn doctrine to the existing course of things is easily seen. "The children of disobedience" are opposed, in the present description, to those who, through the obedience of faith, have been manifested as the children of God. As the Holy Ghost dwells and works in the latter, so the spirit of evil works in and governs the former.

[6] 1 John ii. 8. [7] Comp. 1 Cor. x. 11. [8] 1 John. iii. 12.
[9] John xii. 31. [1] 2 Cor. iv. 4. [2] Acts xxvi. 18.

Man is not recognized, in the light of the Gospel, as an independent agent. Whatever is done here below, is wrought at the instigation either of the Spirit of God, or some spirit which is not of God. *Many* such are in the world;[3] but there is one to whom an evil pre-eminence is given. It is he, therefore, who is here said to work all evil through his ministers, who are numerous and active. The mysteries of darkness are as little comprehensible by our present capacities, as the opposite mysteries of light and glory. While ourselves in the body, we are not competent to measure spiritual things. But we *know* them when revealed to us as truths. And well it is that Christians should remember, that the testimony of the Holy Ghost as to the existence and power of *Satan*, as the ruler of this present world, is not less distinct and positive than that which He renders to the Anointed Captain of Salvation, who has destroyed, for the believer, both the devil and his works.[4]

Verse 3. "Among whom we *all* had our conversation," &c. If Satan be the prince of this world, the lusts of men are the bars by which the strong man keeps his goods in peace. By acting on the already alien hearts of men, he impels them to disobey the will of God. The means employed are as various as the changes of the human fancy or desire. They are here classed, generally, under the two-fold description of the lusts of the flesh and the desires of the mind.[5] Of these desires, the most destructive,

[3] 1 John iv. [4] Heb. ii. 14; 1 John iii. 8.

[5] More strictly, "the lusts of the flesh," comprise, generically, what is presently after distributed under the separate heads of desires (or wills, θελήματα), of the flesh and of the mind.

because the least suspected, as to its genuine quality, is religious emulation, or, what is elsewhere called, the desire of making a fair show in the flesh.[6] The Apostle could bear competent testimony on this point. He had run, as few else ran before or since, in the race of religious enthusiasm. In point of natural fervour and conscientious devotedness, he had, as a Pharisee of the strictest sect, but few to emulate his zeal. But he knew not what master he was serving when he thought that he ought to do many things contrary to Jesus of Nazareth.[7] And now, in the happy enjoyment of a better righteousness than that which he had vainly gone about to establish, and in pursuit of which he had found only self conviction as the "chief of sinners," he confesses that *his* natural course had nothing to exempt it from the common judgment of the world. The precious blood of Christ was no less needed to redeem him and his Jewish brethren, from the vain conversation received by tradition from their fathers,[8] than to purge the conscience of a sinner of the Gentiles.

As to the general drift of the verse, little further need be said. Men may be, and are by themselves distinguished, as being characteristically sensuous or intellectual. But in the eye of the Spirit, the higher and lower qualities of nature are brought to a common moral level. Intellectual pride (which is also spiritual ignorance), is no less offensive to God than licentious wickedness. So long as the bias of human inclination leads men, as it does, away from God, the particular direction followed

[6] Gal. vi. 12. [7] Acts xxvi. 9. [8] 1 Peter i. 18, 19.

is, in one sense, immaterial. Taste, or the power of association or example, leads men in a vast variety of ways. But the common stamp borne by all natural action, is that of a presumed independency of will. Men please *themselves*, and by so doing displease God, who calls for every man's obedience, both of heart and hand. Accordingly, the first articulate confession of the new-born people of God is a recognition of this truth: "All we like sheep have *gone astray*, we have turned every one to his *own way*."[9] To determine, therefore, what is comprehended under the opprobrious term, "children of disobedience," we have only to ask ourselves, what is obedience? And seeing, that to work the work of God is to believe in Him whom He hath sent,[1] it is plain that no other obedience is real but that of saving faith in Jesus. The moral excellencies, therefore, and fair-showing comeliness, which nature many times puts on, are not less certainly comprised in the picture here presented of the course of this world, than the outward depravity, which is so abundantly visible upon the general surface of society. And because a course of conduct, which results from the acting of Satanic influence upon a naturally alien will, must be a standing provocation of the Divine judgment, the conclusion at which the Apostle arrives, that all men are by nature "children of wrath," is as obvious and irresistible as it is terrible in its bearing on a Christless world.[2]

[9] Isa. liii. 6. [1] John vi. 29.

[2] When all are guilty, to make distinctions is, in one sense, superfluous. Not so, however, in another. To guard us against the power of Satan as a *deceiver*, is the great aim of the Spirit of

Verses 4, 5. "But God, who is rich in mercy," &c. Man, and his natural condition, having been described, we are called now to consider Him who made him, and whose testimony declares him to be dead in trespasses and sins. The fact of man's moral ruin becomes the occasion for displaying the perfection of the Divine character. Helpless sin is the opportunity of rich and saving mercy. But it is necessary to remark in the first place, that Divine mercy is here spoken of, not with reference to its aspect in the Gospel message, but as an *operative* thing. It is with the kingdom of God, which is in *power* and not in word, that we have now to do, in contrast to the world, which lieth in the wicked one. The power of God to show mercy and to bless in spite of all resistance, is the subject of His people's praise for ever. Accordingly, the great proof here alleged that He is rich in mercy, is that He loved His people in their natural condition, when dead in trespasses and in sins. And because He loved them, He did not leave them as they were, but quickened them, and gave them everlasting life. It is *elective* mercy that is here described. As it was the sovereign good pleasure of God, that chose the Church

Truth. That maxim of Divine wisdom, so unpalatable to our natural pride, "that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God" (Luke xvi. 18), receives in Scripture every variety of illustration. And it may be useful to recal the *fact*, that it is one class of sinners in particular that the Lord so designates as to place them in emphatic assimilation to the maker of all sin. "Ye *serpents*, ye generation of *vipers*," is His denunciation, not of publicans and harlots, but of pharisees and scribes (Matt. xxiii. 33). "Ye are of your father the devil," was said to those who falsely claimed to be "of God," while refusing to know Him whom God had sent (John viii. 44). And it is on the same principle that "children of the devil" is become a generic description of all who now reject the righteousness of God (1 John iii. 10).

in Christ before the foundation of the world, so it is the active power of His mercy that calls us forth from death to life by the Gospel of His grace.

In the former chapter, when the resurrection of Christ was the principal subject, the greatness of the *power* of God was the prominent consideration. Now, as it is our participation in the blessings of the First-born that is in question, the Apostle dwells upon the greatness of His *love*. We have been described already as accepted *in the Beloved*. We are now made to know with how great a love we were *ourselves* beloved, even in the midst of our natural wretchedness. These truths are not to be sundered from each other, seeing that the love of God to usward is evermore *in Christ;* but they may be, and are in Scripture, presented to our contemplation separately, as well as in their blessed combination. The greatness of this love of God is evinced by the magnitude of the obstacles it has surmounted, as well as by the value of the grace bestowed. A thoroughly rebellious will on our parts could not discourage a love, the energy of which was creative of its own results. Finding us in sin, it created us anew in holiness, removing at its touch all blame from its objects, by the effectual power of atonement. Thus the greatness of Divine love abounded in the form of rich and overflowing *mercy;* a mercy rich enough to pay the price of our redemption in the life of God's own Son. For "God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."[3] He loves us, and then teaches us His love.

He hath quickened us *together with* Christ. If

[3] Rom. v. 8.

love wrought actively on those who were already dead, its first effect must be to give them life. It will be remembered that the Apostle's present subject is the love of God to the Church as the body of Christ. It is not, therefore, the quickening of the individual by the power of the Holy Ghost that is here contemplated, but the coming to life, in Christ, of the entire body. All His members received life in Him when He revived. The love of Jesus had reduced Him, in the fulness of His sacrificial grace, to the fellowship of our natural estate. He was numbered with the transgressors when He gave Himself for our sins. And thus the Father, who had predestinated us to the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ unto Himself, received all His many sons to life, when he quickened the First-born. Hence, although Christ is Himself our Life, and our All, yet, inasmuch as what He is as the Filler of all things, is to be diffusively expressed in that which is His fulness,[4] so we are said here to have been quickened, not *in* Him, but *with* Him; the present sentence being a verification to the faith of the Church of His own promise: "Because I live, ye shall live also."[5] Thus while the first approach of the regenerate sinner to the throne of grace is from below, to praise the abundant mercy which has sprinkled his heart from an evil conscience, by the precious blood of Christ; yet, when the eyes of his faith gather strength enough to see things steadily in the new and marvellous light into which he has been brought, he is enabled to understand that the grace which he has now only begun to *taste* in Jesus, was finished for

[4] Chap. i. 23. [5] John xiv. 19.

him unto life eternal when the Lord revived. And this appears to be the special force of the parenthetic sentence, "by grace are ye saved," which is here thrown in between the statement of our being quickened with Christ, and what is presently said of our fellowship in His resurrection. It is the Apostle's evident desire to exclude entirely from our minds all ideas of merit or even *demerit*[6] of a *personal* kind, when considering the origin and quality of our life as saints. What we *were*, has been judged of God, and dismissed from His remembrance;[7] what we *are*, we are solely by His grace. *Salvation* describes the manner of its operation, but the life conferred is absolutely new, and of the free power of Him who gave it us in Christ. The gift of God is life eternal *through Jesus Christ our Lord*.[8]

Verse 6. "And hath raised us up together," &c. In all points the believer, as a vessel of Divine mercy, is identified with Him who is the full River of God to our faith. Thus life, resurrection, and heavenly glory, which properly reside only in the Person of

[6] Demerit, and that to the uttermost degree, is the standing quality of those who are dead in trespasses and sins, and by nature heirs of wrath. But our question in the text is with the saint, as a participator in that life of which Christ is the source and fulness. Considerations of a personal kind can have no place in such a question. A word may be added as to the attributes ascribed in this passage to the God of our salvation. They are principally three: love, mercy, and grace. Of these, the first, as it describes His *nature*, is the parent of the rest. Mercy is the leaning of that love towards an object naturally unworthy of it; while grace or favour (χάρις), expresses rather the decisive choice, by which mercy acts effectually on its objects, including also, in its meaning, the ever blessed effects of that salvation which it brings. Grace acts thus towards us in the gift of Jesus for our sins. It was confirmed to us triumphantly by His being brought back from the dead. God *favours* whom He knows in love.

[7] Heb. x. 15—17. From His, but not from *ours*. Verse 11, *seq.*

[8] Rom. vi. 23.

Him who is the First-fruits of them that slept, are severally imputed to the saints in Him. But, as in the preceding verses, association, rather than union, continues to be the prominent idea. We are called into the *fellowship* of the Son of God. What God has done to *us* is the main point of the Spirit's teaching here. It is shown that His love has not only triumphed by totally undoing the effect of sin, but that it has originated for us in the risen Christ an entirely new security of life and blessing. Grace has *abounded* over sin. That from which sin degraded man, was the fellowship of his Creator upon *earth*. That to which grace has brought the believing sinner, through Christ, is the fellowship of God in *heaven*. We lost in Adam a life which had originally its conditions of endurance, and those of a most precarious description. *Probationary* life can never be *secure*. We have found in Christ a new and different life, unconnected in any way with that which sin had forfeited. For our Redeemer is Himself our Life. *That* life is held on no condition, but is ours by the free gift of Him who sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins. God has raised *us* up, in raising Christ. He has made *us* sit together in heavenly places, by enthroning Jesus there.

Thus the blasphemous raving of Anti-christian ambition, which aims to be "as God," is but Satan's effort to attain wrongfully for fallen man that which grace confers freely upon the objects of redeeming love.[9] To claim Divine honour is the culmination

[9] Isa. xiv.; 2 Thess. ii. "Ye shall be as gods," was the original lie of the Deceiver. "Ye shall be my sons and my daughters," is the promise of the Lord Almighty, confirmed already to the faith of those who know Him in His Son (2 Cor. vi. 18; i. 20). Grace

of human madness, when urged by Satan to its crisis. To acknowledge that man's natural estate is one of irrecoverable degradation, is the first-fruit of true spiritual conviction. God reduces man to his just level, as a born apostate, and then sets him, by the faith of Jesus, in a new and altogether excellent place. Man, while refusing grace, exalts *himself*, building a tower of vain confidence which must ultimately crush him in its fall. God, by His *truth*, begets those who were once lost sinners as children to Himself in love. When we *submit* ourselves to God, He exalts us in His Son. He has nothing *less* for us than Christ. His gifts are according to His own perfections. He proves what He is, as the God of *all* grace, by loving such as we are shown to be, and making us His heirs.

Verse 7. The glory of God has been already shown[1] to be the paramount end of His grace to a sinner, in His Son. How that glory, which is *eternal*, stands related to ourselves, as the conscious receivers of His grace, is now declared. What God has wrought us for in Christ is, "that in the ages to come He might show the *exceeding riches* of His grace in His kindness to us-ward, through[2] Christ Jesus." The eternal God has an eternal kindness for His children. The exceeding riches of His grace are not to be realized all at once by those who are its objects. Knowledge and enjoyment will grow on, with life, in an interminable progression. Careful attention should be paid to the expression here used by the Apostle. "Ages to come" conveys a different

raises its objects into adoring fellowship with that which sinful pride would fain supplant. [1] Chap. i. 12. [2] Or *in*, ἐν, X.I.

meaning from the same expression in the singular. We have seen that there is a coming age, in which Christ will be paramount in the manifested power of His kingdom. We have seen, further, that a precise limitation is assigned to that coming kingdom.[3] The place also of the Church, in that long day of joy and triumph, has been shown. Having already received, by faith, a kingdom, we shall reign in its manifested glory with Him, who is Head over all things to the Church.[4] Dating, as we must, the commencement of the series of ages mentioned in the present verse, from the second advent of the Lord, we have here afforded to us, by the Spirit, a prophetic hint of just sufficient strength to enable our minds to add to the single and uniform idea of "eternity" the still consistent one of a serial continuity. Post-millennial blessedness, although an everlasting state, is not therefore monotonous. Other ages are to follow, when the closing[5] *dispensation* shall have run its course. Of these we know but little, or rather nothing, beyond the fact here recorded of their future existence, together with the blessed assurance, that they will witness, in their never-ending revolution, the unbroken peace and blessedness of the new heaven and the new earth.

One thing is at least kept clearly before our hearts,

[3] Page 39. [4] Page 46.

[5] I *feel* that this statement is in its terms paradoxical. But such must sometimes be the effect of an attempt to convey Divine realities through the medium of finite ideas and language. Where God has not spoken, they who fear Him will not venture to conjecture. The use of the word here rightly translated "ages," is rather frequent in the New Testament, though generally rendered as an indefinite expression of futurity. But there is a precision in the words here used (*ἐν τοῖς αἰῶσι τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις*), which seems to forbid our construing it in so loose and general a way.

and is indeed the emphatic point of the Apostle's doctrine in this verse: namely, that amid the varied and ever new manifestations of the Divine fulness, which may hereafter be witnessed by a reconciled and thoroughly-renewed creation, His kindness to *us-ward* who *now* believe, will perpetuate the rich savour of His grace. Received up into heaven by the Lord, who will in *person* come to fetch her, His Church will begin her life of glory as the married wife of the Lamb. And after sharing with her Lord the throne of His millennial dominion, she will continue to receive, as the everlasting partner of his joys, increasing and ineffable assurance of the love of God. The Scripture is reserved in its communications as to that which lies quite beyond the limits of our present apprehension. Perhaps the passage now before us goes as far as any in the glimpse which it affords us into the mystery of post-dispensational eternity.[6]

Verse 8. "For by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of of God." Having thus opened on the soul of the believer a vista into an eternity of blessedness, the Apostle now recals us to a fresh consideration of the means by which alone our wished-for inheritance must be attained. Accordingly we have in the present verse an amplified repetition of the doctrine stated parenthetically at the close of verse 5. Grace and salvation stand to one another in the relation

[6] In 1 Cor. xv., we have the post-millennial state described by the single expression, "the end." In Rev. xxi. 1—8, the definite futurity of a new creation is declared. In both the above passages God, in His paramount glory, is the Object kept before us, the idea of mediation being less distinctly marked. But in the text, this truth has its place emphatically maintained. His kindness towards us is *in Christ Jesus*.

of cause and effect. Grace saves. But if so, it may still be asked, in what *manner* does it save? Does it work in us some interior subjective change, by virtue of which we are afterwards considered acceptable on our own account, or is its blessed result arrived at in some other way? In the solution, or rather the *complication*, of this question, both the subtlety of Satan, and the perverseness of the human understanding, have been exercised from the time when the doctrine was first announced. And yet nothing can possibly be more simple and precise than the reply which is here furnished by the Holy Ghost. It is "*through faith.*"[7] Now the nature of faith is, that it seeks for, and finds, an object of trust external to itself. It can have no existence but as the reflection of that which has called it into action. If, therefore, God be the Object of faith, it is because He has revealed Himself. In default of this, there might indeed be a longing of the soul after something, the need of which it might more or less deeply understand—a feeling after God—as it is elsewhere expressed. But there could be no true *faith*, because, until an intelligible revelation has been made, there is no light by which the Object of faith can be discerned, nor any way by which it may be reached. If, then, grace saves through faith, it is manifest that its immediately exciting cause must be the testimony which makes known this saving grace. In other words, it is by a believing reception of the word of truth, the Gospel of our salvation, that the Christian *knows* the grace of God in truth.[8]

[7] διὰ τῆς πίστεως. Perhaps we should rather say, "through *the* faith;" the faith, that is, of God's elect—the faith of the Gospel.

[8] Col. i. 6.

But a further question yet remains. For faith may be allowed to be the instrumental means of salvation, and room still be left for a wholly false opinion as to the true nature and origin of such faith. Is saving faith, then, as is often asserted, a natural and independent effort of the human will? or, to put the question in another way, Is the record which God has given of His Son, a communication credible to the natural man? A clear and explicit negative to both these inquiries is given in the latter clause of the verse before us: "and that *not* of yourselves; it is the *gift* of God." It is scarcely needful to remind the Christian reader that none can really have faith in God who have not first been *born* of God. For it is a standing axiom of Scripture that the natural man perceiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. Accordingly, when the true origin of the believer is inquired for, it is discovered in such expressions as refer us immediately either to the *electing love* of God, His *calling*, or His *quickening* grace and power. While, therefore, faith on the sinner's part is the sole means by which salvation can be reached, both the Lord Himself in the days of His flesh, and His Spirit afterwards by the testimony of the Apostles, have expressly referred that saving faith to the *immediate gift of God*.[9]

To assert, therefore, as is sometimes done, that saving faith is something natural to man, is both to oppose the plainest words of Scripture, and to falsify the testimony which God has borne to the

[9] John i. 12, 13. Compare, for a further confirmation of the Apostle's doctrine, that faith is the gift of God, John vi. 65; Acts xxviii. 27; Phil. i. 29; and 1 Cor. iv. 7.

entire *helplessness* as well as sinfulness of man. That which is naturally dead in sins, cannot arouse *itself* to spiritual life. And if, while reflecting on these things, we find ourselves tempted to echo the half-despairing question of the disciples, "Who then can be saved?" the answer they received may well suffice for us: "With *men* this is impossible, but not *with God;* for with God all things are possible."[1] Salvation is of the Lord,[2] to whom *power* alone belongs, whether to save or to destroy. And if it again be asked, Why, then, is the Gospel preached, and that by the command of God, to every nation that is under heaven? there is a double answer: 1st., the Gospel is the instrument by means of which God works His saving work; and 2nd., God is chargeable with no injustice (for He is the God of *grace* towards the people of His choice) in yet more completely demonstrating the native enmity of the heart of man towards Himself, by leaving His blessed Gospel to be accepted or rejected, as men list, while He entreats them to receive salvation in His Son. All, therefore, who are willing, may take freely of the waters of salvation. But who among us all was willing, until made so by the pressure of that thirst which the Holy Ghost alone produces in our souls?

Verse 9. That salvation is "not of works," results inevitably from the doctrine already stated. Instead of being won by his own effort, salvation is received by the believer as the end of his faith.[3] But the reason elsewhere given is here also added: it is not of works, "lest any man should boast."

[1] Mark x. 26, 27. [2] Ps. iii. 8. [3] 1 Pet. i. 9.