

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS
ON
THE FIRST EPISTLE
TO
THE CORINTHIANS.

BY
ARTHUR PRIDHAM.

"I REJOICE AT THY WORD AS ONE THAT FINDETH GREAT SPOIL."

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THE Reader is requested to correct the following oversights:

Preface, page 1, line 15, for “churches” read *church*.

At page 287, line 11, for “exercises” read *exercise*.

„ 359, note 7, for “*αἰοχρόν*” read “*αἰσχρόν*.”

PREFACE.

THIS book, like the divinely-inspired writing which is its subject, is written in the interest of no class of sectaries, but of "all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord."

It claims to be a faithful (though surely most inadequate) exposition of the apostle's words; and its publication is in the hope that, by divine mercy, it may prove a seasonable aid to some who, with right desires, but defective knowledge, are seeking a refuge from the harassing diversities of modern religious opinion.

God *testifies* while men dispute; and they who truly seek Him, and the knowledge of His will, may find in the epistles addressed by His chosen servant "to the church of God at Corinth," a clear solution of many a question which, in forgetfulness that *the Lord has already spoken*,¹ continues to be controversially agitated among those who bear His name.

¹ 1 Cor. xiv. 17.

God's *Church*, both as the object of His grace, and the subject of His own immediate government; its corporate organization, and who its members are; their calling and distinctive name; their standing and their hope; the quality and order of their worship and behaviour; their true relation to the present world, as well as to each other in the sight of God;—these, which are the main topics of the first epistle, have been so handled by the Spirit of truth as to become the occasion of a large variety of positive teaching, both on the essential verities of the Gospel, and on other points of less importance, yet of deep and lasting interest to every spiritual mind.

As to the manner in which these subjects have been treated in the book now offered to the reader, he must himself be judge. All that is asked is, that he will, before pronouncing on its character, consent to read it as such a work ought always to be read. Let each chapter of the epistle be first prayerfully perused, and then the corresponding portion of this volume. Nor let him fail to honour God so far as to trace the references to their true position in His Word.

If this be done, I dare not persuade myself that no godly mind will dissent in any thing from what he finds; but I am bold, in Christ, to assure each honest reader of a blessing on his pains.

As the aim of this work is not to flatter spiritual dilettantism, but to help and comfort *souls*, such critical matter only has been introduced as may meet in some fair measure the reasonable expectations of those for whom it is intended. But if only God's "unlearned"² find in the following pages what shall bring them to a richer knowledge of Himself, and are thus enabled to say "Amen" to my words, my joy will be fulfilled.

That the faithful and patient criticism of the same kind eye which saw the originals of my earlier volumes has been extended also to the present work, is an encouraging mercy of no little weight.

To God in His ever blessed Son be all the praise.

² Chap. xiv. 16.

August, 1866.

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NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

ON THE

FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS.

CHAPTER I.

"PAUL, called¹ to be an apostle . . . and Sosthenes our brother."² (1.) He is *Christ's* apostle, by the will of *God*; the Lord whom he served being, in His abiding mediatorial position, subordinate to the Father.³ Hence the will of God is, both here and constantly in all apostolic writings, acknowledged as the root and reason of the Gospel.⁴

The chief point of interest to be noted in this opening verse, is the companionship in which the apostle is here found. In associating with his own

¹ On the *calling* of the apostle, something will be found in a note on chapter ix. 1, 2; on his *mission*, see the remarks on verse 17 of the present chapter.

² Perhaps better "your brother." It is ὁ ἀδελφός = "the brother we all know."

³ See below, on verse 9.

⁴ With this may be compared the Lord's own words in John vi. 38-40, and Psalm xl. 7, 8. The name and glory of the ascended Saviour being now declared and attested by the Spirit, to the glory of God who raised Him from the dead. (Phil. ii. 9-11. See also John xiii. 32, and xvii. 1.)

the name of Sosthenes, we may reasonably believe that Paul was actuated, not merely by the strong desire of fellowship in the work of God which always characterized him, but by a just and true feeling also of sympathetic consideration for those whom he was preparing to address. He knew that his pen was laden, not with doctrine only, but with searching admonition also, and with strong reproof; and he was doubtless willing that an epistle which dealt so unsparingly with their condition, and was to so large an extent engrossed by their local difficulties and disorders, should be not only commended to their consciences by its apostolic authorship, but should speak also to their hearts with the familiar and tender persuasiveness of natural association. He couples, therefore, with his own name that of one whom they had known already in the double character—first, of an active enemy, and since, of a brother beloved, and partner in the common faith.⁵

Verse 2. "To the Church of God," etc. A three-fold description is here given of those addressed:—1. They are the Church or assembly of God; 2. They are sanctified in Christ; and, 3. They are

⁵ The name of Sosthenes occurs once besides only, in Acts xviii. 17. In a matter of this kind, absolute certainty is not attainable, but there is a strong moral presumption that the companion of the apostle was also the quondam ruler of the synagogue, whose anti-Christian zeal had brought on him so unexpectedly the rough handling of the Gentile mob. Taken in his own snare, and wounded by the weapon he had forged for others, his discomfiture appears to have been the instrumental means of awakening his soul to a true sense of its condition, and thus preparing him to confess the Name which he had once blasphemed. In such fellowship the once "persecutor and injurious" would find an especial comfort and delight. (*Conf.* 1 Tim. i. 12-16.)

"called saints." The first of these designations relates to their corporate standing as accepted worshippers of God;⁶ the second, to their individual title and position, of which more will be said at the close of the present chapter; and the third, to the sovereignty of that grace which, having foreknown and predestinated them eternally in Christ, has now effectually separated them to God by the word of His Gospel. What they are called to is distinctly stated further on.⁷

But the address, though special, is not limited. What is written, under Divine inspiration, by an apostle of Christ, is intended not for a part only of His household, but for all who are partakers of like precious faith. In the words which follow, therefore, we have an open expression of what is implied in every genuine apostolic greeting. He joins with the Corinthian saints, "all who in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." Moved as he was to write by his apprehension of an incipient breach of the true unity of

⁶ The diversity of the Spirit's language, when speaking of the Church, is very noticeable. His most usual as well as most comprehensive description is the one given in the text. God's assembled worshippers constitute His Church, whether in the aggregate or locally. But the Church is also *Christ's*, being, in its completeness, His own mystic Body, while, in its local variety and progressive state on earth, it is immediately subject to Him also as its only Lord. Hence mention is made in Scripture both of "Churches of God" and "Churches of Christ." So likewise the present testimony of the Spirit is called indifferently the Gospel of God and the Gospel of Christ. The true key to all such diversities of expression seems presented to us in the words of Jesus, when commending His own to the safe keeping of the Father: "All mine are thine, and thine are mine." (John xvii. 10, xvi. 15.)

⁷ Verse 9.

Christ through the working of strong party-feeling in the Church at Corinth, he here utters a preliminary protest against the schismatic temper which prevailed there, by thus assembling round the *name* of Jesus Christ *all* who in truth acknowledge Him as Lord. *Our* Lord He is, but not ours only; He is also *theirs*.⁸

The parity both of privilege and of subjection thus emphatically asserted, forms a suited preface to an epistle which, though strongly marked by local and special characteristics, deals in its progress with doctrines and questions of common and lasting importance to all who desire to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.

Verse 3 completes the greeting with a formal benediction, such as usually accompanies his written communications to the saints, and which, besides its value as an incidental illustration of the Son's equality in Godhead with the Father, serves at the same time to stamp with Divine authority the contents of the following epistle.⁹

Verse 4. "I thank my God," etc. He has much to say, and far more of blame than praise; but before directly addressing them upon their practical condition as believers, he pauses to give solemn thanks to God for the rich abundance of His grace which had declared itself in the calling and plentiful spiritual endowment of this Church. The use they had made of their blessings he will notice in

⁸ It is possible to refer the words *αὐτῶν καὶ ἡμῶν* to *τόπος* instead of *τοῦ κυρίου*, and this is done by some commentators. The authorized version has, however, in my own judgment, more truly expressed the apostle's meaning.

⁹ Except where a distinction is expressly made; e.g., in ch. vii.

due time, but for their positive standing in the grace of God he feels bound at all times to give thanks.

God's people may at any time be contemplated under two widely different aspects: either *absolutely*, as the chosen vessels of Divine mercy, called and justified in Christ through faith, and proportionately endowed with spiritual gifts and powers, or *relatively*, as to their moral condition, and their measure of obedient conformity, as children of the light, to Him whose name they bear. The saints at Corinth are viewed in this epistle under each of these aspects in their order.

Verses 5-8. "That in every thing ye are enriched," etc. Next to the saving grace of God wherein they stand in Christ, the apostle's thanksgiving is excited by a consideration of the large measure of special and distinctive gifts bestowed upon them. Chief among these are noticed their apt intelligence and outspoken confession of the truth. They were enriched by him¹ in all utterance.² A forward readiness, both of speech and act, in the interests of that blessed Name is elsewhere also acknowledged by him as characteristic of this otherwise blameworthy Church.³ Much grace had been given them in Jesus Christ. In Him "all knowledge" also was opened to their search;⁴

¹ Rather, I would say, "*in Him*" (*ἐν αὐτῷ*). The blessings of faith are all held and contained in Christ. In *themselves*, as the apostle presently shews, they were poor enough.

² *Ἐν παντί λόγῳ*. This phrase appears to combine the two ideas—first, of the reception, and also of the publication of sound doctrine.

³ 2 Cor. viii. 7-10.

⁴ That the apostle, in thus dwelling on their opulence of gift, is referring rather to what they possessed and recognized in Christ,

the primal testimony which they had listened to as strangers having been confirmed in them by the superadded gifts and distributions of the Spirit. In this respect they came behind no other Church. The accuracy of their knowledge was evinced, no less than the sincerity of their faith, by the expectant attitude which they maintained until the promises which they had heard with a believing ear should be fulfilled in fact.

They are described accordingly as "waiting for the revelation⁵ of our Lord Jesus Christ," and thus occupying the moral position, and holding fast the hope which, from the moment of the Lord's ascension, had been distinctly set before His people as the goal of their race and the end of their desire.⁶

That the testimony of Christ⁷ had been effectually received by them was thus evident by many and emphatic tokens. And He who had openly acknowledged His own work would also "confirm them to the end," so that they should be "blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." We may note here the peculiar force of this last expression, and its evident connection with the moral state of those who in that day will give account to Him. The believer, already *in Christ* presented without spot to God, is

than to what they had digested and made practically their own by faith and steadfastness, is evident from his language in ch. iii, 1.

⁵ *Τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν.* (Conf. 1 Peter i. 7.)

⁶ Acts i. 11. For further proof of what is stated in the text, the enquiring reader can refer to such passages as John xiv. 3; 1 Thess. i. 10, iv. 16; Heb. x. 37; Rev. i. 7, xxii. 21, and many others.

⁷ It is the testimony of *Christ*, inasmuch as He is its subject; of *God* (*infra* chap. ii. 1), because it is delivered in the power of the Holy Ghost, whom the Father has sent forth in the name of the Son. (Conf. 1 John v. 8, 9.)

charged here below with the holy burden of the Name by which he is called. God's children are also His witnesses. But the grace which originally called His chosen can alone sustain them on their way. And it will do so, since the Lord who saves them does not faint nor change. The apostle, therefore, speaks thus confidently even of those in whom he already sees so much to blame, because, though their relative position to each other in the coming day will depend upon the judgment then pronounced upon their course and conduct as fellow-servants of the same Lord, their personal *standing*, both now and then, and to eternity, is according to the title of divine righteousness which is already theirs in Christ. What inspired these Corinthians with hope to Godward, and emboldened them to look with desire for the coming of the Lord, was their faith, which, by completely justifying them in the sight of God, conferred on them "the hope of righteousness" as their proper expectation.⁸ What would constitute them blameless in the coming day was their continuance in the faith, or, as is elsewhere said, their holding fast the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end,⁹ giving diligence meanwhile, and walking watchfully in the light of Him in whom they put their trust. Such shall have boldness in that day.¹

The strengthening assurance ministered to the believer in this opening address is carried to its climax in verse 9, in which the faithfulness of God

⁸ Gal. v. 5.

⁹ Heb. ii. 6, 14.

¹ 1 John iv. *Conf.* 2 Pet. iii. 14. On the important subject of judgment, in its relation to believers, more will be said in the notes on chaps. iii. and iv., and (if God permit) in a later volume on the second epistle.

is pledged emphatically to the lasting security and triumph of those whom He has called into the *fellowship of His Son*. This declaration of the paramount dignity and blessedness of their calling—a calling in which rivalries and jealousies can have no place—has here a still more impressive force, since it forms a prelude to the strong expostulations which are presently to follow. Of the intrinsic value of this declaration, and its sanctifying effect when held simply and firmly by the faith of God's elect, more will be said as we proceed.

On the language of this verse it may be noted, that the Father's supremacy, which in the days of His flesh the Son delighted to acknowledge, even when most emphatically asserting their oneness,² is perpetuated through the Spirit's testimony by the apostles; for, as the glorifier of the once rejected Christ, the Comforter reveals also by Him the glory of God, who raised Him from the dead. And not the least noticeable, of the many marked features which this epistle presents to an attentive student of the Word, is the distinctness with which the *divinity* of the Gospel is enunciated; *i. e.*, the frequency and clearness with which the several persons of the Godhead are respectively mentioned and set objectively before our faith. In this epistle the Lord for the most part occupies His relative and mediatorial place, while in another the calling here referred exclusively to the Father is with equal distinctness asserted of the Son.³ Most usually "calling" is, like its kindred term "election," attributed to *God*, absolutely. But inasmuch as Christ is

² John x. 29, 30, xiv. 9, 28, xvii. *passim*.

³ Rom. i. 6.

God manifest in flesh, we find both calling and election ascribed also to the Son. He chose the apostles; He calleth His own sheep by name.⁴

Verse 10. "Now I beseech you, brethren," etc. Having in the amplest manner and most positive terms acknowledged the Corinthian saints, to the praise of His glory who had called them, he turns now to consider, with the keen though tender scrutiny of one in whom Christ lives and speaks, in what manner they are responding practically to their calling, and to deal with them according to their state. And here let us first observe the prominence given in this verse to "the *name* of our Lord Jesus Christ." It becomes, in the mouth of the aggrieved Spirit of truth, a solemn and reproachful adjuration, when as a witness for that name he contemplates the scandal of a broken and divided Church.

Three things are here specified as objects of the apostle's desire on his brethren's behalf: 1. Unity of confession and testimony—"That ye all speak the same thing;" 2. Unbroken fellowship in the Spirit—"That there be no divisions [or schisms⁵] among you;" and 3. Such a general oneness of judgment and feeling as might naturally be looked for in those who were partakers in common of the one Spirit of Christ⁶—"That ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." The fervency of his desire, and the urgency of his entreaty, with respect to those things, are justified by what immediately follows.

⁴ Luke vi. 13; John x. 3, xv. 16.

⁵ *Σχισματα*. On the difference between "schisms" and "heresies," see below, on chap. xi. 19.

⁶ Chap. xii. 13.

Verse 11. "For it hath been declared unto me," etc. The frank and express mention here made of the *source* of the evil tidings which had reached him is worthy of one whose glory it was to walk by the rule of simplicity and godly sincerity, whether in the world or in the Church.⁷ Of the house of Chloe, and of those members of it who, Joseph-like,⁸ had brought to their spiritual father their brethren's ill report, we read nothing further in Scripture. To their lasting honour it is that they are here noticed as having communicated to the apostle what had marred their own fellowship with these disunited and factious confessors of the name of Christ. Their own better state may be inferred from the very nature of their report. What grieved them was indeed the working of one of the commonest of natural principles, that of carnal emulation. They shunned, however, and denounced it as something utterly at variance with the new and holy calling which they had received.

Verses 12-16. "Now this I say," etc. The root of their divisions and contentions is now freely exposed, in order to its being judged and withered in the bright light of the Lord. Natural partiality, a sentiment at once the most common among men and the most opposed to the true leading of the Spirit, is found to be in active and unrestrained exercise among those who should have better understood the meaning and power of the one great Name which all alike confessed. If we justly estimate the folly which Paul here denounces, and through which dishonour was cast both on his own name and those of

⁷ 2 Cor. i. 12.

⁸ Gen. xxxvii. 2.

his associates in labour, we shall find perhaps its climax in the lips of those who invidiously claim to be "of Christ." Weakness, culpable indeed, though natural, may often induce ill-taught or unwary saints to put false honour on a favourite teacher; but only a presumptuous self-assertion of the highest and most perilous kind can lead any Christian, or company of Christians, to an exclusive or factious assumption of the honour which, by grace, attaches to all who are in the common faith.⁹

The distressing effect of this discovery upon the mind of the apostle is evinced by the indignant energy of the questions put in verse 13; questions which imply the threefold wrong which these carnal disputants were doing:—1. To the *Person*; 2. To the *Work*; and, 3. To the paramount *Name* of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And here it may be sorrowfully asked, Is it not always and *necessarily* thus, whenever God's true children are found at variance with each other? Does not party or sectarian distinction deny effectively, even if unwittingly, the unity of Christ's one body? Each heart assuredly which shares in any measure Paul's devoted loyalty to Christ (and let us remember that this was nothing more than a just, though, as he confesses, an inadequate appreciation

⁹ That the name of Christ was abused at Corinth in this factious spirit is, I think, evident from the order of the apostle's rebuke. He has no sooner said, "And I of Christ," than he instantly demands, "Is Christ divided?" etc. There is indeed another sense in which it becomes each believer to remember carefully, and boldly yet with meekness to confess, that he is Christ's and Christ's alone—calling none other "Master;" and while thus contending earnestly for the faith once delivered, endeavouring also to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

on his part of that saving and ever blessed grace which is the common portion of the Church) must likewise participate in the feeling here expressed. Deeply indeed must his spirit have been moved when he indited the strange though fervent thanksgiving expressed in verse 14; but the reason immediately afterwards alleged is an abundant justification of his zeal. The bare possibility meanwhile of such an imputation as he here so earnestly deprecates, should warn us of the distance to which real believers may be driven from the way of truth, when they fail to have in a due and heartfelt remembrance both whose they are and by what name they are called.

The care with which he recovers, in verse 16, the half-forgotten instance of "the household of Stephanas," and the effort of memory which it cost him to recall the fact, are alike worthy of notice. The decidedly subordinate place which baptism holds to faith in the estimation of the Spirit is thus clearly and emphatically shown. Not that this passage affords, when properly considered, the least countenance to those who would speak slightingly of baptism, and treat it as a merely carnal ordinance. The solemn assumption, by the newly-born believer, of the name of Jesus as his Lord, was an act both too important and of too solemn and precious a significance to be regarded lightly by an inspired apostle. Nay, it was the deep sense which he entertained of its importance when rightly contemplated,¹ that gave birth to his reproachful question, "Were ye baptized

¹ On this point let the reader ponder what is said in Col. ii. 11, 12.

in the name of Paul?" But, as may be frequently observed in his epistles, a reference made incidentally and for a practical purpose to an inferior topic, becomes the occasion of far weightier doctrinal statement and exposition. Accordingly, having administered this incipient reproof to the schismatic spirit which was rife at Corinth, and which, if allowed to work unchecked, could tend only to the destruction of the faith itself, he turns from them and from himself to speak of the ministry with which he had been entrusted, and which, had they only profited by it, would have kept them far from the unseemly strivings which he here so faithfully rebukes.

Verse 17. "For Christ sent me not to baptize," etc. His mission, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, was "to preach the Gospel." Baptism would surely follow a true reception of his testimony, but that, with all other resulting effects, is kept distinct from the positive and vital work of God by His own word. And here, before proceeding further, we may notice a real difference between the apostolate of Paul and that of the eleven, as defined at the close of Matthew's gospel.² The latter were sent expressly to baptize. Paul was *not*. This very marked distinction between the commissions bestowed by the same Master upon men who were equally "ambassadors of Christ," should by no means be overlooked.

The charge given to the eleven was framed in accordance with that eventual purpose of God, which is to make restored Israel the communicative channel of His grace to the nations of the earth. Besides the delivery of this parting injunction, we read of two

² Matthew xxviii. 19, 20.

separate occasions on which the Lord gave a special charge to His disciples; the first, when in the days of His flesh He sent them forth to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;”³ the second, of a gradually expansive character, immediately before His visible ascension into heaven.⁴ But both these commissions were interrupted and apparently frustrated through Israel’s refusal to receive the truth of God. Given irrevocably by Him who does not change, nor call back His own words, they remain, as to their effectual operation, in suspense until the mystery of the Church has been fulfilled, and the vail which covers still the heart of Israel is removed.

But in the interval between Israel’s refusal of the Gospel⁵ and their national restoration, there is set forth in the world a new and independent testimony which has its *immediate* as well as original source in *heaven*. Paul receives his credentials, as an ambassador of Christ, from a Redeemer who was not risen only from the dead, but ascended also and enthroned with God. And the scope of his commission is according to the breadth and fulness of God’s sovereign grace to man. He is sent indeed to Israel, but no longer as to the naturally entitled guests of God’s great marriage feast. Grace still may linger over them, and truth continues to assert their covenant pre-eminence, when measured with the Gentiles after the flesh; but “the circumcision,” when they come at all into the blessing of the Gospel during the

³ Matthew x. 5, 6.

⁴ Acts i. 8.

⁵ Specially and solemnly recorded against them in Acts vii. *ad fin.*, xiii. 46, xxviii. 25-28, and 1 Thess. ii. 15, 16; while the dispensational mystery connected with it is opened by the same apostle in Romans ix.-xi.

existing dispensation, come, not as the privileged seed of Abraham, but among the other nations of the earth, to whom *distinctively* the message of reconciliation is now addressed.⁶

The terms of the Gospel thus committed to his trust, besides being gradually unfolded as we proceed, are summarily and precisely stated in two separate passages of these epistles.⁷ As to the manner of delivering his message, it was to be "not with wisdom of words."⁸ Fluency of speech, as a natural gift, may be present or absent, without prejudice to the efficiency of an evangelist when considered as a minister of God. Apollos was "eloquent,"⁹ while Paul was "rude in speech."¹ For human persuasiveness, whether natural or artfully rhetorical, cannot effect the purposes of God. His appeal is neither to the imagination nor the understanding simply, but to the hearts and consciences of sinful men. And so the reason of this simplicity of speech is presently added: "Lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." The story of God's love to sinners is in its very nature so complete and marvellous, that human embellishment cannot but impair it. Besides, the task of rhetoric is to stir and excite what is natural in man—to evoke his sympathies and direct his natural aims. But such is not

⁶ This subject, though of much interest and practical importance, can be only thus briefly noticed here. The enquiring reader will find it more fully treated in chapters ix.—xi. of my *Notes on the Romans*.

⁷ Chap. xv. 1, *seq.*; 2 Cor. v. 18–21. ⁸ Or "speech" [*margin*].

⁹ Acts xviii. 24; and on this account probably more welcome to the majority of the Corinthian saints than Paul.

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 6.

the manner nor the end of the Spirit of God. For the ground-truth of the Gospel is the total unprofitableness of the flesh—the repudiation, consequently, of man in his natural state *entirely*, and the declaration of a righteousness which, though for ever inaccessible to human effort, is offered without price to men as the free gift of God through Jesus Christ.

Verse 18. “For the preaching² of the cross is to them that perish foolishness,” etc. The doctrine of free grace is now viewed in relation to its effects, respectively, on those who believe and those who reject the testimony of God. The scope of this verse extends only to the actual hearers of the Word, and of these there are found in result two classes, and two only. These are the “lost” and the “saved.” The warnings of the Gospel, like its blessings, concern those only who listen to its terms. The point here so emphatically pressed on our attention is the inevitable effect of the doctrine of the cross, for blessedness or misery, on all, without exception, who have heard it. We may consider first the breadth of the apostle’s assertion, that to them that perish³ it is “foolishness.” What is thus expressed is rather

² Rather, the “word,” or “speech”—*λόγος*, not *κήρυγμα*. It is used here antithetically to the *σοφία λόγου* of the preceding verse.

³ *Τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις*. The word here and elsewhere used by the Spirit to describe the condition of unbelievers has a considerable latitude of meaning. God’s prophets “perished,” in a natural sense (Luke xi. 51, xiii. 33), by the express declaration of Him whose suffering and honoured witnesses they were. But there is not the least ambiguity in the varied uses of this term in Scripture. When “perishing” is contrasted with “salvation,” as in the text, it has evidently a final and judicial meaning, and is fully equivalent to a state of condemnation, both now and in the coming day of wrath. (John iii. 18; Mark xvi. 16.)

a divine inference from the observed effect of the testimony among men, than a positive declaration on the unbeliever's part. It is not every despiser of saving grace who alleges as a reason of his unbelief the folly or unsoundness of the doctrine preached. But by not embracing heartily the offer of divine mercy which the Gospel freely makes, men treat it *practically* as a thing unworthy of their serious attention, or, in other words, as "foolishness." For what men think *wisdom* they both credit and confess. And if the wisdom of this world assumes, as it often does, a serviceable form, and shapes itself usefully into appliances which minister to men's natural wants, it is most eagerly recognized and followed. Tried therefore by this simple rule of experience, the fitness of the apostle's language becomes evident. No man who has learnt (as God only teaches it) the truth of his own condition as a mortal, and is conscious therefore of spiritual misery and destitution, turns willingly away from the ministry of reconciliation.

To the unawakened, and therefore impenitent sinner, the word of the cross is foolishness; but he continues, "To us who are saved it is the power of God." Let us note first the clear and express assertion here made of "salvation" as the present and unvarying condition of the believer, "to us who are *saved*."⁴ Next, as to the effective means of this

⁴ Σωζομένοις. It is necessary perhaps to protest here against the dilution of the apostle's doctrine which is effected when this word is rendered, as it sometimes is, by "being saved," or "in the way of salvation." As to the grammar of such passages, it is perfectly simple, the participle expressing the state and habitual condition of those described. With respect to the *doctrine*, it is

salvation, it is the word of the cross; which is here described, not as the wisdom, but the *power* of God.⁵ The force of this characteristic attribute of the Gospel will be at once felt by the reflecting reader. To love, is a *disposition*; to save is an *act*; and while God is in His nature Love, the effective operation of His word on those who are quickened by it is the result of His own active power. This description of the Gospel holds good also in a subjective sense; it confers, that is, upon its happy recipients, a settled and soul-sustaining assurance of forgiveness and personal acceptance in God's Beloved, such as lifts the simple believer far above the injurious efforts of the enemy. Confessing God in Christ as a Saviour, he knows that he is safe. The truth which declares to him the sacrificial finishing of sin conducts him also, as an

correlative to its opposite. Sinners in their natural state are not only "being lost," they are "condemned already," and "by nature heirs of wrath." They are, as their deliverer calls them, "lost" (*πρόβατα ἀπολωλότα*, a yet stronger expression than the one in the text), until saved by Him. "By grace ye are saved" (*σεσωσμένοι*, Eph. ii. 5,) is the word of assurance addressed by the Spirit to God's saints. "According to His mercy He saved us," is their joyful confession of the truth. They whom the Lord adds to His Church are not to be saved only, but are saved. To doubt this is to doubt either His wisdom or His grace. It is therefore to be regretted that the A.V. of Acts ii. 47 should have needlessly varied the interpretation of this term. A further illustration of the proper force of this participle may be offered from 2 Pet. ii. 9, where the Lord is said to keep the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished (*κολαζομένους*). Their sentence is fixed, their punishment inevitable. So is it with the genuine believer. He holds now by faith a salvation which he will presently enjoy in glory. See further, as to the different senses in which the believer is said to be saved, *Notes on the Romans*, chaps. v. and viii.

⁵ Compare the same apostle's words in Rom. i. 16, 17, where we have the true fulcrum shown to us on which this power works, "for therein is the *righteousness* of God revealed," etc.

acceptable worshipper, within the holiest of all.⁶ Thus the word of grace becomes to God's chosen both the power of separation from the world, and their covenant of perfect peace with Him.

Verse 19. "For it is written," etc. Pursuing now his theme, the apostle, as his custom is, supports his original assertion by the witness of an earlier oracle of God.⁷ And truly comforting and refreshing is it, in days when men (and among them not a few even of the professed keepers of Divine knowledge, and guides to those who seek the way of truth) seem fast coming to an agreement to disallow the Scriptures as the very and authoritative "word of God," to mark the decisive simplicity with which they are appealed to, whether by the Lord Himself, or His inspired messengers. The complete fulfilment of this earlier testimony to the vanity and guiltiness (for God does not destroy *goodness*) of merely human wisdom, is reserved for the day when He will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.⁸ In the meanwhile, the "preaching of the cross" is the promulgation also of the sentence irreversibly pronounced upon the world and its prince. Things hidden from the wise and prudent are now discovered by the Spirit to the babes in Christ.

Verse 20. "Where is the wise?" etc. The sub-

⁶ Heb. x. 14-22.

⁷ Isaiah xxix. 14. The quotation is made, not from the Hebrew text, but from the Septuagint, a habit usual both with the Lord and His apostles. As it would be tedious to note particularly the numerous examples of this which occur in the course of these epistles, notice is here taken of it once for all. The reader who may desire to examine this subject more closely will find a valuable aid in Gough's *New Testament Quotations*.

⁸ Rom. ii. 16.

stance of this verse consists, also, partly of earlier scriptural quotations,⁹ expanded, however, according to the requirements of his present subject. Gentile philosophy, in all its forms, and every species of merely intellectual speculation or research being, equally with the beggarly elements of Judaism, challenged and confounded by the doctrine of the cross.¹ What Jehovah had of old declared of Himself in promise, as the Redeemer of Jacob, is now put by the same Spirit into the form of a triumphant question, asked in the face of earth and heaven by the messenger of Him who has raised up Jesus from the dead.

Verse 21. "For after that in the wisdom of God," etc. To the declamatory questions just considered, there succeeds now an explanation of the mystery of the Gospel as the special manifestation of the wisdom and power of God. It was in the wisdom of God, says the apostle, that the world *by wisdom* knew not God. This statement amounts to an inspired declaration, that reasoners of the highest natural intelligence and the most extended mental culture had both exercised their powers and achieved their ultimate results in a vain attempt to find out God by search.² In other words, that the proclamation of saving grace in the name of the Son of God, had been intentionally deferred by Divine wisdom until

⁹ Isaiah xxxiii. 18, and xlv. 24, 25.

¹ In this verse, the English term "world" is made to represent, as it does also in many other passages, both *αἰῶν* and *κόσμος*. Of these kindred expressions it may be said, generally, that the former describes the world in its *course*, the latter the world in its *state*. As to the former of these, see more below, on chap. ii. 6.

² *Conf.* Job xi. 7.

the amplest opportunity had been afforded for the natural ability of man to reach its highest point of attainment. The human mind is of limited capacity, and exhibits, perhaps, from age to age, a nearly equal average. But there are prodigies of intellect as well as exceptional instances of bodily vigour; and although the spirit of modern optimism, intoxicated by the abundance of startling results which applied science continues to pour into the lap of civilization, may demur to the conclusion, the believer may boldly affirm, upon the authority of this inspired testimony, that the age of original thinking, in the strict sense of the expression, has long since passed. Whether with reference to the burden of legal liability which pressed upon "the circumcision," or the proved impotency of Gentile philosophy to discover *truth*, it was "at the fitting season"³ that God sent His Son.

It was wisdom on God's part to leave the Gentiles to the fruit of their own way, and suffer opportunity to test the soundness of those claims which the disputer of this world is never weary of advancing. That opportunity can never more recur. For all steps which men now take in a professed pursuit of moral or religious truth must be taken in the face of what claims to be divine revelation. Men do indeed perversely turn their minds away from Gospel light to seek for truth elsewhere, as Israel's idolaters turned their backs upon Jehovah's temple to adore the sun,⁴ but in vain. Modern philosophy cannot release itself from its obligations to revealed truth. While heartily denying and opposing it, God's written word is yet

³ κατὰ καιρὸν. Rom. v. 6; Gal. iv. 4.

⁴ Ezek. viii. 16.

in great measure the very light by which they see to do their evil work.⁵ Moreover, the result here stated by the apostle is also the ill-disguised confession of the infidel. For seeking is not finding, in natural things, although it be so to the genuine seeker after God,⁶ and none know better than the speculative infidel that the pursuit of what he chooses to call "truth" has never yet led any to a knowledge of the living God. To profess to find Him in His works, apart from revelation, is merely to impose on ourselves. Unless *man's* origin and destiny are known, *God* is not known. But what philosopher or sage has ever either accounted satisfactorily for man's actual condition, or given him a trustworthy view of what may be expected after death?

It is of importance also to compare the doctrine of this verse with another declaration of the same witness, who elsewhere⁷ charges on the Gentiles universally the guilt of a willing ignorance of God. The difference is this: mankind are viewed in Scripture under the two conditions; 1. Of voluntary departure through the lusts of their own hearts from the primal knowledge which the creature had of his Creator; and, 2. As endeavouring, when sunk in spiritual darkness, to recover for themselves the light which they had lost. The open witness of creation failed to detain man in the presence of his Maker, and idolatry in its varied forms of degradation was the result. Gentile philosophy, again, was a late

⁵ Any one acquainted with the tone and cast of modern scepticism will admit the truth of this remark. ⁶ Lev. xi. 10.

⁷ Rom. i. 21. "When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful."

reaction of cultivated intellect against the gross and transparent fictions of heathenism. But the world by wisdom knew not *God*. Wise only to do evil, men first put darkness in the place of a Light which they knew but did not love, and then vainly tried to illuminate that darkness by sparks of their own kindling.⁸

But this helpless ignorance of God, which as the judicial effect of human sin and folly glorifies, in one sense, the God who had given men over to their lusts, does not meet the original good pleasure of His will, which was to have a people worthy of Himself. In the sovereignty of His wisdom, evil should work for good. And so he proceeds: "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to *save* them that believe." First, let us remember that a godless state is also a *lost* state. But such has been shown to be the condition of the world. Let it also be well noted that, while men owe their ruin to themselves, salvation is exclusively of God. It pleases Him to save. As to the instrumental means, it is "the foolishness of preaching." To effect the mightiest of works, He employs what to the mind of nature is the most inadequate of means. It is thus that both His wisdom and His power are displayed.

In verse 22 we have a summary of the wisdom of this world, when considered in relation to the higher aspirations of mankind. It is found to exhibit two, and only two, characteristic phases: 1. Credulous unbelief; and, 2. Self-reliant investigation. The Jews, who have stumbled at Jehovah in the flesh, still ask for signs as did their fathers. With an ear

⁸ Isaiah l. 11.

open to everything but truth,⁹ they refuse "the work of God,"¹ while ignorantly zealous for the law. The Greeks, on the other hand, seek wisdom. Ignorant alike of sin and holiness, because ignorant of God, they vainly endeavour by a restless mental activity to solve the riddle of nature, and unravel the hopeless perplexities of mortality. Like the inspired master of human knowledge, they strive in vain to know "the reason of things."²

Verses 23, 24. "But we preach Christ crucified," etc. The demand for a sign receives no answer, and the enquiries of philosophy lead only to vanity and hopeless doubt. It is upon the confessed failure of man, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, to work deliverance for himself, or by the flickering light of natural intelligence to find the way of peace, that God now speaks by His ambassadors to both alike.³ The cardinal *fact* of this divine testimony is a crucified *man*. But to the listening Jew it is opened and alleged from his own Scriptures that this Jesus is the true Immanuel, their long expected Christ;⁴ while to the willing Gentile there is announced at the same time the marvellous intelligence that the God whom he and his fathers had felt after and ignorantly worshipped has sent His very Son to be the Saviour of the world.

The preaching of the cross is considered next in its effects; first, on the natural man in both his distinctive varieties; and secondly, on the genuine believer. It is to the Jews a stumbling block, to the

⁹ John viii. 45.

¹ John vi. 29.

² Eccles. vii. 23-25.

³ Rom. iii.

⁴ Acts xvii. 3.

Gentiles⁵ foolishness, "but to them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God." The natural man, whether circumcised or otherwise, rejects the doctrine of the cross. Self-righteousness stumbles at it, worldly wisdom disregards or openly despises it. Wherever that self-abasing doctrine is received, it bears witness to the sovereign power and grace of Him who *calleth*, with a voice not to be mistaken nor resisted, the fore-known vessels of His mercy.⁶ Addressed to all alike, and naturally opposite to all men's thoughts, the Gospel gathers fruit to God from among the nations of the earth according to the sovereign good pleasure of His will.⁷

The first and distinctive effect of this preaching on "the called," is to present the person of the Saviour⁸ clearly and positively to their souls. To such, says the apostle, "it is *Christ*." The report of Him fell upon their ears in common with those of other men, but being mixed, in their happy case, with faith, His Name becomes to them the verification and assurance of His saving grace. They receive the Lord Himself in receiving the testimony of God. Next, the Christ so received is to them the power and wisdom of God. Power is known by its effects, and works as the fulfiller of His purpose to whom

⁵ ἔθνεσι, not ἑλλήσι, according to the best MSS.

⁶ Rom. ix. 23, 24.

⁷ Isaiah lv. 8; James i. 18.

⁸ The reader will notice that, in stating the effect of the Gospel on "the called," Paul omits any mention here of that preliminary exercise of conscience which usually precedes the firm establishment of the believer in the grace of God. He is not narrating a conversion, but distinguishing characteristically the saved from the lost.

power belongs. Now God's purpose, as respects His chosen, is to *save*. And the effect upon the human soul of a believing reception of Christ crucified is to establish it in the abiding peace of God. His Gospel is the Gospel of *salvation*, and when received with meekness, as His own engrafted word, it sets the simple believer far above all fear of Satan or of man, and gives Him in Christ a present and decisive victory over the world.⁹ For His Saviour is the *power of God*.

But He is God's wisdom also. Now wisdom is proved by a successful adjustment of means to an end; and if (as it needs must be) His own glory be God's end, then must Christ crucified be confessed to be His wisdom: for by the cross of the Son of God it is that the nullity of all creature-claims is demonstrated, as well as the abundant glory of His grace in the triumphant manifestation of His own righteousness.¹ Wisdom has been man's aim since first the lie of the tempter estranged Him from his Maker. Vain man would be wise.² But for the opened eye of faith, the cross is both an eternal silencing of natural pretensions, and a willing and grateful oblivion of them all, in the blessed discovery of what *God* is. Man naturally seeks *himself*. When quickened by the Spirit he seeks God, and finds Him in the cross of His own Son. In that Light, light is both seen and enjoyed: even the Light wherein is no darkness at all.³ And although the intellect is as powerless as ever to explain the

⁹ Eph. i. 10; Heb. ii. 14, 15; 1 John v. 4, 5.

¹ See the apostle's argument in Rom. iii.

² Job xi. 12.

³ Psa. xxxvi. 9; 1 John i. 5.

facts which belong to the mystery of redemption, faith sees (though as yet with the feeble eye of spiritual infancy), and marvels at the perfect beauty of that wisdom which the Spirit now reveals; for God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, has suffered Satan to exist and practise, yea, and to prosper also (but to his own undoing) through the bruising of the heel of Jesus, that in every sphere of His redeemed creation, not His power only, but the excellent brightness of His glory as a Saviour, might be acknowledged and adored in the perfected enjoyment of His love.⁴ In that light sin itself becomes a subject of intelligent contemplation to the believer, but in a far different sense from that knowledge of evil in its origin which philosophy still wearies itself in vain to find; and although in its nature a still undiscovered mystery, it is recognized as a necessity of God's permitting—a means to His great end, who suffers evil only that He may Himself work good; and thus the still unattainable object of human search⁵ shines forth for faith, in all its priceless lustre, from the cross.

Verse 25. "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men," etc. Having asserted in the previous verse the proper glory of the cross, he now takes up again the stigma of reproach already noticed in verse 18, in order to complete his demonstration of the excellency of the Gospel. It is foolishness, it is weakness. Yet in its foolishness it has compassed that of which man's wisdom could but vainly dream; for it has both solved the problem of humanity, and offered to the world a view of its

⁴ Eph. iii. 9, 10; Gen. iii. 15.

⁵ Job xxviii. 12, *seq.*

Creator such as no natural imagination had conceived. *God's* foolishness excels the wit of man. Again, the weak words of His Gospel⁶ have effected what no human power ever wrought before; for they have given a clear conscience to the guilty, and conferred upon the bankrupt and death-dishonoured soul of man a triumphant assurance of eternal life. By how much the dominion of the soul excels the mastery of the body, by so much does the word of truth exceed in power the utmost efforts of the human will.

Verses 26, 27. "For ye see your calling, brethren," etc. The sovereignty of God's calling and election is further insisted on in this and the following verses. Of old it had been said, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches."⁷ Since then, the wisdom which had spoken from a distance and in figures had come in person, and invited all who would to listen to its words.⁸ But when One greater than Solomon was teaching in the temple, and calling men to drink freely at the living well of salvation, though the common people heard Him gladly, the wise and mighty turned away their ears. "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?" was an enquiry which illustrates most naturally and forcibly the blinding effect of traditional orthodoxy in disqualifying the merely *religious* mind for the reception of vital truth, while the exclamation of Festus from the judgment-seat may be matched with the petulant indifference of

⁶ Acts xvii. 18. ⁷ Jer. ix. 23. *Conf.* Job xxviii. 28; Prov. ix. 10.

⁸ Prov. viii. ; John vii. 37.

Gallio, and the mockery of the Athenian sophists, as fair samples of the insufficiency of social rank or mental culture to confer upon the natural man an ability to know and recognize the voice of God.⁹

When weighing the apostle's doctrine in this passage, two things must be carefully and separately considered. The one is, the relative existing differences between high and low, cultivated and rude, etc., as everywhere found among men; and the other, the direct assertion of a divine call as the one effective means by which souls are brought savingly to Christ. Paul's statement is, that not many wise, etc., are called, and he pointedly directs his brethren's attention to the fact. He then (verse 27) states explicitly the reason—"For God hath *chosen* the foolish things," etc. Now it is clear that natural elements are entirely excluded from this solemn question. It is indeed true (and a mournful truth it is), that inasmuch as high birth, enlarged education, and wealth operate directly as means for strengthening and developing what is natural, these conditions are positively adverse to the attainment of divine knowledge, which *must* begin by reducing man to a state of absolute dependence upon God. But, on the other hand, poverty and ignorance are no natural introductions to a state of grace. "Lewd fellows of the baser sort" are as ready to deny the truth as philosophic pride is to ignore it.¹ Man is essentially the same in all gradations of culture or social position. By nature he is willingly averse from God, and toil or pleasure become practically his idols. He is as Abram was before he heard the voice of God.²

⁹ Acts xxvi. 24, xviii. 14, 15, xvii. 32.

¹ Acts xvii. 5.

² Josh. xxiv. 2, 3.

This clear and emphatic enunciation of the doctrine of divine election, in connection with the broad declaration of free grace as offered in the Gospel to Jew and Greek alike, is essential to a just estimate of the way of salvation. Without this element the Gospel would be in danger of perpetual abuse; and by regarding faith as a merely natural faculty, man would seem to have a meritorious interest in his own salvation. But the very reason of grace is *sin*; and sin means, in the language of the Spirit, a natural and permanent alienation of will from God. The carnal mind is enmity against God.³ Moreover, there is no such thing as a natural capacity to receive the truth. Nature may easily become enamoured of *truths*, both practical and abstract, but of those only which lie, or seem to lie, within her own reach. But God is beyond the reach of nature, and cannot be found out by search. He must (if such be His good pleasure) discover Himself, and to this end He must also confer upon the objects of this grace the needed ability to recognize and embrace what He is pleased thus to reveal. And this He does by His own living Word, according to the quickening power of the Holy Ghost.⁴

God calls and also *chooses*. His proclamation of mercy, and His invitations to the feast of His own charity in Christ, are disregarded by the natural ear. And so the result is as thus stated by anticipation in the judicial verdict of His Word—"Because I called, and ye refused; I have stretched forth my hand, and *no man* regarded,"⁵ etc. To be the Saviour of His people God must *save*, and not only notify

³ Rom. viii. 7.

⁴ 1 Pet. i. 23-25.

⁵ Prov. i. 24, *seq.*

to men that the means of salvation are within their reach. And it is for this reason that, in its positive and effective sense, "calling" is descriptive of the state of those only who have been begotten by the word of truth. An unreserved and hearty acknowledgment of this fundamental principle, connected as it invariably is with the doctrine of natural reprobation, or the declared exclusion of man as he naturally is from the kingdom of God,⁶ may at all times be accepted as a token of the beginning of God's work in the soul, even though the joy of His salvation may be deferred for a season, either through a defective apprehension of free grace, or an inadequate measure of faith to receive it according to the frank and gracious simplicity of its terms.

As the day of the Lord is prophetically against the loftiness of man,⁷ so also is the truth of the gospel in its present operation through the Spirit. Self-seeking is the wisdom of this world; self-losing, to be found in Christ, is the wisdom of the just.⁸ Neither might nor earthly wisdom has ever brought true happiness to its possessor; but joy and peace are in believing.⁹ The world both wonders at and curses in its heart, the blessedness of those who, with a knowledge of the living God, are content to be accounted ignorant of other things; who, without either power or visible defence, are yet void of the fear of man, and who are happy with no other reason of their happiness than Christ. Such shall never be confounded; while they do

⁶ John iii.; Eph. ii. 2.

⁸ Phil. iii.

⁷ Isa. ii. 17.

⁹ Rom. xv. 13.

themselves, so long as they walk humbly in the light, confound the world.

Verse 28. "And base things of the world," etc. When the assembly of priestly and secular dignitaries, who were gathered together at Jerusalem to sit in judgment on the messengers of God, took notice of their prisoners, "they perceived that they were ignorant and unlearned men."¹ But, while heartily despising them, they were unable to gainsay the palpable evidences of miraculous energy by which their doctrine was accredited. "Things which are not" began to shake the throne of present power, when Pilate was afraid before the words of One, who, while confessing that He was indeed a King, declared His kingdom to be not now of this world.² And Felix trembled and Agrippa felt ashamed when Paul, a chosen vessel, who, though neither ignorant nor base, was yet a minister of things unseen, bowed down, for a while at least, the stout-hearted wickedness of those who, if they thought of God at all, thought of Him only as one like themselves.³ As it belongs to God to "call these things which be not as though they were,"⁴ so does He, through the effectual power of the heavenly calling,⁵ make present things as nothing in the eyes of them that live upon His word.

But, in truth, the five descriptive epithets, which the Spirit here displays among the ornaments of God's "election," do all, in their first and chief significance, belong to Him who, though God's elect and holy One, was "despised and rejected of men."⁶

¹ Acts iv. 13. ² John xviii. xix. ³ Acts xxiv. 25; xxvi. 28.

⁴ Rom. iv. 17. ⁵ Heb. iii. 1.

⁶ Isa. xlii. 1. liii.; Psa. xvi.

And of this we have the amplest evidence from Scripture: "He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye Him?" "As to this fellow, we know not whence He is;"⁷ are authentic expressions of the value which worldly discernment set, in its day of opportunity, on God's incarnate wisdom. 2. "He weakeneth my strength in the way;" "My strength is dried up like a potsherd,"⁸ etc., were prophetic cries of Messiah by the Spirit, in view of His passion yet to be fulfilled; while, by the testimony of this same apostle, He "was crucified through weakness."⁹ 3. To them that judged after the appearance, the only-begotten of the Father was no higher nor better than "the carpenter's son."¹ 4. By Herod and his men of war the patient King of righteousness was mocked and set at nought, as an insane pretender to a title not his own.² 5. It was because He was from above, and spake of things which He, and He alone, had heard and seen, and which had no existence therefore for the heart of unbelief, that they who heard them stumbled at His speech. The "chosen of God and precious" was, and is, the rejected of the builders of this world. But upon that Stone of help, He who chose Him from eternity has provided and established a kingdom, before which, when its glory is revealed, the power and wisdom and policy of men, with all their proudest monuments, shall be as chaff upon the summer threshing-floor.³

Verse 29 declares to us one specific end of this sovereign calling and election of God. It is, "That

⁷ John x. 20; ix. 29.

⁸ Psalm cii. 23; xxii. 15.

⁹ 2 Cor. xiii. 4.

¹ Matt. xiii. 55.

² Luke xxiii. 11.

³ Dan. ii. 35.

no flesh should glory in his presence." Boasting cannot live with grace. The cross, by withering nature to its very root, leaves nothing from which carnal glorying can spring. Death gives no sound, but confesses in its silence the truth and power of Him who has made it pass on all because of sin.⁴ The presence of the Living God brings what is mortal to its end. That no flesh can see His face and live, was His own assurance to the man whom yet He treated as His friend.⁵

Verse 30. "But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus," etc. When flesh ends the Spirit begins. God is a spirit, and His children are "of Him." But this their new and divine origin is "in Christ." As the personal mortality of each natural man is derived from the first Adam as its source, so is the root of each believer's life in Christ. In *himself* he has nothing but the faith which God has given him, and which, by grace, unites him to the Lord; together with the indwelling Spirit, who attests the truth of his calling, and teaches him to cry, Abba, Father, in the name of Jesus. The believer is of God, and knows, on the assurance of His testimony, that in the Son of God he has eternal life.⁶ And it is to this knowledge that he has been called effectually by the Gospel.

But the doctrine of this verse not only declares the believer's origin as a new man in Christ, but sets forth also with much distinctness the counterpart of that truth. If Christ is the believer's representative with God, He is also *from* God⁷ the full objective

⁴ Rom. v. 12.

⁵ Exod. xxxiii. 20.

⁶ 1 John v. 10-13.

⁷ Ἀπὸ Θεοῦ.

manifestation of His glory to His saints. This is expressed in the words which follow: "Who of God is made unto us *wisdom*; both righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."⁸ Before examining more closely these several terms, it may be noted that we have in this general declaration the triumphant answer of the Spirit to His own enquiry at verse 20. If it now be asked again, "Where is the wise?" the answer is, "In *Christ*." Made wise unto salvation by the teaching of the Scriptures, through faith which is in Christ Jesus,⁹ the believer who willingly arrays himself in the reproach of Christ, and for His sake passes for a fool among the children of this world, will walk before God in that name as in a garment of eternal praise.

On considering the "wisdom" which the Spirit thus presents in Christ objectively to our faith, we find that it offers in its three constituents, of "righteousness," "holiness," and "redemption," a rich and abounding answer to the utmost need of man. The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, because, spite of all its acquisitions and pretensions, it leaves man still unrighteous, unholy, and unredeemed. God's wisdom as a Saviour consists in an effective manifestation of that which, when received as His own free gift, reverses for the believer, absolutely and on all its points, the previous condemnation of mankind as under sin. Nor is this by any means the whole of its effect. Of the three terms here

⁸ Δικαιοσύνη τε καὶ ἁγιασμός καὶ ἀπολύτρωσις. That these latter words form together an explanatory definition of σοφία, I have no doubt. The objections of some modern commentators to this construction of the clause seem little to the purpose.

⁹ 2 Tim. iii. 15.

employed by the apostle in his amplified definition of God's saving wisdom, the first alone at any time belonged to the natural man. It is written, that God created man upright;¹ but holiness was not an attribute of Adam in a state of innocency. It could not be. His ignorance of evil rendered it impossible: for holiness, or sanctification, implies both a knowledge and a judgment of what is contrary to itself. But this is inconsistent with a state of simple innocency. Adam first knew holiness when he proved it in his Maker through his own condemnation and exclusion from the garden of the Lord.

But God is holy, and will have His people like Himself. Besides, therefore, a complete forgiveness of their sins, there must be found, in the provision of His mercy for His chosen, both absolute righteousness and perfect sanctification. And both these things are found in equal measure in His Christ. He is "the Just One," and through the shedding of His blood, believing sinners are completely justified in Him.² He is also "the Holy One," and not only so named by the Spirit, but recognised as such by the devils also, who believe and tremble.³ The same word of truth, therefore, which, as the Gospel of salvation, establishes the believer in God's righteousness, presents him also "holy and unblamable in Christ."⁴ His proper and characteristic description in the language of the Spirit is, "a saint." It is thus that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus

¹ Eccles. vii. 29.

² On the subject of justification generally, and with especial reference to the meritorious obedience of Christ, the reader is referred to the third edition of *Notes on the Romans*, chaps. iii. iv. and v. . ³ Mark i. 24. ⁴ Eph. i. 13; Col. i. 22.

Christ puts full honour on His own Beloved, by making Him not only the retriever of man's ruin, and the triumphant undoer of the serpent's work, but the communicator also to His chosen of a life to which His own holiness, no less than His everlasting righteousness, essentially belongs.⁵

The last feature of this our living wisdom is redemption. And as righteousness and holiness exist for the natural man in no other manner than as vain imaginations, so also redemption is a truth which those only who are consciously "sold under sin"⁶ can either desire or rightly comprehend. And if it be enquired why in the statement of his doctrine the apostle has observed this order, putting that last which in its effective operation is a necessary introduction to the other two, it may be answered that redemption is not the beginning only, but the

⁵ It is a common error among Christians to draw an unscriptural distinction between justification and sanctification; to find the former in the Saviour, and look vainly for the latter in themselves. But, not to speak now of other Scriptures, the apostle's doctrine in the text should be sufficient to prevent so hurtful a misconception of the truth. Its origin may be probably referred to a misunderstanding of the scriptural phrase "sanctification of the Spirit." But if attention be paid to the passages in which this phrase is found, it will be seen that it always signifies the regenerative work of the Holy Ghost, as a necessary prelude to an active faith, in God's elect. There is indeed a secondary and more practical sense in which personal sanctification is regarded as the aim and desire of God's true children; but this last is only a special form of the general exhortation of the Spirit to the saints. They are already rooted by the Father's hand in Christ; their desire should be (even as the apostle prays) that their walk should be worthy of their vocation, and their moral condition be according to the grace wherein they stand. On the first of these points, we may refer in illustration to 1 Pet. i. 2; 2 Thess. ii. 13; on the last, to 1 Thess. v. 23; 1 Pet. iii. 15; Heb. xii. 14. ⁶ Rom. vii. 14.

end of the Redeemer's work—that while in Him believers have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, they are waiting also for redemption in its final form.⁷ Their *bodies* are the Lord's. Already justified and sanctified in Him, they are looking for the moment when, at the appearing of the Saviour, His ever blessed work as the Redeemer will receive its consummation, in the changing of those whom He has purchased into His own very likeness. Even now His people are the sons of God, but as they have not yet seen Him in whom believing they rejoice, they know not how they will appear in that great day. But they know that they will be like Him; for they shall see Him as He is.⁸ Such, then, is Christ, as the confidence and joy of God's elect, the open vision of divine glory into which they are called to look by faith, the goodness and wealth of that inheritance which is the eternal portion of the saints in light!

Verse 31. "That as it is written," etc. We have seen, in verse 29, that carnal boasting is silenced in the presence of the work of God. We have now a re-opening of lip for those who bow willingly the knee to Jesus, according to the faith of God's elect.⁹ For they who in Christ are already more than conquerors may boast. The revelation of God's glory as a Saviour leaves little to His true worshippers but praise.¹ They pray also, and that at the prompting of the same Spirit who teaches them to sing. But their boast is Jesus. Confessing Him to be the Lord, they use the liberty here given by the Spirit

⁷ Eph. i. 7; Rom. viii. 23.

⁸ 1 Pet. i. 8; 1 John iii. 2.

⁹ Titus i. 1.

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 9; Col. i. 12, 13.

to set up their banners in His Name.² What was written by the prophet in the midst of his affliction,³ is now repeated by the apostle as a watchword of triumphant faith. For the day which kings and prophets sighed for has arrived.⁴ The darkness is passed, and the true light now shineth;⁵ and the brightness of that light is discovered, to the called and chosen heirs of salvation, in the face of Jesus Christ.⁶

² Psa. xx. 5.

³ Jer. ix. 23, 24.

⁴ Matt. xiii. 7.

⁵ 1 John ii. 8.

⁶ 2 Cor. iv. 4.

CHAPTER II.

THE general statement of doctrine contained in the latter half of the foregoing chapter is now followed by a more direct application of it to the Corinthian saints.

Verse 1. "And I, brethren, when I came to you," etc. They were his witnesses as to the manner of his introduction to themselves; for they knew that he had come among them at the first, not as a sophist in quest of an admiring auditory, but as one burdened with a message from the living God. Nor, when he spoke to them of Jesus, had he artfully endeavoured to make his doctrine chime with their existing notions or ideas. Full as they were of speculative thought, and both quick to receive and eager to discuss intellectual novelties of any kind, there was nothing in their previous culture or habit of thought on which his doctrine might be grafted as on a stock prepared naturally for its reception; for he brought to them a *testimony*, not a theory. He came among a nation of philosophizing idolaters, to declare with authority the words of *truth*. He brought the testimony of *God*¹ to those who hitherto

¹ The testimony of God in a double sense. First, because God in Christ was its subject; and, secondly, because God is also by the Spirit the original and effective witness to Himself.

had been without God, and therefore without hope in the world;² for at Corinth, as at every other seat of Gentile commerce and civilization, men were either carried thoughtlessly along the worn and unclean ways of gross idolatry, or driven, in their vain search after good, from one unsatisfying system of philosophy to another, knowing, or seeming to know, a little of everything but that only knowledge which gives life to its possessor.³

Verse 2. "For I determined not to know any thing," etc. This verse is of much interest, not only as a pregnant expression of the substance of divine testimony, but also as shewing in a strong light the important place that self-conscious judgment holds in the work of true spiritual service. What is given to Christ's servants to fit them for their work is, "the spirit of power, of love, and of a *sound mind*."⁴ The "man in Christ" is never lost in his office as a witness or preacher of God's testimony. Not going in the heat of his spirit under the strong hand of the Lord, like the reluctant prophet of Israel,⁵ but entering on his work in full and glad communion with the Master whom he served; Paul here lets us know, that he so shaped his testimony as to wither most effectually the false pretensions of the flesh, and to afford the freest scope for the positive operation of divine power.

He did not affect, therefore, as some others did,⁶ to turn philosophy to the service of the Gospel, by seeking for presumed affinities of the lower and the

² Eph. ii. 12.

³ Eccles. vii. 12.

⁴ 2 Tim. i. 7.

⁵ Ezek. iii. 14.

⁶ 2 Cor. ii. 17.

higher wisdom.⁷ Such compromises he well knew could lead only to a corruption of the Word of God, while they implied also an incompleteness in the testimony which professedly came forth from God. If Christ was to be the *end*, so should He likewise be the beginning of his doctrine. He would begin where nature ends. Of *death* he would speak, but not as a helpless confessor of its power. Nor would he philosophize upon mortality, like their own enquiring sages; but he would explain its meaning, and declare its cause. He would speak of it in connection with His name, who alone had tasted without sin a sinner's doom. He would show them how by dying Jesus had abolished death, and brought to light (for those who would by faith behold that light) both life and incorruption by the Gospel.⁸ He would know among them nothing but Jesus Christ, and Him *crucified*. He would declare to them His *name*, and who He is that bears it; his *title*, and by whom and why conferred; His living and meritorious obedience, and the much long-suffering of His grace. But especially he would insist upon His *cross*; for thus and thus only could the truth be fully told, whether of man in the dark bondage of his sin and misery, or of God in the abundant greatness of His love. He would declare God's testimony of His *Son*.

Verse 3. "And I was with you in weakness," etc. But though he well knew both the nature of his

⁷ Like those unhappy but far more guilty sophists of our own day, who would marry their "higher Christianity" to the advanced physical science of the times, and celebrate the unblessed union by a deliberate sacrifice of all that is vitally distinctive of the Gospel.

⁸ 2 Tim. i. 10.

work and its results,⁹ and while his sound spiritual judgment taught him the right mode of dealing with these Gentile mind-worshippers, he could not but be conscious, on that very account, of the formidable character of the resistance which the prince of this world was everywhere organizing against the truth, and which, in a city like Corinth, possessed in full force and efficiency its two main elements of Jewish virulence and Gentile pride. Against the threatenings of personal danger, as well as the disheartening effect of doctrinal opposition, he both needed and received the special encouragement of the Lord.¹ Nor should we, in considering this verse, lose sight of the bearing which it also seems to have upon that inward and helpful, though often sorely-trying exercise of soul, which constitutes so large a portion of the "travail,"² which God commonly uses as a moral means of bringing His own children into light. They who truly work with God are made to feel continually that it is not they, but He, in whom the power dwells.³

Verse 4. "And my speech⁴ and my preaching was not with enticing words," etc. He would neither leaven his teaching by palatable flatteries, nor commend it by rhetorical artifices to his hearers' taste. Both in manner and in substance his ministry should be "of God." In *His* presence no man can be otherwise than simple, and Paul fulfilled his mission

⁹ Acts xxvi. 18.

¹ Acts xviii. 9, 10.

² Gal. iv. 19.

³ In the Second Epistle this important principle is illustrated more at large.

⁴ Or doctrine, λόγος, the substantial truth of which the preaching (κήρυγμα) was the vehicle of expression.

as one who would persuade not men, but God.⁵ Instead, therefore, of rhetorical suasion, his gospel made its way "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." In this large and general expression there is, probably, a reference to the outward miracles, which were so freely lavished at the beginning of the gospel as a demonstrative token to mankind at large of the source from whence the testimony came. But if so, they hold, in this description of his work at Corinth, but a secondary place. What he evidently insists on is the purely spiritual character of his ministry, and its effect upon the hearts and consciences of those who had received it. The spirit of truth is the glorifier of Jesus; and both as the convincer of sin, and the revealer of Divine righteousness, He had wrought effectually at Corinth through the ministry of Paul.

In verse 5 we are shown the motive which governed the apostle in thus rigidly avoiding, in his preaching, the ordinary methods of persuasion. It was, he tells us, "That their faith might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the *power* of God." If the Gospel is God's wisdom, the faith which embraces it is a token also and a witness of His power. Credence may be given to the doctrines of men, and human wisdom has its votaries; for nature easily responds to what is natural. But a faith which *justifies*, discerns the Person of its object, and is itself the gift of Him who sent His only begotten into the world, that we might live by Him. Its quality is according to its origin. True faith believes God's word, and reckons on His power,

⁵ Gal. i. 10.

regardless of the doubts or remonstrances of natural reason; for the Gospel treats of natural impossibilities, while human wisdom either deals with natural facts, or wastes itself in empty speculations. But in neither of these can faith find any rest or stay; it must have a definite object before it, and can live only on a positive testimony. But philosophy does not testify. It has no message. *That* can only come from truth that is from *God*. And thus it is that every one who has known experimentally the power of the gospel, feels an instinctive disgust at artificial mannerism of any kind on the part of those who take in hand to preach the word of life. The faith of God's elect stands not on that "rational conviction" which is the pedestal of mere historic Christianity, but by the upholding power of Him who gave it, and because it is itself a faculty of that new nature which the regenerative grace of God has conferred upon His own. Now, the work of regeneration is by the quickening word of truth. To the apostle, therefore, any artificial methods of commending his testimony would seem a sort of sacrilege. His power of persuasion was the native force of truth; its effect was to ground the willing listener upon the Living Rock of ages. Thus God is glorified in that which is His own peculiar work.⁶

Verse 6. "Howbeit we speak⁷ wisdom," etc. While

⁶ 2 Cor. i. 21.

⁷ The change from singular to plural here is of importance as well as interest, since it may serve to check the tendency existing in some minds to isolate entirely the testimony of Paul; and because he was, in fact, selected by sovereign grace as the chief expounder of the previously hidden mystery (Eph. iii.), to infer from thence that the other apostles were not also cognizant of the true doctrine of the Church.

the preaching of the cross is, in the manner of it, "foolishness," there is a wisdom which is spoken to the perfect. We have thus a clear and decisive line of demarcation established by the Spirit between those whom He addresses on the gracious invitation of the Gospel, as the word of reconciliation, and those who, having by faith received the word with understanding, are now estimated according to the grace in which they stand. The latter are by description "perfect,"⁸ because seen and accepted in the Perfect One Himself. But though perfect in standing, as complete in Christ, they are not so in knowledge. On the contrary, in the true order of the Spirit's teaching, the complete justification of a sinner is the prelude to his education as a saint. To "go on unto

⁸ Τέλειοι. Perfection is, in the New Testament, spoken of in two principal senses; first, absolutely, as a declaration of the finished work of Christ, in which sense *all* who believe are necessarily perfect (Heb. ix. x.); and also, relatively, in which latter sense *no* saint of God is perfect until presented to the Father in the bodily likeness of the Firstborn from the dead. The standard of this relative perfection is the Father Himself, who has called us into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ (Matt. v. 48), and it is as such the common object of attainment to all who run the race of faith. Paul was a runner while he lived, but had not yet attained to this perfection, since no unfinished course can possibly be perfect. (Phil. iii.) In close connection with this latter meaning of the term a third sense may also be distinguished; as where, in chap. xiv. 20 of this epistle, believers are exhorted to be "*men*" (marg. *perfect*); and in another place to be "*perfect and entire.*" (James i. 4.) The moral force of these and similar exhortations is too obvious to require explanation. Lastly, and not without reference to the language of this verse, the same term is used by the apostle in Heb. v. 14, to distinguish them that are "*of full age*" from infantine or backslidden believers. In this sense it is nearly equivalent to "*spiritual.*" In the last of these categories the apostle refuses to place the Corinthian saints (chap. iii. 1, 2), while acknowledging them fully in the first.

perfection" is the natural progress of those who have begun to know the Lord.⁹ The "path of the just" can be trodden only by the just. The Father guides and chastens His own children, while in grace He seeks still to reconcile His adversaries to Himself.

Accordingly the *teaching*, as distinguished from the *preaching*, of Jesus Christ, is the subject of the present and following verses to the close of the chapter. And now, reversing his own language, he asserts as a teacher what as an evangelist he had disclaimed. It is no longer foolishness, but wisdom that he speaks. "Yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world,¹ which come to nought." The first point of contrast to be noticed between the wisdom of this age and the wisdom of the just is, that the first is perishable like the fleeting time which witnesses its efforts, while the last grows on to a completion which will only be attained when the former things are passed away. They are diverse also in their origin, their object, and effect. The one is from beneath, the other from above.² Self-seeking is the rule and aim of worldly wisdom, while the fear of the Lord is the beginning and the sum of the wisdom which cometh from above.³ "In much wisdom is much grief," is the confession of him who saw the furthest into things beneath the sun;"⁴ but

⁹ Heb. vi. 1; *conf.* Hosea vi. 3.

¹ τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, "The rulers or authorities of this age." He is speaking of the present terminable course of things; of the "day of man," as distinguished from the "world to come" (Heb. ii.), or "day of the Lord." Under the term "princes" is comprised pre-eminence of any kind recognized among men, especially the ascendancy of *mind*.

² James i. 5, 17; iii. 17, 18. ³ Prov. ii. 1-5. ⁴ Eccles. i. 18.

the wisdom that God teaches leads His children in the way of pleasantness and peace.⁵ Corruption and a fool's reward are the certain end of what the world esteems, while the good fruits of true wisdom will be reaped with endless praise when the day comes for her children, who have justified her, to receive her crown.⁶

But besides these broad and general distinctions between the wisdom of the Spirit and the wisdom of this world, there is revealed now to the perfect a form of wisdom which no other eyes can see. Of this, in verse 7, he proceeds to treat—"We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery," etc. There are mysteries of grace as well as mysteries of nature. Philosophy still hopes to penetrate the latter, while the former are the birthright of the simple who believe in God.⁷ At all times the secret of the Lord has been with them that fear Him; for in His *name* was treasured all that He could give or show. But there is an order in the revelations of His truth, even as there are measures and degrees in the bestowment of His grace. As we are taught elsewhere, a *better* lot has been reserved for us who *now* receive God's calling than that of the fathers, who obtained a good report through faith.⁸ The language of the passage now before us is both clear and definite: the wisdom to be spoken among the perfect, although ordained before the world, was hidden⁹ until its destined recipients had attained, through the revelation of God's

⁵ Prov. iii. 17. ⁶ Matt. xi. 19; Prov. iii. 15; iv. 9.

⁷ Matt. xi. 25.

⁸ Heb. xi. 40.

⁹ Θεοῦ σοφίαν τὴν ἀποκεκρυμμένην, i.e., that was and is hidden from any but an initiated eye.

finished love in Christ, the distinctive title now conferred upon them by the Spirit.¹

To Paul, then, and his fellows² it was given to speak to God's elect of things which had been hidden from the view of all their predecessors in the faith. The birth of Jesus as the seed of promise, the excellency of His person, His humiliation and rejection by His own, His sacrificial death, His triumphant resurrection and ascension; in a word, "the sufferings of Christ and the glories which should follow,"³ are all "contained in Scripture." But what God's former prophets saw in vision, and recorded at the bidding of the Spirit, they understood but in a limited degree. Let us remember, that it was to *Israel* that those oracles of God were committed which contain the secret of His counsel. But Israel was (and will be so again acknowledged) God's *earthly* people. The heritage of Jacob is "the high places of the earth."⁴ Hence the long day of Messiah's kingdom, with its abundant blessings, both spiritual and temporal, to be enjoyed on earth—first by Jehovah's chosen people in Immanuel's land, and mediately through them by the other nations of the world—is the chief burden of prophetic Scripture.⁵

¹ In Heb. xii. 23 we are shown the perfected standing of the Old Testament saints, through the retrospective efficacy of the death and resurrection of the Lord. (*Conf. Rom. iii. 25.*)

² Each after his measure and according to the place which he was called to fill in the appointed ministry of God. It was, however, in an especial manner to Paul that the doctrine of the Church, and its distinctive calling and glory, which is the wisdom here spoken of, was entrusted; a distinction duly recognized by the apostle of the circumcision. (2 Pet. iii. 16.)

³ 1 Pet. i. 11.

⁴ Isa. lviii. 14.

⁵ *Notes on the Psalms, passim.*

But of the consequences which were to flow from Messiah's rejection by His own, and the judicial repudiation of Jerusalem, they perceived but little. It may be reasonably doubted whether the Christ of God ever was or could be contemplated by prophetic faith apart from the nation of Israel and its destinies. And although Abraham rejoiced to see His day, his joy was in the ratification of the covenant which made him "heir of the world," rather than in a power to discern the present calling and appointment of the Church.

The mystery of which the apostle speaks, though deposited as if in cypher in the Jewish oracles, was inaccessible to human search, until in due season God himself became its interpreter. Hence it is said to have been "hidden in God."⁶ For until God came forth by His Spirit as the witness of His world-rejected Son, and the comforter of those whose calling is to suffer for His name, the proper origin and destiny of the Church remained unknown. And while it is true that, since the publication of this mystery by apostolic teaching, it has become a portion of the "common faith," it is even now appreciable, as he tells us, only by "the spiritual." It is by "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God," and not by mental effort or an indolent acquiescence in mere traditional teaching, that the hope of His calling and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints are to be known.⁷ As it is the wisdom of God, it can be tasted only in communion with God. A carnal and unhumiliated heart can find no access to this wisdom, though it bid high

⁶ Eph. iii. 9.

⁷ Eph. i. 16-18.

for its acquirement.⁸ But with the lowly there is wisdom. Meanwhile, referring to its end and purpose, it was ordained of God, the apostle says, "for our glory."

The glory of God's saints is their calling into the fellowship of His Son, while to bring His *many* sons to glory is the declared purpose of Him who calls them by His grace.⁹ The vessels of elective mercy were by Him "afore prepared unto glory."¹ And as the Son was with the Father from eternity, and is the efficient Maker of all created things, so also were His predestined "fellows" both contemplated and provided for in God's eternal counsel.² Before the worlds were framed by the word of God, their Framer had received in promise the Church of His election.³ And according to its origin, so also is its present calling. By their confession of the cross God's chosen are definitively severed from the "dwellers upon earth," and are viewed by the Spirit as already translated and enthroned in heavenly places in their Head. *There* is their heritage, and there the goodly treasure of their hope.⁴

Their calling is, therefore, distinctively a *heavenly* calling; for in the Church there is no *Jew*.⁵ On earth they have no life nor name, save as confessors of *His* Name, whose reproach they are allowed by grace to bear. Already receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved,⁶ they are taught by the Spirit,

⁸ Prov. xvii. 16.

⁹ Heb. ii. 10.

¹ Rom. ix. 23.

² God's *wisdom* planned the Church before the ages, *πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων*. His *kindness* is to be the portion of that Church, by Jesus Christ, through all the coming ages of eternity, *ἐν τοῖς αἰῶσι τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις*. (Eph. ii. 7.)

³ 2 Tim. i. 9; Tit. i. 2.

⁴ Eph. i. ii.; Col. i.

⁵ Col. iii. 11.

⁶ Heb. xii. 28.

which dwells in them as the earnest of their inheritance, to occupy with diligence until the reigning time be come. They are, by calling and description, brethren of the First-born, and companions in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.⁷ The Christian reader of these notes will readily perceive how different are the thoughts suggested by a contemplation of the hidden mystery of God, from any ideas associated with Christianity as a recognized religion of the world. What place and relation the Church, as the mystic body of Christ, holds *in* the world, while itself no longer *of* it, will more fully appear in the following chapters. To proceed now with our subject.

Verse 8. "Which none of the princes of this world knew," etc. The language of this verse shows clearly that the root of the mystery, whose dispensational manifestation we have just been considering, lies in the person of the Son of God; and it may remind us of what is said as to "the mystery of godliness" by the same witness in another place.⁸ In point also of practical doctrine, we may compare with it the words of Peter, when encouraging the actual murderers of Christ to come boldly to the ready feast of God's abounding grace.⁹ It was, indeed, with wicked hands that they had crucified the "man approved of God;"¹ yet they had done it ignorantly. For though He had wrought such miracles among them, they believed not on Him. They would not and they could not give Him His true name and honour; for upon their naturally alien

⁷ Heb. ii. 11; Rev. i. 9.

⁹ Acts iii. 17.

⁸ 1 Tim. iii.

¹ Acts ii. 22, 23.

hearts the spirit of blindness had judicially descended, according to what Esaias said, when he saw His glory and spake of Him.² None knew the wisdom of God, though each in turn felt something of the power of the truth, when "both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel," were united in their work of blood. Christ was crucified upon a doubt, not of His innocency, but of His divinity. *Knowledge* would have changed Pilate from a judge into a worshipper. But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled?

Verse 9. "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen," etc. The evident drift of this quotation³ is, that the wisdom which is the peculiar portion of the believer in Christ crucified, although hidden from the understanding of the prophets who foretold it, had been, nevertheless, indicated in the language of Scripture; but as a treasure whose key was still in the hands of Him who inspired the prophets, and would in due time fill with the true and perfect light the apostolic heralds of His grace. Accordingly he proceeds:

Verse 10. "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit," etc. These words contain an express declaration—first, of the special gift bestowed on the apostles as the inspired interpreters of God's secret wisdom, and, secondly, of the fellowship in light and knowledge which is common to the Church throughout its varied membership, as having received the Holy Ghost the Comforter; for He who

² John xii. 37-41.

³ The apostle's words are not in literal agreement with any single passage in the Old Testament. We may perhaps regard them as a condensation of Psa. xxxi. 19, and Isa. lxiv. 4.

inspires the teacher, is the power of reception also to the taught. Nor is there any limit to the progress of God's chosen in this school of wisdom; for, as he proceeds, "The Spirit revealeth all things, even the deep things of God." The Lord's promise to His disciples was, that when the Spirit of truth was come, He should guide them into all the truth. Things which He had said while with them should be brought to their remembrance, and *many* things which He had left unsaid, because they were unable to receive them, should be told them in that day.⁴ Both things in heaven and things on earth are comprised in the teaching of the Spirit of Christ; for all things that the Father hath are also His, and the universal Headship over all has been conferred on Him who is appointed Heir of all.⁵ And the Spirit takes of His to show them unto us. Nay, the depths of God are open to the search of His elect. The knowledge which they are invited to pursue, under the enabling strength and guidance of the Spirit, surpasses knowledge; for it is the love of Christ, itself the measure of the fulness of Him who filleth all in all.⁶

But although the Spirit is all-searching, we are not therefore to infer that all to whom that Spirit has been given are, in an experimental sense, either all-discerning or all-receptive. There are measures of spiritual capacity as well as of natural endowment. Moreover, the Lord has Himself established for us the closest moral connection between the conscience and the spiritual understanding.⁷ Yet in an

⁴ John xvi. 12, 13. ⁵ John xv. 15; Eph. i. 10, 11; Heb. i. 2.

⁶ Eph. iii. 16-19.

⁷ John xiv. 20-23.

absolute sense the common possession of the Spirit places all believers on a par in this respect, since all are alike renewed for knowledge after the image of Him that created them.⁸ As nature and her things are open indefinitely to the investigations of the natural mind, and as each man naturally is the judge of his own thoughts, so is there opened also to the spiritual understanding an ever widening view of all that lies comprised within the domain of *truth*; God, who cannot be found out by natural investigation, being Himself the boundless subject of His Spirit's search. This is distinctly expressed in what follows.

Verse 11. "For who among men⁹ knoweth," etc. The intrinsic and inviolable privacy of the human breast is here chosen as a just analogy by which to illustrate the doctrine of spiritual consciousness and intelligence. The subjective application of this comparison to the believer, as a new and spiritual man, will appear in the following verse; what we have now carefully to notice is the permanent and absolute distinction of the two subjects of comparison. Man and his things fill one category; God and His things the other. With respect to the latter, it is obvious, though not here mentioned by the apostle, that it also comprehends the former; a *perfect* knowledge of man and his things belonging also to God, and to Him alone. But the point of practical importance is the positive exclusion of the natural man from the entire domain of spiritual knowledge. "The things of God knoweth no one," says the apostle, "but the Spirit of God." Theolo-

⁸ Col. iii. 10.

⁹ Τίς γὰρ οἶδεν ἀνθρώπων κ.λ.

gical knowledge is not necessarily spiritual knowledge. What men call "divinity" has often nothing of God in it but the scriptural language, which in too many cases is perverted to the darkening of His own true counsel. Mere mind may handle truth, but cannot taste it or enjoy it. Nor is there anything less edifying, and few things are more painfully unprofitable to the children of God, than to listen to the language of men who bring to the study of the word of God no sounder qualification for its exposition than a cultivated natural intellect.

Verse 12. "Now we have received," etc. These words apply in the first instance to the apostles, as inspired teachers of the truth, as is shewn more evidently by the following verse. But this specialty of meaning is but an example (though a most important and essential one) of the wider and deeper truth already stated; for apostolic gifts and powers are but particular forms of that energy which belongs to the Spirit which is given to the Church at large. And this is a point placed beyond all reasonable controversy by a consideration of the latter clause of the verse before us, which declares that the Spirit is given "that we may know the things which are freely given us of God." But the gifts of God, and the knowledge necessary for their enjoyment, are not bestowed upon apostles only, but on all who are partakers of the common faith.

When it is asserted by the apostle, that what we have received is "*not* the spirit of the world, *but* the Spirit which is from God,"¹ we have something more than a repetition of the contrast already drawn

¹ Τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ.

between the Spirit of God and the spirit of man. There is in these words a distinct recognition of two antagonistic spirits, either of which a man may be said to "receive." In other words, there is implied here what is taught more expressly in other places,² namely, the necessary subjection of all men to the leading and governance either of the Spirit of truth, or the spirit of error: the Spirit which proceedeth from the Father and the Son, to inhabit as His temples the bodies of God's saints, or the spirit which worketh in the children of disobedience. Nor is there any doctrine of Scripture, next to that which teaches us the name and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, more needful for us to keep well in memory than the doctrine of the personal and world-pervading energy of Satan. He is, by divine description, both the god and prince of this world, until the time arrives for the kingdoms of this world to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.³ As this subject will be frequently before us in the progress of these Notes, it is enough to have stated it thus generally here.

That we may know and thus *enjoy*⁴ what God has freely given us in Christ, is the declared intent of this unction from the Holy One. Hence it is evident that our growth in true spiritual knowledge must be proportioned to the measure of our own willing subjection to the Spirit's leading. If grieved by our ways, He will not, indeed, leave His people, but will no longer be their open spring of joy. If obeyed, through our subjection to the word, He will

² Eph. ii. 2; 2 Cor. iv. 4; 1 John iv. 1-6.

³ John xiv. 30; Rev. xi. 15.

⁴ 1 John i. 3, 4.

freely shed abroad the love of God in our hearts, and cause us to abound in hope. As to the things that are "freely given us of God," a full statement of them can be collected only from the general teaching of the Spirit. While in the world, and as distinguished from it, believers are described by the apostle⁵ as "they that receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness." From this their present standing, they look onward to their certain hope of glory. "They shall reign in life by One, Jesus Christ." And in the same epistle we have, as the subject of an entire chapter,⁶ a rich and marvellous display of the believer's character and prospects as a man in Christ. We shall find, also, at the close of the chapter immediately following this, a pregnant summary of the possessions of the saints. It needs only to be here repeated—first, that a true Christian *standing* is one not of expectation only, but also of present and assured ownership through faith, and secondly, that each believer has conferred on him a power of unlimited progress in the experimental knowledge of Divine things.

Verse 13. "Which things also we speak," etc. The promise of the Spirit was not only for the personal blessing of him that received it, but was to be diffusive in its results. Out of his belly should flow rivers of living water.⁷ And here we may again notice the comprehensiveness of the Lord's promise, and its application in principle to all believers, while giving their full weight to those official endowments of an apostle, which are in their nature

⁵ Rom. v. 17.

⁶ Rom. viii.

⁷ John vii. 38, 39.

both peculiar and exclusive.⁸ The verse before us expresses in the clearest terms the writer's claim to Divine inspiration, in the strictest and amplest sense. His *words* are of the Spirit's teaching, not less than the truth which they convey. And strange and unwelcome as such doctrine may appear to the unhumbled pride of men, it is to the believer the enunciation of a necessary and most welcome truth. Unclean lips must be first purged, if they are to become the oracles of God. Nor could His precious thoughts to usward who believe be safely trusted to the wit of man for their appropriate clothing. He who made man's mouth has also filled it at His pleasure, and in the instances which he has chosen, with speech fitted for the declaration of His counsel; making his tongue to be, under the sovereign guidance of the Spirit, as the tongue of a ready writer. If David speaks, it is by his own confession (confirmed by the witness of Him of whom he spake) not of himself, but by the Holy Ghost.⁹ The Jewish Scriptures were to Him of whom they testified, and who came in person to fulfil them, collectively "the word of God;" while, to fit His chosen messengers for their appointed work, they were endowed expressly with power from on high.¹

If, therefore, Paul was chosen, as he surely was,

⁸ Compare further, as to the efficient spring of Paul's own testimony, his language in 2 Cor. iv. 13.

⁹ 2 Sam. xxxiii.; Mark xii. 36.

¹ Luke xxiv. 49. An apology seems almost necessary to the Christian reader for insisting so pointedly on what is, in truth, a rudimental doctrine of the faith. But we live in days when a distinct and persistent assertion of what is vital is the first duty of all who would avoid the guilt of complicity with the fast-growing heterodoxy of the time.

not only to preach Jesus as the Son of God by word of mouth, but also to make an express addition to the written word of God,² we need not wonder at the emphasis with which he here lays claim to verbal inspiration. As one who spoke God's words, he was enabled to "match spirituals with spirituals,"³ to present divine revelations in words which, though they are his own, and exhibit very generally in their arrangement a characteristic "style," were suggested to him by the Holy Ghost. The language of this verse applies, of course, equally to the oral and written testimony of the apostle; but more especially to the latter. And it may be further remarked, that the frequency with which in the course of his epistles he asserts his claim to immediate inspiration, is what might be almost naturally expected in the writings of one who, though not a whit behind the chiefest apostles, was exposed pre-eminently to question, because not numbered originally with the twelve.⁴

Verse 14. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God," etc. In an earlier verse he has accounted for the crucifixion of the Lord of glory, by declaring that none of the princes of this world knew the wisdom of God. In the passage now before us, both that culminating work of darkness, and all other forms of resistance which men offer to the Spirit of truth, are referred to their common principle. To be natural we must reject the Spirit's things. We have here, first, a statement

² Col. i. 25. πληρῶσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ.

³ πνευματικοῖς πνευματικὰ συγκρίνοντες.

⁴ See below, in chap. xv. 9, *seq.*

of fact, together with its operative cause; and, secondly, an explanation of both cause and effect. Men *do* refuse the Spirit's things, because they despise them. Men *must* so estimate the Spirit's things, because while in their natural state they are incapable of discerning their true value, and consequently of receiving them. Such is declared to be the born condition of the natural man.

Let us now observe carefully, before proceeding further, that in these opposing categories of "natural" and "spiritual," all who hear the Gospel are comprised. No place is found, in the Spirit's estimate, for that numerous class who may be said practically to be halting between two opinions. Not to receive the witness of God is to reject it. A neutral or indifferent position is allowed to no man in the presence of divine truth. Moreover, a knowledge of the Gospel, and even a mental acquiescence in its truth, is not the same thing as receiving it. But not to receive it in the *love* of it, is to neglect God's great salvation, and in the name of such it is asked, "How shall we escape?"⁵ Lastly, a religious profession may be quite sincere, and yet the professor be a natural man. He is so, until divinely taught the secret of his own entire ruin from his birth, and through faith enabled as a blood-bought sinner to glory only in the name of Jesus.

Returning to the verse before us, we shall find it to be, in point of fundamental doctrine, a counterpart of the same apostle's teaching in Rom. viii. 5-8. He has in the latter passage treated as his subject the will and power of the natural man, while he deals

⁵ Heb. ii. 3.

here with his understanding. As lawlessness is characteristic of corrupted nature, so also is ignorance of God. A mind, whose description in the Spirit's language is "reprobate,"⁶ must be constitutionally incapable of perceiving and appreciating the beauty of divine truth.

There is, therefore, in these words of the apostle a sufficient, though truly solemn, explanation of the varied phenomena of unbelief. There is an essential diversity of flesh from spirit, and a consequent impossibility of a natural reception of spiritual truth. If "enmity against God" is the fixed condition of an unregenerate will, "darkness" is also the quality of a natural understanding. It is the natural man as a *whole* that is here in contemplation. In his case, conscience and intellect are alike outside the sphere of spiritual activity. Self-disapprobation is not necessarily a divinely given knowledge and judgment of self. Natural men often quarrel with themselves. But the Spirit disallows the entire man. Both root and flower of the flesh are withered by the truth of God.⁷ The Jew and Greek meet here upon a common level. God's prophets had of old continually upbraided Israel as a people void of understanding,⁸ on account of the folly and evil of their way; but in the New Testament the Spirit of Christ enounces clearly, and as a fundamental principle of truth, that which in the earlier Scriptures is presented mostly in a concrete form, as exemplified, that is, in the recorded ways of men.⁹

⁶ Rom. i. 28.

⁷ Isa. xl. 6, 7.

⁸ Isa. i. 3; xxvii. 11.

⁹ Though from an early date in human history the essential contrariety of flesh to spirit had been plainly declared (Gen. vi. 3),

The whole of the apostle's teaching here is but an expansion of what the Lord had testified in the days of His flesh,¹ and is in its nature of the utmost importance to the believer. Most solemn and emphatic is the protest which is thus recorded by anticipation against the popular delusion which regards Christianity as a matter of education. *Religion*, as men speak, in any of its manifold forms, may be taught by the traditions of men. The knowledge of God is theirs only who are taught of Him. And that such may learn Him, He first quickens them by the word of His own power. For by nature they were dead in sins, and the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. *Let him who is first quickened*

The bearing of this doctrine upon much that is nominally Christian in the present day, cannot but be felt by every one who through grace has received a saving knowledge of the truth; for its just effect is to exclude utterly from the Christian name and standing whatever is not of the Spirit. But in our day the *world* is Christian. But is it *spiritual*? If not so, it is not of God. Nay, it is only the more God's enemy, by falsely arraying itself in the name which can be truly named only by those who have learnt its meaning through the Spirit's teaching.² As the Master has foretold, the field is filled now with a mingled growth. But the time of the harvest and of judicial separation is at hand.³

Verse 15. "But the spiritual man discerneth all and in the generation of God's children from the beginning the helpless ruin of nature had been the occasion of their trusting in the living God.

¹ John iii. 3-6.

² Chap. xii. 3.

³ Matt. xiii. 36-43; Phil. iii. 18, 19; Rev. xiv. 15-20.

things,"⁴ etc. This follows as a natural corollary to what has gone before. A man is according to his origin. If natural, he is cognizant of natural things; if spiritual, of spiritual things. But the Spirit searcheth *all* things. He therefore who is spiritual has an unlimited range of thought and search. Called with an immediate *heavenly* calling, he is exhorted primarily by the Spirit to fix his attention and engage his affections with the things above.⁵ But because he is in Christ, and is called to the fellowship of the Son of God, all that lies within the boundless sphere of His inheritance is also comprised within the proper range of spiritual thought. Now the earth is the Lord's as well as heaven, and its destinies, and those of its inhabitants, which to the politician or philosopher are speculative guesses only, are to the spiritual matters of sound knowledge; for God does not hide from His children the counsel of His will, but plainly reveals it in His Word. To see things clearly we must be above their level; and the gift of the Spirit not only makes the believer, so long as he is walking in the light, as "a lord of wing,"⁶ to overlook and so escape the methods of the devil, who would take him in his net, but by shewing to him human things as they are seen from heaven unravels for him the perplexed enigma of "this present world." He does not, like the king of Babylon, think doubtfully of what may come hereafter,⁷ but has shown to him in open vision the history of man, from his

⁴ It is noticeable that this verse, though found in all other MSS. of recognized value and authority, is entirely omitted in *Cod. Sin.*

⁵ Col. iii. 1-3.

⁶ בעל כנף Prov. i. 17 [margin].

⁷ Dan. ii. 29.

beginning to his end. He can speak with the calm certainty of knowledge of a "world to come,"⁸ and bring its distinctive features into a positive comparison with those of the "present evil age." He knows the blessed yet deeply solemn difference between "man's day" and "the day of God."⁹ Both good and evil are the subjects of his meditation, and both in their direct relation to the person and titles of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whether on earth or in heaven, the song of the Spirit has a double burden. He sings of mercy, but He sings of judgment also.¹

The *position* here taken for the believer is new, but the *principle* is old. Always the disciple of truth has been elevated in knowledge far above the natural man; for it is the Lord alone who giveth understanding, and by His word it is that the hearts of them that fear Him are made wise.² Such was the relative condition of God's saints while under law, in comparison with the ungodly among whom they dwelt. But the true worshippers of the Father are made perfect, not only as pertaining to the conscience, but in understanding also. Standing before God in Christ, in the full acceptance of the offering once made for sin, they are capacitated also, by the indwelling Spirit of adoption, for fellowship both with the Father and the Son. Thus the term "spiritual man," though occurring also in the Old Testament,³ receives in the New an accession of meaning of the most important kind.⁴

⁸ Heb. ii. 5.⁹ 2 Peter iii.¹ Ps. ci.; Rev. xix.² Psa. cxix. 130; Prov. ii. 6.³ Hosea ix. 7.⁴ The true nature of the difference cannot be better illustrated than by a reference to "the law," as contemplated by the Jewish and the Christian saint respectively. Now the law, though plainly

But although the spiritual man discerneth all things, "he is himself discerned of none." This also is a necessary consequence of the affirmative description which precedes. What is light to the spiritual man is darkness to the natural. The world can neither estimate the consciousness, nor discern the motives of a Christian. As the Master was a stranger and a riddle among men, so also are the servants, and that in proportion to their likemindedness to Him. "The world knoweth *us* not," says another witness, "because it knew not *Him*."⁵ Nor should we forget that the absolute distinction of light from darkness, of flesh from spirit, lies at the bottom of this comparison. The apostle's words have also an important relative force. A carnal or earthly-minded Christian, although, if he be really such, he has the Spirit in him, will hold that Spirit grieved and bound. He must *live*, if life be in him,⁶ in the Spirit, but he may not be *walking* in the Spirit.⁷ In such a case, all that should properly mark him as a spiritual man will be dormant and intelligible to the natural man, "made for sinners" (1 Tim. i. 9), is yet in its deeper meaning "spiritual" (Rom. vii.), and therefore appreciable fully by the regenerate alone. To the Old Testament believer, who was under it, the law was both his comfort and his plague. He loved it while he broke it, spite of himself, and was afraid therefore of its judgments. (Ps. cxix. *passim*.) But the law is not in the apostle's contemplation when he reasons among Christians upon spiritual things; for the office of the Comforter is to preach and teach, not Moses, but Jesus. By testifying of Him who is (among other varieties of blessing) "the end of the law for righteousness to every believer" (Rom. x.), he leads the disciple of perfection into the secret and fulness of all truth. Law disappears, because its proper subject is no more *alive*; for, as he elsewhere testifies, we are "dead to the law by the body of Christ." (Rom. vii. 14; Gal. ii. 19, 20.)

⁵ 1 John iii. 1.⁶ Rom. viii. 9.⁷ Gal. v. 25.

inoperative. He will, instead of discerning all things, be in an evil sense himself discerned. Too blind to see what is naturally afar off, he will be affected mischievously by what is nigh. He will be barren and unfruitful, because practically destitute of the joy of the Lord.⁸ The respect which true spirituality seldom fails to extort from the world which hates it, will in his case be exchanged for contempt; for men know men. The world is quick to notice and condemn in Christians what they instinctively perceive to be alien to their profession as partakers of a heavenly calling.

Verse 16. "For who hath known," etc. These words stand as to their meaning in more immediate connection with verse 14, and are an emphatic confirmation of the doctrine there laid down. "The unsearchable riches of Christ" are, as he elsewhere speaks,⁹ accessible only to the mind of Christ. Conscience knows sin, but does not know God rightly until enlightened by the Comforter. Christ was Himself a new thing in the earth, and was as such the common stumbling-block of the natural man. And now that He is revealed from heaven as the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, they who are called into His fellowship are also sharers of His nature, and therefore, in their measure, of His mind. Himself the wisdom of God, the children whom God hath given unto Him are by description children of light and children of wisdom. As such they have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things.¹

⁸ 2 Peter i. 9, 10. ⁹ Eph. iii. 8. *Notes on the Ephesians*, in loc.

¹ Eph. v. 8; Matt. xi. 19; 1 John ii. 20.

While, therefore, Paul is still asserting in this sense his own official inspiration, the language he employs is too general to be thus limited. As the contrary statement, which condemns the natural man to a perpetual ignorance of the things of the Spirit, is universally true, so also has this assertion of the specific privilege of the spiritual man a common application to all who are of God. They who have the life of Christ have His mind also. We cannot have Him partly, but in full; for though He cannot be divided, He in this sense multiplies Himself indefinitely. He is in Person the wisdom of God, and by faith is made our wisdom also.² No marvel, therefore, if the perceptive energy of the Spirit is here so boldly affirmed to be commensurate with the subject which we are called as believers to contemplate. God is the portion of His children. No man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him.³ And He does declare that Name to His brethren, and celebrates His praises by His Spirit in the Church.⁴

² Chap. i. 30.

³ Matt. xi. 27.

⁴ Heb. ii. 12. Fulfilling thus His own gracious words in John xvi. 25.

CHAPTER III.

IN the foregoing chapter, the lasting distinction between the spiritual and the natural man has been defined with the severity of inspired truth. But besides this broad and essential difference between the living and the dead, the children of light and the children of disobedience, there is another, as has been already noticed,¹ of a relative kind. And it is this that the chapter on which we are now entering so strikingly enforces; the illustration of the doctrine being drawn as usual from the existing condition of those immediately addressed.

Verse 1. "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual," etc. If describing them to others, he would magnify their graces; when speaking to themselves, he looks to their deficiencies and faults. Viewed as in Christ, they were, in the absolute sense of the term, "spiritual," for they were no longer "natural," nor does he ever call them so. But when their spiritual *condition* is examined, it is found so faulty and defective, that he has to refuse them the title of "spiritual" in its practical sense. Referring in this verse to his original sojourn at Corinth, he reviews his earlier labours in words expressive both of the nascent condition of their faith,

¹ *Ante* page 5.

and of the tender assiduity with which, as their father in Christ, he had fed them at the breasts of truth. They were *then* "carnal"² without blame, through the infantine state of their souls, as newly born to God. The same term is presently applied to them reproachfully, because of the culpable slowness of their growth in grace.

Verse 2. "I fed you with milk," etc. By comparing these words with what is said at the close of Heb. v., we may better understand the range of the apostle's earlier teaching while at Corinth. The doctrine of saving grace, as equally antagonistic both to the empty ordinances of Judaism and the vanity of Gentile philosophy, had assuredly been the staple of his ministry. And while he tarried with them they had thriven on his words; but in his absence things had changed. They had grown, indeed, but in the knowledge neither of the Saviour nor themselves. The knowledge which puffs up was plentiful among them, but God's wisdom was there hard to find. Light is reflected also from this verse on the descriptive term "perfect" in the previous chapter. None can be rightly so described, whose natural will has not been broken effectually by the subjective power of truth. Paul felt himself unable to minister the strong meat of God's purposes, and

² Σαρκινός. This, which, instead of σαρκικός, is the reading of *Cod. Sin.*, in common with all the other MSS. of most esteem, is probably not an accidental diversity of form. The distinction between "fleshy" and "fleshly" seeming to express more accurately than the single term "carnal," the difference between the former and latter state of the Corinthian saints. But the difference in form of these two nearly synonymous terms need not be insisted on. See the following note.

to open by his teaching the mystery of Christ, before those to whose undisciplined hearts it would have been rather a snare than a blessing. There is no strength to bear the weight of Christ's glorious Name, and to hold with steady hand the precious things of God's sanctuary, except in a soul that has been laid in spirit where the Saviour lay for our sakes. The cross precedes the glory, not in the order only of historic fact, but in the moral training also of God's saints.

But at Corinth they had tried to learn this lesson backwards. Like foolish children, they would have the end without the way. Like Israel after the flesh, they would have the land without the wilderness which led to it,—God's rest and glory, without any sufficient previous knowledge either of themselves or Him. And thus on their own shewing they were "carnal," in a bad and condemnatory sense, by the false and ignorant use which they were making of spiritual things. And this charge he now proceeds to establish on explicit evidence in the words which follow.

Verses 3, 4. "For ye are yet carnal,"³ etc. The

³ *Σαρικοί*. It will be useful to notice the scriptural meanings of this term. 1. It is never used as equivalent to "natural." So far from it, that a man must have ceased to be "a natural man" in order to perceive, in the spirit of self-judgment, that he is "carnal, sold under sin." (Rom. vii.) 2. It is, when applied to Christians, expressive not of nature, but of condition or habit. A babe in Christ is carnal, because the truth, though in him, has not yet attained growth enough to form distinctively his character. He is interested, but not yet *established*, in the grace of God. In this sense the apostle uses the word in verse 1. But a faulty Christian is also carnal when, with a high profession and presumptive knowledge of truth, he is acting visibly and habitually

test which he here applies is a decisive one. By outward confession, dead with Christ, they were following within the living Church of God the ordinary ways of men. They were minding earthly and natural things, and with a natural result. Envy and strife⁴ are works of the flesh; and while such things were found among them, they indicated a state of soul which might be profited by faithful exhortation, but would only be further damaged by the communication of more doctrinal knowledge. There was indeed a dead stop to their growth in grace while this spirit reigned among them. For although God's gifts were with them in abundance, yet He was not honoured in His gifts. Disorder prevailed where peace and union should have been; because through their shallow apprehension of the grace in which they stood, they still thought, and felt, and strove like men who had objects of their own to seek, and personal interests to serve.

But this, in the eye of the Spirit, is to be low and small indeed. Moreover, the Lord, whose name they bore, was virtually displaced from His supremacy as the Head of His own house, so long as the ministers of His grace, and who served them for His sake, were thus exalted or depressed by false and partial comparisons. And we should notice also, that as the evils here judged by the apostle, and all other forms of evil which may infest the Church of God, spring solely from the working of the flesh, so their

under the government of merely natural instincts and motives. "Carnal" stands thus morally opposed to "spiritual," but with much less latitude of signification.

⁴ The third descriptive term, *διχοστασίαι*, "divisions," or "factions," is wanting in the best MSS.

effective repression is to be sought, not in the exercise of high-handed authority (though an apostle had this also in reserve), but by a patient endeavour to restore the disorderly to a more healthy state of soul. For *order*, in God's house, means obedience to God. Where there is a common subjection to the Lord, there will be also a mutual and willing subjection to one another in His fear.⁵ Fixed laws or human ordinances of any kind can never regulate the house of God. For a heavenly people there are spiritual ordinances: "Wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ."⁶ And it is through the active and unfettered ministry of the Spirit that the Master's voice is heard. As to the factious temper which dishonoured the Corinthian saints, it may be said broadly, that while party feeling and particular sympathies⁷ are among the commonest of natural instincts, they are, on that very account, directly opposed to the love which is of God. That love, which is the active energy of the Spirit, embraces for Christ's sake all that is of Him, and gives ungrudgingly the honour due to truth. While, therefore, they continued to say, "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos," he might well ask reproachfully these forgetters of their new and higher origin, "Are ye not *men*?"⁸

⁵ Eph. v. 21; 1 Peter v. 5, 6; 1 John i. 7.

⁶ 1 Tim. vi. 3; John xiv. 23.

⁷ This expression must not be misconstrued by the reader. Friendship, no less than natural affection, is acknowledged with honour in the word of God. But for the Christian there is a paramount sympathy whose proper object is the Lord, and, for His sake, those in whom He dwells. The comeliness of natural proprieties is but increased by a practical subjection to this wider and enduring tie.

⁸ "ἄνθρωποι is preferred to σαρκικοί in all the better MSS.

Verse 5. "Who then is Paul?"⁹ etc. In addressing himself to the cure of the evils complained of, the apostle seeks, in the wisdom of the Spirit, to make the present failure of his brethren a seedtime of their future blessing. They had been ensnared through ignorance, and he will make a better knowledge of the way of the Lord their preservation in the time to come. In the first chapter he repudiated the false honour done to his own name, and those of his fellow-labourers generally, as a thoughtless derogation of what was due to Christ alone. He only had been *crucified* for them. But now, by a more especial reference to himself and to Apollos, he endeavours to lead them to a right estimate of the operation of the Spirit in the Church; by reviewing their respective labours not, as these Corinthians were accustomed to regard them, in relation to their visible effects, but in the more solemn light of their common responsibility to Him who had called them to their work. They were *ministers*, and therefore of far less account than the doctrine which they brought; less also in honour (if their office only were in question) than those whom they served.¹ The subject of their ministry was Christ; its end, the establishment in the faith of God's elect of those to whom they spoke. Of the efficacy of their ministry these Corinthian saints were witness, since it was by them that they believed. As to its origin and manner, it was as the same Lord gave to each.

Verses 6, 7. "I have planted, Apollos watered," etc. With respect to the ministries thus figuratively

⁹ Or, rather, "what?" *τι* being a better reading than *τις*.

¹ Luke xxii. 27.

described, and to all other spiritual energies, they are but distinctive forms and measures of that which is essentially common to the Church; for there is given by the ascended Lord to each member of His mystic body "grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ."² The point kept constantly in view by the apostle is, the utter exclusion from the true work of the ministry of all merely natural energy. God's work is wrought of God, who selects and qualifies His agents at His will. If Paul plants or Apollos waters, the work of both is in the power of Him who has distributed to each, and of whose sovereign will the increase comes. Boasting is thus excluded from the work of the ministry, no less than from the faith which justifies a sinner. Neither the planter nor the waterer is anything; for both might labour, and a blight, and not a blessing, be the result. It is God only, who commands the increase, that is anything; and He is not all only, but *in* all.³

Verse 8. "Now he that planteth," etc. Equally null as respects personal sufficiency, they are both one in the source of their common ministry, while the individuality of each is maintained intact with reference both to his responsibility and his reward. And let us note how distinctly the apostle here enounces the standing and inseparable connection between service and reward. From Jesus downward this principle obtains. That His reward was with His God, was the consolation of Messiah's wounded Spirit when contemplating the apparent futility of His service here below, and His present exaltation is

² Eph. iv. 7-12.

³ Eph. iv. 6.

the answer of God to that appeal.⁴ So also are apostles, prophets, saints, even all that fear His name, both great and small, to receive reward in the great day of recompences yet to come.⁵ The work and its reward will have a due proportion to each other. To each labourer it will be according to his proper toil.⁶

Verse 9. "For we are labourers together with God," etc. The same doctrine is here stated, only in a higher tone. God's only recompense is the achievement of His will; and by the Spirit of adoption, who leads the feet of God's true children in the steps of Jesus, they are made co-operators with Him in His work. It is a wonderful sentence, but in perfect keeping with the character of our calling; for we are called through redemption into the fellowship of God's own Son. And as the One "Elect of God" said in the days of His flesh, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work;" so now, in their subordinate yet kindred standing and relationship, they who are joined to Him may speak of God's things as their own. Admitted to the secret of His counsel, His will, instead of a dreaded burden, is His children's natural delight.⁷ In proportion to the measure of their faith, they are by His enabling power the willing and interested helpers of His work.⁸

⁴ Isa. xlix. 4; Phil. ii. 8, 9.

⁵ Rev. xi. 18.

⁶ Κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον κόπον. The repetition of ἴδιον in each clause of this verse gives additional emphasis to the doctrine.

⁷ 1 John v. 2, 3.

⁸ Heb. xiii. 20, 21. Although the particular instances are of apostolic or quasi-apostolic standing, the doctrine of the passage is of general application to believers.

But if God's objects should be those also of His saints, their interest is to know what now especially engages His attention, and on which His gracious labour is immediately bestowed. To such an enquiry the verse before us furnishes a full reply. "Ye are God's husbandry," says the apostle to those beloved though faulty ones—"Ye are God's building." God's present care in this world is His Church. We have here two separate figures to express the nature and effect of the present ministry of Christ by the Spirit. Each of these has its proper meaning; the first relating to the work of God in its patient and much hindered progress, the other to its end, when the Church will be presented faultless in the presence of His glory. But from first to last the work is the work of *God*. To exclude the flesh under every form, and to familiarize the hearts and consciences of believers to the truth of their standing as new creatures in Christ, is the apostle's constant aim. As to the difference of idea conveyed by the two expressions "husbandry" and "building," they represent with equal force and beauty the double aspect of the work of God. Each saint is, whether considered as a separate plant of righteousness or as a branch of the true Vine, an object of the Father's unremitting care; and surely a harvest both rich and plenteous will crown the husbandry of grace. But a building is for the Builder's lasting habitation and His rest. He will occupy the work of His own hands. He will be at home for ever in the congregation of His saints.

Verse 10. "According to the grace of God which is given unto me," etc. Pursuing now the latter of

these metaphors, he here enters more at large upon the doctrine of the Church as God's spiritual building, using, as his habit is, a local and special instance as an illustration of his general thesis; for God's Church is where God's saints are found. By the will and grace of God Paul had become the founder of His Church at Corinth. He had come to that city as a stranger, knowing and speaking nothing but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. But he had not come in vain, nor had he wrought without an aim. By the foolishness of preaching he had laid a foundation, on which, by other hands besides his own, God's building might be raised. As the work was of God, and his own part in it by the grace of God, he does not hesitate to magnify his office, to the praise of His glory who had called him, and who wrought so effectually by his means. He calls himself a wise master builder, inasmuch as the laying of a sound foundation is the essential security of the house. But God's work, though perfect, is progressive, whether in the individual soul or in the general structure of His Church; and according to the skill and fidelity of His fellow-workers, so it fares for the present⁹ with the work itself. Hence the warning here addressed to those who might offer themselves as helpers in the work of the ministry. They had not an occupation only, but a *charge*. To

⁹ And for the present only; for in the end His work shall surely praise Him. He will deal with those whom He employs according to the quality of their work, but He never leaves His people to the hands of others. The resources of His grace and power in Christ are the pledge both of the stability of each particular saint, and of the glorious completeness of His Church.

the evangelist succeeds the teacher, who should look well both to himself and to his words.¹

Verse 11. "For other foundation can no man lay," etc. It is in a secondary and relative sense only that the apostle can call himself a founder. There is One who alone can say, "*I lay in Zion a chief corner stone.*" The person of Christ, now "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead,"² is the eternal truth on which God's building rests. A reception by faith of that essential and life-giving truth establishes the believer, as a stone of God's building, in his place: happy if he rest there, undisturbed by divers and strange doctrines, himself in Christ, and Christ in him, the beginning and continuance of his confidence and rejoicing, and his bright and certain hope of glory.³ But our question here is rather that of ministry in its general effect upon God's building, than the experimental history of souls; and so he proceeds:

Verses 12, 13. "Now if any man build upon *this* foundation gold," etc. The first thing to be noticed is the complete ignoring, on the Spirit's part, of all ministry whatever that is not based on fundamental truth; for although under the one only Name there are found many counterfeits, and false and imaginary Christs are often laid by the emissaries of Satan as foundations for new religious theories, fulfilling thus the Lord's own words, they are not at all contemplated by the apostle in this admonitory view of Christian ministry. Next, as to the imagery em-

¹ 1 Tim. iv. 16.

² Rom. i. 4.

³ Heb. iii. 6, 14; Col. i. 27.

ployed. It falls, in all its variety, under the category of "adorning" the doctrine, or the contrary.⁴

It should be noticed, that the acceptable and the refuse work are here presented under an equal distribution. There is a threefold gradation both of what is precious and of what is vile. The several terms employed are strongly suggestive in their character, and may be turned, therefore, to profitable or unprofitable account, in the way of practical exposition, as they are meditated by the spiritual understanding, or rashly handled by the natural imagination: it is enough now to say generally, that whatever is "of faith" will both stand and be unerringly appreciated in the coming day. All that is not of faith, though acceptable in the eyes of men, will surely disappear before the face of Him who is as a consuming fire to the flesh. But until that day arrive, the quality of very much that is wrought habitually in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in the professed interest of truth, must rest undetermined. There are some things so evidently "of God" as to commend themselves to the hearts and consciences of all who know the truth. But these are the exceptions. Of Christian labour generally it must still be said, "The day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire." Christian opinion is not fire; nor is popularity an unerring proof of worth.⁵ But there is a fire which must try the work of every one who names the name of Christ.

Verses 14, 15. "If any man's work abide," etc. A trial of *works* is not necessarily a judgment of *persons*. In the world it is so; that is, all who stand

⁴ Titus ii. 10.

⁵ Luke vi. 26; Gal. i. 10.

on their own righteousness, and neglect God's great salvation, must answer for themselves. Their actions and their secret thoughts will alike be judged in righteousness, and themselves be dealt with according to their works.⁶ But in the Church an opposite principle obtains. Men are not judged by their works, but works rather by their men;⁷ for the workers in this latter case are, by the grace which calls them, *saints*. Themselves and their works together, as children of Adam, have been already judged and set aside, and as new creatures in Christ they are themselves the workmanship of God.⁸ Their sins are forgiven them, and they are themselves eternally redeemed. *Standing* now by faith in Christ, they are called to *walk* also in Him. As God's children, they are expected to be both lovers and imitators of God. Their actions, therefore, and their counsels, must be weighed, not to discover whether they are saints, but to determine how far they have walked worthy of their calling.⁹ It is needful to

⁶ Rom. ii. 16; Rev. xx. 12, 13.

⁷ The reader will bear in mind that I am speaking of the Church in its divine and living sense. Hypocritical profession neither separates men from the world, nor joins them to the Lord. They have no believing knowledge of Him as their Saviour, and will be disowned as His servants in the coming day. To serve God acceptably we must first be *sons*, the spirit of adoption being the true power of a godly walk. Hence the characteristic description of those who either separate themselves *now* from the generation of God's children, or are hereafter sundered at the final judgment, is "sensual [or natural], not having the Spirit." Jude *passim*.

⁸ Eph. ii. 10.

⁹ Christian works are judged with reference to Christian men. "The Father judgeth," etc. (1 Peter i. 17, etc.), not whether they whom He has Himself begotten be His sons or no, but whether in their ways they are honouring His name. Hence also He scourges every son whom He receiveth. (Heb. xii. 7, 8.)

keep this fundamental distinction clearly in view when considering the doctrine of these verses. It relates exclusively to Christian service—to that which, whether wisely or unwisely, is at least *intentionally* superadded to a genuine confession of the faith.¹

As it is through the finished work of their Redeemer that life becomes the portion of the saved, so is it by their work and service for His name's sake that this life becomes a manifested thing. To confess Him as the *Lord*, is to acknowledge also an unbounded duty on our parts. And what is wrought by His servants—albeit the power of their service is the energy of the Spirit—is *their own*, in the Master's estimation, both for praise and blame. Now the Lord's desire is, that His elect should both be fruitful, and that their fruit should remain.² But a charge entrusted to the hands of men is always liable to dereliction or abuse. Men, whom the Holy Ghost made overseers, might err, and lead other men astray.³ Hence, though there is a sure reward for them that serve the Lord, the special honour of the Father being in reserve for such,⁴ the nature and measure of that recompence will be known only in the day of fire. There will be gain or loss according to the operation of that final test on each one's work. All that is of *faith* will come forth unto praise, and honour, and glory in that day. All that is *not* of

¹ The *sins* of believers are not at all in contemplation in this passage, but are sufficiently noticed and provided for elsewhere. (1 John i. ii.) Rome must, therefore, seek some surer foundation than this passage for its extra-scriptural fable of purgatory.

² John xv. 16.

³ Acts xx. 28, 30.

⁴ John xii. 26.

faith is in its nature *sin*,⁵ and will be obliterated by the fire which reveals it.

It is the good and faithful servant who will enter into "the joy of his Lord." They only who have had the hearts of servants in their day of patience will taste the reward of labour in the kingdom. *Truth* must *stand*, and will not change. What we are *here*, by the grace of God, we shall be *there* also, in the glory of God. This subject will more than once re-appear in the progress of these Notes. Let us turn now to consider more distinctly the unconditional assurance of salvation that is appended to this warning as to works.

His *work* shall be burned, *himself* shall be saved; "yet so as by fire." Such is the apostle's declaration. Moreover, the destruction of his work will be a *loss*. What Lot wrought in Sodom perished in the conflagration of the place, while he, the just man in a false and evil association with the world, was plucked as a brand from the burning. It is by personal examples that the standing doctrines of the faith are illustrated. The reward was Abraham's, but deliverance was Lot's. So will it again be in the coming

⁵ Rom. xiv. 23. The believer stands already in the full power of redemption, the blood of Jesus Christ atoning for and cleansing from *all sin*. The fire of the coming day will be, therefore, to the *losing* servant of the truth an humbling, though welcome, rectification of his error, and a perfecting of what before was lacking in his faith. Whatever has divided his affections with the Lord he will most surely lose, but his loss will gain for him an estimate of grace such as he might have had and kept while here below, and which, had he held it, would have turned his works to gold. And if in the kingdom he goes unrewarded for his service, yet no shame shall follow him, nor envy at the higher grade which he may then see others occupy, who have wrought more wisely in their day of toil.

day. It is the day of Jesus Christ. *His* work therefore will be supremely vindicated in that day. While differences of an important kind will be found among His servants, there will be none among His *sheep*. Every believer will be saved, and live. He will be saved, because he is a vessel of divine mercy. He will not be condemned, because he will not be upon his trial on his own account, but was justified completely and for ever when in faith he made confession of the Saviour's name.⁶ He will live, because he is a member of Christ's body, because God's own Son now lives who once was dead, and is now known and worshipped by His own as the true God, and eternal life.⁷ But the unskilful builder upon God's foundation will learn in that day, as he never learnt before, the manner of the God with whom we have to do. The false ornaments which he may bring with him will be put off in that presence. What he unduly valued and contended for in the days of his probation, he will loathe and utterly condemn in the presence of his Judge. But his Judge is also his Salvation, and by the very fire which consumes his then discarded works he will himself be *saved*.

Verse 16. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?" etc. Leaving his words of warning and encouragement to fall, under God's direction, into their fitting place, and do their proper work, the apostle turns now to apply his general doctrine of "God's building" more directly to the saints at Corinth. They had already learnt this truth in part, but had felt little of its power and meaning, as was proved by their disorderly condition. Hence the re-

⁶ Rom. x. 9, 10.

⁷ 1 John v. 20.

proachful tone of his question. The first thing to be noticed in considering this verse is, that the apostle is here declaring, not a promise only, but a present truth. God's people *are* His temple. And it is interesting to observe, that this doctrine, which is tacitly involved wherever the subject of the Church and its relations is treated in the epistles, is for the first time declared expressly in this passage, and owes its distinctness of enunciation to the failure of those who should have recognized and walked in it as the peculiar glory of their calling. God had dwelt for a while *among* His earthly people, but not *in* them. The tabernacle in the wilderness, and afterwards the temple, were alike symbolic of a better thing to come.

What God inhabits personally is the house or temple of God. In the first and highest sense the title belongs only to the body of the Lord.⁸ But since the ascension of the risen Man, the unction of the Spirit which once rested upon Him alone has descended upon those also who by a believing confession of His name are admitted, in the Father's estimation, to His place. What truly acknowledges the name of Jesus as the Lord is beautified in the Spirit's testimony with His own distinctive honour. The Church is the temple of God, because the Church is the body of Christ. The twelfth chapter of this epistle treats more at large the mystery of Christ; but it is here noticed, though in general terms only, because it is the essential truth on which the descriptive language of this passage rests.

⁸ John ii. 19-21.

With respect to the doctrine of the indwelling Spirit, it may be scripturally stated in a threefold gradation: 1. Christ personally and supremely; 2. The Church as His body; and, 3. The individual saint, both separately as a child of God, and relatively as a member of Christ's mystic body. It is to the second of these that the teaching of this verse refers; and the point of chief interest is, that the apostle applies in unqualified terms to these saints at Corinth a title which, in its full sense, comprises the entire Church of God. *They* are the temple of God. They are so, because they are God's gathered people in that place; for what God inhabits is His temple. While, therefore, the Church in its *entirety* can never be assembled in one place on earth, the Church in its *unity* is represented wherever real believers are assembled in the name of Jesus, and in common subjection to the word of God. God's temple was at Corinth. It was also at Ephesus, or Rome, or wheresoever else His saints were congregated. Nor would a member of one of these assemblies, if suddenly transferred to another, be conscious of any spiritual change or displacement as a stone in God's building. For God's people are His house, without any reference to place or circumstance. That this solemn and ever-blessed truth may be enjoyed by those whom it concerns, there are required on their parts, first, a believing recognition of this doctrine as a fundamental principle of truth; and, secondly, a temper of soul suited to the moral relation in which God's worshippers stand towards the Object of their worship. "The fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Ghost"

are bound together in a strict and necessary association.⁹

Verse 17. "If any one defile [or destroy] the temple of God, him shall God destroy," etc. God's holiness attaches also to His temple; and as from of old His declaration has been that He will be sanctified in them that draw nigh to Him,¹ so have we here also a solemn warning of the consequences of defiling or corrupting the living temple of God. But what in particular is the apostle's meaning, and by whom is this guilt to be incurred? To answer this question, we must first ask another: What constitutes the temple in its holiness? Paul says, "Ye are the temple of God." But how came they so? The answer is, "Through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth."² God's temple is founded on His *truth*. Its defilement, consequently, is effected

⁹ Acts ix. 31. *Conf.* Ps. lxxxix. 7. And here let the godly reader who desires to enjoy, amid the fast-thickening confusions of the evil days, the blessings of genuine Church-fellowship, remember for his comfort and encouragement, that all doctrine that is vital is *imperishable* also. Let him hold as abiding maxims, that God dwells in His people *now* as He did then; that a company of saints, if gathered in faith and true subjection to the Lord is, in a true though not exclusive sense, *His* Church or assembly; but that such a company, the moment it becomes exclusive (except of such evil as the Lord condemns to exclusion by His word), ceases to be God's assembly, and is merely *man's*, though consisting of God's saints, and though it may in its blindness and self-deception esteem itself to be peculiarly the Lord's. Let it also be remembered, that while many assembled bodies of believers in one place do not nullify the oneness of the Church, human rules and ordinances do. The Lord is *with* as well as *in* His saints. Wherever, therefore, two or three are gathered in His name, they are, if walking humbly, a genuine and blameless sample of His Church; and are, as such, "the temple of the living God." (*Conf.* 2 Cor. vi. 16.)

¹ Lev. x. 3.

² 1 Peter i. 2; 2 Thess. ii. 13.

chiefly by the introduction of false doctrine, and secondly, by its never-failing accompaniment of moral debasement and corruption;³ for holiness can only live with truth. The allowed presence of an unconverted person in the Church is a defilement. The Canaanite has no place in the congregation of the Lord.

The verse which we are now considering evidently contemplates a different class from those above described as being "saved by fire." God does not save here, but destroys. The end of these corrupters will be as their work. Having stolen into the temple, undetected by those who, as watchers, failed to penetrate the disguise of their hypocrisy, they have wrought there according to their instincts. They have wrought corruption, and in their own corruption they will "utterly perish" in the day of God.⁴ There is no salvation for what God destroys. A corrupter of the faith is not himself "of faith," and therefore not of God. It is the allowed intrusion of the world that has corrupted the great house of God.⁵ Men destitute of faith crept in originally unawares; and the work of corruption having once begun, it will not cease until great Babylon comes up in remembrance before God, and the corrupter and his work are destroyed together in that day.⁶

³ That there is in this verse an anticipative reference to the special case of sin recorded in chap. v. is possible, but by no means certain.

⁴ Jude 4; 2 Peter ii. 12. The apostle's language is in the original highly expressive, both of the effect of this evil working in the Church, and of the retributive character of the judgment denounced on its authors.

⁵ 2 Tim. ii. 20.

⁶ Rev. xvi. 19.

Verse 18. "Let no man deceive himself," etc. Besides the general admonition with which this verse begins, and which applies itself to all alike, it seems to intimate that unregenerate men had already found a place among them, through an outward acceptance of the Gospel, and were, by force of intellectual pretension, assuming the place of teachers in the Church. And this supposition is confirmed by his own direct assertion in chap. xv., where, finding fault with their lax doctrinal notions, he complains that there are among them some who have not the knowledge of God. But words which denounce unauthorized intruders into the fold of God, are a healthful warning also to the true sheep of the flock. Nothing is easier than self-deception; nothing more difficult than effective self-judgment. What Paul here deprecates is the recognition, in any way, of natural gift or influence as of any validity in the Church of God. True grace in believers will duly acknowledge the manifold social differences which exist among those whom God has called; but to make either natural ability, or the accident of birth or social position in the world, a means of advancement or of personal influence in the Church, implies a total forgetfulness of the very nature of God's house, and of the presence and holiness of Him who dwells there by His Spirit.

Verses 19, 20. "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God," etc. The power of the cross is practically lost upon the conscience, so long as we are seeking eagerly what the world has to bestow. We find, therefore, the same maxims of divine wisdom, which the apostle has already quoted when

vindicating his calling and labour as an evangelist, repeated now with a warning reference to the apostasy of the Church.⁷ The history of Christendom is a large and mournful commentary on these verses. Very early in the day of grace the wisdom of this world found acceptance, and began to operate injuriously within the fold of Christ. The incipient workings of the mystery of iniquity are distinctly traced, and its progress and consummation prophesied emphatically in the later testimonies of the Spirit.⁸ The Christian, who has heart and leisure to note its gradual expansion in detail, has only to study ecclesiastical history *in the presence of God's word*, and in the same solemn light to scan the spectacle that modern "Christianity" now offers to his view.

The caution here addressed to the Corinthian saints is of an increasing force and application to the end. Through neglect of it the spoiling of God's work began, and a similar disregard or forgetfulness has constantly operated with a withering effect upon the successive revivings which from time to time the mercy of the Lord has wrought in the midst of an apostate Christendom. The wisdom of this world continues to be foolishness with God. Its learning and policy are but the instruments of a foolish shepherd,⁹ and in their use tend rather to the dilapidation than the edifying of God's true building. The constructive energy of the Spirit works instrumentally

⁷ That is, of the professing body at large, within which is contained the true bride of the Lamb, which does not and cannot turn away from Him.

⁸ 1 Tim. iv.; 2 Thess. ii.; 2 Tim. iv.; Revelation, *passim*.

⁹ Zech. xi. 15, *seq.*

by many and varied means; but in every instance where true spiritual progress is made, it is in contradiction to the will and power of the flesh. The world and its wisdom are things to be *overcome* by God's chosen, and not taken into their association; to be disallowed, not flattered; to be despised as dross, not leant upon as strength. "The *Lord* knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain;" and what He knows He imparts also, for the preservation of their way,¹ to those who are willing to be taught of Him.

Verse 21. "Therefore let no one glory in men," etc. The negative reason already given is in keeping with the standing warnings of the oracles of God;² and, to one who rightly understands the doctrine of the cross, must carry full conviction to both heart and conscience. But the Spirit cannot stop here. Writing as He is to those who as saints are called into the fellowship of God's own Son, He seeks rather to preserve them from a relapse into the former lusts in their ignorance by putting them in mind of the transcendent excellency of their calling as believers, and thus killing the root of natural desire by raising their souls to a sphere of communion altogether beyond its range. "*All things are yours.*" Such is the overwhelming announcement by which the Spirit of truth would put to shame the folly of those who either set their affections upon earthly things, or, like the disciples in the day of their Master's humiliation, are ready to dispute for precedence in the house of God.

The truth and fitness of this astonishing declara-

¹ Prov. ii. 6-8.

² Isa. ii. 10-22.

tion are perceived only when we call to mind the nature of the believer's standing as a man in Christ; for as it is a distinctive title of the Saviour that He is, by supreme appointment, "Heir of all things,"³ so also they, who by the generation of the Spirit are "the sons of God,"⁴ are made partakers of the inheritance of the First-born from the dead. They are by divine description "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."⁵ Standing complete in Him who is the Head of all principality and power, their expectations are according to the position which they occupy, in everlasting righteousness, by the saving grace of God. To catalogue the wealth of God's elect would be, like the recording of the Saviour's acts, to fill the world with books. Mention is, however, made in what follows of some of their possessions, with a manifest reference to the untoward spiritual state of those immediately addressed.

Verse 22. "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas," etc. The complaint at the opening of his epistle was, that some declared themselves to be "*of Paul*," etc. Brought back from their childish aberrations by his wholesome and corrective words, and placed anew in the marvellous light of God, they are to find there that, while no man is their owner but the Lord, both Paul and Apollos, with every other precious gift of Christ, are *theirs*. Nor should we fail to notice here the special mention of the name of "Cephas." Writing to *Gentiles*, he would have them know that they have the same interest in what Peter taught, as in the words of their own divinely inspired apostle; for the apostle of the circumcision

³ Heb. i. 2.⁴ 1 John iii. 2, v. 1.⁵ Rom. viii. 17.

was, like his "beloved brother Paul,"⁶ a minister of *Christ*; and that ministry is for those who, whether from the circumcision or the uncircumcision, have been brought through faith into the "one new man" in Christ, where neither Jew nor Gentile are named or remembered any more.⁷ Some reference has been made already to the evil of overlooking this principle of spiritual identity,⁸ a danger against which the young believer should be especially upon his guard.⁹

But not only are the chosen servants of the Lord the possession of His saints, the *world* also, and all that it contains, is theirs; for Jesus has overcome the world. Its kingdoms and their glory, once offered by the tempter as an unavailing lure to the obedient One, are now His own by right of conquest and redemption. He is already crowned on high with all dominion; but His especial claim to this world is as yet asserted only, not enforced; while faith sees, by divine anticipation, all things in His hands.¹ He was in truth "the light of the world,"

⁶ 2 Peter iii. 15.

⁷ Eph. ii. 15; Col. iii. 11.

⁸ *Ante*, page 45. See also the following note.

⁹ There is no such thing as Pauline Christianity, or even Pauline doctrine, in the true sense of the expression; for all sound doctrine is of the Spirit. It is *God* who bears witness of His Son. He distributes indeed the tasks of His appointed labourers, and, according to His wisdom and good pleasure, He conferred on Paul a particular commission, and inspired him with a knowledge of the mystery of Christ, which was not originally shared with the other apostles. But whatever is ministered of God, through any medium, is ministered to the *Church* in its unity. Nor are we to conclude that, because certain important truths (*e.g.*, the gift of the Spirit to the believer in Rom. v.) are stated categorically in an epistle of Paul, the doctrine in question was unknown elsewhere. What formed the current oral teaching of himself and his fellow-labourers is condensed, and sometimes amplified by special revelation, in his epistles to the Churches.

¹ Rev. xi. 15.

when by His presence and unappreciated grace He proved the darkness that was reigning there; He will be its manifested and acknowledged light, in the day when His glory is revealed.² And His chosen are the sharers of His throne. Meanwhile they hold, as companions in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, a sure title to the world and all its wealth. And the in-dwelling Spirit is the earnest of this claim. But for this very reason, they who are led of the Spirit eschew both the world and its honours till its rightful owner come. Their present calling is to *overcome* the world by faith in Him who has already made it all His own.

"Life" also is theirs; for they already are in Him who is the life of men. Of mortals, the believer can alone be said in truth to *live*, because the death to which he was naturally born is passed, through faith in his crucified Redeemer, and he is, while yet in this body of humiliation, acknowledged by the Spirit as both quickened and risen with Christ.³ By the same title "death" is likewise his, to triumph over and deride, in the victory of Him who has abolished it,⁴ while still accepting it with all humility as the mark of judicial dishonour which belongs to his body, in common with all flesh, until the time of change arrives.⁵

"Things present" are, equally with "things to come," included in the portion of the saints; for godliness has promise of the life that now is, and of

² See further, as to the kingdom, the remarks on chap. xv. 24, *seq.*; also, *Notes on the Hebrews*, chap. ii., and on the *Romans*, chaps. viii. xi. ³ John v. 24; Col. ii. 12; Eph. ii. 5, 6.

⁴ Chap. xv. 55; 2 Tim. i. 10. ⁵ Rom. viii. 10; Phil. iii. 20, 21.

that which is to come.⁶ Things present are indeed, for the believer who desires to walk godly in Christ Jesus, more often of a grievous than a joyous kind; but he carries peace within him, and has a present hold by faith on immortality and glory. He knows withal, while suffering his allotted tribulations, that *all things* work together for his good, and that afflictions, in themselves too heavy, are light in comparison with the coming and never-ending joy.⁷ He knows that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and that hope maketh not ashamed.⁸ Of the future he is sure, since Jesus, the Redeemer of both soul and body, has gone in to appear as his Forerunner before God; while of things present he alone can be said to have the mastery, because he only among men has a certain knowledge, either of their existing state or their eventual destiny. While the natural man is but a doubtful pensioner of time, the believer holds the earth and all its fulness in the strength of his Redeemer's title. What men call theirs is not their own, but may at any moment be required at their hands,⁹ while they who through the cross have ceased to be numbered among men call nothing now their own but *Christ*, well knowing that with Him they shall inherit *all*.

Verse 23. "And ye are Christ's," etc. We have here shown to us the immediate basis upon which the saint's title to universal inheritance rests. By ceasing to be his own he has become, as the purchased possession of the Lord, the expectant heir of

⁶ 1 Tim. iv. 8.

⁸ Rom. v. 3, 5.

⁷ 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

⁹ Luke xii. 20, 21.

all. For what Jesus has received in righteousness He bestows in grace upon His Church. She is the bride of His election, and will be the wedded partner of His throne. But deep as is the well of mediate blessedness from which faith draws of the divine fulness in Christ, there is a yet further depth in which the secret of the saint's continuance and the eternal validity of his title must be sought. And this is indicated in the closing sentence of the chapter. "And Christ is *God's*."

The Father's supremacy is the crown and fulness of revealed truth. The Son proceeded forth and came from God, and is from eternity, by natural description, "the only-begotten of the Father."¹ Born before all creation, He was in God's form, and as His power and wisdom, the effective Framer of the worlds.² But from the time of His incarnation He became, in His new and self-humbled form, the holder, in righteous title, of all that God can give.³ And in an especial sense He thus acknowledges His Church. "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me," is His own confession of His chosen as the Father's gift. For the children's sakes, which God had given Him, He had taken flesh; and in the form in which He wrought the work of their redemption He will abide for ever as their Head. The Sanctifier and the sanctified are all "of one."⁴ Proved now by His resurrection to be indeed the Son of God, His delight is to glorify the Father by declaring what He has received of Him. By His gift and appointment He is, as "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,"

¹ John i. 18; Phil. ii. 6.

² Heb. i. 2; Col. i. 15, 16.

³ John iii. 35; Phil. ii. 7, 8. ⁴ Heb. ii. 11, *seq.*

both the Head of His body, the Church, and the beginning of that creation which God owns, and will for ever bless.⁵ He is the second Adam, the true image and glory of God, as well as the Head of His immediate house—the Firstborn of His many sons. He is God's, to honour and to glorify with endless blessings, the satisfying fruit of the travail of His soul; even as He was God's to deliver for our sakes when, as the Lamb without blemish, He gave Himself to death for our sins.

It is thus that God in the highest becomes the ultimate and lasting rest of the believer's trust.⁶ All spiritual teaching leads to God; to God *in* Christ, and *through* Him also to the Father. For we call upon the Father if we know the Son, even as we call upon the Saviour when we know ourselves.

It is evident that the apostle, in this summary of the believer's heritage, has reached the measure of all truth. In finishing this chapter, therefore, we arrive also at the end of the first great division of this epistle. What follows, though in close connection with it, has yet a different character in many respects, which will more distinctly appear as we proceed.

⁵ Col. i. 18; Rev. iii. 14.

⁶ 1 Peter i. 21.

CHAPTER IV.

IN the chapters already considered, we have had, besides the apostle's opening salutation, both doctrine, exhortation, and reproof; but more abundantly the first of these. For we have been taught—1. The nature and power of the Gospel. 2. The manner and quality of the wisdom of the just; and 3. The origin and essential character of spiritual ministry. In the act of administering the most severe reproofs, the Spirit has found occasion to assert still, in the very loftiest and firmest tones, the boundless and eternal privileges of the saints. God and His excellent glory have shone forth in living brightness from the face of Jesus Christ. In what remains, we shall find Him engaged for the most part in the needful, though less welcome, task of reviewing in closer detail the state of those whom He addresses, and labouring to correct their manifold disorders. Yet the same precious tokens of true spiritual teaching will continually present themselves as we advance: the rich and imperishable blessings of grace standing out from time to time in vivid distinctness of assertion, as if to shame the evil which He has to judge, and only shining the more brightly from the contrast in which they stand, in the sure testimony

of God, to the faulty ways and works of those who are its objects.

Verse 1. "Let a man so account of us," etc. Having reminded the Corinthian saints of the marvellous excellency of their standing as partakers of Christ, he returns here to the special subject of ministry, in order to connect it more distinctly and freshly in their minds with the Name and power of Him who is its source and ultimate object. It was through forgetfulness of this, that room had been found for their unseemly partialities. But he would have them know that if Paul and Apollos belonged to the saints, they were not therefore *subject* to the saints, but to Him from whom they had received their charge. Let those, then, who thought of them and of their doctrine, think of them in relation to Him, in whose Name and by whose authority they taught; for they are ministers of *Christ*, and stewards of the mysteries of *God*. Man should acknowledge God, and honour Him in those whom He employs as His messengers, and the accredited revealers of His will. And they whom he here addresses should remember, that although by grace in Christ, they still are *men*,¹ and as such have to do with God.

But (verse 2), though their title as God's servants was not justly open to dispute, there attached to their calling and office its proper responsibility. Fidelity to their trust is expected from stewards by

¹ To be men, in the spirit of natural self-dependence, is their shame (chap. iii. 3, 4); to be men in the fear of God, is to be true followers of Him who glorified the Father in that form. (Phil. ii. 8.)

the general consent of mankind. Nor is a divine commission conferred on any apart from a similar condition.² The Lord will reckon with His servants in due time. But for this very reason (verse 3), Paul felt himself entirely indifferent to any judgment which might be formed of him or of his work by men, or in man's day. He stands at God's judgment-seat for a supreme adjudication of the claim which he boldly asserts, in the meanwhile, as a true fulfiller of his charge. With him, therefore (and with all who are like-minded), it was but a very little thing that men should either praise or blame. His Master is his arbiter. Man's day is fleeting, like himself; and the acts on which its light shines are hastening on to meet their final decision and award in the eternal brightness of the day of God.³ When he thought of this, he felt that even his own heart must suffer a suspense. He dared not rest upon his own impressions or even his convictions; yet, as the following verse assures us, his were convictions of no ordinary kind.

Verse 4. "For I know nothing by myself,"⁴ etc.

² Ὡδὲ λοιπόν τι ζητεῖται κ.λ. *Cod. Sin.* All the better MSS. agree in rejecting the common reading, ὃ δέ. The precise force of the apostle's words it is not easy to determine. In the text I have given what appears to be his drift. With respect to the terms, "stewards" and "mysteries of God," they refer still to the Church as the building of God. His true worshippers are also His household; to be served out of the riches of His own glory by Christ Jesus, through the immediate ministry of those whom He calls and qualifies to serve. We may compare with this verse his earlier declaration in chap. ii. 7, the latter passage having only a more limited scope.

³ *Conf.* 2 Cor. v. 10; Rom. xiv. 10.

⁴ Οὐδὲν γὰρ ἑμαυτῷ σύννοια. "I am conscious to myself of nothing," i.e., "of no dereliction of my trust."

His heart does not condemn him, and he has therefore boldness toward God.⁵ It need hardly be said that he speaks here, not of his flesh,⁶ but of himself as a new man in Christ, and especially of his apostolic course, as he wrought for the fulfilment of the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus.⁷ But though bold in this avowal, he could not rest in so self-flattering a conviction. It might or might not prove ultimately true. Paul might have erred like Cephas, and need a clearer vision than his own to see wherein he had come short. He was not therefore *justified*, although the testimony of his conscience was a sustaining comfort to him as he ran on still in his unfinished course.⁸ But there is a Judge, who will enquire not for His servants' sins, but for their works. Himself the propitiation for their sins, and the unwearied advocate with the Father on behalf of those who, while in this body, have their many offences to confess,⁹ He is withal the searching scrutinizer of all that has been done among men under the external sanction of His name. What we are now ashamed of He will hide. What we avow He will examine, and declare its value openly, for praise or blame.

Verse 5. "Therefore judge nothing before the time," etc. If God Himself be Judge,¹ we who are to come severally under His review do well to hold our judgment in suspense. No warning has been more frequently reiterated by the Spirit, and none

⁵ 1 John iii. 21.

⁶ Compare his opposite confession as to this in Rom. vii. 18.

⁷ Acts xx. 24.

⁸ 2 Cor. i. 12.

⁹ James iii. 2; 1 John ii. 1, 2.

¹ Psa. l.

perhaps less carefully observed among God's saints, than this. The Lord will come; and to the soul that is kept fully awake to that most blessed hope, the imminency of His advent is an effectual check upon the natural censoriousness of the flesh. But the Lord has seemed to tarry, and the lengthening of His absence has been also an opportunity to the rashness of carnal self-confidence. And to such a height has this habit of premature and unauthorized judgment attained, that the absence or inaction of this spirit among God's children is not only among the happiest, but perhaps the *rarest* also of all symptoms of spiritual well-doing.

The time indeed seems long, but the Lord will surely come, and will not tarry;² and the effect of His appearing will be twofold. He will both "bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts." Good and evil will alike come forth from their present obscurity. The doubtful motives of time will be sifted then, and righteously appraised. The secret practisings of policy and worldly wisdom will be unravelled and condemned. The blind partialities and one-sided fanaticisms of the day of man will be revised and corrected in the light of God. All secret acts of goodness also will at length come forth to view. Both words and works which were meant only for the ear and eye of God will then be owned of God with an open acknowledgment of praise. The *counsels* also of the hearts, whether prospered or frustrate in the present day, will be made manifest by Him who is the searcher of all hearts. *What men have*

² Heb. x. 37.

purposed God will testify, not to the shame of His children, but their praise.³

All who have loved God will have praise of God. The limit of endeavour may have been a secret prayer, but nothing is in vain that is "of faith." As we have seen already, blame may be mixed with praise; but no living branch of the true Vine of God is altogether fruitless. And since *grace* reigns, there will be found a crown for all. The varied estimate which the Spirit gives, in the apostolic scriptures, of the condition of the churches here below, may be taken as a sample of the ultimate award of that great day.⁴ There will be differences not here only, but above. There are great and small in the kingdom of heaven, both now and in the day of revelation. According to the talents given will be the measure also of reward. But no heart that has sought to please God will be unremembered in that day. For He who saves His people by His sovereign grace is not unrighteous to forget what they have done or wished to do for Him.⁵

Verses 6, 7. "And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself," etc. We have here an apologetic explanation of the prominency given to his own name and that of Apollos. His argument is general, but he enforces it by these conspicuous and familiar instances. It was for *their* sakes that so much mention had been made of these helpers of their joy. That they might learn in them, and by

³ The apostle seems to contemplate in this verse the honest, though often mistaken, purposes of godly men; *e.g.*, David's intention to build a house for God was both praiseworthy and wrong. (2 Sam. vii.) ⁴ *Notes on the Romans*, chap. xvi. ⁵ Heb. vi. 10.

the estimate they had of their own ministry, "not to think above what is written," he would do this violence to his personal inclination.⁶ He means evidently by these words to refer them to the general verdict of the oracles of God as to the vanity and unprofitableness of the flesh in all its forms, and of which he has already cited some impressive samples.⁷ Of this also the entire doctrine of the cross is both the confirmation and the ever blessed compensation. He would instruct them in the way of wisdom, not by verbal doctrine only, but by practical examples. They should learn the folly of dissension by having their own party tendencies reviewed in the clear and solemn light of God. They should gain a sound estimate of Christian ministry, its proper objects and effects, of the snares to which it is exposed, and the spirit in which it should be exercised, by a personal reference to those whom they had acknowledged as Christ's messengers, and more especially to himself. His aim is to bring them back in the spirit of their minds to *God*, and to detach them entirely from man.

And this was something to be *learnt*. For strange to say, the Spirit's moral teaching in the Church consists mainly in a practical establishing of the hearts of God's elect in those fundamental truths which from the first they have unfeignedly acknowledged and received, though with little apprehension of their force. It might easily be imagined by a

⁶ Τὸ μὴ ὑπὲρ ἃ γέγραπται. *Cod. Sin.* agreeing with all the better MSS. in its omission of the word *φρονεῖν*. Literally, "that ye might learn 'not above what things are written.'" The ellipsis of the verb gives to the clause a sort of proverbial conciseness.

⁷ *Ante* i. 19; iii. 19, 20.

recent convert, that one glance of an intelligent faith directed to the cross must suffice to extinguish all natural partialities in the bosom of a true believer. But we have to learn that, though the flesh is judged, it is not killed, but lusts still against the Spirit in those who are themselves no longer "in the flesh,"^s and can be repressed and silenced in its importunities only by the active energy of faith. Subjection to Scripture is the only real emancipation from injurious human influences. A neglect or forgetfulness of the word of God will prevent us from duly profiting even by a ministry which is itself of God. An inspired apostle would be but a snare and hindrance to a soul that saw truth in *him* only, and did not find the Master in His servant. It should be remembered also that these evil partialities rest mainly for support on what is an unchangeable law of our being. Men cannot and are not meant to profit *equally* by all God's gifts. As His abundant goodness has provided, in the rich variety of His endowments, for the widely differing cast and disposition of men's minds, so also are His people to learn practical subjection to Himself, as well as mutual sympathy and forbearance, by a ready and unfeigned acceptance of all which their conscience acknowledges as genuine, though their personal share of profit may vary with the channel through which spiritual doctrine flows. Not always drinking largely from an earthen vessel, they may sometimes find their pleasure in noting the effect on others of a ministry which brought no special blessing to themselves.

To attach themselves therefore to particular teach-

^s Rom. viii. 9.

ers, to the neglect and disparagement of others, would be to dishonour Him who is the source of every gift, and by whose grace alone they had themselves been allowed and enabled to taste the word of life. Did they or could they forget who it was who had put a difference between them and their former selves? Who and what were they, as believers, but by the grace of God? Could the "called of Jesus Christ"⁹ make a spoil and false glory of His gifts? Alas! forgetfulness has ever been the standing discredit of God's people.¹ Possession, which should rather kindle gratitude, and keep the Giver's grace abidingly before the heart, has led too commonly to pride and thankless wantonness.² To hold humbly, by the same faith which originally grasped them, God's covenanted blessings in His Son, is the perfection of the godly man. Such wisdom was not found among these "carnal" saints, who, while outwardly acknowledging their common debt to grace, were treating God's distributions as their natural right, and thus dishonouring Him who had enriched them, while they gloried in His gifts.

Verse 8. "Now ye are full, now ye are rich," etc. His language of expostulation takes here a tone of sad but pungent irony, as he contemplates the opposite effects of the same truths as displayed in his own case and in theirs. They were resting mentally on doctrines which he held and lived upon by faith. They were glorying in their *position*, and enumerating their acquisitions as men in Christ, while he was seeking painfully to follow in the path

⁹ Rom. i. 6. ¹ Deut. xxxii.; Psa. cvi. 13; Gal. iii.; Hosea xii. 5.

² Heb. xiii. 6.

the Master trod. Grace humbled him, because he meditated duly on the difference between his natural condition and his calling as a saint and minister of Christ. The same grace was thoughtlessly abused on their parts, through lack of conscience and a defective estimate of that in which they made their boast. Their speech as well as ways bewrayed them. A heart full of Christ could never be a Paulite, or a partizan of any other name. Essentially their error lay in not perceiving that salvation is not an assurance only, but a *hope*, until the Saviour come; that in *themselves* they had nothing, but had all in *Him*; that to wait therefore on the Lord, and keep His way,³ is the true secret both of well-pleasing and of spiritual happiness. What the apostle waited for with patient longing they were foolishly anticipating in the spirit of their minds. They were reigning whilst he toiled. Yet the kingdom was his aim no less than theirs, and in the very act of chiding their wrong-mindedness he tells out his fervent aspiration for the time when, by the grace which saved them, both they and he should reign indeed.

Verse 9. "For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last," etc. The meaning of these solemn and remarkable words seems, when regard is had to the context, to be as follows: the apostles preached Christ crucified, and called believers by the power of that doctrine out of the world; turning them from idols to the service of the living and true God, and from settlement on the earth to an instant expectation of the return of the Son of God from heaven.

³ Ps. xxxvii. 34.

Nominally this is the common standing of the saints; but it happened too frequently that the doctrines of grace, instead of separating men from earthly things, were in many respects producing an opposite effect. Christianity was already in danger of becoming (as it since then has become) a dominant religion among men, and of mounting the seat of earthly grandeur and consideration, instead of retaining its essential character of a standing (and therefore suffering) testimony both to the total disallowing of the flesh on God's part, and to the riches of His own redeeming grace in Christ. The *cross*, when seen by faith, brings men to God. *Christianity*, as a religion, professes to bring God to man; *i.e.*, it puts honour upon natural men and circumstances, and thus destroys entirely the essential distinction of the Gospel.

In the condition of the Church at Corinth, Paul noticed the beginning of this fatal perversion of the truth. Divine doctrines were becoming there the vehicles of natural ideas and desires. By profession they were waiting for Christ, yet in His absence reigned as kings. The men in whom the genuine power of godliness was exemplified went in jeopardy of life, while they whom "for Jesus' sake" they served were quiet and at ease. It seemed therefore to his mourning spirit, as if the beginning of true spiritual devotedness might also be its last example, and that instead of the disciples emulating their teachers in the way of God, there was to remain a permanent distinction, not of office and official power only between the apostles and their followers, but also in the exhibition of those qualities of the new

life which belonged to them all in common as partakers of the grace of God.⁴

Verses 10-13. "We are fools," etc. In the first of these verses we have the world's estimate of apostolic devotedness. For Christ's sake they were fools, they were weak and they were despised; their condition thus agreeing with their doctrine, which is foolish, weak, and despicable in the eyes of men, and this before God was their highest praise. On the other hand, the saints at Corinth were wise (not *for* Christ, but) *in* Christ; they were strong and they were honourable. There is a double meaning in this description. There is for them, as for their teacher, both wisdom, strength, and honour in their Head; but a true apprehension of his standing as a man in Christ led the apostle to live and occupy *for* Christ. And this true wisdom, which would in due season bring its crown, made him and his fellow-workers what they were in the estimation of the world. But what were these Corinthians for Christ? They were surely, in their present state, of no account at all. His witnesses must live daily on His grace, and not on the stale manna of their knowledge. It is because of the littleness of their faith, and the dis-

⁴ They are a spectacle to the upper and the nether world; *Τῷ κόσμῳ, καὶ ἀγγέλοις καὶ ἀνθρώποις*—"to the world, both to angels and to men." *Κόσμος* has here an actual and not a moral signification, and is equivalent to "ordered creation." Angels observed them with their own peculiar interest, and might well marvel that the labourers in such a field and for such a harvest seemed so few; while men would know them by their testimony and their lives. Nor would the latter fail to note the contrast which so soon began to show itself between apostolic doctrine and practice, and the words and ways of those who succeeded by profession to their place.

proportionate amplitude of their pretensions, that what should have been their glory is here turned ironically to their shame.

In striking and instructive contrast to the barrenness of these self-complacent spiritual idlers, we have now a memorial of the habitual manner and experience of this true imitator of his Lord. "Even to the present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked," etc. Hardship and ill-usage came upon him; not because he sought them, but because they met him in the path of his devoted service. The world which had persecuted the Master did not spare His zealous follower. In the doing of His Father's will, the Son of God had known both thirst and hunger, while destitution was His habitual condition in the world which He had made. And Paul resembled Jesus, in such manner as a vessel of divine grace can emulate the Fountain which has filled it. But the Corinthians were not like Paul. Some of the traits here presented to us are peculiar, and not connected necessarily with the apostolic calling; *e.g.*, his labouring with his hands, and his voluntary abnegation of domestic ties, and of these we shall hear more when he speaks more minutely of his apostolic claims.⁵ There are others again which are (or should be) common to the teachers and the taught.⁶ Meekness and patience are a part of the nature of God's true children, while of all alike who enter the kingdom of God it is written that they must enter it through tribulation.⁷

Verse 14. "I write not these things to shame you,"

⁵ Chap. ix.

⁶ Rom. xii.

⁷ John xvi. 33; Acts xiv. 22; Rom. viii. 17.

etc. Shame might well be their effect, but his motive was from a deeper and more tender source. These Corinthians had in their light-mindedness but ill remembered the relationship; but he who had travailed for them could not forget that they were his own sons. As a father, therefore, he would warn them. If his words were searching, it was love that spoke, and love is jealous of its own. The lasting endurance of the tie which subsists between the evangelist and those who are converted by his testimony is touchingly asserted in what follows.

Verses 15, 16. "For though ye have myriads of teachers in Christ,"⁸ etc. Addition might be made indefinitely to the decisive work of their conversion; to their faith might and should be added knowledge, etc.⁹ But if they lived, they owed themselves to him who had been God's instrument in quickening their souls. In Christ, Paul had begotten them through the Gospel. What they knew vitally of Jesus they had learnt from him. But a father is the natural guide and teacher¹ of his children. Others who undertook their training might mislead as well as guide. There are faithful and unfaithful ministers of Christ. Alas! how often has the life communicated by the Gospel been corrupted practically

⁸ Ἐάν γάρ μύριους παιδαγωγούς ἔχητε ἐν Χρῆ. There seems to be a moral connection between the term by which he here describes their teachers and their own infantine state of spiritual growth. (*Conf.* Gal. iii. 25.)

⁹ 2 Peter i. 5, *seq.*

¹ This, although strictly and naturally true of an inspired apostle, is not so, generally speaking, in the case of an ordinary evangelist. The teacher is his natural successor in the work of perfecting the saints. (Eph. iv. 11.) Both callings are not unfrequently united in one person; but this is exceptional, the gifts being themselves distinct.

through the erroneous teachings of those who, in self-satisfied ignorance of God, have taught perversely things which they ought not, to the subversion of men's souls. Of some of the teachers here mentioned by the apostle, and the quality of their doctrine, we shall hear again in the course of these epistles. With reason is it that he now with such affectionate entreaty offers himself, and his own ways in Christ, as a pattern to these loved, but faulty and deluded sheep.

Verse 17. "For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus," etc. Himself a "beloved son" of the apostle, as well as "faithful in the Lord," Timotheus was doubly fitted for his mission. The saints at Corinth might be moved to a wholesome emulation by the example of one who stood to Paul in the same spiritual relation as themselves; while as his chosen associate in his labours, and the authentic expounder of his will as an inspired teacher and director of God's people, he would cause gladness by his visit to all who really sought the way of truth.

But (verse 18) there were some at Corinth who, though both in and of "the Church of God," had no sincere desire to be subject to his will. Through a false elation, founded most probably upon erroneous conceptions of the nature of Christian liberty, and sustained by a consciousness of more or less personal ability, they had already become estranged in their sympathies and aims from him who had begotten them through the gospel, and had learnt in the spirit of their minds to detach themselves from what they esteemed the *yoke* of apostolic oversight. Paul's

absence was their opportunity; and although he spoke of seeing them again, they speculated on the likelihood of his finding full employment at a distance. Besides, what was not evil in their own eyes, they might think to be of little adverse interest in his. Nay, the visible effect of their influence upon their brethren might lure them even to the vain imagination that he, whose presence while among them had been "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling," would scarcely venture back to Corinth only to engage in what they would consider a mere contest for pre-eminence. Thus judging after the flesh, they were lulling themselves and those who heeded them into a false security, from which the apostle's words are now intended to arouse them.

Verse 19. "But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will," etc. They had mistaken both themselves and him. And let us first note here the saving proviso with which he qualifies his resolution to return. The absence of this habitual feeling of dependence on the will of God, coupled, as it usually is, with the contrary habit of self-confident boldness, is one of the surest symptoms of a low and carnal state of soul. It was the want of this restraint that loosed the tongues of those who were "puffed up" to talk so exceeding proudly in Paul's absence. But he had learnt another and a better way, and one which he would teach them also who were willing to be taught. If he came, it should not be by the permission only, but in the power also of the Lord. He would know the origin and quality of that which was thus lifting up its head. What these self-commended teachers *said*, he would care little to enquire, but he would

diligently sift their *work*. Their rod of office should be matched with his. Pretensions may be easily advanced by human wilfulness, but power is of God. His kingdom (verse 20) is in power, not in word; and he would remind them that, as believing confessors of the name of Jesus, they were both within that kingdom, and subject to its rule.²

In the closing verse he puts a question well fitted to correct these false notions of liberty, and to prepare them for its true enjoyment, by first subjecting themselves to God. The power which guided the apostle was the Spirit of the unchanging God, and His manifestations must be in their effects according to the state of those among whom He came. To the meek He would show meekness, but would wrestle with the froward.³ Love is His nature, and mercy His delight; but He is the angry resister of the proud. He is the trier of His people's hearts and ways; and as they regard Him, so will He be found of them.

² "The kingdom of God." This expression is used in Scripture to describe the present status of the believer, as well as his prospective inheritance. By faith, he is already in it; in fact, he is to enter it. God's kingdom is wherever God is truly owned; here most imperfectly, amid the contradictions of the flesh, hereafter in blissful perfection, when all things are made new.

³ Ps. xviii. 25-27.

CHAPTER V.

"It is commonly reported among you," etc. (1.) The earlier chapters of this epistle were grounded chiefly on the particular report of those of Chloe's household, with reference to the intestine divisions and schismatic temper which had marked the Church at Corinth; and, with a declaration of his purposed visit, he concludes his general review of their condition. But there was among them another kind of evil, and that of common notoriety, which, while it remained unjudged, degraded the Church of the living God below the moral level of the Gentiles, among whom they should have shone as a light in the midst of darkness. An act had been committed by one of their number, which was not only a grievous sin against God, but was felt to be an outrage upon natural morality, even where licentiousness of life was a broadly-marked feature of society.

Had an ordinary Christian teacher been addressing an assembly which connived at such gross and notorious immorality as is here described, he would in all probability have fastened at once upon this patent wrong, and deferred the mention of all other topics until an evil of such magnitude had been redressed. But the apostle was guided by a higher

wisdom. He well knew that unholy practice cannot dwell where truth is felt and honoured; he defers, therefore, any mention of this particular scandal, until he has endeavoured, as in the foregoing chapters, to arouse in his brethren a sense of their spiritual poverty and leanness, and restore them to a consciousness of what they owed to God as the called and chosen vessels of His grace. Having done this, he now turns to deal with this most shameful case, and to call upon them both to take swift vengeance on the dishonour which this act had brought upon the name of Christ, and to purge themselves from complicity with the evil-doer by subjecting him to the last extreme of godly discipline.

Verse 2. "And ye are puffed up," etc. It is difficult to comprehend the state of mind here described by the apostle. That Christians, in whom God's Holy Spirit dwells, would be insensible to that which shocked the world's sense of decency, and should evince a haughty indifference to so damaging a scandal in the house of God, proves at least instructively how different in principle are mere doctrinal pretensions and the true power of godliness. But both wisdom and mercy are to be discerned in the recorded history of this case. Like all other Scripture, it is written for our learning; and by its means we are taught convincingly the following important truths: 1. That a change of dispensation works no alteration in the flesh. 2. That salvation in Christ is compatible with personal condemnation and a judicial destruction of the flesh. 3. That the abundance of grace in redemption, and the indwelling presence of the Spirit of adoption, are not suffi-

cient to preserve a careless Christian from the power of the tempter. 4. That although the Lord does not change, and that which has once been given freely by the grace of God can never be withdrawn, sin cannot be removed without repentance; and 5. That the known defilement of one member of Christ's body taints the whole, so long as it remains neglected or unredressed by scriptural discipline. At Corinth an act of sin had been committed which called imperatively for a corresponding act of discipline. A public scandal had occurred which could only be compensated by an equally public repudiation of its author. Yet this obvious principle had been overlooked or disregarded by those whom Paul here in his mournful irony extols as "wise in Christ!"

The question already asked, in chap. iii. 16, has probably a reference to what is now before us; for it is not only by false teaching that the house of God may be defiled. And it may be noticed here, that the first recorded case of discipline, both in the original assembly at Jerusalem, and in that since gathered from among the Gentiles, is one of extreme gravity; the first consisting of an attempt to veil the sin of covetousness by a lie against the Holy Ghost;¹ the other, an act of uncleanness of the grossest description. God, that is, was outraged thus early, both in His holiness and in His truth, by those on whom He had lavished the abundant riches of His grace in Christ. And this enormity of evil was doubtless suffered to appear at the beginning of the

¹ Acts v. The lie being uttered, as well as the sin committed, in forgetfulness of Him whose presence dwells among His saints. (*Conf.* Joshua vii.)

dispensation, both to warn us of the incurable evil of the flesh in those even whom the Lord had added to the Church,² and to demonstrate the inflexibility of that holiness which has its proper habitation in "the temple of God." Our own lot is cast in a time when historically the Church of God has lost for many ages its true character of unity and holiness. But the order of God's house remains the same. He is the judge of sin among His saints, and cannot allow the sanction of His name to anything which practically contradicts His nature.

The behaviour of the Corinthians in the matter of this sin is a true index of their spiritual tone. Had they been corporately in a godly state, they would assuredly have dealt with this evil as became the house of God, and would have needed no summons to their duty from without. A Church, like an individual, should judge itself. If otherwise, it is judged of the Lord. In the present instance, the Church was itself receiving the discipline of sharp reproof from Him, in being thus constrained to inflict on this particular evil-doer the heavy sentence of excommunication. Apostolic decision was quite unnecessary in such a case;³ for the *Lord* is both in and with His people. Had they duly responded to this solemn truth, they would have won the apostle's praise by their prompt and righteous judgment of iniquity, instead of bringing on themselves this shameful burden of rebuke.

Verses 3-5. "For I verily, as absent in body," etc. What they should have done unbidden, Paul, though

² Acts ii. 47.

³ This is convincingly shown by his own question in verse 12: "Do ye not judge them that are within?"

not personally among them, had already done; but he had done it not as an outside witness, but as *present* with them in spirit. These words deserve our careful attention. In the unity of the body of Christ, the apostle was in spirit and sympathy wherever God's assembled saints were found, and was personally interested in their acts. What he here implies is taught with more distinctness as a principle of Christian doctrine further on.⁴ Every true Christian has a proper interest in what is done or suffered in the Church of God.

The directions which follow, as to the manner of performing the definitive act of excommunication, involve three things. 1. They were to pronounce this sentence in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. 2. They were to be all assembled, that the judgment so pronounced might be the act of all; and 3. It was to be done in a believing conviction, both of the concurrence in their sentence of all other members of Christ's body, and of its sure confirmation and enforcement by the power of the Lord.

As to the nature and present effect of this sentence, it was "to deliver such an one to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh;" while its ultimate intent was, "that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." The former clause of this verse exhibits, with a clear and solemn distinctness, the essential difference between the Church and the world. The one is the abode of the Spirit of God; the other, the present realm of Satan. "We are of God," says another witness, "and the whole world lieth in the wicked one."⁵ No intermediate position

⁴ Chap. xii.

⁵ 1 John v. 19.

is recognized in Scripture. But the law of God's house is subjection to His will. The commission of sin by a believer is a violation, therefore, of the sanctity of His presence, which fails not, if unrepented, to bring its penal consequence on the offender. There are sins which receive a private chastisement; the grieved Spirit of God inflicting sorrow on the fool, until he is brought low for his iniquity, and again restored by grace.⁶ But public sins must have a public punishment, or the shame of complicity attaches to the Church, and the temple of God again becomes "a den of thieves."

But if a Christian incurs by his behaviour the designation of a "wicked person," and is as such cast forth from God's assembly, and "delivered unto Satan," he is not *surrendered* to the power of darkness, nor abandoned by the Lord who has redeemed him for Himself. With a stern yet loving severity he is handed over to the prince of this world, as God's instrument "for the destruction of the flesh." The apostle's language is general, and we need not seek for its further historical elucidation.⁷ Morally its force is this: Satan, as we know from Scripture, is the willing inflictor of personal distresses of all kinds, including even bodily death; but at the discretion of Him who, as it respects His saints, has already wrested from him the power of death. He torments men with remorse after having successfully incited them to sin. He plagues, moreover, the bodies, and corrupts the substance of God's chosen, when He

⁶ Ps. cvii. 17-20.

⁷ As an illustration of the principle, compare Isa. l. 1, and Jer. xi. 15, with Isa. lvii. 17, 18, and Jer. xxxi. 18-20.

sees fit to heat the furnace of affliction to an extraordinary pitch, for the eventual benefit of their souls.⁸

Church discipline, then, if administered as an act of faith and obedience, will never fail to bring upon its subject (if a real Christian) its proper and positive effects.⁹ The chief of these is sorrow of mind; the dreadful consciousness of being at a distance from the Lord, and under His immediate displeasure. This feeling (the needful precursor of genuine repentance) may be produced instrumentally by any of the numerous methods which divine wisdom may see fit to employ, or allow Satan to use, for humbling and weakening the native energy of the will. Having transgressed through wilfulness, the offender has to learn against his will, that the way of transgressors is *hard*. But the way of man is not the *end* of the Lord. His name is *Saviour*, and those whom He once loves He loves unto the end. In His own day He will be supreme in the sovereign assertion of His grace.¹

Verse 6. "Your glorying is not good," etc.

⁸ Job i. ii. xlii.; James v. 11.

⁹ Bodily sickness and death are enumerated among these in chap. xi. But as has been already said, the body is *the Lord's*; and if killed by His own judgment, for the benefit of the spirit, it will yet be raised in glory at His coming.

¹ The reader will do well to note the structure of the apostle's language in this passage. In verse 4 it is "with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ" that the offender is directed to be cast out. For the Saviour is both the Head and immediate Judge of His own house. But He is the Judge also of the *world*. And His first great act on His descent from heaven will be to take out of it that which he now confesses before the Father as His own. "The day of the Lord Jesus" is, in other words, the day in which the gospel of our salvation becomes, through His all-transforming power, a visible and finished truth. (Heb. ix. 27, 28; Phil. iii. 20, 21.)

Having laid on them these solemn injunctions for the vindication of the honour of the Lord's name, and the clearing of themselves from guilty imputation, the apostle is led, after a further word of reproof, to impart some positive teaching of deep and lasting importance on the general subject of Church discipline. But first they are rebuked for boasting where they should have mourned. High-mindedness had generated among them a shameful indifference to the presence of evil in God's house. They must accept, therefore, these humiliating reproofs. For they should indeed have known that to tamper with sin is to be ourselves infected by it, and that one sinner destroyeth much good.² The word of God is full of warning as to the contaminating power of unjudged evil,³ while from nature itself they might have learnt that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." The proverbial aphorism here introduced becomes now the immediate basis of the practical teaching which follows.

Verses 7, 8. "Purge out therefore the old leaven," etc. Although the language here employed is figurative, there is no ambiguity in the apostle's words. Leaven is called "old," the lump desired is called "new." This clearly marks the difference between the old nature and the new, with reference to the practical habits of life; for, as he goes on to say, they are in Christ already a new lump—"ye are unleavened." Their behaviour had indeed fallen fearfully below the level of their standing by faith as new creatures in Christ. Iniquity had found a shelter for itself within the sanctuary of God, and

² Eccles. ix. 18.

³ Joshua vii.; Hosea xiii. 12, &c.

their first act of obedience to the word of Him who judged them must be to carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place.⁴ But more than this was necessary for their effectual restoration to a healthy and acceptable state. By wandering in the spirit of their minds from Jesus crucified, they had fallen into the adversary's snare. Their remedy was to be found only in a direct return to Him. And so he proceeds: "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us," etc.

The force of this allusion is evident. The paschal feast was the primal institution of divine fellowship in a corporate sense. The blood of atonement stood on that night between the Israelites and those who were without their doors. Judgment was without; but within, not peace only, but communion. No Israelite might eat the passover alone. Family association, founded upon the divinely recognized unity of the house of Israel, was a characteristic feature of the ordinance. There is a similar analogy in the things of Christ. The shedding of His blood is to the believer not only an assurance of personal security from the wrath to come, but the basis also of association (in the power of the Spirit, who declares the efficacy of that blood) with all who are partakers of like precious faith. For the same reason it is a solemn witness also of condemnation to those who refuse to place themselves by faith beneath its shelter.

In the ordinance of the passover, next to the preparation of the lamb, the most noticeable peculiarity was the jealous exclusion of leaven in every shape. That which was both customary, and in a manner necessary to natural comfort, must be carefully

⁴ 2 Chron. xxix. 5.

avoided at this feast of remembrance. Nor is it difficult to understand the drift of this injunction, and to perceive its moral harmony with the radical principle of the institution; for the essential thing to be remembered, on the part of those who kept the passover, was the solemn fact of the judicial rejection of all natural claims, and that even for God's covenanted people there could be found an acceptable standing in His sight upon the ground only of a divinely ordered sacrificial atonement. So is it likewise in the spiritual antitype. As Jesus suffered once for all, as God's foreordained Lamb, to make atonement for His people, and thus made death the sole means of their redemption, so is there in faith's remembrance of the cross an utter disallowing of all that is of nature, whether comely or uncomely. Natural objects and considerations cannot blend with what is of the Spirit; and if allowed a place in Christian life or worship, act invariably with corrupting effect.⁵ The great fact therefore of the cross, with its ever blessed significance for the believer, is the point to which the apostle here seeks to recall the hearts of the Corinthian saints.

"Therefore," he continues, "let us keep the feast." He is contemplating the Church under one of its permanent aspects during the existing dispensation, that, namely, of a sheltered anticipation of the wrath which is coming upon the children of disobedience.⁶

⁵ The reader will not, I hope, misunderstand this language. The *relationships* of nature are acknowledged and adorned by grace, while the *aims* of nature, its motives and ruling principles, are disallowed. Redeemed man is for the Lord, who has redeemed him.

⁶ It is usual among Christians to refer this passage to the Lord's Supper, and it has, no doubt, a very natural and obvious appli-

It is as redeemed to God by the blood of His own Son that believers are acknowledged as His people and His worshippers. They are called, therefore, to pass the remainder of their earthly life as a continuous holy-day to Him who has thus delivered them from the present evil world. God's Church has no *annual* remembrances. Israel's appointed feasts are to the believer figures of permanent realities. "Days, and months, and times, and years," are for the flesh, and not for the Spirit. The solemnly enjoined, but soon to be neglected, annual passover is replaced, for the partakers of the heavenly calling, by the unceasing ordinance of faith. To live by Christ, we must eat His flesh and drink His blood, not occasionally and by a special act of remembrance only, but continually, as by "the faith of Him" we pass the days of our appointed sojourn in the flesh.⁷ Hence the force of the call here made to those who had shown themselves so forgetful of the difference which redeeming love had put between them and an unbelieving world.

But God's feast must be kept to Him and in His manner, "not with the old leaven;" not, that is, in the wisdom or energy of nature. For God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.⁸ God's ritual is not a measured ordinance, but the living homage of that offering which comes up only out of hearts which He

cation to it. Yet only as the celebration of that ordinance is a periodical and more emphatic outward acknowledgment of the relative positions of the Church and the world. There is perhaps in verse 8 a premonitory reference to that form of disorder which in chap. xi. is expressly noticed and condemned.

⁷ John vi. 53-58; Gal. ii. 20.

⁸ John iv. 24.

has filled.⁹ *Faith* is the only condition of continuous and experimental Christian life, even as it is through believing the testimony of God that men are originally quickened into life. Nature is dead, judicially, by the cross of Christ; and the believer is to learn to keep himself in a watchful remembrance of this, to *arm* himself with the same mind.¹ Otherwise his worship and service will be leavened by the wilfulness of nature, and be without acceptance in the sight of God.

“Neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness.” We have here, as is usual in divine teaching, a transition from what is general, to some special and prominent features of the thing described. Malice and wickedness are inherent qualities of our old nature; they are, therefore, a summary description of the practical activities of the flesh. The drift of Paul’s teaching is this: nominal profession, unsustained by faith, (which is the meaning of “the old leaven,”) defiles the house of God, and should be allowed no place in His assemblies.² But corrupt behaviour (leaven of malice and wickedness) in a saint, is equally obnoxious to divine displeasure, and must be as decidedly rejected. What God refuses to tolerate is wilful sin. When it shows itself among His people they are no longer owned as His, except upon repentance and a true return to Him. “Sincerity and truth” are the acceptable accompaniments to the Lamb of God’s providing. Faith unfeigned can alone seat a ransomed sinner with

⁹ Heb. xiii. 15.

¹ 1 Peter iv. 1.

² *Conf.* Heb. xii. 15. “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God,” &c.

acceptance at the feast of God, and honesty of conscience can alone maintain him there. The question here is not as to the internal conflicts through which a believer may pass in the course of his personal experiences, and to which the Lord alone is privy as his Advocate with the Father, and the great High Priest of his profession. It relates rather to the genuineness or otherwise of his faith in Christ, and his practical singleness of desire to walk godly in Him.

Verses 9, 10. "I wrote unto you in an epistle," etc. It is probable that he here refers to some earlier, and no longer extant, epistle, which he had sent in reply to particular enquiries put to him by some at Corinth, who more especially valued his judgment and desired his guidance.³ But whatever be the particular reference in these words, his meaning is not doubtful. He had given them wholesome and godly counsel as to their walk and conduct as the Lord's people in the world. They are called to be a *separate* people; not to the eye, but to the conscience of the world. They are not called to come out of the world, but, remaining in it, to confess before men the Name of their Redeemer, and to adorn the doctrine of God in the presence of His enemies. But to do this, they must themselves

³ Is there not room here for an inference, that the non-removal of the scandal, of which he complains in this chapter, was owing partly to the imperfect acceptance which his earlier communication had received? *Some* only at Corinth were "of Paul." To such his words would be decisive; not to others. This also would still further explain the remarkable firmness and severity of tone which is so strongly characteristic of both the epistles to this Church.

be pure. Their voluntary association must be not with darkness, but with light. With the men of this world they might traffic and occupy, but as with men belonging to another clime; shewing all meekness to all men, and watching wisely all occasions in their faithful endeavours to win their neighbours to the way of life.

Verse 11. "But now I have written unto you," etc. His former admonition had proved ineffectual through the dulness of their spiritual perception, and the generally low tone of their souls. He now states therefore, with a more emphatic precision, the rule of Christian association on its negative side. No doer of such things⁴ as are here enumerated is to be acknowledged as a brother. His Christian title is to be the sentence of his exclusion from spiritual fellowship while continuing in unrepented sin. The things here specified are representative of natural wilfulness in some of its commoner varieties and forms, and with such no obedient Christian is to eat. The prohibition thus expressed begins with the Lord's table, but certainly does not end there. Voluntary companionship of any kind is evidently contemplated in the apostle's words.

The aim of the Spirit, as the monitor and guide of the believer, is the purity in life and habit of those who are by faith already pure. Any toleration, on their part, of known and persistent evil, is a virtual falsification of that holy calling which has made them the fellows of the Son of God; for His name is *holy*; and though found among publicans and sinners when abroad upon the errand of His

⁴ *Conf. Gal. v. 21.*

mercy, He will be sanctified in them that name His name, and are dwellers in His house. He is not less essentially the hater of evil, than He is in grace the Saviour of sinners. We may not continue in sin, that grace may abound.⁵ Now our walk and voluntary associations will be according to the dominant inclinations of our hearts; and if, as he elsewhere says, we walk in the Spirit, we shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.⁶

With respect, moreover, to the specifications of sin in verse 11, it is evident that the apostle's injunction is one which needs for its adequate fulfilment an habitual nearness in heart and spirit to the Lord. His eye is the true light of those who walk in Him. In His presence things put on a new appearance, and are called by other names. That which believers in a low condition would excuse, or even praise as "prudence," might be judged as "covetousness" by a mind of healthier and more godly tone. But inasmuch as even a true and holy judgment of evil might, if unrestrained within due limits, become a snare, and turn, through the native deceitfulness of our hearts, to mere censoriousness and Pharisaic pride, the directions here given are so expressed as to furnish a safeguard against this formidable danger. Positive proof of sin is required. "If he *be* a fornicator," etc. Notoriety, clearly established on sufficient testimony, is the ground on which such judicial discrimination as is here enjoined, whether for public discipline, or the regulation of private intercourse, is to proceed. Without

⁵ Rom. vi. 1, 15.

⁶ Gal. v. 16.

this provision, a groundless slander might attain the weight and authority of a divine command.⁷

Verse 12. "For what have I to do to judge them that are without?" What is outside the heavenly Jerusalem⁸ should also be without the Church. The world is without; the natural man is without, or should be so. But that which is without, though subject to God's jurisdiction as the governor of the world, is not, in the present dispensation, under the administration of the Spirit of Christ. Apostles are for the Church, not for the world, except as messengers of God and ambassadors of Christ. The aim of the prince of this world has been from the beginning, to abolish practically this divinely established boundary of light and darkness. Neglect of godly discipline, accompanied as it always is by a lowering of the standard of doctrinal truth, began that course of declension which has made Christendom what it is, and is, alas! yet to be. But a more fitting occasion will be found for contrasting the original portrait of God's Church with its many modern copies, when reviewing chaps. xii. and xiv. of this epistle. In the meanwhile, the words with which the apostle closes his notice of this special case of discipline demand our careful attention.

Verse 13. "But them that are without God judgeth," etc. In the reiterated command "to put away the wicked person," we have a sort of moral definition of what God will at any time acknowledge

⁷ Paul's own practice in such cases is clearly intimated in 2 Cor. xiii. 1: "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word [or fact] be established." (*Conf.* Matt. xviii. 16.)

⁸ Rev. xxii. 15.

as His own assembly ; namely, a company of His living and obedient worshippers, among whom nothing which He excludes is suffered to remain. The terms “within” and “without” declare respectively the limits and mutual relations of the Church and the world. The latter God will judge ; the former is to judge itself. If this prime duty be neglected, the Lord continues faithful, and will judge His own.⁹

The importance of the subject may perhaps justify some additional remarks of a practical kind on Church-fellowship, and that discipline of God which is its regulating spring. Whoever is in Christ is both *in* and *of* the Church of God, His Church being but another name for the general assembly of His saints as gathered out of the world by the gospel. But all true believers are in Christ. A true believer is, then, in the sight of God, a living member of Christ’s body ; a member, therefore, whether recognized or not, of each and every *genuine* assembly of God’s saints. He is in fellowship with God’s people, because he is in fellowship with God.

But a Christian may, as we have seen, be really such, and yet have to be judged and treated as an evil doer. He ceases then to be reckoned among the living, and, in the solemn language of another Scripture, he “remains in the congregation of the dead,”¹ until the truth of his original profession is re-asserted by a genuine repentance. And as with moral pravity, so also with erroneous teaching. God’s inspired oracles are the standard of sound doctrine ; whatever, therefore, is offered in His name to man, which does not harmonize with His written testimonies, is judged

⁹ 1 Peter iv. 17.

¹ Prov. xxi. 16.

as a lie against His truth. But the objects of His discipline are *persons*, not abstractions. If men pervert His words, or substitute their own imaginations for His counsel, they are condemned as the adversaries of His truth. The leaven of false doctrine is even more dangerous in its effects than that of evil practice, and the warnings of Scripture against its toleration, whether publicly or privately among God's saints, are proportionately frequent. Yet in this case also men are to be judged upon distinct and positive evidence. A heretic who resists a second admonition is to be rejected, because self-condemned.² Not every spirit is to be believed, but all are to be tried.³ The wish expressed by Paul, in writing to the Galatians, indicates the form also of the judgment which would fall on those who continued to molest the saints.⁴ So also as to private intercourse. A man who, while claiming Christian recognition, does not bring with him the faith of God's elect, is to be treated as an evil doer, and refused. If any receive him, they are included by the Spirit in his condemnation.⁵ For the faith once delivered to the saints is committed to the common and united keeping and defence of all who are themselves of God.⁶ Beyond this Scripture does not go. Beyond this, therefore, there is no room for the obedience of *faith*. What is looked for in God's people is truth and uprightness. None who are led by the spirit of error can be *true*, nor can any one who, while professing love for Christ, contends for what is false, be *upright*. Both alike fall, while remaining

² Titus iii. 10, 11.³ 1 John iv. 1-3.⁴ Gal. v. 12, 10.⁵ 2 John 9-11.⁶ Jude 1-3.

in that state, without the pale of God's true Church, and as such should be rejected by His saints.

But in ordinary language, "Church discipline" signifies the enforcing of "Church law." With respect to this, it is only necessary to observe that the Church has *no* original legislative power or authority. While herself subject to the Lord, her voice is the echo of His word.⁷ But it is He who walketh among the candlesticks; and, as the Head of His own house, He calls on those who have an ear to hear, not the Church, but "what the Spirit saith unto the churches."⁸ In fine, and with reference to existing things, it may be said that any assembly of saints which either excludes what God acknowledges, or keeps within it that which He condemns, is not an assembly or Church of God at all; not through defect of "orders," or of an imagined apostolic genealogy, but because it lacks the prime essential of subjection to the Lord and to His word.

⁷ Matt. xviii. 15-20.

⁸ Rev. ii. iii.

CHAPTER VI.

IF astonishment and grief were excited in Paul's mind, when he thought of the remissness of the saints at Corinth with respect to practical holiness, and their defective appreciation of their proper standing as the temple of God, that feeling changes now to angry indignation when he finds God's children rushing out of doors, to lay their quarrels for decision at the feet of those who crucified the Lord.

Verse 1. "Dare any of you," etc. The energy of his rebuke is fully justified by its occasion; for it was, indeed, a bold as well as heartless thing to seek, for the redress of their private grievances, to those who were the natural enemies of truth, and from whose condemnation they had been exempted only by the elective and redeeming grace of God. And here we may first notice the application of the term, "unjust," as a distinctive appellation of those who are described in the foregoing chapter as "without." As the believer is justified by his faith, so the world out of which he has been called is left by the Spirit under the stigma of unrighteousness.¹

¹ There is besides a specific and peculiar force in the use of this term in such a connection. The spirit of this world cannot judge righteously in any matter in which God and His people are concerned, provided always that the latter maintain their true cha-

The "saints" and the "unjust" are the two antagonistic designations under which he classifies respectively the Church of the living God, and the world out of which it has been called.

Well, then, might the apostle marvel and be angry when he heard that they whose calling is a solemn testimony to the world, both of its own condemnation and of their separation from it in the power of a heavenly hope, should have so far forgotten their true standing in the grace of God, as to be suing one another in the courts of Cæsar for the perishable interests of time. Nothing could be devised by the craft of the deceiver more entirely destructive of the moral power of Christianity, as a testimony in the world, than such a proceeding. That they who, as Christ's disciples, are taught to "hate their own lives," should so cleave to their carnal interests as to act in the manner here described was, in a very important sense, a greater scandal even than their toleration of a particular moral enormity; for it was a degrading to the world's level of the whole fabric of the Church. From thenceforth Truth might well seem to the natural man no better than a matter of opinion, if it had no power to provide within its own circle for the contentment and happiness of those whom it nominally raised so high above the ordinary aims of men. Moreover, by referring their disputes to a worldly tribunal, they were plainly conceding to the world a jurisdiction over the people

racter. Pilate judged Christ unjustly, and, as iniquity is the condition of every man who is not right with God, such decisions as were sought by these Corinthians could only be measures and degrees of practical unrighteousness.

of God. Nor would it avail in such a case to draw distinctions between temporal and spiritual things; for a man's *rights* attach to and derive their character from his *person*: a spiritual man can properly contend, therefore, for spiritual things alone. But Christians, if real ones, are spiritual men, and cannot, therefore, without a virtual denial of their standing, assert any natural claims or rights at all; and on this the apostle presently insists.² They are neither debtors to the flesh, to live after the flesh;³ nor can they, without practically falsifying the ground-truth of their confession, invoke the aid of the "secular arm," either for the furtherance of their private aims, or the nominal advancement of the cause of truth.

Verse 2. "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" As in the former instances,⁴ so here also, the gross misconduct of God's people is rebuked by a remembrancer of the transcendent glory of their calling. They should have known and felt, as it were, instinctively, how derogatory it is to the position of men in Christ, whose hope it is to share in a little while His very throne, to be imploring one another for objects of temporal advantage before the unrighteous judges of the earth. They should have remembered that the spirit cannot profit by the flesh, that the world's assistance is never given to God's people but at the price of their dishonour,⁵ and that a just man falling down before the wicked is as a troubled fountain and a corrupt spring.⁶ These self-elated "babes in Christ" would surely

² Verse 7.³ Rom. viii. 12.⁴ *Ante*, pages 91, *seq.*⁵ 1 Sam. xi. 2.⁶ Prov. xxv. 26.

become conscious, as they listened to Paul's faithful words, how sad and shameful was the descent which they had voluntarily made from their true excellency in Christ, when they suffered thus the eye of the enemy to look upon their nakedness. Moreover, it was a wrong done to the world itself; for what power is there in a testimony which contradicts itself, by preaching the cross, and yet warring in the flesh?

Yet the decree has from of old been established, and, since the ascension of the Lord of glory, has been openly asserted by the Spirit, that His saints shall judge the world.⁷ Righteousness shall judge unrighteousness; and they whose calling it is to sit with Christ in heaven will have dominion over them that dwell upon the earth. Are, then, he indignantly asks, the heirs of such a calling "unworthy to judge the smallest matters?" Are God's assessors unequal to the task of settling their own disputes? Is the Spirit, which was given them that they might search the depths of God,⁸ incapable of showing them the merits of some shallow controversy between man and man? Was Wisdom failing her own children, or had Righteousness forsaken its abode? The more our own souls as believers are enabled to appreciate "the true grace of God wherein we stand,"⁹ the more justly we shall estimate the deep and fervent emotion of the apostle as he poured forth his mar-

⁷ Dan. vii. 18; 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12; Rev. ii. 26. This is true in two senses; first, and with reference to the day of decision, when the Lord will reveal Himself as the Avenger (2 Thess. i. 8-10); and, secondly, in the administration of that kingdom which Jesus has gone to be invested with, and which His chosen are to share with Him.

⁸ Chap. ii. 12.

⁹ 1 Peter v. 12.

vellous invective, which is now pursued in a yet higher strain.

Verse 3. "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" The repetition of the reproachful interrogatory, "Know ye not?" is a sufficient assurance to us that this doctrine, so astonishing in itself, yet in such strict and necessary keeping with our calling into the fellowship of the Son of God, had been a not unfamiliar topic of Paul's verbal ministry at Corinth, and had been both heard, therefore, and outwardly received, by those to whom he writes. But if so, they had proved since how little they had understood the ground of their own boasting, when they were puffed up, and reigned as kings. The saints shall judge angels who kept not their first estate,¹ even as the saints are now served by other angels in the name and at the will of Him whose ministers they are, and who upholds them in their places by His grace.² But if such be their destination and their present honour, how much rather should they be entrusted with the lesser interests of this present life? One further question follows, to complete the confusion of these "wise" Corinthians, by showing them that their practice was one of entire self-stultification.

Verse 4. "If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, do ye set them to judge who are *of no account whatever* in the Church?"³ And

¹ 2 Peter ii. 4; Jude 6.

² Heb. i. 14; 1 Tim. v. 21.

³ Βιωτικά μὲν οὖν κριτήρια ἂν ἔχητε, τοὺς ἐξουθενημένους ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, τοὺτους καθίζετε; These words may be construed either affirmatively, or interrogatively, as I have preferred to do above. Either way their drift is the same. The A.V. is evidently

such were the Gentile magistrates before whom they were carrying their matters for decision. He thus endeavours to recall them to a just sense of their folly. The point of his remonstrance is this: You know that an unconverted Gentile has no place within the Church, and that the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God; do you then, in forgetfulness of this, go forth from the place of righteousness to seek for equity outside God's building, and place, so to speak, the Spirit of Christ under an obligation to the prince of this world? Such a proceeding is the quintessence of disorder and confusion. Light seeks help from darkness, and sanctity looks for satisfaction to iniquity.⁴

Verses 5, 6. There was a double cause for humiliation in this case. First, that the children of light and wisdom should so shame their parentage by an open avowal of their incompetency to deal with ordinary matters; and, secondly, that Christ's brethren, instead of dwelling together in the unity of His peace, should be going to law with one another, and that before the unbelievers. Among those who

wrong, being self-contradicted in the following verse, since the "wise man" vainly sought for is surely not "of least esteem in the Church." (*Conf.* James iii. 13.)

⁴ Yet sad and glaring as is the inconsistency of such conduct, it finds a shameful justification in the fact, that when those who profess godliness are walking otherwise than by faith, they fall in their practice below the level of the world. Scripture abounds in instances of this. Abimelech reproved even Abraham; and Pilate, unprompted by the lips of Levi, would have let his prisoner go. (*Malachi* ii. 5, 7; *Luke* xxiii. 13, *seq.*) Paul trusted Caesar more than an apostate Sanhedrim. A church in a low state is no longer a sanctuary of righteousness. The proverbial iniquity of ecclesiastical legislation in the history of Christendom is sufficiently well known.

sat so royally upon the throne of truth, was there none who cared to be a peacemaker among his brethren? And again, was love so weak, and the spirit of self-seeking so strong among God's children, that differences could attain to such a ripeness of mutual wrong as to fit them for adjudication before a worldly court? Had they so learnt Christ? If so, the time was surely come to lead them back again to view the hole from whence they had been digged,⁵ and to seek to recover for them that mind which was in Christ Jesus,⁶ and which, for the present, they had so evidently lost. And so he proceeds :

Verse 7. "Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you," etc. The apostle goes here to the true origin of the evil, and openly convicts these quarrelsome pensioners of mercy of a radical alienation of spirit from the mind of Him whose name they were so grievously dishonouring. For the Lord had shown to them a better way. He had taught His disciples, both by word and by example, neither to do evil nor resist it; to suffer wrong, but not inflict it; to bear injuries without resentment, and that to give was ever more blessed than to take. Moreover, He had spoken in a yet more serious tone of the danger impending over those who, whilst calling on the Father, proved, by the different spirit that was in them, that they were not really born of Him.⁷ Low indeed was the condition of these poor saints at Corinth. *Why* did they not rather suffer wrong? What answer can be given to such a question, but that they had so far lost sight of the true hope of their calling, as to be

⁵ Isa. li. 1.

⁶ Phil. ii. 5.

⁷ Matt. v.-vii.; xviii. 23-35.

again "minding earthly things." But this was a dangerous retrogression. Perdition lies that way. For the *Saviour* is in *heaven*, whither also the minds and affections of His chosen are now called.⁸

Verse 8. "Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud," etc. Truly this was to be carnal, and to walk as men. And now, before proceeding further, it is well that we who are so ready to approve Paul's judgment of these faulty ones at Corinth should glass *ourselves* awhile before his words, and ask what we whose lot is fallen on these late days have now to say with reference to the charges here alleged. And here every spiritual mind will acknowledge, that one of the first things we become conscious of, on awaking from the lethargy of formalism, is that the Church, as a visible contrast to the world, exists no longer in its unity, but that sectarian watchwords and pretensions have superseded universally the true and divinely formed society of God's believing people. Yet there remains, and cannot be destroyed, the intrinsic difference between the saints and the unjust; between those who are by grace within the house of God, and those without. But where is the practical exhibition of this difference? Is a modern law-court a sanctuary of spiritual wisdom? Are juries God's peacemakers, on whom His blessing rests?⁹ Are Christians of the present day ashamed to litigate? Are they so satisfied with favour, and filled with the abundance of their better and enduring substance, as to abandon willingly their natural rights,¹ when threatened by the hand of fraud or violence? Nay,

⁸ Phil. iii. 18, 19; Col. iii. 1-3.

⁹ Matt.' v. 9.

¹ Heb. x. 34.

it must be further asked, Are not the very distinctions between "within" and "without" held, for the most part, rather in a carnal and sectarian than a vital and spiritual sense? They who are God's true children cannot but feel, in some degree at least, according to His nature; and personal faith and godliness will both strive to keep the way of truth, and will sigh and cry at what is contrary to truth.² But it is surely most important that, in a day when *light*, both true and false, is everywhere abounding, they who are "of God" should rouse themselves to search and try both their position and their ways by the living testimonies of the Holy Ghost. His deepest condemnation is pronounced upon His people when, in speaking to their characters and ordinary walk, He has to rate them but as other men. What the apostle here records against unspiritual Christians may remind us of an earlier judgment of the same eternal Spirit, when He looked at Israel after the flesh, and found them as the children of the Ethiopians; when Ephraim and Judah preyed on one another in Immanuel's land, and that land became a heritage of strangers for their sin.³

Yet the Lord is the light and refuge of His own; and although the hope of renovating Christendom, until the promised advent of its Judge, can be entertained by none who with an opened ear take heed to the sure word of prophecy, the way of personal obedience is still the way of pleasantness and peace. If God's saints can of themselves work no deliverance, they may at least, by sticking to His testimonies, be themselves delivered from the blame of

² Ezek. ix. 4.

³ Amos ix. 7; Isa. i.

countenancing what is false to Him, and go forth one by one, as truth leads each one separately and according to his faith, without the camp to *Jesus*, bearing His reproach.⁴ To return to our chapter.

Verses 9, 10. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" Not only had they been unmindful of their own true dignity as saints; they seemed to have forgotten also the essential character of the kingdom of God, which they were called to inherit. They are again found in dangerous company. Judged by the allowed practice of some among them, they seemed rather to belong to those who have no part in God's kingdom than to its true heirs. Rapacity and self-seeking are not fruits of the Spirit, but works of the flesh.⁵ The apostle spreads out therefore before their eyes this roll of carnal wickedness, that by a steady contemplation of it they may be enabled not only to note and put far from themselves such forms of evil as might yet remain unjudged, but also to feel more acutely their exceeding folly in seeking, as they had, to a world which carried on its front such marks as these for the arbitration of their own disputes.

They should have known and remembered, that holiness can never mate with sin; that God's kingdom opens only to His children; that to do evil habitually is to deny the faith of Christ, whose purchased people are by natural description "zealous of good works."⁶ Thus he warns them, ~~in~~ loving faithfulness, lest, through the deceitfulness of sin, they should be further hardened in an evil way.⁷

⁴ Heb. xiii. 12.

⁵ Gal. v. 19, *seq.*

⁶ Titus ii. 14.

⁷ Heb. iii. 13.

But his warnings are those of an apostle of Christ, and a minister of the saving grace of God. While, therefore, he shows them thus plainly the incompatibility of sin with holiness, he is not unmindful of the true standing of those whom he addressed. Accordingly, he proceeds:

Verse 11. "And such were some of you," etc. All were unrighteous naturally, though particular forms of sin are distinctive of particular sinners. This, therefore, is no *partial* retrospect, nor does he intimate that sinners of such stamp were naturally further from the kingdom of God than others. His desire is to make an appeal, both general and special, to the consciences of those to whom he writes. He had charged them with practical ungodliness when judging their ways; but on an assumption of the genuineness of their faith, he cannot rank them *personally* with the ungodly. He rebukes their evil sharply, but does not suffer his rebuke to contradict the Gospel of God's grace. The sins found among them might prove both the unaltered character of their flesh, and the weakness of their spiritual growth, but could not overthrow the work of Christ. What they *were*, they were by natural birth. What they *are*, they are by the power of an eternal redemption. That their practice should be carnal was their shame; and to make them more ashamed, he would again remind them of their unalterable blessedness as viewed of God in Christ. This is strikingly expressed in the remainder of the verse.

"But ye are washed,"^s etc. We may first notice

^s Ἀπελούσασθε, more strictly, perhaps, "Ye have washed yourselves clean," *i.e.*, from your sins. The only other place in which

the *order* in which this declaration of the threefold effect of faith on the believer is stated. When, in chapter i., he is triumphantly asserting for God's chosen the wisdom of the just in Christ, his doctrine takes a different form. Referring all to Christ personally, he declares Him to be made to the believer "righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," the excellency of His person discovering itself finally in His perfect work. But now, since he is speaking not of the absolute standing of the Church in Christ, but of what the believer is by imputation, he observes an order more in harmony with his immediate subject. His reference is accordingly—

1. To our personal uncleanness; 2. To our natural alienation; and, 3. To our natural state of sin. But in the name of our Lord Jesus, and in the Spirit of our God,⁹ there are found for the believer both purification, and sanctification, and righteousness. Let us rest a moment upon each in turn.

1. Personal uncleanness is gone. The once hopeless leper has become, through grace, a purged and acceptable worshipper. There is most probably in the apostle's language an allusion to their voluntary act of baptism, itself a fruit and sequel of their justification by faith. His present question being

this word occurs is Acts xxii. 16, where Ananias calls on the same Paul, in his newly awakened state, to arise, and be baptized, and *wash away* his sins. The effect of faith is sometimes, in scriptural language, ascribed to the act of the believer. (*Conf. Rev. i. 5 with vii. 14.*)

⁹ Ἐν τῷ πνεύματι Τ. Θ. ἡ. There is no need to censure the A.V., "*by the Spirit*," etc., though it is scarcely exact. The apostle's meaning seems to be, that while the blessings he describes are for the believer, in the name of our Lord Jesus, their *power* is in the Spirit, who alone reveals Him to His saints.

with believers in a low and disorderly condition, and his aim being to restore them to a healthier tone, he naturally begins by reminding them of their first glad and solemn act of faith, when in the name of their Redeemer they gave outward token of having passed through death into the new and risen life.¹ And that washing, since it was not "the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,"² has an abiding efficacy. Washed in the laver of regeneration, and clean through the word of grace which they had received, they needed still to wash their feet by a continual recurrence to the grace of their ascended Intercessor, but were personally "clean every whit."³

2. They were sanctified. Naturally afar off and unholy, they had been brought nigh, and sanctified in the power of His name, who is personally the Holy One of God. The believer is "a saint," in the language of Scripture, from the moment that he has confessed the name of the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Ghost. And now these careless ones at Corinth are reminded of their personal sanctification,⁴ that they may both be made ashamed of their worldly practice, and comforted and sustained under the pressure of an accusing conscience, by a reference to

¹ Rom. vi.; Col. ii. 12.

² 1 Peter iii. 21.

³ Titus iii. 5; John xiii. *passim*, xv. 3.

⁴ Sanctification, in the Gospel, has a threefold meaning. It is described—1. As a decisive *act* of God already done, and therefore to be contemplated, as in the present passage, retrospectively. (*Conf.* 1 Peter i. 2; 2 Thess. ii. 13.) 2. As a *state*, in which sense, like the former, it may be predicated of all the "holy brethren." And, 3. As an unfulfilled *desire*, under which meaning it is presented to us in such scriptures as 1 Thess. iii. 13 v. 23.

Him who is Himself their sanctification, and who by His effectual intercession as our great High Priest maintains His erring people to the end in their appointed place.⁵

3. They were justified. The doctrine of justification, as stated in this verse, should be compared with the fuller teaching on this subject elsewhere delivered by the same apostle,⁶ in which the work of Christ, and the faith which receives the testimony of God, are dwelt on exclusively as the means of our justification. But what is there implied only is here distinctly enounced. We are justified in the *name* of the Lord Jesus, and therefore through faith in that name. But by what operative power—of nature or of God? The closing words of the verse affirm in the clearest manner the doctrine everywhere noticeable as an axiom of apostolic teaching, that if Christ has wrought the work of God *for* us, it is by the energy of the Holy Ghost only that that work is made our own in its effect. The same eternal Spirit which led Jesus to the altar for our sakes, when He offered Himself without spot to God,⁷ now verifies His ever blessed work to our souls. This doctrine is again distinctly inculcated further on.⁸ Believers *begin* with the Spirit,⁹ and are hence, as justified men in Christ, characteristically “in the Spirit,” as their proper designation. Like their Galatian brethren, the Corinthians also had practically (though in another sense) forgotten their true origin; and it is this fact which gives its true point to the apostle’s present teaching.

⁵ Heb. vii. 25.

⁶ Rom. iii. iv.; Gal. ii. 16, 17, iii. 8–24.

⁷ Heb. ix. 14.

⁸ Chap. xii.

⁹ Gal. iii. 3.

Verse 12. "All things are lawful unto me." etc. Having sought thus to re-establish the feet of his erring brethren upon the everlasting foundations, he turns now to handle the delicate and important question of spiritual liberty; and, as his manner is, he offers himself and his own ways as an illustration of his teaching. He knew that the disorders in the Church at Corinth had mainly arisen from a low and carnal estimate which had prevailed there of the nature of their calling as free men in Christ; and in addressing himself to the task of correcting their erroneous views, he begins by affirming the principle of liberty in the widest and most emphatic terms. Legal prohibitions do not, any more than doctrines and commandments of men, belong to those who are no longer under the law.¹ Standing as a new creature in Christ, the believer who is rightly instructed in the mystery of the faith has part in the liberty of Him who is by righteous title "Lord of all." It is impossible to doubt that the apostle had, when personally among them, insisted clearly and emphatically on the vanity of all questions relating to "meats and drinks." He would not fail to disallow the "weak and beggarly elements" of Judaism, when setting forth in its majestic fulness "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God."²

But it was here that Satan found occasion. To flatter the natural will, by a specious perversion of sound doctrine to the service of men's lusts, has ever been among his chief methods of corruption; and he had largely practised, and with mischievous effect, on these inexperienced Corinthians. But the

¹ Rom. vi. 14, vii. 6; Gal. v. 18. ² Gal. iv. 9; 1 Tim. i. 7-11.

apostle will show them more perfectly the way of the Lord. To him all things are lawful, but not all are profitable. All things are lawful, but he will not be brought under the power of any. Liberty without discretion is a snare. Again, to profess liberty, while governed by any natural habit or inclination, is a delusion and a mockery. It is expected of freemen that they use their liberty aright. A liberty which is asserted in the name of Christ can only be enjoyed in fellowship with Christ. But the Lord, who alone was personally free, was also the only one who perfectly denied Himself. And in like manner as He glorified the Father, His friends are enjoined to continue in His love.³ Spiritual liberty is a natural paradox; for we are only free when subject to the Lord. The life of a saint is a conflict between the leading of the Spirit and his former lusts.⁴ The will of God, which by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ has sanctified him once for all, is the measure also and the end of the believer's way.⁵

Verse 13. "Meats for the belly," etc. God's goods are for His people, but His people are for Him. Every creature of His is good, and nothing to be refused that is received with thanksgiving.⁶ But as there are natural uses, so are there appointed ends. The present tabernacle is to be dissolved. God will destroy the belly and its meats, but the *body* is for ever. It is for the Lord, and the Lord for it. It is to be yielded now to the holy uses of His service, even as He will claim it for His own, and change its fashion to the likeness of Himself in the day of

³ John xv. 10, 14.

⁴ Gal. v. 17.

⁵ Heb. x. 10; Rom. xii. 1, 2.

⁶ 1 Tim. iv. 4.

His appearing. It is not for fornication, or any other unclean use, the mention of which things should not be heard among God's saints.⁷

Verse 14. "And God hath both raised up the Lord," etc. The moral relation of the doctrine of the resurrection to the subject of the foregoing verse is clear. The disposition shown by some at Corinth to continue the licentious habits of their former life found some support at least in the false views which they entertained of the eventual destiny of their bodies. That the true doctrine of the resurrection had been "spiritualized" away by some, is evident from chap. xv.; and nothing so directly tends to a false disparaging of the body, which is God's workmanship, and a practical dishonouring of Him who formed man in His own likeness, as a disbelief of its eventual redemption.

The truth thus questioned was, moreover, the very basis of their faith. To doubt it, therefore, was to nullify their own standing as confessors of the name of Jesus; since it was by means of the resurrection from the dead that His true title and glory had been openly asserted. Hence the distinctness with which

⁷ Eph. v. 3. There is an obvious connection between the allowed liberty of meats and the forbidden sin. The adversary might urge plausibly, since natural appetite of one kind is left free, why not another also? Paul anticipates this fallacy, by reminding us of the difference between the body itself and its temporary means of sustenance. Since its nature is not yet changed, it is to be supported and refreshed by God's richly supplied bounties. But the body is not to be confounded with that which supports it. Like the soul which animates it, the body is the Lord's. His name is meant to be the bridle of its *lusts*; while we are expected, through the Spirit, to mortify its *deeds*. (Rom. viii. 13.)

he here affirms the doctrine which by implication is contained also in the previous verse. Now, however, the resurrection is treated with an exclusive reference to the Father, "God hath raised up the Lord." And this is natural. What is in question all through these expostulatory parts of the epistle being the *glory of God*. They who are His "called" and "chosen" have forgotten this. He has been shamed by the disorder of His house and the practical iniquity of His own children; and it is by reminding them both of His mighty acts, and of His counsel yet to be fulfilled, that they are to be corrected and restored. He who raised the Lord "will also raise us up by His own power." Now, Christ is by personal description "the power of God," and it is "by Jesus" that we shall be raised up at His coming.⁸ If the nature of that power be enquired, with reference to its effective operation, it is by that self-same "Spirit of our God," to whom, in verse 11, he has referred their participation in the present blessings of their calling, that God will raise His chosen in that day.⁹ But the doctrine of the resurrection is not to be cherished only as a future hope; it is intended to have an anticipative realization in the believer's present walk. And so he continues :

Verse 15. "Know ye not that your bodies *are* the members of Christ?" etc. What they will be in their final transformation they already are in truth. They should have known this also. For the faith which unites us to the living and ascended Lord does not disjoin us from ourselves. If we are redeemed *men*, our bodies (though not yet fashioned to their des-

⁸ 2 Cor. iv. 14.

⁹ Rom. viii. 11.

tiny) are as surely our Redeemer's as our souls.¹ As a natural man, the believer is not divided, but judicially *extinct*. "Ye are dead,"² etc. As a member of Christ, he is inhabited by the power which will presently transform his body to the likeness which belongs to the life which he already has by faith. It was, then, a foolish imagination to suppose that the soul and body could be under different rules. Both are the Lord's, though each has its proper functions and its own relation to the other. The quickened soul is the appointed ruler of the unchanged body. Now the desire of the new man is holiness, while the predisposition of the body is to the service of sin. But to the will of the new man there is added also the enabling power of the Spirit which dwells in us; and it is on this distinctive truth that proper Christian responsibility is founded. The apostle, therefore, who through grace so justly apprehended his position as a man in Christ, and stood so jealously upon its honour, exclaims: "Shall I take the members of Christ?" etc., and answers his own question with an instant and vehement denial. But might there not be (in the estimation of some philosophizing Christian) a tinge of extravagancy in the language here employed? If any thought so, they must submit to still further teaching on this point.³

Verse 16. "What? know ye not?" etc. Had they forgotten that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, that by a

¹ Gal. ii. 20; Rom. viii. 11.

² Col. iii. 2.

³ And this is the practical foundation of the Lord's new law of divorce. A tie which God has formed, once broken in the spirit of it, has no longer any value in His eyes. (Matt. xix. 4, 9.)

natural union they might, though twain, be yet one only in His eyes? Fornication is nature without God. It is therefore sin, like every other act of God-forgetting wilfulness. But in a Christian it is doubly sin; for what he does, he does as a member of Christ's mystic body. He cannot abdicate the honour put upon him by the grace of God, though by a careless walk he may deny his own confession, and grieve that Holy Spirit of God by which he has been sealed unto the day of redemption.⁴

Verse 17. "But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." God, who had said of old, "Two shall be one flesh," now makes a second declaration of the spiritual oneness of the Lord and His redeemed. Creation and its ordinances are a standing analogy of grace. The woman is both of and for the man. The believer is both of and for the Lord. The Sanctifier and the sanctified are all of one.⁵ It is by faith that we are thus united—married to Him that is risen from the dead, that we may bring forth fruit unto God.⁶ He had already said, "The body is for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."⁷ Now, addressing not so much their conscience as their faith, he reminds them of the vital union which subsists between the Giver and the receivers of eternal life. As Adam is in every natural man, so Christ is in every spiritual man. This subject, together with others concerning idolatrous defilement, and the relation of the sexes in the Church of God, will receive a fuller treatment in the following chapters, where they are handled separately and in

⁴ Eph. iv. 30.

⁵ Heb. ii. 11.

⁶ Rom. vii. 4.

⁷ Verse 13.

detail. At present the apostle is intent on the eradication of that particular form of evil which, through a specious abuse of the principle of Christian liberty, was seeking for itself a permanent shelter in the house of God. Accordingly he returns to this in the following verse.

Verse 18. "Flee fornication," etc. Instead of being regarded as a thing indifferent, or even as a trivial offence, this sin is to be dreaded and shunned as a leprosy; for it contaminates both soul and body. Other sins did so but in part; but this completely, by turning that which God has claimed for Himself to an use which He condemns. A wrong is thus inflicted on the body itself, by alienating it from its true honour as an instrument of righteous worship, and again degrading it to the service of sin. It is, therefore, morally, what idolatry is spiritually; and the dissuasive from both is expressed by the apostle in the same terms.⁸ Each sin is to be *fled from*, by those who would please God. But there is a further and especial sense in which a believer's body is said to be sinned against by such an act. And this also the Corinthians should have known.

Verse 19. "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?" There is such a thing as spiritual self-respect. A Christian is expected to forget his first parentage in the remembrance of the second. He is not God's creature only, but His child. As the Son of God became incarnate, to put Himself within reach of our sins, so the believer, who adds knowledge to his faith, should understand that his mortal body is the temple

⁸ Chap. x. 14.

of the Holy Ghost. Sent down by the Father in the name of Jesus, He occupies this earthly house as a pledge and witness of its coming change.⁹ Now it is *God's* Spirit which we have of Him, and God's Spirit is His own essential presence. But what God dwells in is His temple. We have in this verse a distributive repetition of the doctrine already stated in an earlier chapter.¹ Each Christian body is a temple of the Spirit, even as the collective assembly of saints is His temple, and the place where His honour dwelleth, in what locality soever that assembly is found. Now what God occupies is His, and not our own. We are not robbed of our natural ownership, but it merges in the higher honour of our calling. *Our* bodies are *His* temple — ours, therefore, only as ourselves are His; to be kept then, in sanctification and honour, in His Name.² Thus a double duty is imposed on the Christian with respect to his own body. He is to manage and govern it with vigilance and godly decision, as a restive and unruly beast; he is to hold it in honour, and tremble to abuse it, because it is the temple of the living God. Are we Christians, and yet ignorant of these things? Once more, then, let the cross be our monitor and shame.

Verse 20. "For ye were bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." Redemption to God by the blood of His own Son is the "*ultima ratio*" of all true Christian morality. Our bodies are the property of Him who has purchased us at such

⁹ 2 Cor. v. 1-5.

¹ Chap. iii. 17.

² 1 Thess. iv. 3, 4. The rest of this verse is omitted in all the better MSS., including *Cod. Sin.*

a cost ; for He did not buy us partly, but entirely. Let, then, the God of our mercy have the willing service of those bodies which are His.³ The fleeting days of our sojourn here below are our opportunity of glorifying Him, by yielding *ourselves* to Him as those that are alive from the dead, and our *members* as instruments of righteousness unto God.⁴

³ Rom. xii.

⁴ Rom. vi. 12.

CHAPTER VII.

WE are entering now upon a new division of this wonderful epistle. No longer grounding his communications on the report of others,¹ he proceeds, in what follows, to consider and reply to certain enquiries which had been submitted to him in writing by the Corinthians themselves. We cannot know specifically, in the absence of this document, all the topics on which they had consulted him; but it is evident that the four which follow were of principal importance. 1. The doctrine of marriage; 2. The behaviour of Christians in relation to idolaters and their habits; 3. The order and method of spiritual worship, and, in connection with this, the nature and limits of spiritual powers and operations in the Church; and, 4. The doctrine of the resurrection. These subjects are now treated in their order to the close of chapter xv., the deeply interesting and all-important topic of "Charity," or "Love," being introduced in chapter xiii. as the central spring, on the healthy action of which all other spiritual energies depend morally for their beneficial effect. We have first, in the chapter now before us, an elaborate examination of the present relationship of man and woman, when regarded as new creatures in Christ.

¹ Chap. i. 11.

Verse 1. "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me," etc. That the subject of this chapter should have suggested itself to them is not at all surprising. They had been taught, as a rudimentary doctrine of the gospel, the judicial setting aside of nature and its claims. How shallow soever their experimental knowledge of the cross, they knew at least its doctrinal intention, and had embraced it as the truth of God. They had learnt also, it may be well supposed, that in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage.² Was it, then, incumbent on the believer, as one dead and risen with Christ, and a partaker of the *heavenly* calling, to demonstrate practically his severance from the world, by refusing to contract a tie which had for one of its chief objects the replenishing of the *earth*?³ And again, if already married, did it become him to continue in that state in which the gospel had reached him in its soul-delivering power?

These and similar reflections were natural in their circumstances, and had no doubt found an expression in the enquiries addressed to the apostle. To all such surmisings on this subject he now returns the general reply: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." The first thing to be noticed is the striking contrast which this positive declaration offers to the primitive oracle of God. When his Creator provided for the "earthly" man, He declared it *not* good for him to be alone.⁴ The woman was created for the man. But the believer, though still bearing outwardly the image of the earthly, is no longer in the flesh, but in the

² Matt. xxii. 30. ³ Gen. i. 28. ⁴ Chap. xv. 47; Gen. ii. 18.

Spirit. He is in Christ; joined to the Lord by faith, and awaiting the moment of his change into the likeness of the heavenly, where sexes are unknown. Seeing, then, that in Christ there is neither male nor female,⁵ the apostle's answer is in strict keeping with the ground-truth of the gospel.

But while there is a simple severity of truth which faith acknowledges, and to the practical attainment of which it both may and is encouraged to aspire, the provisions of divine grace are designed to meet the infirmity of the flesh, as well as to satisfy the desires of the Spirit. He who has called us to the fellowship of His Son, yet considereth our *frame*, and remembers that we still are dust;⁶ and while refusing any countenance to sin, provides honourably for the need of those who, with a clear perception of their standing, and a full acceptance of the apostle's dictum as a maxim of true spiritual wisdom, find celibacy a burden both difficult and dangerous to bear. Accordingly the express sanction of Christian marriage, declared in the following verse, is administered as a corrective of a known and still existing evil in the Church.

Verse 2. "Nevertheless, because of the fornications,"⁷ etc. That sin might cease among God's children, let saints still walk as men, in that at least which God had sanctioned before sin began. Christian marriage is a thing allowed, and therefore blameless and honourable, rather than intrinsically *good*. It is placed, therefore, by the apostle on a relatively low ground. As an aid to spiritual progress it is valueless in itself; and, as he afterwards shows, more

⁵ Gal. iii. 28.⁶ Ps. ciii. 14.⁷ Ἀπὸ δὲ τὰς πορνείας.

likely to hinder than to further godly service, when contracted upon simply natural grounds. For it is in its nature foreign to the heavenly calling of the saint. Its proper tendency is to settle men on earth, and engage their thoughts and energies in matters of this life. Hence, what was injunctive to the Israelite is permissive only to the Christian. He is interested in espousals of another kind.⁸ Yet marriage is honourable in all,⁹ and though granted as a concession to our natural frailty, has reflected on it by the Spirit the light and beauty of the finished truth above.¹ In a word, no Christian is advised to marry whose life of celibacy is not found to be a burden and a snare.

On the verses immediately following (3-5) little need be said. They stand in their plainness as a specimen of the perfection of spiritual wisdom and discretion. Let not God be mocked in any of His ordinances. If His children marry, let the marriage be in deed, and not in form only, and in name. Let Satan also be remembered as the disturber of God's saints in all which He allows. If, therefore, married Christians see it good to part awhile, that they may seek God more diligently in persevering and abundant prayer,² and for some positive spiritual end, let it be *only* for awhile. Let such exceptions be broadly distinguished from the rule. Let them come together again, lest, through a lengthened estrangement from the habits of wedlock, opportunity be given to the father of lies to infuse doubts into the mind of

⁸ Rom. vii. 4. ⁹ Heb. xiii. 4. ¹ Eph. v. 22-32; Rev. xix. 7.

² *Νηστεία*, "fasting," is not found in any MS. of high critical authority.

either as to the sanctity of that which God ordains.³ In marriage, continence is not a virtue, but may easily become a snare.

Verse 6. "But I speak this by permission," etc. These words, which seem to relate principally to the verse immediately preceding, are of much interest, *since they put in a clear light the difference between apostolic counsel and apostolic command.* The latter should bind every Christian conscience.⁴ The former binds no man, though it will not be lightly disregarded by the godly. The counsel of an inspired apostle never can be *wrong*, but may not be applicable in every case. They had consulted Paul as an oracle,⁵ and he returns oracular replies; but not oracular *injuncti*ons. When he speaks of the expediencies of Christian life, he occupies indeed a position of paramount authority as a spiritual guide; but his voice is not the commandment of the Lord. When teaching, or exhorting, or reproving, or consoling, it is otherwise. This distinction is simple and easy to discern. Advice, as to the use to be made of God's permitted things, stands morally on quite a different level from revelation or command. With respect to the present subject, Paul would rather have kept silence. The topic was alien to his personal sympathies as a listed champion of the faith,⁶ as presently appears. But they had sought his counsel, and he would give it freely and honestly as in the sight of God.

³ To what an extent he has succeeded in subverting the true idea of marriage, and its obligations, will be acknowledged without difficulty by every spiritual mind at all familiar with ecclesiastical history.

⁴ 2 Peter iii. 2.

⁵ *Conf.* 2 Sam. xiv. 23.

⁶ 2 Tim. ii. 3, 4.

Verse 7. "For I would that all men were even as I myself," etc. It was from no natural distaste for married life that this wish proceeded. His own words in a later chapter⁷ concur with the impression which a careful study of his character would be likely to leave on most minds. Domestic joys would have been heartily appreciated by a man of his temperament and susceptibilities. But great grace was upon him. His miraculous conversion was also his especial consecration to the work of God. His liberty was left him, but he loved his bonds. And as one who knew by experience both the joys and the afflictions which belong to the "better part" of undivided service to the Lord, he would that his brethren might be as himself in the completeness of their freedom from all earthly ties. But never shall we find an inspired apostle, or any other truly spiritual man, attempting to make *himself* a final standard of conformity to others. Paul gloried in his own practice, and felt so conscious of like-mindedness to Christ, as to be able to indulge without reserve his wish that others might emulate his ways. But he remembers *God*. His own wishes are not God's appointment. And in the acknowledgment that "every one has his proper gift of God," he both limits his own holy desire, and records by anticipation his protest against the folly and enormous wickedness of those who, under a lying pretext of elevating and purifying the ministerial calling, should afterwards enforce by human authority an official celibacy, in utter disregard of the sovereign distribution of that gift.⁸ How different the lan-

⁷ Chap. ix. 5.

⁸ 1 Tim. iv. 1-3.

guage of true wisdom and purity of mind which follows.

Verses 8, 9. "I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry," etc. Giving still its due precedence to a single life, he acknowledges in all a common and sacred right of choice, while on some he enjoins, as an escape from spiritual danger, a course which, for its own sake merely, he would rather have them shun; for fretting desire is a hurtful soul disease. Godliness, *with contentment*, is great gain; without it godliness itself becomes endangered. A man must be his own judge in this matter. Marriage is honourable if he choose it; but his choice will bring its consequences. Can he live single with an unrepining heart? By all means let him do so; for the present calling of God is not to vineyards and oliveyards, or temporal happiness or opulence of any kind, but to suffer for awhile with Christ, and then to reign with Him. The fewer natural claims a Christian has upon his time and energies, the freer will he be to follow with a single eye the Master whom he is allowed to serve.⁹ But let him know his proper gift, and aim no higher than God gives him strength to reach.

Verses 10, 11. "But to the married I command; yet not I, but the Lord," etc. What is expedient is recommended; what is right must be enforced. Whether known or unknown at the time of their espousals, *God* was in the ordinance which bound the man and wife together. Let no false view, therefore, of her higher calling tempt a Christian

⁹ John xii. 26.

woman to forsake her husband. Still less may she do so on any lower plea. If she has already done so, let her be as a widow in her shame, or remove it by a reconciliation to her husband; for his house is her true place of honour and repute. Outside his doors she is, unless wrongfully repudiated, a dishonoured woman. So also with the man. Let him remain in the bonds which he has voluntarily assumed. To dissolve such a tie, except by the express permission of Him who originally formed it, is to despise the Lord. But by His recorded sentence, marriage once contracted is annulled only by that sin which in its nature breaks it.¹

Verses 12-15. "But to the rest speak I, not the Lord," etc. Having thus ratified solemnly, as God's witness, the primitive ordinance of marriage, and asserted its unalterable validity, he turns now to contemplate some of the practical anomalies which the operation of the gospel could not fail occasionally to produce. Of a married pair, one might be taken, and the other left. Was the man, who had received the Lord while his wife remained in unbelief, to put her away? His first impulse might be to do so, and passages of Scripture might easily occur to him, when he turned to search into the oracles of life, which seemed to point out such a course as well-pleasing in His sight who will be *sanctified* in His people. But such an inference could only arise from a mistaken estimate of his calling; for gospel truth makes no compulsory external change. While Christ is hidden from the natural eye, God's kingdom is within His saints. By the power of the Spirit,

¹ Matt. xix. 9.

truth operates upon the heart and conscience, and proves by its fruits that its mission is not to regulate the social life of this world, but to call men out of it to heaven. If, then, the woman who refused her heart to Christ clave still in natural affection to her husband, let him not put her away. Still less should he avail himself of this divinely wrought difference to claim emancipation from a possibly unwelcome yoke. Her pleasure, and not his, must be consulted. If she depart, he is a married man no longer.² Neither brother nor sister is bound in such a case. But let both man and woman, whom the Lord has singly called, remain content in the now incongruous union which the Lord has thus disturbed. Let His hand be known and waited on by those who bear His name.

The Christian wife must not, and need not, forsake her unbelieving husband who would keep her still; for both wife and husband are mutually sanctified in such connections.³ There is a remarkable force and beauty in this declaration. God, who is holy, and who calls His children to be like Himself, puts thus an especial honour on the name of Christ, by extending its hallowing influence to things which are themselves unholy. The root of this, as of all other Christian privileges, is the Lord's victory in redemption. As He had already said, "All things are yours, and ye are Christ's."⁴ Thy wife then, O believing husband—thine husband, O believing wife, is still thine own, and may be owned and honoured without derogation of thine high and holy calling. The children also which may issue from this hetero-

² Verse 15.³ Verse 14.⁴ Chap. iii. 23.

geneous union are holy, for the believing father or mother's sake; or rather, through the sanctifying virtue of that Name on which either parent has believed. Let such, then, as be content to dwell with Christ, be suffered to remain; to become, peradventure, themselves partakers of like precious faith. But liberty must never be infringed. They who will may go. God's calling is in peace. If present unbelief is associated with respect and natural affection, there will be peace unbroken in the household, though the Lord may have divided soul from soul. If otherwise, the cross must be accepted, and its burden borne; and no false relief sought by an arbitrary disruption, on the believer's part at least, of this standing ordinance of God.

Verse 16. "For what knowest thou, O wife?" etc. A truly solemn question, here put by the apostle for the double purpose of encouraging true faith, and of discountenancing that species of natural importunity which sometimes takes its outward form. The common tendency, to do evil that good may come, might easily find room to operate in cases of this kind. A Christian wife, or husband, might reasonably wish to detain a reluctant partner, in the hope of winning such to Christ. But this wish must not be gratified at the expense of liberty. Faith has no need of such methods to attain its end. Its first and last principle is unqualified subjection to God. Its dearest interests are committed trustingly to Him, and to His will. Nor does it ever shine so brightly as when submitting willingly, at God's command, to such privations as appear to shut out natural hope. Subjection to the mighty hand of God is the leading

idea in all these admonitory provisions for the well-being of His saints.

Verse 17. "But as the Lord distributed to each, as God hath called each, so let him walk,"⁵ etc. In this, and the seven verses immediately following, the apostle is led forth from the special topic of marriage and its obligations, to take a wider survey of Christian duty and responsibility in its general bearing on those who are the called of God. Let us note first the discriminative language of this verse. *Calling* is referred to God, who quickeneth the dead; *distribution* to the Lord, as the Head of His own house, to whom the Father hath given all things, and who dispenses at His pleasure to His own. With this verse we may compare verse 7. It is important in two ways; first, as claiming for every believer an unfettered liberty of serving God according to the measure of his ability, and without dictation from another; and secondly, as illustrating the nature and limit of apostolic authority over the Christian conscience. As the apostle of the Gentiles, Paul had the care of all the churches. But in thus asserting his own calling of God, and exercising what he had received of the Lord, with what admirable wisdom is it done! Each believer is liberated from all other bonds, and each bound freshly in willing and abiding service to the Lord. *Regulations*, such as men delight in, there are none. "The statutes of the Lord" are rehearsed, for the rejoicing of the hearts of them that love Him;⁶ while unerring counsel is freely offered by the apostle, according to the grace and wisdom given him, for the guidance

⁵ *Cod. Sin.*, with all other MSS. of acknowledged weight, transpose the names as above.

⁶ Ps. xix. 8.

and encouragement of those who, though personally free in Christ, are neither strong nor wise.

Verses 18, 19. "Was any one called being circumcised?" etc. God's saving grace adapts itself equally to the various states and conditions of men. His *calling* brings us to Himself in Christ, but leaves us personally as we were. Paul styled himself an Israelite,⁷ although it was his glory to demonstrate the common extinction of Jew and Gentile in the cross, and to speak of the new man in Christ, where neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has a place. But as one who for the hope of Israel had suffered bonds, he confessed the cross among his brethren after the flesh, even as the Gentile saint was called to worship the true God in the presence of his idolatrous countrymen and kinsfolk. Neither should the one deny his circumcision, but rather give it its true honour in its place;⁸ nor should the other think to make himself more acceptable in the Father's sight by adding an obsolete ritualism to a living faith in Jesus. The new man has to do not with carnal ordinances but with *God*, who is honoured only by the doing of His will.⁹

Verses 20-24. "Let each abide in the same calling," etc. He who calleth His own sheep by name had recognized and owned them in their several positions in the world. Let these remain then where grace found them, and make their social standing, whether high or low, a means of adorning the doctrine of their Saviour God. As the verses last noticed disallow all factitious distinctions of a religious kind, so here we have the blessed light of God shed freely

⁷ Rom. xi. 1.

⁸ Rom. iii. 1, *seq.*

⁹ 1 John v. 3.

in on the contrasted states of natural liberty and bondage. What God calls He also owns. The believing bondman is Christ's freedman; the freeman who is called is the purchased slave of his Redeemer. All callings and occupations are of equal honour in the sight of God, save those which involve a breach of His commandments. Let every one that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.¹ But slavery is not iniquity in the slave, though it may be in the owner. The Christian slave is not to mind his bonds, nor pine for a natural liberty which he might be tempted to abuse. Nay, even if freedom were within his reach, he would do better to remain where God first found and blessed him.² For in his bonds he is Christ's freedman and companion. That grace should be exemplified in every variety of social grade and circumstance is for the glory of the Saviour's name. In verse 23 we have a repetition of the fundamental axiom already stated in the foregoing chapter, together with a hortatory counterpart to what is there laid down. Redemption emancipates from man, but consecrates to God. The believing slave, therefore, is to wear his bonds rather as ornaments of grace than as badges of humiliation. The Lord will tarry with him in his durance, and give him presently a glorious release. Out of prison he shall come to reign. But, whether bond or free, let

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 19.

² Ἄλλ' εἰ καὶ δύνασαι ἐλεύθερος γενέσθαι, μᾶλλον χρήσαι, v. 21. "Nay, even if you may attain your liberty, stay rather where you are." Such seems to be both the natural force of the apostle's words, and to be more in agreement with what follows, than the reading of the A.V. Alford's note on the passage is worth consulting by the critical reader.

no man think himself *his own*. This is the cardinal idea on which all genuine Christian service turns. But oh! how easily let slip!

The point of the apostle's teaching in the whole of this interesting passage³ may be thus expressed: The Christian is a risen man in Christ; no longer, therefore, in the flesh, but in the Spirit. The Lord's kingdom is not now from hence; and His people are, while waiting for it, companions of His patience. To quit, then, the position in which grace finds us, for the sake of secular advantage, is clearly, as a rule, a thing contrary to the mind of the Spirit. Yet God compassionates the natural infirmity of His children; and while He lets them know that absolute self-denial is the better way, a way ever open to the willing soul, He puts upon them no enforced constraint; for self-denial, to be acceptable, must be voluntary. We are not chained to our post, but exhorted to remain there. And he who considers wisely the manner of his calling will not lightly disregard that counsel. The language of verse 24 is very emphatic—"Let them therein abide *with God*." For with the willing and obedient disciple both the Father and the Son make their abode.⁴ God dwells in His chosen by His Spirit, and makes His gracious presence manifest in proportion to their simplicity of faith and readiness of mind. He walks with them on their pilgrimage, and cheers them with the ever-nearing prospect of His rest. Thus godliness with contentment is indeed great gain. Many a Christian has had to charge the unprosperous tenor of his "few and evil days" to an original neglect

³ Verses 17-24.

⁴ John xiv. 24.

of the apostle's precept in this verse. Aiming at worldly increase, he has found only barrenness of soul; because God, who had sought and owned him in his low estate, had no mind to rise with him to a higher earthly sphere.

Verse 25. "Now concerning virgins," etc. Returning now to his previous subject, he takes up the special case of virgins. Should they continue such, or marry? They had sought his counsel on this question also, but he has no definitive reply to give. The Lord will put no yoke upon them. In this, as in the other matters treated in this chapter, He will leave grace to work freely, without any statute of obligation or restraint. But as a receiver of mercy, and a ministering steward of the grace of God, Paul will give them his judgment on this point also, which they might accept as from a partner in their hope, and one whom mercy had kept faithful to his trust.⁵

Verses 26, 27. "I suppose therefore that this is good on account of the present necessity,"⁶ etc. What, then, is meant by these words? Their usual acceptation is, that the apostle is referring to some temporary and particular pressure, out of which the Church might afterwards emerge. But this is surely at variance with the whole tenor of his teaching in this chapter. What he here describes is not, I am persuaded, exceptional, but general. The present necessity is the present *time*, the burden of their life of patience here below. The order into which he here shapes his counsel is like that observed at the

⁵ Πιστός appears to have this double sense in verse 28.

⁶ Διὰ τὴν ἐνεστώσαν ἀνάγκην.

beginning of the chapter. Before pronouncing on the special case, he repeats his general judgment as to the expediency of marriage. It is better that a man continue as he is. If wed, let him abide in wedlock; if single, let him so remain. But besides the common charge of contending for the faith, each believer has his own "necessity" or "burden." Let him bear it patiently with God.⁷ To seek a wife might be to find a blessing or a snare. Let him, if meditating any change of state, know well the motives which are prompting him, and pause before changing his existing burden for another haply of still greater weight.

Verse 28. "But if thou marry, thou hast not sinned," etc. While maintaining the honour of marriage, he clearly intimates the preference of his spiritual judgment for a single life. The reason has been already stated. Christ did not die and rise again to settle His disciples upon earth, but to make them meet for their expected transference to heaven.⁸ Till then they would best serve Him who were least impeded by the cares and troubles of this life. But to wed is to invite these cares. Such, therefore, shall have trouble in the flesh. A new "necessity" will supersede the old. Thus he sets before us counsel which, if followed in the enabling strength of God, will be for profit and for praise. But it is a counsel which bears with so unwelcome a restraint upon the heart and frame of nature, that he could not but have felt that the permission of God's primal ordinance would, even by those who confessed that they were dead, and tasted their true liberty and joy

⁷ Gal. vi.

⁸ Col. i. 12.

in the knowledge of their union with a risen Saviour, be generally followed rather than the apostolic warning. And as an imitator of Him who marked, without upbraiding it, the weakness of the flesh, his sympathies are with the weak. To be truthful, he shows them the effect of marriage; but in refusing to dilate on such a theme, he spares himself as well as them.

Verses 29-31. "But this I say, brethren," etc. Instead, therefore, of dwelling on the contingencies of married life, he recalls them to a remembrance of the shortness of the *time*. Let us note his language well. He does not reason on the brevity of life, but on the shortness of their allotted time of pilgrimage. With life, as men reckon it, they have already done. Both dead and risen with Christ, their calling is to wait here, as His witnesses, until He come. Let, then, their thoughts be suited to their calling, and their actions to their thoughts. Let not the married long for settlement, nor the mourners for more hopeful days, on *earth*. Their endless consolation shall arrive when Jesus comes. Let those again, with whom things prospered, seek their joys elsewhere than amid the uncertainties of this transitory state. Let not the love of gain, which glues men to the things of time, usurp the place of godliness, which teaches us to handle *God's* things as our own. Let, in fine, the believer's use of this world (and none but such can use it rightly) be according to the place he now holds in it as no longer of it. Let him use it neither eagerly nor wastefully. Let him not live to-day as if he feared to-morrow might deprive him of his joy, nor as one who revels at his

ease in his inheritance ; but rather as a steward who is wise to turn the mammon of unrighteousness to permanent account ;⁹ for the world and its changing fashions pass away.

Verses 32, 33. "But I would have you without carefulness," etc. Again returning to the subject of marriage, he here presents, in immediate connection with the preceding general reflections, a new topic of consideration to those who might be contemplating this important step. Time, with its opportunities, is short, and should not be encumbered with unnecessary cares. He had spoken of the troubles naturally incident to married life ; he now dwells on its distractions from the single-eyed service of the Lord. The apostle speaks here affirmatively, because he is estimating Christian character, not as it too often shows itself, but at its value as a just effect of faith. The unmarried saint is joined to his Redeemer, and seeks to please Him by caring for His things. Let him reflect, then, before voluntarily changing his condition, on the obstructions to his customary service which marriage must involve. For marriage, once contracted, has its *claims*, which cannot be rightly disregarded. It is not exactly as a reproach that he adds, "The married man careth for the world," etc. Within due limits, this is right in his position. He is no longer free, as heretofore ; nor may he deny his wife, even for Christ's sake, as he

⁹ Οἱ χρώμενοι τῷ κόσμῳ ὡς μὴ καταχρώμενοι. Using, but not abusing, *i.e.*, claiming the full liberty of Christ the Lord of all, but not using liberty as an occasion to the flesh. Nay, not always going to the just extent of liberty, but reining permission by a spirit of godly expediency, according to the apostle's maxim in chap. vi. 12.

might deny himself. To love his wife, and honour her, are now among the settled duties of his place; and in discharging them, he may find himself both lower and less happy, spiritually, than when he lived only for the Lord.

There is a similar difference¹ between the virgin and the wife (verse 34). The former is devotedly the Lord's, and consecrates herself to Him to whom she is joined in one Spirit; caring for His things, and watchfully pursuing the way of personal holiness as a blameless handmaid of the Lord. Let her weigh this well when sought in marriage, and not surrender lightly the place she already holds in God's household. For the wife, though holy, is by her calling rather a "Martha" than a "Mary."² She cares for and obeys her husband; and because to please him is her proper aim, she cares also for the things of the world. To think now of the things of Christ, in the spirit of her virgin liberty, would be to fail in her duties as a wife. For she is no longer now her own. And although both she and her husband be "heirs together of the grace of life,"³ and marriage has with its burdens many a blessing also for those who keep the way of God, it cannot and must not be a state of entire personal freedom.

Verse 35. "And this I say for your own profit," etc. Having set the better way before them, he now

¹ *Μεμέρισται*. She is divided, etc., has different duties, as he goes on to show. In Jerome's day, the habit seems to have been to place this word at the end of the preceding verse. "He cares to please his wife, and is divided. So also," etc. The reading of *Cod. Sin.* perhaps favours this arrangement. But the difference is altogether unimportant.

² Luke x. 38-42.

³ 1 Peter iii. 7.

apologizes for his words, while still maintaining his position. He speaks only in their interest as his spiritual children, not to ensnare them in rash purposes, or that they should bind themselves heedlessly to resolutions which might prove galling to their flesh. But there is a spiritual comeliness of which he was himself enamoured, and by which he would gladly see them captivated also—that if strength were given them of God, they might emulate him in the race of single-hearted zeal. To Paul, to live was Christ; would not they desire also to wait upon the Lord without distraction? He would not doubt it; for such love as his could never bear to think disparagingly of his fellow-saints. But this was a matter in which other interests and inclinations than those of the individual saint might be involved. And so he proceeds:

Verses 36–38. “But if any one think that he is behaving uncomely toward his virgin,” etc. The doctrine of these verses seems to be as follows: Paul had distinctly affirmed the excellency of single in comparison with married life, dwelling more especially upon the case of virgins. Now a virgin is at the disposal of her parent. Should he, then, determine not to give her away in marriage? That, he affirms, would, as a rule, be the better way. (v. 38.) But arbitrary decisions, which are established only by the sacrifice of others’ happiness, are never pleasing in the sight of God. There must be no tears upon His altars.⁴ Let the Christian father, then, have due respect to the affections of his child. He should, indeed, commend to her the higher path ;

⁴ Mal. ii. 13.

but let him not turn a privilege into a punishment, by condemning her to an unwilling celibacy. It were less comely to be a repining virgin than a rejoicing bride. Let him act, then, in such a case, as nature prompts, and God allows. Parental authority should never be so exercised as to provoke a just anger in the child.⁵ There is no *sin* in this question, and God is to be remembered in His gifts.⁶ Let them marry. But where the daughter is willing to remain a virgin, and no moral necessity dissuades the parent from the "better" course, let not the ordinary objects of matrimonial alliance, such as provision for life, advancement in the world, etc., be listened to by a Christian parent in the interests of his child. She cannot elsewhere fill so honourable a place as that of an undistracted handmaid of the Lord. Let her parent prefer this for her, while he has the liberty of choice. But the engagement of her affections to another would be a necessity to which he ought to yield, and in giving her in marriage in such case he would be doing well. He would do better to withhold her than to give her, if no will but his own had to be sacrificed; but his virgin must not be his *victim* also.

Verse 39. "The woman is bound⁷ to her husband," etc. Having declared thus fully his judgment on Christian matrimony generally, whether actual or prospective, he adds a brief but very important admonition as to second marriages. The frank and emphatic terms in which the wife's liberty to take

⁵ Eph. vi. 4.

⁶ *Ante*, verse 7.

⁷ The words, "By the law," which follow in the A.V. are undoubtedly spurious, being found in no MS. of critical authority.

a second husband is acknowledged is in perfect keeping with his general doctrine. A virgin is not absolutely at her own disposal; a widow is. In the former case, the will of the parent is directed; in the latter, that of the woman; for liberty is the *state* of a believer, which cannot be changed by arbitrary ordinances. A second marriage is upon the same footing, morally, as the first. One restriction only is imposed upon the Christian widow's liberty of self-disposal. If she marry, it must be *in the Lord*. To give herself to one who did not love Him, would be to deny the sanctity of her own standing as a believer; or, as the same witness has expressed it elsewhere, "to wax wanton against Christ," and mark herself for judgment, by renouncing practically her first faith. With this proviso, she may marry whom she will. Nay, there are cases when a second marriage is enjoined; for if single life is not spent diligently for the Lord, it is a burden and a snare. It is better that a woman be a wife and mother in the Lord, than a gossiping wanderer from house to house.⁸ Nevertheless, he continues:

Verse 40. "She is happier if she so abide," etc. He here contemplates the case of one who is a widow indeed. If otherwise, she had better be again a wife. Such is the judgment of one whose experience, as well as his official calling as an apostle, amply qualified him to pronounce with authority on what was happy or expedient in Christian life. The closing words of this chapter⁹ are interesting for the light

⁸ 1 Tim. v. 11-15.

⁹ Δοκῶ δὲ καὶ γὰρ Πνεῦμα Θεοῦ ἔχειν. "And I think that I also have the Spirit of God." These words are slightly ambiguous,

they seem to throw on the general question of the validity attaching to his permissive and, as it were, extra-official communications. It is an inspired apostle still who speaks, though rather as a friendly counsellor and true helper of their joy, than as a direct messenger of God to their consciences. As a man in Christ, he is in fullest sympathy with those whom he addresses, and takes a perfect interest in the topics which he handles. But he speaks without positive command. While, therefore, his answer to their enquiries affords a solid ground for faith to act on, inasmuch as they are the words of an inspired teacher, they claim no absolute obedience. They assume an exercised conscience on the part of the enquirer, and to that conscience, as in the sight of God, the decision must be left. Counsel is not command, except when uttered by the Lord Himself. But the measure of our own sound-mindedness as Christians may be estimated always by the much or little heed we give to such a counsellor's advice.

In closing this chapter, it seems needful to disclaim, though at the risk of some repetition, the inference which modern expositors have drawn from the march of events in qualification of the apostle's counsel as to marriage. His advice is addressed to *Christians* according to the truth of their standing *in Christ*, and their consequent position on the earth as partakers of the heavenly calling, and expectant

and the A.V. is not to be condemned, though it hardly seems to bring out their full meaning. They contain, I cannot doubt, a half-sarcastic allusion to some of those false teachers at Corinth whom he more decidedly stigmatizes in his second epistle, and whose constant endeavour it was, by an insincere magnifying of the other apostles, to depreciate the ministry of Paul.

heirs of the kingdom and glory which are "ready to be revealed." To imply, therefore, as is done by some evangelical teachers, that Paul's argument is rendered obsolete by the providential expansion of the dispensation, and the lingering of that judgment which awaits the full ripening of the apostacy for the infliction of its threatened stroke,¹ is to miss entirely the true drift of his teaching, as well as to misunderstand the very nature of the present time. "My Lord delayeth His coming" lies surely at the bottom of all such fallacious imaginings. God has never had a settled Church on earth. Jerusalem, our mother, is *above*. "An established Church" is a human idea naturally expressed. But it is, and for that very reason, an utter misrepresentation of the truth of God. He builds His saints together, and establishes their souls in Christ; but settle them on earth He never does. He has prepared for them a home elsewhere. No error can be more injurious to real Christians than an attempt to read God's oracles in the reflected light of *facts*. It is to judge God and His word by appearances, instead of judging appearances by His word. The longsuffering of God is indeed salvation, as each of us in turn has gratefully to own; nor will it cease while any foreknown and predestinated member of Christ's body remains uncalled. But the night is far spent, and the day of the Lord will surely come. Nor will any be less expecting it than they who, though founding their hope of salvation on the finished work of Christ, have become contented settlers on earth through a disregard or misinterpretation of His warning words.

¹ 2 Peter iii.

29. 18

CHAPTER VIII.

IN the foregoing chapter the apostle has fully delivered his judgment on one important topic of enquiry. He now takes up another, of wider interest and more general application, seeing that the true worshippers of God are necessarily and constantly in the presence of false worship or idolatry, in some one or other of its many forms. The world's religion; the worship, that is, which is offered by men in their natural state, is idolatrous in the estimation of the Spirit of truth, whatever be its object. Ignorant worship of the true God is idolatry no less than creature worship,¹ though God will know well how to discriminate between mere natural darkness, and the willing ignorance of those who turn away from Christ to follow the lie of the deceiver. The subject begun in this chapter is continued (interwoven, meanwhile, with collateral topics more or less akin to it) to the end of chap. x.

Verse 1. "Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge," etc. These opening words are not without a tinge of irony. There was, perhaps, something in their

¹ Acts xvii. 23.

manner of putting the question which, when he thought on their practical condition, seemed to call for this rebuke. It is like the "Ye are wise" of chapter iv. Still, it is a truth, when said of Christians, that all have knowledge. But knowledge puffeth up, as these Corinthians had been recently reminded in a very humiliating way. Love edifieth. At Corinth there was both too much knowledge, and too little. Men's brains were active, while their hearts were learning little of that love which is alone true knowledge.² Hence, instead of edification, there was found division, a result both natural in itself, and of continual occurrence practically, when knowledge is possessed by Christians in excess of grace.

Verse 2. "And if any one think," etc. The language of this verse is of the very widest bearing and application. Aimed more immediately, and with destructive effect, against spiritual pride and self-complacency, it not less forcibly derides the vain boastings of the natural man. What the world calls "knowledge," is but aspiring ignorance; for "the reason of things," though sought for eagerly, is never found by intellectual research. It is treasured only in a larger heart than Solomon's. The Maker knows His work, and its occasion; and they who are satisfied with what He now reveals will be patient learners to the end of that which they must one day know in full.³

Verse 3. "But if any one love God, the same is known of Him." They who love God truly do so

² 1 John iv. 8. ³ καθὼς δὲ γινώσκει. (*Conf.* chap. xiii. 9-12.)

on the faith of His own love to them:⁴ and hence their love is no doubtful or uncertain sentiment. Men deceive themselves by *thinking* that they know; God's children *taste* the grace of Him in whom they trust. Knowledge is precious when added to this faith; but for a creature yet sinful, though redeemed,⁵ to be known in love, is better than to know; for to trust is to be satisfied, while partial knowledge, though it may elate injuriously its possessor, gives him no true rest. The serpent suggested knowledge as his original bait. The Spirit sheds abroad the love of God in the heart of the believer; and the heart thus filled gives back a portion of the love which fills it. Love is *of* God first, and then *to* God;⁶ and the comfort of this latter love, which is the prime affection of the quickened soul, is its consciousness of being known and not despised of Him. God knows His people, as a father knows his sons. Responding ever to the confidence with which they trust in Him,⁷ He cares for them, and fills the measure of their joy in verifying, by His blessed Spirit, all His promises of mercy to their souls.⁷

Verses 4, 5. "As concerning therefore the eating of those things," etc. Returning now to the main question, he pierces all idolatry to the heart by a simple description of what an idol is. The first principle of true knowledge is the unity of the living God, and that an idol, consequently, is "nothing in the world;" for it is a lie, which truth will utterly abolish when it comes forth in its majesty and strength.⁸ And as are the idols, so also are

⁴ 1 John iv. 19.⁵ 1 John i. 8.⁶ 1 Peter i. 21.⁷ Luke xii. 7, *seq.*; 1 John i. 4, v. 10.⁸ Isa. ii. 18.

their worshippers;⁹ but *not* so are the things which they offer to them; for these last are God's good creatures turned to a false use, and, therefore, recoverable at any moment by the arm of faith; for the earth and its fulness are the *Lord's*. And though there be that are called gods by their votaries, they are but as an impure dream. Heaven, as well as earth, is sullied by idolatrous imaginings. Man deifies what God despises and abhors.¹ Having willingly forgotten the living and true God,² the activities of a darkened understanding have spent themselves in a vain search after what should never have been lost. Man has peopled both earth and heaven, with the creations partly of an idle fancy, and partly of a terrified imagination when responding to the claims of an evil and darkened conscience. There are lords many, and gods many, though one common character attaches to them all.

Verse 6. "But to us there is but one God, the Father," etc. We have now a solemn and formal declaration of the objective doctrines of the faith. To us, as to Israel, there is one, and therefore the same, God. *He* knows no other, nor can His true worshippers, how faint soever be the measure of their light.³ But to us God now reveals Himself not as He did in other days. In Eden Adam communed with his Maker, and was sentenced by his Judge, who mingled with His words of condemnation the promise of a better hope. To the fathers, God revealed His glory as the Almighty Speaker and

⁹ Ps. cxxxv. 18.

¹ In this chapter idolatry is referred to man as its inventor. Its remoter origin, and common though hidden object, is declared in chap. x. ² Rom. i. 21, *seq.* ³ Isa. xliii. 10, xliv. 6, 8.

Fulfiller of His word. To Moses, the same God declared Himself to be distinctively Jehovah, and made that name the pledge of His unchanging mercy to the people of His covenant. But the mercy to Jacob, though secured in the very nature of Him who will never cease to be "the God of Israel" while earth endures, has been intercepted in its flow by Israel's unbelief, and has found, while their blindness lasts, an object naturally alien from Israel's hope.⁴ God has a people now who know Him by another name. They whose calling is "to the fellowship of the Son of God," while holding fast in their remembrance His other and enduring titles, both know and call upon Him as THE FATHER.

The words which follow open further the essential glory of the Christian's God, and the relation of His people to Himself: "*of whom are all things, and we for Him.*"⁵ The Creator of all things has a specialty of purpose respecting His Church. The doctrine briefly intimated in these words is expanded more fully in another place, where creation is viewed, not absolutely, but with a positive reference to the calling of the Church. God is there affirmed to have created all things for the purpose of thus manifesting to the principalities and powers in heavenly places the varied riches of His wisdom.⁶ So also here, as he is speaking of the supreme object of Christian faith, he confines his description within the limits of operative grace: for He is known as God *truly*

⁴ *Notes on the Romans*, chap. xi.

⁵ Εἰς αὐτόν. Compare with this the wide expression of the same witness at the close of his survey of the mystery of divine government. There, not His Church only, but *all things*, are to, as well as of, Him. (Rom. xi. 36.)

⁶ Eph. iii. 9-11.

through His Gospel only; and they whom He has begotten by the word of His truth, He has begotten for Himself.

But for God, who is invisible, to be manifested, He must reveal Himself by mediation; and that He should be known to His chosen as the Father could be only by the mediation of the *Son*. Accordingly he proceeds: "And one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him." Whatever is *of* God is by Jesus Christ; whatever is *for* Him is also by His means. Creation, as well as Redemption, is a mediatorial work; but the latter re-acts, in its effect, upon the former. All things, whether in heaven or on earth, will stand eventually in the power of sacrificial reconciliation. But as in the former clauses, so here, the apostle confines himself to the immediate effect of mediatorial grace. "We" (believers) only are as yet "of God," and we only are "by," or "through," the Lord Jesus Christ.⁷ To us who confess Him by the grace of God, He is the one and only Lord. The world acknowledges the name, but through ignorance of its power denies Him His true homage as the Lord. The Church both knows and rejoices in the present effect of redemption, even the remission of sins; and by the one Spirit has access with boldness by the faith of

⁷ We may compare Paul's doctrine here with his earlier statement in chap. i. 30—"Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus." There is a distinction as well as difference between these kindred expressions, the one last quoted contemplating the believer as elect in Christ, the other describing by what means alone they who are naturally strangers are brought nigh to God. (John xiv. 6.) They are the upper and the nether springs of truth, and we must drink at both if we would satisfy our souls.

Him.⁸ The third great article of Christian faith—the divine personality of the Holy Ghost—besides being everywhere implied in apostolic Scripture, is demonstratively asserted in a later chapter.⁹ But as he speaks now of divinity objectively only, and not in its full and absolute sense, putting in direct contrast the true and false objects of human worship, to introduce it in this passage would be out of place; for the Spirit does not present *Himself* to the adoration of believers, but reveals to them the Father in the Son.¹

Verse 7. “Howbeit there is not in all this knowledge,” etc. He speaks still of Christians. There were some who, though verily alive to God, were yet so weak in faith, and had so imperfect a knowledge of the truth, as to think idols to be really gods, though false ones. In the mind of the Spirit they are “nothing.” But not every saint has the mind of Christ developed in him to this point.² Where this,

⁸ Eph. ii. 18, iii. 12.

⁹ Chap. xii.

¹ The limits of objective Christian worship are defined clearly in this verse. All additions therefore, from the name of the blessed Virgin through the long series of Romish “saints,” are plainly idolatrous. But if so they are of *Satan*. (Chap. x. 20.) And the system which sanctions and endeavours to enforce such worship is pre-eminently a “synagogue of Satan.” (Rev. iii. 9.) “To us,” etc., says the apostle, in the name of all who truly call upon the Lord; and he speaks, let us remember, by the Holy Ghost. They therefore who call upon *other* names, and add to the one living Mediator and His ever blessed work an intervening mediation of merely human invention, have evidently left the pale of truth, and are, in the words of another witness, “not of us.” (1 John ii. 19, v. 20, 21.) But see below, on chap. x. 7, note 8.

² The true reading in the second clause of this verse appears to be not *συνειδῆσαι*, but *συνηθίσαι*; *Cod. Sin.* confirming the already preponderating evidence in favour of the latter word. The sense will then be—“With habit of the idol,” *i.e.*, though such persons

however, is the case, there occurs a breach often of the agreement which ought always to subsist between the understanding and the conscience. The apostle notices this with especial care and earnestness, because of the paramount importance of conscience in the life and conversation of God's children; for faith and a good conscience are the Jachin and the Boaz³ of God's living temples. If the latter be neglected the former will not stand. The doctrine of this passage is of permanent interest and value, though the particular example which illustrates it may not be of common occurrence at the present day.

A believer's conscience suffers defilement not only on the commission of wilful sin, but by an allowing of any thing which dishonours in anywise the name or truth of God. If, as in the instance specified, a Christian ate something which had been offered to what he considered to be a false god, he sinned by his act against the truth which he professed. He countenanced idolatry by acknowledging the idol; while another Christian, who had learnt more perfectly the way of God, and was better established in the faith, might harmlessly partake of what to his conscience was nothing but an ordinary meal. The presence or absence of doubt in a believer's mind makes the whole difference between bad and good in an estimate of actions of this kind.⁴

were true Christians, divine light had not yet shone into their minds with sufficient clearness to enable them to change their habitual estimate of things: what they used to think an idol they thought an idol still.

³ 1 Kings vii. 21.

⁴ Rom. xiv. 22, 23.

Verse 8. "But meat commendeth us not to God," etc. The contrast between the former yoke of bondage and the genuine liberty of Christ is strongly manifested in this verse; for it was God who had once established for His people the strict law of difference between meats. But carnal ordinances cease with the flesh for which they were made, and the believer is no longer in the flesh, but in the Spirit. The darkness has passed, and the true light now shineth. To a risen man all natural things must be intrinsically indifferent, while each creature of God is gratefully acknowledged in its place and kind, as a passing mercy from the Father of lights. The world and its things are to be used in the spirit of that faith which looks beyond it, and according to the mind of Him who did not please Himself.⁵

Verse 9. "But take heed lest by any means," etc. The liberty of God's children is absolute,⁶ but they are expected to use it as imitators of God. We have to consider not ourselves only, but both our brethren and the world. A saint may be walking without circumspection, and yet with an unruffled conscience.

⁵ Rom. xv. 1-3. The doctrine of this chapter, with which Rom. xiv. should be compared, is important also in its relation to the earlier apostolic rescript from Jerusalem. (Acts xv. 23-29.) The metropolitan authority of the latter was transitional, and presently to cease, while the apostolate of Paul to the Gentiles was both original and of permanent effect. What was granted as a limited "indulgence" from Jerusalem is proclaimed absolutely from heaven; for, as he says, "Jerusalem above, which is *our* mother, is free." (Gal. iv. 26.) When Peter, James, John, and Jude address their inspired letters to the saints, they write, not in concert from Jerusalem, but from Babylon, from Patmos, and other unknown places, no longer recognizing differences between Jewish and Gentile faith, but treating of things common to all who are "of God."

⁶ Matt. xvii. 26, 27; John viii. 26.

But this is dangerous. Heed must be taken lest, while enjoying, in one sense blamelessly, our liberty, we become unwittingly a stumbling-block to others. An ostentatious use of liberty rarely fails to injure both the boaster and those who may observe his ways. True grace, because it *is* free, and knows its happiness in fellowship with God, makes no effort to *seem* free. Rather it will seek to use its liberty in love, considering the weak, and neither despising them, nor tempting them by wrong example to act in any thing beyond their faith. In what follows we have a strong example of the possible effect on others of a heedless and unseasonable assertion of what is still undoubted Christian liberty.

Verses 10, 11. "For if any one see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple," etc. Two Christians are here contemplated: the one with a faith so sound as to feel at his ease even in an idol's temple, because he knows the idol to be no god at all; the other, abhorring idolatry, but believing still in idols. The inconsiderate freedom of the one infuses a false boldness into the spirit of the other, and hurries him into an act, which, not being in his case done to *God*, is not of faith, and is therefore sin.⁷ Such examples only *edify* what truth must afterwards pull down.⁸ The moral consequence of such unguarded self-assertion is put in a startling form by the apostle's question in verse 11.⁹ We should bear well in mind, when

⁷ Rom. xiv. 23.

⁸ *Margin.*

⁹ MSS. of high authority put this remonstrance affirmatively, and perhaps with greater force. I give the reading of *Cod. Sin.*: Ἀπόλλυται γὰρ ὁ ἀσθενῶν ἐν τῇ σῇ γνώσει, ὁ ἀδελφός, δι' ὃν Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν.

reading such passages,¹ the Lord's own words, which place the everlasting shelter of His name around His ransomed flock. No sheep or lamb of His shall perish; for none can pluck them from His hand.² We are our brethren's keepers only, not their Saviour. Out of our careless hands they fall for safety into His. But the apostle puts this question to the strong man's conscience, that, by weighing it in the spirit of self-judgment, he may learn to think not loftily, but soberly; not of himself and his privileges in the pride of a self-elating knowledge, but of others in the spirit of that love which edifies with God. So far as his false example is concerned, it tends to ruin, not to peace, by leading his weak brother into sin. He shall not surely perish; for His Redeemer is mighty, and has made eternal satisfaction for his sins. But the strong, who should have helped, and not pushed down, the weak, shall be shamed into sobriety by the Lord's rebuke.

Verse 12. "But when ye sin so against the brethren," etc. The real nature of all such inconsiderate acts is here touchingly, as well as solemnly, declared. To wound a Christian conscience is to offend the Lord. Forgetting that we are members one of another, we sin against Christ whenever we do wrong to our brethren; for He is in His people, and what is done to them is done to Him. Paul knew this well, since it was the very edge of that sharp sword of Jesus' mouth which had cleft his own self-righteous heart in twain.³ The principle of vital union lies at the bottom of all true Christian conduct in which others than ourselves are interested;

¹ *Conf. Rom. xiv. 15, 20.* ² *John x. 28, 29.* ³ *Acts ix. 4.*

and, indeed, there are few acts in Christian life which are entirely singular. The effect of our every day conduct is felt, and operates for good or evil upon those who are in contact with us, though we may be forgetful or unconscious of the fact. Often immediate results appear. But all will be known only in that coming day, when every act and purpose not confessed already, and repented of as sin, will be definitively weighed and judged.

Verse 13. "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend," etc. The fervency of this personal asseveration is due to the sentiment expressed in the preceding verse. He thinks of Christ, and of the possibility of wounding Him in one of His weak members, and from such a thought his soul instinctively recoils. All things were surely lawful to him, and he, if any one, might push his divine license to its furthest limit; for the teacher of liberty may surely exemplify his own doctrine. But he walks by another rule. To the glory of God and of Christ he asserts entire liberty on behalf of those whom the Son of God has freed, while his own steps in this present world are regulated, not by a self-assertive exultation in his personal immunities and privileges, but by a tender and watchful regard for the welfare of his brethren in the faith. To bring them up to his own happy level, he is willing to descend, and, if need be, to remain with the weakest on the lowest ground. Having all in Christ, he can not only vanquish, by His grace and in His name, the lusts of his old nature, but for His sake also, and after His example, can deny the blameless promptings of his inner man.

It may be well to remind the reader, with reference to the subject of this chapter, that no true analogy exists between the idol temples at Corinth, and the idolatrous corruptions of the faith which are so common in our own sad day. The former were harmless to the established Christian, who ate their offerings as common things. The latter cannot be countenanced in any way without damage to the soul. The idol is "nothing;" but false doctrines and observances under a Christian name are active lies against the Spirit of truth, and therefore to be shunned and utterly disallowed by all who themselves would keep the way of God. Idolatry is a thing to be *fled from*, not countenanced, when regarded as a work of Satan; and it is under this last description that all corruption of true doctrine falls.

⁴ *Infra*, chap. x. 14; 1 John v. 21.

CHAPTER IX.

THE doctrine of spiritual liberty, already so largely treated, and under so many aspects, is now to be regarded from a different point of view, and in an immediate connection with the apostle and his official calling. It may be conjectured, that questions had been already raised by some at Corinth as to the validity of Paul's claim to the apostolic title. There is at least a strong moral presumption, that the question of ministry in general was among the subjects submitted to him in the letter to which he has referred in chapter vii. We have accordingly, in the present chapter, a full consideration of the subject of evangelical ministry, together with the divinely appointed rights and privileges of those who are expressly called to exercise it, himself and his own practice being, as usual, the chief illustrative example of his rule.

Verses 1, 2. "Am I not an apostle?"¹ etc. There is an obvious moral connection between these opening verses and the close of the last chapter. He had there warned us against an abuse of liberty through

¹ The true reading probably is, "Am I not free? am I not an apostle?" etc.; thus connecting what follows more closely with the foregoing chapter. Such is the order of the words in *Cod. Sin.*, with most other MSS. of note.

the ensnaring effect of knowledge unqualified by grace, and had forcibly declared his own purpose and manner of life with reference to things indifferent. But the grace of our Lord, which so richly abounded in the chosen vessel of His mercy,² was working far too feebly among the saints at Corinth for their ready appreciation of his self-denying love. Evil surmisings were freely entertained in hearts which should have been governed rather by that love which thinks no evil. Hence the necessity laid on the apostle of so frequently calling their attention to himself; for he knew the methods of the enemy, and was well aware that his doctrine must suffer with his name—that his testimony as an apostle of Christ would lose much of its moral weight, so long as it was in the power of any to utter unrefuted insinuations against himself.

Accordingly he throws down before them this fourfold challenge; to be taken up entirely, or in any part, by those who felt bold enough to do so. His claims are put in an interrogative form, because addressed to those who, as his own children in the faith, were most competent to pronounce on them; and who, had they duly remembered the means of their own birth to God, would have needed no additional assurance of his right to the title which he bore. That he was free, would be most evident to those who had opportunity of contrasting his Jewish and his Christian state and practice. That he was an apostle, these Corinthians at least, if others doubted it, might well have felt convinced. That he had seen the Lord, was indeed, as to the

² 1 Tim. i. 14.

manner of the tale, an assertion which the world might treat as no better than a brain-sick delusion, but which had for its vouchers, first, the fact of his own conversion, and, secondly, his doctrine and miraculous powers, which proved their divine origin by their effects, and which he boasted to have received immediately from the Lord.³ Let them, then, consider who it was that sought thus to lead them in the path of personal self-denial, and taught the strong to bear the infirmities of the weak; for it is to give increased weight to his exhortation that he asserts here so decidedly his apostolic liberty and

³ Gal. i. 1, 11, 12. Paul, like the twelve, received his apostleship through a personal call from the Lord. But as his calling was from heaven, so also was his ministry of a distinctively heavenly character. What the first apostles received gradually, as their cherished hope of an immediate restoration of the kingdom to Israel, was supplanted by the more direct testimony of the Spirit to the heavenly calling of the Church, Paul was taught expressly, and from the first. They began at Jerusalem, and for a while Jerusalem was the centre to which faith looked for counsel and direction. But this was not to last. The Scriptures must be otherwise fulfilled. The twelve were scattered providentially, on their errand of longsuffering mercy, when Jerusalem had filled her cup of trembling to overflowing by resisting the pleadings of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Their testimony, for the most part oral, has left but few visible effects. Those of them who wrote by inspiration lead our thoughts into quite a different channel from that taken by the first apostolic preaching of Peter and John at Jerusalem. But Paul began from heaven, and called men straight to heaven. His natural wishes bound him first to Israel and their hope, but his calling was to set forth distinctly a hitherto unopened chapter in the great book of God's counsel. What the Church of God is, both in name, in origin, in nature, and in destiny, we learn from neither of the twelve, but entirely from Paul. What John saw and spake of as the Bride was not communicated to the saints, till long after Paul had written all that is to be known on this side glory of the true calling and standing of the Church. *Ante*, pages 93, 189, *notes*.

privileges. They who thought grudgingly of practical self-sacrifice might change their estimate of Christian service, and its ever blessed consequences, when they saw what rights Paul both possessed, and for love's sake was willing to renounce.

Verse 3. "Mine answer to them that do examine me is this." These words seem rather to belong to the challenge delivered in the opening verses than to what follows. The *proofs* of his apostleship he has already given. A declaration of its privileges follows, but is hardly an answer to any who would question originally his claim to the apostolic title.

Verses 4-6. "Have we not power to eat and to drink?" etc. If, then, he is an apostle, he has a just title to the rights attaching to this office, which are here expressed summarily as a claim to free maintenance for themselves and families, if they had them. He does not assert simply a right to marry, but that if he were married, or took a wife, she also, as well as he, might look to the Church for maintenance. Not all the twelve were single men. Nor were the Lord's brethren after the flesh.⁴ The others claimed and enjoyed immunity from secular toil, that they might give themselves entirely to prayer and to the ministry of the word.⁵ And were Paul and Barnabas less worthy of this exemption? This coupling with his own name that, not of Apollos, who was well known to the Corinthians, but of one who is not elsewhere mentioned in connection with them, is remarkable. Not many years before, these devoted

⁴ It is interesting to find these once rejected and rejecting brethren of Jesus now by grace enrolled among the apostles and martyrs of the faith. (Matt. xii. 48; John vii. 5.) ⁵ Acts vi. 2-4.

fellow-labourers had parted angrily asunder on a point of godly expediency,⁶ and from that moment all further historic notice of Barnabas and his labours ceases from the inspired record. But it was not in Paul's heart to cease from remembering with affection his first⁷ and fastest friend in Christ. And now that attempts were being made, under false Jewish influences, to disparage his own claims in comparison with those of the original apostles, he comprises, as it were instinctively, in his vindication of his rights, the name of that one among his fellow-labourers in the gospel who from the first had been the quickest to acknowledge and rejoice in the extension of the grace of God to the Gentiles.⁸ If, as appears from verse 6, he only among these early labourers in God's husbandry emulated his former associate in his boast that his gospel should be burdensome to none, the fact should not be unrecorded, both for the praise of his devotedness, and to bring before these quick-witted but slow-hearted saints a second practical example of what the truth they gloried in could make of men of like passions with themselves.

Verse 7. "Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges?" etc. Natural analogies are often used by the apostle to quicken a dull spiritual understanding. We have here a threefold comparison. Spiritual service is likened to the calling and occupation of—1. A soldier; 2. A vine-planter; and, 3. A shepherd. The first and third of these respect the apostle's relation to his Master, and the provision which He has appointed for His servants. The second looks rather to his own special connection with the Corin-

⁶ Acts xv. 37-40.⁷ Acts ix. 27.⁸ Acts xi. 23, 24.

thian Church. They might be called, in subjection to the Lord, Paul's vineyard. "I have planted," etc. But on each of these grounds he felt himself entitled to their cordial support. They should have honoured him as a champion of the faith. They should have remembered what Corinth was, and what they personally were, before God's tillage was begun in that city by his hands; and as true sheep of God's flock, they should have counted it an honour to minister of their temporal goods to one who led them so faithfully to the rich and abundant pasture of His grace. Nay, the ordinary rules of fitness and propriety among men should have made unrequited service a thing unheard of in the Church of God. But grace only can appreciate grace; and nothing is either stranger or more certain than the fact that, both in apostolic times and since, the most devoted services for Christ's sake have, as a rule, received the scantiest acknowledgment.⁹

Verses 8, 9. "Say I these things as a man?" etc. Conscious that his words might be criticised, and by some regarded as his own merely, and of no divine authority, he hastens to corroborate them by an appeal to the law of Moses. Nor is it difficult to see the propriety of this. He knew that Jewish prejudice lay at the bottom of the opposition to his apostolic claims, and that they practised on Gentile ignorance in furtherance of their ends. Hence, instead of quoting in the first place the words of the Lord Jesus, he cites the former ordinance, that the mouths of such adversaries might be more effectually stopped. The order also in which his

⁹ Phil. iv. 15-17.

references to the law are made is instructive. He does not begin by reciting any distinctive priestly or Levitical statute, but grounds his plea upon a kindly provision of Him who preserveth beast as well as man, and makes God's care for oxen an *a fortiori* warrant of the spiritual labourer's claim. Labour is entitled to reward, by the law of Him who imposed toil originally on his creature as the fruit of sin. Does God, then, care for oxen? rather, does He *not*? But if so, how much more for man? And if, for the sake of men's bodily wants and temporal advantage, labour is to be had in honour, how much rather that which is bestowed upon their souls?

Verse 10 is a striking example of the freedom with which the Spirit of grace applies all the Scriptures, as constituent parts of the "word of Christ,"¹ to the believer and his things. The words of Moses had respect to oxen, and, to the apprehension of the legislator, had, it is likely, no ulterior force. But the apostle is emboldened to claim them as a specific provision for himself and his fellow-labourers in the gospel; for what Moses uttered was the word of *God*, who sees the end from the beginning, and has sown seed in His earliest testimonies to bear fruit through time and to eternity. "*He* saith it altogether for our sakes," is the apostle's bold declaration. But as the verse in our Bibles is a little indistinct, through the faultiness of the text from which the translation was made, I have given in a note what appear to be Paul's genuine words.²

¹ Col. iii. 16.

² The verse stands in *Cod. Sin.* (with which A, B, and C agree) as follows: Ἡ δὲ ἡμᾶς πάντως λέγει; δὲ ἡμᾶς γὰρ ἐγγράφη, ὅτι

The labourer is worthy of his hire, and should work with an undistracted mind. Both nature and the law maintain this principle. And now, having settled his general claim upon these solid grounds, he makes, in verse 11, an appeal to their own sense of justice: "If we have sown to you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" Apostolic labour had begotten them to God. They had received, through the word of grace, the remission of their sins, and were nourished on the word of righteousness through the continued ministry of Christ. Were meat and raiment to be weighed against these things? And if love sent the messengers, and wrought the work, was it to leave with them no likeness of itself? Would not a grudging response to an apostle's need imply that, instead of gaining moral elevation by the Gospel, they had fallen below their former selves? For Greeks were ever ready to shower honours and emoluments on those whom they considered public benefactors.

Verse 12. "If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather?" etc. There were others who were their creditors in this behalf, if only they could see things justly in the light of God;

ὁφείλει ἐπ' ἐλπίδι ὁ ἀροτριῶν ἀροτριᾶν, καὶ ὁ ἀλοῶν, ἐπ' ἐλπίδι τοῦ μετέχειν. "Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes it was assuredly written; for the ploughman ought to plough in hope; and the thresher also in hope of participating," i.e., in the fruits. As to the particular application of the kinds of labour specified, since they represent the first and the last of agricultural operations, they seem intended to convey a comprehensive summary of spiritual labour generally. Compare his earlier expressions in chap. iii.

but he pre-eminently, as their father in the faith. For the truth's sake, then, he thus distinctly states and insists on their acknowledging his claim. But they are his witness also, that the power thus righteously asserted he had never used. He had chosen another and a wiser way. Having full knowledge of the enemy's devices, he would carefully cut off occasion. He would suffer no facts to appear in connection with his ministry which could be turned by the adversaries of truth to a damaging account. While he delighted to receive such offerings as voluntary love might make,³ he would endure any measure of personal privation rather than prompt thoughtless or unwilling Christians on his own account. It should be in no man's power to insinuate, with any show of reason, that God's chosen ambassador of reconciliation to the world made a market of his commission; nor should it be asserted plausibly of one who by profession gloried in the cross of Jesus Christ his Lord, that he *traded* in the gospel of free grace.

Verses 13, 14. "Do ye not know?" etc. Having already shown that both nature and law provide, in the spirit of equity, for the support and comfort of the labourer, he next makes a special reference to the Levitical institute, in order to establish definitively the analogy which subsists between the priestly service and reward under the former covenant, and the ministry of Christ under the new. The Lord has *ordained*, that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel. Nor let it seem strange to any, that Paul should presume a familiar knowledge of

³ Phil. iv. 10, *seq.*

Jewish ordinances on the part of these Gentile saints; for, not to speak of his own teaching when among them, we may be sure that they had not listened to the ministry of one so mighty in the Scriptures as Apollos without becoming generally acquainted, at the least, with the ordinances of the former sanctuary. The same Lord who had provided that they who served Him in His earthly temple should be partakers with the altar, has also willed that they who wait upon the ministry of His grace shall do so without care.

The first thing we have carefully to notice here is, that while there is an analogy in the provision for the support of the ministers respectively in the two dispensations, there is *none whatever* in the services themselves. A priest is not a preacher, nor a preacher a priest, except upon the different and essential ground of his being a Christian by the grace of God. Aaron, the saint of the Lord, was, in his official capacity, a figure of the Holy One, who now, as the Son consecrated for ever, fulfils the service of the true tabernacle in the heavens.⁴ The sons of Aaron, by natural generation, are a type also of the children which God has given to His great High Priest.⁵ The brethren of Jesus share by grace His double title of both king and priest. But there is absolutely nothing of a sacerdotal character in true Christian ministry. "Offering" and "intercession" are the two distinctive functions of priesthood. Both these are glorified supremely in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and are exercised habitually, in a lower but acceptable sense, by all true Christian

⁴ *Notes on the Hebrews*, passim.

⁵ Heb. ii. 13.

worshippers.⁶ But neither one nor the other belongs distinctively to the ministry of the Gospel.

A priest was, by his calling, nearer to God than those for whom he acted; and, by virtue of his office, holier than they. But both nearness to God and sanctification are conferred in Christ, without distinction, upon all who are called of God into the fellowship of His Son. Moreover, the Jewish priesthood was confined within the limits of a particular family, and transmitted by hereditary descent. But Christian ministry, if genuine, is the exercise of an immediate spiritual gift, and discovers itself in all parts of the Church, according to the sovereign grace and power of the Giver. Transmitted or traditional gift is communicable only by the hands of a divinely inspired apostle;⁷ while the assured supply of all that is essential to the calling and edification of the Church is conferred directly and at His own good pleasure by her ascended Head.⁸ And where such gifts are exercised in faithfulness for Christ, they constitute, the apostle tells us, a moral claim upon the practical good offices of those who receive the spiritual benefit.⁹

It was the early error of confounding Christian ministry with priesthood, coupled with a radically false view of the doctrine of regeneration, that laid

⁶ Heb. xiii. 15, 16; 1 Tim. ii. 1.

⁷ 2 Tim. i. 6. In 1 Tim. iv. 14 we find the presbytery also instrumentally concurring in the bestowment of God's gift, which had first been assigned by prophecy to its appointed recipient. This is not to be confounded with the ordination of elders spoken of in Titus i. 5, which was a solemn recognition only of an existing fitness for the office. (*Conf.* 1 Tim. v. 22.)

⁸ Eph. iv. 7-13.

⁹ Gal. vi. 6.

the foundation of that portentous structure with which we are now but too familiar as "the Christian world." The builders of Babylon have stumbled at the true doctrine of Christ's priesthood, as well as perverted the pure Gospel of God's saving grace. But further notice of existing ecclesiastical theories and institutions must be reserved until the subject of the Church comes before us in the order of the apostle's teaching. In the meanwhile, it may be useful to consider a little further the question of ministerial support, with reference to the present times.

The principle stated by the apostle is perfectly clear and simple; and, as an ordinance of Christ, the duty of considering the temporal wants of those who labour in the gospel is one which every right-minded saint will be swift to acknowledge. The provision, though divinely sanctioned, is neither fixed nor measured, but is left, as a stewardship of grace, to the love of those who feel thus their obligations to the Lord. It is manifest, therefore, that state-endowments (themselves a badge of bondage to the world), or compulsory payments of any kind in support of an established clerical body, are things quite foreign to the Spirit's teaching in this chapter. For, first, the clerical function itself is, as will be more fully shown hereafter, a standing contradiction of the true principle of Christian ministry; and, secondly, no unwilling offering can at any time find God's acceptance, and, if levied in His great name, is but an insult and dishonour to that name. The Lord lives and works in the hearts of His people, and it is only as a willing fulfilment of His pleasure that the ordinance here delivered by His apostle can be truly

kept. And it would be well if they also who, as "Nonconformists," boast their emancipation from state fetters, would bethink them a little, in the light of Paul's teaching on this point, of the various methods practised among themselves for the raising and securing of what is considered a competent ministerial remuneration. The moment any other force is brought to bear on Christians than their sense of loving duty to the Lord, there is a necessary deterioration of the work, of whatever kind it is. God loves a cheerful giver; and if ever kindness flowed spontaneously, it might be expected to do so from believers towards those who minister among them that grace of Christ which has saved and keeps alive their souls. Yet, strange to say, this claim, so obvious and so tender,¹ is but too easily ignored by those who should be most sensitively alive to it.

Moreover, there is a propriety in all Christian things which is not to be learnt by rule. But the habit, so common in the present day, of bestowing upon popular ministers costly memorials of a merely ornamental description, is a manifest violation of this propriety. Neither the lust of the eye, nor the pride of life, are of the Father; nor should a preacher of the cross be tempted to deny thus practically his own death to the world.² Stated salaries also, as a

¹ 1 Thess. v. 13.

² And what shall be said of those open compromisings of truth and godliness peculiar to our own sad times, and of which the bazaar system is perhaps the commonest and most offensive example? The woe of the Jewish prophet was denounced against those who "built up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity." And is there a lesser guilt attaching to those who, for

matter of bargain and agreement, equally militate against the principle here enforced. Had, indeed, the Church abode in her first love, continuing steadfast in the faith, and keeping the Lord's ordinances in the living power of the Spirit, there would, no doubt, have been a certain method in general operation, such as we find intimated in the so-called Pastoral Epistles,³ by which sufficient maintenance would have been furnished to God's labourers, in perfect harmony with the fundamental principle of liberty and individual responsibility. But the Church, as a dispensation, has not so continued. Yet the Lord's will has not changed; and this divine rule, like all else that is of God, remains still for the comfort and direction of those who desire only to be pleasing in His sight.

One word more on this point. It is the called and sent evangelist who is principally contemplated by the apostle. Teachers and taught are elsewhere placed in a similar relation; such, that is, as addict themselves wholly to the ministry of the saints.⁴ But the difference is manifest between those who devote themselves, with an entire renunciation of secular pursuits, to the service of the word, under the persuasion that the Master has so called them,

nominally Christian ends, set forth in their most tempting array the fruits that the soul of Babylon lusts after; winning not unfrequently, from the world's voice in the newspapers, an ironical commendation of the skill with which merely natural tastes have been anticipated and gratified, and saddening those only who remember that for professors of the heavenly calling to mind earthly things is to glory in their shame, and to show themselves enemies to the cross of Christ. (Micah iii. 10; Rev. xviii. 12-14; Phil. iii. 18, 19.)

³ 1 Tim. v. 17, 18.

⁴ Chap. xvi. 15, 16; Gal. vi. 6.

and an occasional, or even habitual, exercise of gift within the Church by those who, while happy in the thought of being allowed thus to be helpers in the work of God, are conscious of no special and imperious call. Besides, a supposed call may prove imaginary, or delusive; a restless natural energy, and love of notoriety, simulating not unfrequently what is really divine. But in such cases truth becomes its own avenger. A false gift will soon either unmask itself, or be unmasked. If unsound in doctrine, his speech will bewray his folly to the ears of those who have an unction from the Holy One. If sincere, but ignorant and self-elated, he will also find his level in due time. What is of God will bear with it the seal of God, and will be owned of all who are themselves in true subjection to His word. To return :

Verses 15, 16. "But I have used none of these things," etc. Having established, on behalf of Christ's true ministers, the claims allowed them by their Master, he now sets himself before their eyes as a prominent exception to this rule. Love, in its fervent energy, will rise superior to permissive privilege. Paul would have advocated with less earnestness the rights of spiritual labour, had he not steadfastly resolved to waive his personal claim; for he sought not theirs, but them, and would by his own example stir their minds to a nobler ambition than they had yet conceived. He would show them that there is a spiritual no less than a natural heroism, and that prizes may be won in Christ as well as on the Olympian course. He confesses, that as a Christian he is an ambitious one. He will have something of

his own to boast of. His calling gave him no occasion, nor his apostolic mission, nor could he glory even in a faithful fulfilment of his trust; for his commission was also his necessity. When God sends, to refuse to go is to incur a woe instead of gathering a blessing. He would not imitate the folly of his great prophetic predecessor in his mission to the Gentiles, but would preach faithfully the preaching which he had received.⁵ But in so doing, he felt that he was still but an unprofitable servant, doing only what he had been bid to do.⁶ Yet he has a boast, of which he shows himself most jealous, and its nature is declared in what immediately follows.

Verses 17, 18. "For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward," etc. In former chapters he has spoken of ministry, and its effects, with reference to the power and the praise. The labourer was nothing: God is all. Yet faithful labour should not fail of its reward. He now lets us know that the new man has his opportunities of distinction not less than the old. As it respects his voluntary action, a Christian may sow to the flesh or to the Spirit, and with proportionate results.⁷ But the will of Paul ran freely with the will of Christ. He was not only his Lord, to be obeyed, but his study also—his model and his aim. If boundless grace had put him into the ministry, he would occupy in the spirit of the Master whom he served. What, then, was his reward, by which he set such store? The happy consciousness, that though he had toiled more than others, he had wrought for love, and not for gain; that he had

⁵ Jonah, *passim*.

⁶ Luke xvii. 10.

⁷ Gal. vi. 7, 8.

denied his natural affections,⁸ and renounced all ties, but those which bound him to the Church, for Jesus' sake. He counted it his chief renown, that those who knew him should acknowledge him as one who laboured at his own cost, and not that of others; that what he had received freely from his Lord he freely gave, with the added interest of his personal toil.⁹ He would fulfil his course as a faithful imitator of Him who counted it more blessed to give than to receive; and would aim thus at that recompence which they only who are likeminded can appreciate, and which none but they who labour watchfully and prayerfully can hope to win.¹ This, then, was his glory, that he had so laboured as not only to feel no self-reproach, but to be justified in setting his own practice as a model for the imitation of his fellow-servants; that, having power, he refrained from using it, preferring God's folly to the wisdom of this world,² and, for the sake of others, refusing to take honour when honour was his righteous due.

Verse 19. "For though I be free from all, yet have I made myself servant unto all," etc. He here confesses, not to ambition only, but to a spiritual avarice as well. His eyes and his heart are on his gains. If beside himself, there was a method in his madness, which taught him, though a seeming loser, how to play a surely winning game. For what he was gathering here so painfully was fruit to life eternal. His barns were in heaven, not on earth, and he was fast filling them with an imperishable store. There is nothing contradictory in the former

⁸ *Ante*, verse 5.

⁹ Matt. x. 8; Acts xx. 34.

¹ John xiii. 16, 17; Luke vi. 40.

² Ps. xlix. 18.

part of this verse to what has gone before. His meaning is evidently this: The commission which he had received, though it bound him in a necessary obedience to the Lord, conferred no *special* claim on any to his services. He was free from all, to exercise his ministry at the bidding only, and in the power, of the Holy Ghost. As an ambassador of Christ, he stood above, and not below, those to whom he bore the message of His grace. But his *heart* was also in his work. Apostolic testimony would not fail to tell on its predestinated objects, but neither should loving devotedness be allowed to go without its recompence. It is a deeply interesting point that is opened to us in this passage, the moral connection, namely, which subsists between the spontaneous zeal of man and the sovereign power of God's elective grace. Paul's heart was bent earnestly on winning souls. But if, instead of a zealous self-devotion to his work, he had performed it only with a reluctant fidelity, would some of his many trophies have remained unwon? Not to God surely, who knows and will accomplish the full number of His chosen, but by the servant who wrought so little in sympathy with the heart of his employer. None of God's people will be lacking when He writes them up.³ But even as the entire Church is its Redeemer's crown and praise, the fruit of the travail of His soul, so also in a secondary sense will the souls which loving and patient toil has won to Christ be given, as a crown of rejoicing, to them that win them in the coming day.⁴

Verses 20-22. "And unto the Jews I became as

³ Ps. lxxxvii. 6; Rev. xx. 15.

⁴ 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

a Jew," etc. He here expands and illustrates this master principle of his action as a wise winner of souls.⁵ As a man in Christ, he belonged no more to any category of natural standing or description; but in the spirit of a love which seeks its object everywhere,⁶ he would put himself indifferently upon any footing which might give him a more ready access to his wish. Among Jews, therefore, he was as a Jew. How he acted on this principle, and with what discouraging effect, we are told in the inspired narrative of his earlier work.⁷ Receiving hatred for his love, he learnt in that school conformity to Him who had once endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself.⁸ But while tender to the Jewish conscience, he withstood their doctrinal pretensions like a rock. He was "to them that were under law as one under law, though himself in nowise under law."⁹ The

⁵ Prov. xi. 30.

⁶ John iv. 23; x. 16.

⁷ Acts ix. *seq.*

⁸ Heb. xii. 3. What is stated in the text applies generally to Paul's experiences at the hands of his kindred after the flesh. That his zeal for Israel may have sometimes urged him beyond the line which God had measured for his service, is not only possible, but, as I judge, manifest as a matter of fact, on a due consideration of the circumstances connected with his last recorded visit to Jerusalem. But to them that love God all things work for good. The Lord chastens whom He loves. Paul's error, if we so pronounce it, was one of those which conduct the wanderer eventually, under the controlling hand of Him who brings good out of evil, to higher honour than before. As a gracious recompence for the humiliation and afflictions which befell him as the immediate result of his decision, he was enabled to date from his captivity those wonderful epistles in which the mystery of Christ has been set forth in fullest brightness for the comfort and instruction of the Church.

⁹ *Cod. Sin.* agrees with all the other MSS. of note in inserting, after *ὡς ὑπὸ νόμον*, the additional words, *μὴ ὡν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον*. These last contain, in fact, the very point of the present instance;

class here referred to comprises not born Jews only, but all of any nation who had learnt and acknowledged the doctrine of Moses. Himself standing fast in the liberty with which Christ had made him free, he would willingly conform to legal usages, and submit to legal restraints, if by so doing he could gain a more willing ear for his Gospel among those who bore still upon their necks the yoke of bondage.

So likewise with the Gentiles. To them that were without law he would be also without law. What they are naturally, he is by grace in another and a nobler sense. Theirs was the liberty of ignorance, his of perfect knowledge. But though free from law, because standing in God's own righteousness, he is not lawless to God, but in immediate subjection to Christ.¹ He would win the lawless to the truth of God, and, through the knowledge of a better liberty, would bind on them the easy yoke of Christ. To the weak, and therefore scrupulous believer, he offered himself as a companion, and would humour patiently his weakness, till he had nursed him to a better strength. In his eyes, liberty of meats and drinks was not a thing to be asserted practically, so long as their enjoyment hindered or ensnared another's conscience. To all, in their various tempers and conditions, he would accommodate himself in loving patience. Conscious that he carried in him that of which all stood equally in need, he would labour to impart the truth to all; for to him to live was Christ. Himself saved as a

since, if Paul had been in any sense personally under law, there would be no meaning in this part of his boast.

¹ *Μὴ ὡν ἀνομος Θεοῦ, ἀλλ' ἔννομος Χριστοῦ.* *Cod. Sin. et al.*

miracle of mercy, he lived only to save others by the grace of God.² He was, not officially only, but in heart also and affectionate desire, a debtor to the Jew and Greek alike;³ and while any strength remained in him, he felt his obligation to be still unpaid.

Verse 23. "And this I do for the Gospel's sake," etc. All that he did or suffered was distinctly for the furtherance of the Gospel; and, as he elsewhere testifies, he had no other aim in life than to finish joyfully his course as an evangelist, or minister of the grace of God.⁴ If we consider with attention the passages in his epistles in which this word occurs, we shall see how large a meaning he attaches to "the Gospel," or good news of God. And it is of importance to keep this well in view, that we may escape the ill consequences so often found resulting from a shallow estimate of this most expressive and most precious term. The Gospel, as Paul knew and preached it, is the doctrine of *Christ*; the complete setting forth of God, as He is now declared by the Spirit in His testimony to the Son. In its full sense, therefore, it comprises all that the

² The limit of Paul's desire was, "that he might save *some*;" words which, like the solemn questions put in chap. vii. 16, may well be commended to the meditation of those ardent evangelists who now dream so hopefully of the rapid and complete conversion of the world; for other things are written of the nations than their conversion by God's present testimony. A faithful preaching of the cross will have its rich blessing and reward; but no true evangelist will ever forget that one part of his mission is to warn the unbeliever of the wrath to come; and that while a proclamation of free grace leaves the recusant without excuse, God's *saved* are also His "elect" and "called."

³ Rom. i. 14.

⁴ Acts xx. 24.

glorifier of Jesus can reveal of Him; and therefore, though known *savingly* by all believers, it is known as yet in part only even by the apostles.⁵ In its narrower and more common acceptation, it signifies God's message or commandment to mankind as such, His free and pressing invitation to all who will own that they are helpless sinners in His sight, to receive His own righteousness in exchange for their iniquities, and confess Jesus and Him crucified as the reason of their hope of glory, in entire renunciation of themselves.

Thus the Gospel speaks to saint and sinner both. To the former, by the lips of God's appointed teachers; to the latter, by His messengers or preachers. In this latter sense, an imperfect Gospel is no true message of God; for His words to men in their natural condition are few and positive.⁶ The reception by faith of His perfect declaration of free grace makes them also perfect who receive it;⁷ for it is the word of truth, the Gospel of their salvation.⁸ But the blessings of the saved, their standing and their privileges, their duties and their prospects—in a word, the doctrines of life and godliness, are the subjects of the gracious teachings of the Comforter, whose work ends only at the open revelation of the Lord.⁹ To Paul, then, the Gospel, in its rich and

⁵ Chap. xiii. 9; Phil. iii. 10.

⁶ We shall find the apostle stating this message with much precision in the opening verses of chap. xv.

⁷ *Ante*, chap. ii. 6, *seq.*

⁸ Eph. i. 13.

⁹ A marked sign of the present times is the strange indifference often shown by Christians to sound spiritual *teaching*, while evangelical preaching (not always of the purest kind) is eagerly sought after. But it is of deep importance to remember, that true growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ can

full entirety of meaning, was everything: for it he lived, and by it he would stand or fall. His desire was to be a partaker, not *of* it only, but *with* it also; to participate in its ever blessed fruits as it prospered, by the grace of God, in his own hands as a fellow-labourer with God. Moreover, he would have his brethren and children in the faith his partners also in this joy. They had indeed received the Gospel, and the work begun in them should in due time be surely perfected by Him who had called them, and would confirm them to the end.¹ But he longed to arouse them to a truer apprehension of the grace in which they stood, and to stir their hearts to something like an emulation of his own toilsome but most happy course.

Verses 24, 25. "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all?" etc. His desire is, that virtue should be added to their faith;² that, instead of being satisfied with being safe in Christ, each believer should resolve to win commendation from the Master whom he served. He was himself both running and contending, and he would have them follow his example, and aim at the same prize. But they must understand that, in spiritual as in natural things, success waits only upon effort. Accordingly he introduces in these verses a double similitude, drawn from those public games in which the natural Greek took so deep an interest, both personal and national. The winner at the foot-race must distance

never come by a neglect of His own appointed means. Nor will God's saints ever learn to think rightly of themselves, or of the world, so long as they regard an assurance of personal security as the measure and fulness of the Gospel of God.

¹ *Ante*, chap. i. 8, 9.

² 2 Peter i. 5.

his competitors; the wrestler, if he wished for victory, must submit to the necessary training; and, as usual, when stimulating that which should have already been effectively operating in their souls, he repeats his half-condemnatory, "Know ye not?"³

To understand these verses rightly, we must bear carefully in mind what it is with which the Spirit is here specifically dealing. His subject is not the final preservation of the soul which the blood of the Saviour has redeemed, but the eventual reward or loss of the believer, as a diligent or careless runner in the race of faith. This is quite evident from the terms of the comparison. A sinner dead in sins can run no race; nor can one whose natural description is "ungodly and without strength" engage as a spiritual athlete, either in conflict with the powers of darkness, or in the emulative contest of love and good works. Besides, the very idea of *effort*, which here is the essential thing, is carefully excluded from the conditions of a sinner's justification and personal acceptance with God. It is "to him that worketh *not*"⁴ that righteousness is imputed, through faith in Jesus Christ. Advice to saints is not Gospel to sinners, nor is the believer's hope of glory ever allowed by the Spirit of truth to rest on anything but Jesus and His finished work.

The race, then, is the race of Christian life, and the contest that of well-pleasing to the Lord. With Christ as its starting-point, and Christ also as its goal, that race has to be run with patience by a faith which looks off from⁵ all other objects, to fix

³ *Ante*, chap. iii. 16, vi. 9, 15, 16, 19.

⁴ Rom. iv. 5.

⁵ Heb. xii. 1, 2. 'Απορῶντες εἰς τ. 'Ι.

its gaze solely upon Him. But just as men did not, at the Grecian games, contend with halters round their necks, so neither is the Christian called to save himself by any effort or endeavour from the wrath to come; for as a sinner he has already fled for refuge to the hope set before him. He has run into the tower of his safety, and is safe.⁶ It is in his Saviour's name that he appears as a competitor within the lists, and by His Saviour's strength alone that he can hope to win. But there is a prize for those who overcome. And here we should note the contrast between the illustration and the living truth. At the trial of natural ability, all the competitors but one were sure to lose. In Christ, all are already more than conquerors, but such as draw back unto perdition by failing to continue in the grace of God. Yet, though in this sense every real Christian overcomes, there is another sense in which merit will be found and honoured, according to its measure, by the righteous Arbiter of all that has been wrought here in His name; a merit not original or inherent, but of *grace*. And it is in this latter sense, chiefly, that the apostle speaks of winning in this place.⁷

What animates the wrestler is the consciousness that he is aiming at a prize which human strength may win. But he puts himself voluntarily under the severest training, because he knows that his own unaided powers are inadequate to his ambition. So also in the fight of faith. We wrestle against adversaries which mock all our natural strength. The arms of God are needed, if we fight the fight of God.

⁶ Heb. vi. 18; Acts x. 45; Prov. xviii. 10.

⁷ Chiefly, but not exclusively, as the sequel shows.

The victory is surely within reach, but the crown is for them only who strive lawfully. To faith must be added virtue, and to virtue knowledge,⁸ etc., if faith is itself to stand unshaken in an evil day. A supine inertness in the passing time of opportunity will bring loss instead of gain, in the day when crowns are given by the Lord to them that love Him. Faith without works is dead, being alone;⁹ but a faith which lives loves also, and will seek, in the way of diligent obedience, the approbation of the Master whom it serves.¹

Verses 26, 27. "I therefore so run," etc. After having stated the conditions of spiritual prosperity and success, he again presents himself as their example. He knew both whom he trusted, and at what he aimed; and, in the strength of Him who had loved and purchased him, he kept joyfully upon his course. He does not run uncertainly; his goal is straight before him; his eyes and his heart are fixed on the same object. He runs with a winner's confidence; for it is the prize of his high *calling* at which he aims. He knows that He who calls is faithful also, and will perfect what He has begun. Having been apprehended of Christ Jesus,² he cannot rest until he also apprehends. Nor does he fight at random. He knows the law of the contest, and obeys it. He is well aware that flesh can only hinder spirit, and with a resolute decision he maintains unceasing war upon his flesh. But when he speaks of governing his body, and repressing forcibly its inclinations, he does not mean by *that* ascetic

⁸ 2 Peter i. 5-10. ⁹ James ii. 17. ¹ Gal. v. 6; John xv. 10;
2 Cor. v. 9. ² Phil. iii. 12; 1 Thess. v. 24.

discipline, which is, he tells us, of little profit at the best,³ and which, in its too probable abuse, he dis-countenances and condemns.⁴ What he intends is, such a rendering of his members in their proper instrumental efficiency to the service of the living God, as is possible for those only who by faith are alive to *Him*, in Christ.⁵ His desire is to serve and glorify the Lord. The adversary who obstructs his wish is really the devil, but instrumentally his own flesh. This, therefore, he resolves to tame and mortify, subduing natural propensities by spiritual strength and tenacity of purpose. Knowing that they who are Christ's *have* crucified the flesh with its affections and its lusts, he finds in that faith the effective power of God against his natural will.⁶

Moreover, willingly as he pursued his course, he fails not to remind us, in the closing words of this chapter, that watchful self-restraint is a moral necessity of spiritual life. It is possible to preach to others, with no life in ourselves. The Lord has elsewhere taught us impressively the same truth. Zeal may be strong enough to compass earth and sea, and yet be merely natural. But if so, it is a work of the flesh, which has its place outside the kingdom of God.⁷ The aim of all such teaching as we have here is to encourage faith, and condemn by anticipation reckless and self-confident professors.⁸ Of the Lord Himself it is written, that for the joy

³ 1 Tim. iv. 8.

⁴ Col. ii. 20, 23; 1 Tim. iv. 3-5.

⁵ Rom. vi.; Col. iii.

⁶ *Notes on the Romans*, third edition, pp. 164-166. Gal. v. 24; 1 Peter i. 5.

⁷ Gal. v. 21; Matt. xxiii. 15.

⁸ We may compare, as to its moral drift, the Lord's parable in Matt. xviii. 23-35.

set before Him He endured the cross. If there is nothing to allure us, we shall not pursue. But faith has an object toward which it moves, not doubtingly or with indifference, but with an eager and confident desire. It has a present knowledge of Christ, which, though too scanty to satisfy, is enough to give conscience rest, and to set love in free and willing motion for His sake. That His people should be zealous of good works was a part of His purpose in redeeming them; and they who know the grace of God in truth are *happy* only while endeavouring to do His will.⁹

The apostle's figure represents, like the parable of the virgins, the profession of godliness in its positive and general aspect. All set forth to meet the Bridegroom; all nominally enter on the race and engage in the contest. But not all are found duly furnished for the trial. As a lamp, without a separate vessel of supply, is a figure of self-sustained profession, without a saving knowledge by faith of the fulness that is in Christ, so are these runners and wrestlers, who, instead of winning, lose themselves, because not truly founded on the grace of God. The reader will find, on a careful study of the Word, that it is the habit of the Spirit to accompany the fullest and most absolute statements of grace by warnings which imply a ruinous failure on the part of some who nominally stand by faith.¹ Hence the emphatic force of the expression "walk." Our walk has a certain direction, towards God or towards the world, and the course we follow will, if continued, bring us to its proper end. Now faith seeks God, and, though

⁹ John xiii. 17.

¹ Gal. v. 2.

obstructed by the tendencies of nature, *pushes* against those forces to its aim. Unbelief does just the reverse. It loves and seeks the world, and disregards conscience to attain its wish. There are two "secrets"—the secret of God and the secret of man. The former is with the righteous; His covenant is their assurance; and they know that His grace will not fail them, notwithstanding the manifold offences which they have to mourn.² The secret of man is the delusive persuasion of the tempter that he shall still have peace, though he walk in the imagination of his heart.³ Such persons *speculate* in grace, instead of *living on* it. The delight of the evil doer is not in God; but with His word upon his lips, his heart goes after his own lusts.⁴ But God will both expose and judge the secrets of men, in the day when He will judge the world in righteousness.⁵ Then shall all find what they have sought. The Lord will be the prize of those who truly valued and pursued Him,⁶ while they who have loved and served "other things" better than Himself will find, that what they have chosen wilfully in time, they must retain unwillingly for ever.

The doctrine of this passage, since, while addressed as a word of exhortation to true saints, it contemplates profession whether true or false, is clearly distinguishable from that relating to *works only*, as declared in chaps. iii. and iv.⁷ The apostle is here

² James iii. 2.

³ Deut. xxix. 18.

⁴ Jude 4.

⁵ Rom. ii. 16; Acts xvii. 31.

⁶ Phil. iii. 8, 9.

⁷ The word *ἀδόκιμος*, which occurs seven times in the New Testament, is never applied to works, but always to persons. Its most frequent use is to describe an unbelieving professor. In this sense it is employed, once figuratively, in Heb. vi. 6; and twice, in the

indicating by his own example the true way of life and peace.⁸ Presumption and high-mindedness are among the marks attaching to those who, without true faith, are inflated with mere doctrinal knowledge. The confidence of a true child of God is not in his calling, nor his position, nor his faith, but in his ever blessed Lord and Saviour. Warnings, therefore, and exhortations which grate harshly on the ears of insincere profession, are drunk willingly as medicine by the godly soul. The true believer does not stumble at the words of Him who has redeemed him,⁹ but accepts joyfully the burden of the cross, because he has already known, through faith, its life-bestowing power in his soul.

way of express denunciation, in 2 Tim. iii. 8, and 2 Cor. xiii. 5. Once it is used as a descriptive epithet of the natural mind in its God-rejected state (Rom. i. 28); and once more, in Tit. ii. 16, in order to characterize the walk of those who in the same verse are called "abominable and unbelieving."

⁸ Rom. viii. 6; Gal. vi. 16.

⁹ Luke ix. 23-27.

CHAPTER X.

FROM particular exhortation, enforced by his own example, the apostle turns now to consider the wider aspect of divine government, which is illustrated by the history of Israel after the flesh. And this he does for the sake of bringing into view the practical analogy which subsists between God's former dealings with His people in the wilderness, and His present relation toward those who, by their outward confession of the doctrine of Christ, comprise the general aggregate of Christianity, whether true or false. His language, when dealing with this topic, although it does not take the form of a prediction, yet points with a sufficient distinctness to that general apostacy of Christendom which is the common burden of New Testament prophecy, and of which the failure of the generation which left Egypt to enter into Canaan is the standing type.¹ It is a subject of deep and solemn interest to the believer, and, like all other divine warning and teaching, fitted not only to arouse his vigilance, but also to strengthen and establish him in the true grace of God.²

Verse 1. "For³ I would not have you ignorant,

¹ Jude 5; Heb. iii. iv.

² Col. i. 28; 1 Peter v. 12.

³ All the better MSS. have γὰρ instead of δι.

brethren," etc. The terms in which he introduces this new topic both indicate its own importance,⁴ and place it in a close moral connection with his foregoing exhortation. He would not have us ignorant of what was written expressly for our sakes, and as an appointed preservative against the dangers which beset our course. We may notice first the expression, "our fathers," which is here used, not as it often is, to designate God's true and chosen seed, but generally as a description of the entire nation. All are not Israel that are of Israel,⁵ but all who bore that name were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea. The demonstration of Jehovah's power in dividing the Red Sea gave the before desponding people confidence to follow Moses to its other side.⁶ True faith in *God Himself* kept Joshua and Caleb for the promised land. This ocular faith of Israel⁷ is a figure of that "faith upon evidences," or "rational conviction," which is so often found in those who, alas! shew nothing symptomatic of true life to God.

Verse 2. "And were all baptized unto Moses," etc. The allusion is to the effect produced on the minds of the Israelites, when they witnessed the catastrophe of Pharaoh and his hosts, as described in the inspired narrative. With the double proof before their eyes of God's power, both to save and to destroy, "the people feared the Lord, and be-

⁴ We may compare his similar language in Rom. xi. 25, when impressing on his brethren the necessity of their acquiring and retaining a right knowledge of the dispensation under which their lot is cast.

⁵ Rom. ix. 6. ⁶ *Notes on the Hebrews*, ch. xi. ⁷ Ps. cvi. 12, 13.

lieved the Lord and *His servant Moses*.”⁸ The apostle, by a bold figure, gives here to Christian baptism this retrospective application, the final and divinely-ordered rite reflecting its name upon the action which prefigured so strikingly the effectual revelation of the arm of the Lord, in redeeming grace and power, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁹

This baptism to Moses was the definitive sealing of his title as the mediatorial leader and commander of Jehovah’s people; all that had taken place in Egypt, including even the institution of the Passover, having left his work, as the apostle of their deliverance, incomplete, until he had freed them finally from their oppressors, and brought them, as a ransomed people, into an entirely new place and condition. They were no longer in the place of their birth, nor had they yet been conducted to their promised habitation, but they had passed from under the hard hand of Pharaoh, to be the acknowledged flock of their Redeemer, and the followers of him who led them onwards in Jehovah’s name. They are a figure, thus considered, of the true Church in the present dispensation, which is delivered from the present evil world,¹ and marked for heaven, by the Holy Spirit of promise,² but left, meanwhile, to pass through the appointed way of tribulation,³ until the time of patience is fulfilled. And herein lies the point of the apostle’s comparison. Speaking to those who, as a body, really were, through grace, *in Christ*, and therefore rightly baptized in His

⁸ Exod. xiv. 31.

⁹ Col. ii. 12.

¹ Gal. i. 4.

² Eph. i. 13.

³ John xvi. 33.

name, he is in spirit contemplating a time, even then too soon to come, when baptism by water would no longer be a trusty voucher of true faith. *All* were baptized to Moses. All, too, would be baptized to Christ.⁴

Verses 3, 4. "And did all eat the same spiritual meat," etc. This statement embraces a descriptive summary of the miraculous preservation and sustenance of Israel in the wilderness, and its terms deserve attention. Both the manna and the water are called "spiritual;" not as if what is marvellous must be therefore also spiritual, but because, as in the previous instance, true Gospel light is here reflected on these earlier phenomena of grace. Spiritual sustenance, in the true sense of the expression, is the diet of faith only, supporting not men's bodies, but their souls.⁵ When, therefore, the apostle says that they drank of that spiritual Rock which followed them, which Rock was Christ, his meaning appears to be, first, that the Rock, once smitten by divine command, and twice by human petulance and

⁴ I infer (though with the unhappy certainty of offending not a few of those who love the Lord) from the apostle's language in this passage, first, that Christian households were, as a rule, baptized; and, secondly, that the ruinous delusion of baptismal *regeneration* was, with all its portentous consequences, distinctly within his contemplation when drawing this parallel.

⁵ In John vi. the Lord, after contrasting the Mosaic miracle with the Father's gift—declaring His flesh and blood to be the true meat and drink of His chosen—adds, in verse 63, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." And wherever these words are received into the heart by faith, they join the believer personally to the Lord. In the Gospel, such find not Christian doctrine only, but Christ Himself.

impatience,⁶ did really follow Israel; and, secondly, that this constant miracle was visibly to them what Christ is spiritually to ourselves. All ate and drank of the miraculous supply. All now, also, who are nominally Christians do, by profession, live upon the Lord. But though man ate angels' meat, he did not emulate angelic duty; nor does an outward participation of the bread of God give life to any in whom the word has not been mixed with faith.⁷

Verse 5. "But with most of them⁸ God was not well pleased," etc. By faith God's people please Him, and by faith and patience they obtain His promise.⁹ But Israel, as a nation, had not faith in God. When, therefore, they were brought into the wilderness, their hearts turned back from Canaan into Egypt, because they knew God only by their natural senses, and failed to perceive (notwithstanding the abiding witness of the fire and the cloud) that He was really with them in that desert place. Because of unbelief they could not enter into His rest.¹ They were overthrown in the wilderness because they spake against Him there, forgetting the God who had formed them, and despising His pleasant land, because they disbelieved His words.² It is

⁶ Exod. xvii.; Numb. xx. 11-13.

⁷ It is usual to refer the apostle's comparison in these verses to the Supper of the Lord. Without denying absolutely such reference, I would say that it is at best remote and doubtful. What he here speaks of is *daily* meat and drink. His figure is a pattern of what the true believer finds continually, and lives on, in his crucified Redeemer. On the Scriptural doctrine of the Lord's Supper, as distinguished from the ecclesiastical fiction of a "sacrament," more will be said in the remarks on the following chapter.

⁸ Τοῖς πλείοσιν.

⁹ Heb. xi. 5, 6, vi. 12.

¹ Heb. iii. 19.

² Deut. xxxii. 18; Ps. cv. 24.

essential, however, to remember, when reviewing the story of Israel, that their destruction was the natural and just effect of the change which they had voluntarily made at Sinai from grace to law.³ Up to that time, though they had murmured and provoked, not a hair of their heads had perished. It is the law that worketh wrath.⁴ Thus Israel in the wilderness becomes a double type; first, of the true Church, which is not under law, but under grace; and, secondly, of the false profession, which, not being "of faith," is judged on the principle of law; for grace is powerless apart from faith.⁵ Accordingly he proceeds:

Verse 6. "Now these things were our examples," etc. Israel's history is a warning to the believer's conscience, and a prophetic figure to his spiritual understanding. For under the sun there is no new thing; as man has been he is, and will be to the end.⁶ But the believer is not numbered among men. The proper sphere of faith is not below the sun, but far above it, in the brightness of the risen life. And so it is written, "We who have believed are entering into rest;"⁷ our Forerunner having gone before to take possession for us of the blessings which we are called to inherit, while the witnessing Spirit already is the seal, to our faith, of an eternal redemption. Meanwhile, all who make an outward profession of the truth are passing through this world as through the wilderness, and Israel's behaviour and catastrophe are the warning voice of God to our hearts.⁸ Faith will observe that warning, unbelief will not. Bold

³ Exodus xix. ⁴ Rom. iv. 15. ⁵ Rom. iv. 16; Gal. v. 2, 3.

⁶ Ecclesiastes i. 9. ⁷ Heb. iv. 3. ⁸ Heb. iii. 7-13.

when it should tremble, and fearful when it should confide, baptized but unregenerate nature takes without hesitation the name and profession of a pilgrim of salvation, while its heart and all its present interests are entirely in the world. Forgetting that the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power, it stays itself on lifeless ordinances, and can give no valid reason of its hope.⁹

Looking more closely at the snares of destruction which swallowed up the former generation, we find their ruin to have been due in every instance to practical unbelief, associated with its unfailing companion—carnal wilfulness. The apostle selects his instances in such a manner as to present to our view not only the sins which chiefly threaten the believer's peace, and against which he should be constantly upon his guard, but the leading features also which, if Christian profession followed the example of Israel's unbelief, that apostasy would be found to exhibit. There is, first, a general warning against "evil things." And if it be asked, What are these evil things? the reply of the Spirit will surely be, Whatever faith does not seek and find in Christ; for godliness has promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.¹ Now faith, which is the root of godliness, waits for its blessings on the living God, and is content with what He gives. But as Israel lusted after the fleshpots of Egypt, because their soul was "dried away" instead of nourished by the food of God's providing, so are there those who, while professing Christ, suppose that godliness is worldly gain, who starve upon the food of God, and

⁹ 1 Peter iii. 15.

¹ 1 Tim. iv. 8.

put their souls to an eternal hazard by persisting in their lust of "other things."² In the day when great Babylon is judged, the things which she preferred to Christ will be a bitter augmentation of her woe.³

Verse 7. "Neither be ye idolaters," etc. The language of this verse is striking. *Some* only were idolaters, but "the people" were drawn after their example. On turning to the narrative in Exodus xxxii., we find that "the people gathered themselves together," etc., the evident meaning of which is, that at the instigation of some, who had brought in their hearts the gods of Egypt into the wilderness,⁴ the multitude were set upon this mischief. The sin became national when Aaron recognized the calf in his official character as Jehovah's priest, and from that event the Spirit of God has accordingly dated the national apostasy;⁵ but the immediate judgment fell on the three thousand, who, it may be presumed, were the "some" here mentioned by the apostle. If the true character of this idolatry be examined, its essence will be found to consist, not in a formal renunciation of the living God, but in a substitution of human inventions for the one divinely-chosen mediator. The people who had been "baptized unto Moses" now asked for other "gods who should go before them." They had lost Moses, because Moses was with God, whither, through want of faith, their hearts could not follow him, though it was for their sakes that he was hidden from their eyes. The whole transaction is of the deepest and most solemn interest; less on its own account, than as a figure of

² Matt. xiii. 22; 1 Tim. vi. 5, 9, 10; Matt. xvi. 25, 26.

³ Rev. xviii. ⁴ Ezek. xx. 8, 9. ⁵ Acts vii. 42; Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12.

that which has long since come to pass, and is now clearly visible to every spiritual eye.

It was expedient for His own that Jesus should go away. For their sakes He has sanctified Himself and gone on high.⁶ His absence with the Father, which is the time of hopeful patience for those who, through grace, are both justified and sanctified by faith, has given also to the enemy his opportunity of corrupting and practically destroying, to a great extent, the true doctrine of the Gospel. Rome, with its abstract orthodoxy, and its practical substitution of many gods of human invention for the one Mediator between God and men, is the fearful counterpart of this early apostacy of Israel. And it is solemnly instructive to notice how the inspired narrative of their transgression is expressed in language which, in its literal acceptation, represents not the sin then present, but that which was to come. They ask for gods; and when the idol is unveiled, it is greeted with the plural acclamation: "These be thy gods, O Israel," etc. Yet the calf was *one*. The meaning of this is plain. The calf was but one form of that general lie against the Creator's glory which constitutes idolatry. The language, therefore, of its blinded worshippers expressed the true spirit of their creed. Error is multiform, but truth is single in its perfectness. If Christ the Lord be not seen by faith in His *exclusive* mediatorial place and glory, His mother after the flesh⁷ is but the first of a countless

⁶ John xvi. 7; xvii. 19.

⁷ The true glory of the "blessed among women" is obscured exactly in proportion to the degree of false honour to which her name is raised by her idolatrous votaries. The present generation has witnessed the sealing of the sum of sacerdotal folly and auda-

host of lying divinities, in the recognition of which false devotion shuts out from its view the true God and eternal life.*

But if Rome, with its open idolatries, presents the most obvious and striking fulfilment of this evil type, it would be but a shallow and self-flattering conclusion to infer that the spirit of idolatry is possessed of no other shrine in Christendom. The apostle's warning points to each and every form of ecclesiastical corruption, by means of which the hearts of men are drawn off from an immediate dependence, by faith, upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence it embraces traditional human teachings, and all ordinances of religion which do not carry with them the positive authority of God. Nay, an evangelical preacher may himself become a "golden calf," if accepted by his followers as a final oracle of God. Of the idolatry of mammon it is needless to speak here specifically, as it does not fall properly under this point of the apostle's teaching; but it may be affirmed generally, that wherever worship is offered to God in the name of Jesus Christ, otherwise than

city, by the addition of the fable of the "immaculate conception" to the creed of what claims to be the catholic and apostolic Church. Of this, and all other extra-scriptural doctrines and traditions of men, it may be said, in the words of the same apostle, in chap. xi. 16, "We have no such custom, neither the *Churches of God*."

* 1 John v. 20, 21. No Christian reader will, I hope, infer from this that I retort upon the Papal system its own anathema, and declare salvation to be a thing impossible within the Romish "Church." Many a sinner saved by grace, and secretly sustained upon the living bread, is assuredly to be found among her idolatrous crowds. What is affirmed in the text is, that Romish doctrine is a specious lie against Christ's glory, and subversive of the faith of God's elect. Yet God has His remnant even there, no less than in other systems of more scriptural pretension.

in the power of the one Spirit, and by those who are themselves through faith alive to God, the evil here depicted has its repeated illustration.⁹

Verse 8. "Neither let us commit fornication," etc. The close connection subsisting between idolatry and the sin here mentioned is evident from the narrative to which reference is made.¹ With respect to the literal transgression, it is needless to repeat what has been said already in an earlier chapter.² Of its spiritual significance, the scriptures of the prophets offer everywhere the amplest illustration; while with special reference to Christendom, it is enough to say that this charge forms the chief distinctive condemnation of her who is, by singular pre-eminence in wickedness, "the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth."³

Verse 9. "Neither let us tempt the Lord,"⁴ etc. For forty years that generation tempted God. But the particular examples noted in the books of Moses occurred at the outset and the close of Israel's wilderness experience;⁵ and it is to the last of these that the apostle here refers. And considering that this event in Israel's history is the chosen metaphor of gospel grace,⁶ its citation here as a prophetic warning to the Church is a fact of sad and terrible

⁹ With the latter part of this verse we may compare the words of the same witness, when closing his mournful prophetic description of the last and most difficult times of the existing dispensation. Nominal Christians are there characterized as "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." (2 Tim. iii. 1-5.)

¹ Num. xxv.

² Chap. vi.

³ Rev. xvii.

⁴ *Κύριον* is preferred to *Χριστόν* by all the better MSS.

⁵ Ex. xvii.; Num. xxi. 4, *seq.*

⁶ John iii. 14, 15.

significance. For it cannot but remind us of those times which, if not already come, are assuredly at hand, when, like the Israelites who on the very borders of the land turned fretfully away from the bread which had sustained them to that hour, so also they who have long lived professedly upon God's gospel will turn quite away from it, no longer enduring sound doctrine, but after their own lusts heaping to themselves teachers, having itching ears.⁷ Upon such the serpent, which seemed dead at the beginning of their course, shall come again with fatal and destructive power at the end. Iniquity will be the final ruin of all those who, after having for a while escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust, turn back at last with eagerness to that which they had always loved, and from which, though separated for a season by the force of conscience, they had been never willingly and heartily estranged.⁸

Verse 10. "Neither murmur ye," etc. The present allusion seems to be to the insurrection of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, against both Moses and Aaron, as recorded in Numbers xvi. Murmuring had been the people's habit from the first. Three days of wilderness experience sufficed to change their psalm of triumph to reproachful complainings against the arm of their deliverance.⁹ But the spirit of rebellious discontent attained its climax on the occasion above mentioned; and as it is the last in the sad series of typical delinquencies here cited by the apostle, so is it recorded by a separate witness as a figure of the closing and decisive provocation which is to bring in upon the "children of dis-

⁷ 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4.

⁸ 2 Peter ii.

⁹ Exod. xv. 24.

obedience" the long deferred infliction of the wrath to come. Long inured to the "way of Cain," who served his own will, and loved to commemorate his own dishonoured name, and accustomed, like Balaam, to make traffic of God's truth, they will "*perish* in the gainsaying of Core."¹ When *the* Antichrist appears, who takes falsely all Christ's honours to himself, the end will come.²

Verse 11. "Now these things happened unto them," etc. The judgments which befell the natural Israel are recorded by the Spirit as a warning safeguard of the seed of God. And here we must bear carefully in mind the essential difference between the condition of Israel, as under law, and the security of the Church of God's elect, as under grace. Sin shall not have dominion over such.³ Iniquity, under every form, should be far from the path of those who name the name of Christ. But God has provided for us not as we *ought* to be, but as we *are*. And so it is written, "If any one sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins."⁴ The record of the punishments inflicted on the Israelites as a people under law is to us a part of that "word of grace" which is able to build us up, and give us an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in Christ.⁵ They were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages⁶ are come. This last expression should be attentively considered.

As Christ is personally the limit and measure of

¹ Jude 11, 16.

² 1 John ii. 18.

³ Rom. vi. 14.

⁴ 1 John ii. 1, 2.

⁵ Acts xx. 32, xxvi. 18.

⁶ τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων. With this may be compared the συντελεία τῶν αἰώνων of Heb. ix. 26.

all truth, so the Church, which is His body, can have no successor. Before the incarnation of the Word, the successive ages of appointed time were preparatory. Eden, the world before the flood, the times of Noah and his descendants until the call of Abram—the patriarchal times—the legal and prophetic epochs, and, finally, the days of John the Baptist, are periods in the long day of natural probation. “The kingdom of God” was preached when God Himself became its preacher, though in the strange similitude of sinful flesh.⁷ “The fulness of time” was come, when God sent forth His Son. Each earlier age had borne its witness to the state of man as under sin; but the crucifixion of the Lord was the filling to its measure of human ignorance and guilt, while His resurrection was the open condemnation of the world which had rejected Him. But where man ends, God also begins in the perfect revelation of His love. The definitive and public declaration, by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, that sin is the proved state of the world, and judgment its natural inheritance,⁸ is accompanied by the proclamation of free and absolute *grace*; Divine righteousness being bestowed unconditionally upon all who, by the quickening power of that Spirit, are made willing to receive it. Thus “the beginning of the Gospel”⁹ coincides, historically as well as morally, with “the ends of the ages.” It is, as he elsewhere says, “in these last days” that God hath spoken unto us by His Son.¹

⁷ Mark i. 14, 15; Gal. iv. 4. ⁸ Eph. ii. 3; John xvi. 9–11.

⁹ Phil. iv. 15.

¹ Heb. i. 1. The reader will find more on this subject in the short essay on the dispensations, prefixed to the *Notes on the Hebrews*, second edition.

From the new era of the Lord's resurrection, time has been traced onwards by the Spirit; first, indefinitely through the present dispensation of long-suffering grace; then, by a positive measure, to the ending of the kingdom presently to be revealed, and thenceforward to eternity, through those "ages to come," in which the exceeding riches of the grace of God are to be shewn in His never-ending kindness to His heritage through Jesus Christ.² In preparation for those future ages, He has already placed His Church in heaven, in her Head. Meanwhile, the believer occupies a position which makes him, until the arrival of that "grace which is to be brought to us at the appearing of Jesus Christ,"³ a witness both to the finishing in judgment of the evil day of man, and the coming introduction of the day of God. Hence the force of the apostle's warning. They who by their calling are of heaven ought not to walk as dwellers upon earth. Egypt and its bondage are behind us. Canaan is our own, in Christ. We that believe do enter into rest. Such is the language of true faith, which finds the world to be the same waste, howling wilderness that it was to Him who found in it no place to lay His head.

Verse 12. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth," etc. A warning addressed directly to the natural self-reliance of our hearts. Faith accepts it gratefully, because true faith is never separate from self-knowledge, and feels therefore the need of those "reproofs of instruction which are the way of life,"⁴ and the divinely-appointed antidotes to the deceitfulness of sin. But in truth faith does not reckon in

² Eph. i. 18, ii. 7.

³ 1 Peter i. 13.

⁴ Prov. vi. 23.

this fashion ; for it owns no standing but in Christ. It is when habit practically takes the place of faith that these admonitions tell with most effect. We may compare with this verse the apostle's earlier words in chap. iii. 18. A tone of self-complacent security is of all things the most dangerous to the believer, a truth of which these Corinthians are a notable example. But they are warned, that what they tampered with carelessly, or in the spirit of haughty self-confidence, would ensnare them if they did not watch. "Reigning as kings" is often a prelude to a sad and humiliating bondage.⁵ Knowledge such as the apostle here imparts will keep faith steady, and make it fruitful in good works. For lack of it the most exulting saint may change into a fool.⁶

Verse 13. "There hath no temptation taken you," etc. As a prelude to the special exhortation which occupies the remainder of this chapter, we have now a general declaration ; first, of the limits of temptation ; and, secondly, of the faithfulness of God, as the ready Deliverer of those who in their trials look to Him. The *measure* of temptation is the human conscience. What man ought not to do he is through his lusts solicited to do by Satan, who works, as the tempter, upon our natural dispositions. The *end* of temptation is apostasy from God ; its means are almost infinite. God, who tempteth no man,⁷ is yet the trier of His children's hearts, and turns the active malice of the adversary to their eventual gain. What the apostle is here plainly teaching is, that there exists in every saint a measure of ability

⁵ *Conf.* 2 Cor. xi. 20.

⁶ Gal. iii. 1, *seq.*

⁷ James i. 13, 14.

to resist temptation, and that when that measure is exceeded an escape is made.⁸ The fear of God, and that alone, is the certain preservative from temptation under all its forms. His presence is His children's hiding-place; nor will He suffer darkness to invade His light.⁹ With God, temptations may be borne and turned to joy.¹ If not abiding under His shadow, our own strength is as a straw against the tempter's power.²

Verse 14. "Wherefore, my dearly beloved," etc. The special sin and danger to which these saints at Corinth were peculiarly exposed, is now taken up by the apostle as a subject of direct and explicit warning. Of idols, and their intrinsic vanity, he had already spoken in chap. viii. But an idol, though itself a nonentity, is a visible expression of the deadliest of evils. Idolatry, or the habit of false worship, is to be shunned as the chief snare of the tempter. Effectual refuge from its power is to be found only in the service of the living God. In order therefore to guard his brethren the more surely against this all-besetting danger, he turns at once to the chief distinctive act of Christian worship, that by duly meditating on their position and sanctity as partakers of Christ, they might shrink with a readier abhorrence from any fellowship with the way of darkness.

Verse 15. "I speak as unto wise men," etc.

⁸ The superintending rule of God, when Satan is the active instrument of His will, is strongly expressed in the latter part of this verse. In this sense, it is He who *makes* both the temptation and the way of escape.

⁹ Ps. xci.

¹ James i. 2.

² 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

There is, perhaps, a tinge of irony in these words;³ but if so, it soon disappears, as he passes into the subject of the following verses. He is here summoning his brethren to an exercise of that faculty of spiritual judgment which really exists (however weakened and impeded by the intertwinings of natural vanity and self-conceit, as in the case of some at Corinth) in every genuine believer, and thus to determine for themselves how far any tampering with idolatry was morally compatible with true spiritual worship.⁴

Verses 16, 17. "The cup of blessing which we bless," etc. The Lord's Supper is here introduced, as the distinctive rite of Christianity, in comparison with the sacrificial feasts, both of Israel after the flesh, and of the idolatrous Gentiles. The apostle first makes mention of the cup,⁵ most probably because it was when taking into His hands the cup of thanksgiving, which closed the Paschal supper, that the Lord began the institution of His own ever

³ *Ante*, chap. iv. 10.

⁴ The language of this verse is noticeable also from its incidental bearing on the question as to the fitting age for admitting young Christians to the table of the Lord. In God's house there is a gradation, analagous to what exists in our own. Now, speaking naturally, babes are truly of the family, but hardly of the table. The Lord's table is the place of judgment, because it is the place of divine communion in the highest sense. But judgment is for men of full age. Under the law, Levitical service began only at the age of early manhood. Is this a hint to be followed in the present case? The development of the spiritual understanding, like that of the natural, is various and unequal, and respect should, doubtless, be had to that. But it would be a questionable privilege to place a child in a position where his action might exceed his knowledge in the handling of holy things.

⁵ In chap. xi., where he is declaring formally the order of the Supper, it is otherwise.

blessed feast of remembrance. The leading idea in the passage is that of common participation, and consequent identity of state and relation, on the part of the communicants. The cup is the *communion* of the blood of Christ. *All* bless as well as drink. The bread which is broken is broken by and for *us*. *We* break as well as taste. It is the communion of the body of Christ. The result is then stated: "We being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."⁶ The language here employed by the Spirit is not figurative, but mystical; that is, it is not a metaphorical description of a fact, in its nature intelligible, but the declaration of a mystic truth which faith receives, but which is quite inaccessible to the understanding. By participating (through faith) in the one true Bread, we become inseparably joined to Him. He is in us, as well as we in Him. Hence the boldness of the apostle's expression, "We are one body," ourselves also an offering to God, while partaking, as His accepted worshippers, in the true sacrifice of His altar. And this last idea seems to form the moral connection with what immediately follows.

Verse 18. "Behold, Israel after the flesh," etc. Priests and worshippers were alike sharers with God's altar, though in different measures and degrees. The particular allusion, however, is to the

⁶ Verse 17 has been rendered in various ways, but the A.V. seems to give, as clearly as any, the true drift of the apostle's teaching. Meyer's version (quoted disapprovingly by Alford) of the closing words, *ἐκ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἁποῦ μετέχομεν*—we all, "by means of that one bread, partake," *i.e.*, in the one body, seems not unworthy of attention on syntactical grounds.

peace-offering as described in Lev. iii.⁷ By complying with the ordinance, those worshippers who offered acceptably and in faith, received through the altar the blessing of communion with the God whom they worshipped. What His fire had tasted, they ate in the secure enjoyment of His peace. The richer and vital parts of the sacrifice were His, the remainder was the portion of His priests and worshippers: a precious foreshadowing of that more perfect fellowship which is, by the one Spirit, now established between the Father and the true worshippers in the one acceptable offering of Christ. The carnal ordinance put the Israelite in communion with the *altar*, not necessarily with God, who is known by faith only. So also now, it is possible for the natural man to take ostensibly and outwardly the meat which can nourish truly those only who are themselves "of God."

Verses 19–21. "What say I then? that the idol is any thing?" etc. He had already, with all who have knowledge, ignored contemptuously both idols and their offerings. Nor does he now recall his words. But he will let us also know what sort of power it is that animates, and secretly sustains, these intrinsically empty vanities. Human souls and bodies were defiled by bowing in adoration to something which was not God—which in itself was "nothing in the world." But "nothing" cannot move men's souls. There is a *power* at work, and that of universal operation and activity. "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice," says the apostle, "they sacrifice to *devils*, not to God."

⁷ *Conf.* also Lev. vii.

God is the Author as well as Object of all true worship; Satan, of what is false. As truth when it reveals itself commands the homage of its worshippers, so error, which works only to discredit truth, leads men in willing bondage through its mazes, alluring their eyes and imaginations with such phantoms of delusion as tell most effectually on the God-seeking yet truth-rejecting soul of man. For a god is a necessity to man. But fallen man can neither love nor seek the *righteous* God. Hence idolatry, in its spirit and essence, is but a continuance of that evil work by which the serpent first drew off the allegiance of the creature from the Creator. We may notice here also the distinct recognition by the apostle of a plurality of evil beings, who act as the deceivers and betrayers of mankind. He does not say that the Gentiles offer to *the* devil, but to devils. If Satan was alone in his original transgression,⁸ he did not long remain so. Angels also sinned, and fallen humanity lies within the tether of those chains of darkness by which they are retained until the day of judgment.⁹ To our apprehension, they enjoy a boundless range, though kept within the limits of divine appointment. Wherever man is, Satan and his angels are. Wherever man is any other than a worshipper of God, he is the hoodwinked and deluded slave of the "rulers of the darkness of this world."¹

We need not wonder, then, at the energy of the apostle's language. He would not that they who had been called by grace into the fellowship of God's Son, should have fellowship also with devils.

⁸ 1 John iii. 8.

⁹ 2 Peter ii. 4.

¹ Eph. vi. 12.

We have here the practice already noticed in a former chapter,² set in a new and altogether different light. Christian liberty, indeed, is always free; but let God's saints beware. That wicked one will surely "touch them,"³ if they place themselves heedlessly within his reach. To assist at an idolatrous feast, would be a thing morally incompatible with a true and intelligent participation of the "table of the Lord."⁴ Truth is jealous of its rivals, though destined in the end to vanquish and destroy them. Darkness and light have no communion. The position of a Christian, as a worshipper of God in the Spirit, is one which, if rightly maintained, must be in all respects a contrast to that which is occupied by the men of this world. While, therefore, liberty is left untouched, the apostle warns thus emphatically the careless, though sincere, believer against any voluntary intermeddling with the customs of the heathen. When associated with them we are no longer upon holy ground. Their gods will be also our plagues, if we give, or seem to give, to them in any wise the honour which they falsely claim.

Verse 22. "Do we provoke the Lord to anger?" etc. Strange questions to be put to God's elect! Yet needful, and in strict keeping with the parallel which is maintained throughout the chapter. The fathers had provoked Jehovah by their vanities;⁵ and by

² Chap. viii. 10.

³ 1 John v. 18. Let those of God's true children who may feel in themselves any disposition to tamper with modern "spiritualism" remember this.

⁴ This expression, so familiar now to every Christian ear, and often, alas! such an apple of discord among the divided brethren of Christ, occurs here only in the apostolic writings.

⁵ Deut. xxxii. 21; Jer. viii. 19.

touching the unclean thing, these saints at Corinth were in danger of a similar defilement. And Jehovah does not change. His new name, and his ever blessed victory of grace, while they comfort and preserve for ever them that trust in Him, will give no shelter to those whose hearts are mad upon their idols. The same almighty power, which presents His Church in glory to the Father, as the chosen firstfruits of His creatures, will cast down Babylon with ruin irremediable.⁶ Meanwhile, he is the Judge of His own house, and walks among the candlesticks with eyes of fire.⁷

Verses 23, 24. "All things are lawful,⁸ but all are not expedient," etc. The first of these verses makes a concession, the second states a rule. The broad declaration of liberty which he had once before made in his own person,⁹ he now repeats in general terms; but this time with reference less to the danger to which a want of circumspection might expose the unwary Christian, than to the mischievous social effects of the unseasonable assertion of a liberty which set ordinary ideas and prejudices at defiance. All things do not *edify*. But, as he proceeds to say, to think of others rather than ourselves is the true rule of conduct in the Church of God. Its progress and stability as God's building morally depend on this. Our acts are never, in this sense, indifferent; good or evil must result from them to others. If our walk does not edify, it will most surely damage our fellow-saints. We are a snare instead of com-

⁶ Rev. xviii. 8.

⁷ Rev. ii. 15-23.

⁸ The words, "To me," repeated also in the next clause, are undoubtedly spurious.

⁹ Chap. vi. 12.

fort to each other, unless personally walking in the light of God. The principle here briefly intimated is expanded fully in chap. xii., where the doctrine of Church membership, with its resulting privileges and duties, is stated by the apostle expressly and at large.

Verses 25, 26. "Whatsoever is sold in the shambles eat," etc. Though it is incumbent on all who love God to love their brethren also, and to seek therefore to remove all occasion of stumbling from their path, the liberty of Christ is to be freely exercised in the ordinary walk of life. The Christian is not to go out of his way to find difficulties. No questions should be asked for conscience' sake. Let him take the world as he finds it, and use its things in thankfulness to Him whose they really are, remembering and maintaining that the earth and its fulness are the Lord's. Nor can the evil ends to which His bounties may be turned by men invalidate the title of His saints to the free enjoyment of whatever He has made.

Verses 27, 28. "If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast," etc. The dainties of him that hath an evil eye are not to be desired by the righteous.¹ And the world's eye is evil, under all disguises, toward the children of light. If Jesus sat at meat in the house of an unbeliever, He was *watched*; nor can His disciples, who desire to walk godly, be exempted from the like unfriendly gaze. While, therefore, the fullest liberty of intercourse is conceded to the Christian who desires to remain on terms of social intimacy with his unbelieving neigh-

¹ Prov. xxiii. 6, 7.

hours, he is plainly warned that his doing so is a voluntary exposure of himself to danger. A good motive or a bad might induce him to receive an unbeliever's courtesies, and according to his motive would be the measure of his risk. When in such company he is to act still as becomes his calling. He is a Christian, and a saint of God, *wherever he is found*. Let him, then, keep this well in his remembrance. If any one calls his attention to an idol-offering,² he is to refuse it, as a testimony to the truth. For the idol is a lie. The earth is the *Lord's*, and the fulness thereof.³ What is in such a case to be considered is the conscience, not of the believer, but of the idolater. His false worship is to be boldly disowned, in the hope of convincing his soul of its true condition in the sight of that God who made both him and the vanities which he adores. This is plain from what follows.

Verses 29, 30. "Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other," etc. Besides a repeated vindication of the liberty of grace, there is implied in these verses a fresh dissuasive from such incongruous association. A believer should not lightly put himself

² More exactly, "a sacred offering," *ιερόθυτον* being the reading of *Cod. Sin.* with most of the better MSS. There is a lasting significance in the apostle's caution. The *spirit* of idolatry is as rife now as then, its forms only being changed. If the world courts Christians at any time, it is in the hope of inducing them to sanction its *religion*. Men's hatred to the cross is on the very ground that it disallows and treats as idolatry whatever is not of faith. The world has no true "holy things." The Spirit's estimate of all such will-worship is to be found in Isaiah lxvi. 3.

³ The last clause of v. 28 is wanting in the best MSS. But if considered redundant, in a critical sense, it is scarcely so in meaning, though no doubt an attentive reader would easily supply it from the context.

in a position where he would be in danger either of dulling his own conscience through complicity with evil—partaking with sinners on their own terms⁴—or of causing offence, by acting in such a manner as to do violence to the habits and prejudices of those with whom he is thus voluntarily associating. He will be judged by his unbelieving entertainer in any case; for inconsistency, if he complies; for obstinate bigotry, if he declines.

Verse 31. “Whether therefore ye eat,” etc. A summary of godly life and practice. Themselves received of Christ, in saving grace, to the glory of God, His followers have no other duty but to strive to keep His way. Now His perfection was to glorify the Father; not by self-assertion, but by self-renunciation, His own glory as the Son of man being the patient fulfilment of the will of Him that sent Him. His example is the true measure of His people’s way; and “he that saith he abideth in Him ought also to walk, even as He walked.”⁵

Verse 32. “Give none offence,” etc. The three-fold distinction here stated should be carefully remembered and observed. The Jew, by nature, is not so widely sundered from the Gentile, as is the Church of God from both. The former two comprise the sum total of mankind, considered as dwellers upon earth. The last consists of those only who, through death, have entered into life by faith in the crucified and risen Son of God. Nor are these distinctions only for the present age. In that which is to come they will again appear, though

⁴ Compare, as to the spirit of the apostle’s warning, Ps. l. 18.

⁵ 1 John ii. 6; 1 Peter ii. 21.

under widely different conditions. The Jew will then no longer be a dishonoured wanderer, and by-word among men, but settled in the peace and glory of Immanuel's land. The Gentiles, who now tolerate or persecute them, according to their humour, and sometimes flatter them for objects of self-interest, will in that day own them as their masters, while they taste the blessings of their overflowing cup. The Church of God, which now is His suffering witness upon earth, will then be with God, even as He now, by His Spirit, is with her; abiding in that rest of glory which is now her blessed hope, and confessed in that day according to the now derided truth of her high calling.⁶

The believer, then, should learn to shape his walk according to his knowledge. Let him demean himself toward the Jew as toward one of that nation who, though now enemies for the Gospel's sake, are, as touching the election, beloved for the fathers' sakes.⁷ Let him tenderly respect their blindness, soon to be removed by the appearing, in consummated mercy, of Him who for a while inflicted it in judgment; and let him take good heed that nothing is done, by one who says that Jesus is Jehovah, which might seem to justify a natural Israelite in continuing to blaspheme that worthy Name. Let him respect also the darkened conscience of the Gentile, and seek, by godly well-doing, both to silence the complainings of their ignorance, and to move them to give God glory in this day of gracious visitation.⁸ Lastly, let each true child of God con-

⁶ 2 Thess. i. 10; John xvii. 23.

⁷ Rom. xi. 28.

⁸ 1 Peter ii. 12.

sider what manner of behaviour is suited to His house. It is a solemn thought, that none but a Christian (nominally at least) can offend a Christian. The world's hostility is not offence, but arises simply from the nature of things. Offences come when Christians (whether true or false) so act under their new name, as to make their conduct seem a contradiction of the Master's words.

The chapter closes with a recurrence to himself, and his own practice, as their example in the Lord. His habit was to remember, not the number or extent of his powers and privileges as an apostle, but that, as a partaker of Christ, he was in the midst of those who were unsaved. To win, therefore, for his message a willing and believing ear was the aim which regulated all his conduct among men. While he occupied for God, he was himself God's care; and he would have those who accept his doctrine imitate his ways also in Christ.⁹

⁹ *Ante*, chap. iv. 17.

CHAPTER XI.

THE opening verse of this chapter might well have been allowed to stand as a close to the preceding one. It would, however, be too much to say that in its present position it is out of place. No fitter preface could be found for the fresh division of the epistle on which we are about to enter; in which the apostle, no longer dealing now with general questions, reviews with searching eye the internal order and condition of the Church which he is addressing. As usual, he begins by commending what he can.

Verse 2. "Now I praise you, brethren," etc. Amid their manifold deficiencies and practical irregularities, they had remembered Paul's words in all that he had specifically enjoined. What he delivered to them they had kept and observed, though, as the sequel shows, not without a notable faultiness in the manner and spirit of their observance. Disorders of a serious kind had arisen, not from neglect of the positive directions which they had received, but from a too scanty measure of that which is the prime element of all true order in the house of God, a remembrance, namely, of His very presence with His saints. Accordingly, after this brief but hearty expression of general approbation, he applies

himself at once to the task of needful correction and reproof.

Verse 3. "But I would have you to know that the head of every man is Christ." The false position assumed by women in the Church is the first of the unseemly anomalies then prevalent among them, to which he calls their attention. And it is evident that this form of disorder was, like most of the others mentioned in this epistle, an effect of the perverted notions of Christian liberty which then characterized so distinctly the Corinthian saints. Having learnt from the apostle himself that distinctions of sex are unknown in the new creation, and that in Christ believers are already new, there were some among them who caught eagerly at the fallacious conclusion, that the order of nature need no longer be observed; that an equality which subsisted in Christ should find its just expression also in Christians; that women therefore might, without reproach or injury to their true character, forsake the place which nature had assigned them, and, putting zeal for modesty, might boldly covet notoriety as public guides and teachers in the Church. It was an error similar in its principle to that which led some to "reign as kings," instead of occupying for the Lord. They thought too exclusively of what they were *in Christ*, and not enough of what Christ should have been in *them*. But His grace works, not to the overthrow of natural distinctions, but by clothing the as yet unaltered forms and relationships of nature with the moral beauty of His own comeliness. A Christian woman is a woman brought to *God*; to walk, therefore, in His

light, according to the original conditions of her form and place.

The tone in which he deals with this question is not that of vehement expostulation, such as is usual with him when rebuking a moral evil, or chiding a blameworthy ignorance, but of calm and kindly instruction; for the error, though grave, was one of inexperience rather than of wilfulness. Nor does he at once attack the positive scandal of female teaching in the Church, but, reserving his authoritative prohibition of this practice till he comes to speak generally of public ministrations,¹ he begins by distinctly setting forth the order of the new creation, of which Christ, and not Adam, is the head.

Under the sun, the new creation is manifested through the unaltered pattern of the old. Above it, there is neither male nor female, and no longer "flesh and blood." There is in this passage a blending of the old and new, some statements in the apostle's category being of permanent, and some of only temporal force. God will for ever be the Head of Christ; man in this body only is the head of woman; while in the glory ready to be revealed Christ is the head, not specifically of the man, but generally of the Church, which is His body and His bride. *Headship* should not be confounded with *lordship*. Christ is Lord of all, of the dead as of the living. He is the Head of the believing man, because Himself the true Adam, the image and glory of God—the pattern, therefore, and original of all who stand in Him by faith. Now "a woman in

¹ Chap. xiv. 34, 35.

Christ" is a phrase unknown to the Spirit, though grace saves all alike. But there are women in the Church, which is the body of Christ, and the place wherein God's honour dwells. Being there, she owns an immediate subjection to the man, though both are heirs together of the grace of life. Lastly, the Head of Christ is God. Relatively to the Father, He is the eternal Son, co-equal in Godhead, but secondary in relation. As incarnate, and so "made of a woman," He was still the "only begotten of the Father," and therefore solitary in His perfectness, because "separate from sinners." As alive from the dead, He declares Himself to be "the beginning of the creation of God," thus filling the measure of pre-eminence by placing Himself, in His now abiding human form, at the head of that creation which He had first made and afterwards redeemed. As such, He is distinctively the *Christ*, or anointed One. But His honour and dignity proceed not from Himself, though it is His personal excellency that constitutes His title to pre-eminence. The form which He now wears, and will for ever wear, is a confession of One greater than Himself, not in natural relation only, but specifically as superior in name and place. The Head of Christ is *God*, who raised Him from the dead, and gave Him glory.²

Thus the primal relations of man and woman remain unaltered by redemption, until the power of the Lord is finally put forth to change both at once into His own image.³ To disregard, therefore, these relations, would be to make the Church of God a scandal to the natural sense of what is comely.

² 1 Peter i. 21.

³ Phil. iii. 21.

Respect should rather be had even to the outward indications of the difference which God had made from the beginning. He proceeds accordingly to deal methodically with the question of attire.

Verses 4-7. "Every man praying or prophesying," etc. Let us first notice that the apostle's question here is with praying or prophesying absolutely, as acts of spiritual worship and service, but with no necessary reference to time or place. That a woman should speak at all, in an open assembly of God's worshippers, is a thing afterwards expressly forbidden by the apostle. God's daughters may prophesy as well as pray, within the sphere of privacy which divine wisdom has assigned to them;⁴ but in every public place it has been willed that *men* only pray or otherwise speak audibly before the Church.⁵

With respect to the immediate topic of covering or uncovering the head, the drift of the passage seems to be as follows: God's worshippers, while in the flesh, should present themselves before Him according to the truth of their original creation. In a state of innocence, when their unclothed nature was their comeliness, the woman had her natural veil. The fall did not alter their relative position, but judicially confirmed it; the woman, as the first transgressor, being set more emphatically in the subject place.⁶ Dominion was now added to companionship, a hopeful type of the relation in which the Lord would one day stand toward the Church of His redemption. The woman's veil stands therefore as a token of this divinely imposed subjection. And

⁴ Acts xviii. 26, xxi. 9. ⁵ Τοὺς ἄνδρας. 1 Tim. ii. 8.

⁶ Gen. iii. 16.

now that grace has clothed them both with a new and unfading comeliness in Christ, their relative condition still remains. They worship as ransomed *sinner*s, and therefore, while their outward form remains unchanged, the woman's veil is not a badge of her subjection merely, but also her ornament and praise; for meekness is beauty in the sight of God, and praise is for those who tarry willingly in their appointed place. The man, as his Maker's image, ought to have his face unveiled, since in Christ he stands with full acceptance in His sight. He is on earth what His exalted Head is in the immediate presence of God. Let the woman, as his partner in the grace of life, be so attired as to honour in his place her own immediate head. While abiding in her place, she is the glory of the man.

Verses 8-10. "For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man," etc. The large space devoted by the apostle to this subject implies both the moral value of this question in the sight of God, and the degree to which a false idea of spiritual liberty had tended to work confusion in the Church. He would have us remember and hold in honour the order of God's work. The man was neither of nor for the woman. Without him she would not have been, and of his substance and for him she had been taken, and was formed. There was, moreover, a further reason why a woman should wear outwardly a symbol of subjection. God's angels are unseen but interested witnesses of what is passing among men. Especially are they the watchful attendants of the heirs of salvation;⁷ and as the calling and election

⁷ Heb. i. 14.

of the Church is the subject of their wondering and delighted study,⁸ so are they also the attentive observers of the order and demeanour of God's children in His house. Angels are, both here and hereafter, connected closely with the Church of God. Already we are come, as partakers of the heavenly calling, to their innumerable company;⁹ and even as they are represented in the Apocalyptic vision as encircling the redeemed in heaven,¹ so are they God's appointed watchers of His chosen, while accomplishing their pilgrimage towards the promised rest.²

To understand fully the allusion here made by the apostle, we must call to mind the descriptive character which belongs to angels in the word of God.³ Perfect subordination, and a ready obedience to the voice of their Creator, distinguish the unfallen angels from those who fell, and kept not their first estate. Now the power which establishes true order in God's Church, is the same all-quickenings Spirit which garnished the heavens, and set the elect angels in their appointed spheres. These, then, whose very nature is order, ought not to see disorder in God's house. But such must be the effect on them of any practical derangement of the relation which they know to have been established from the first between the woman and the man.

Verses 11, 12. "Nevertheless, neither is the woman without the man, nor the man without the woman,⁴ in the Lord," etc. While maintaining the

⁸ Eph. iii. 10; 1 Peter i. 12.

⁹ Heb. xii. 22.

¹ Rev. v. 11.

² Gen. xxxii.; Ps. xxxiv.

³ Ps. ciii. 20.

⁴ That this is the true order of the clauses is probable from the concurring testimony of the best MSS.

difference of place, he asserts the community of standing in the Lord. If the woman was formed originally both of and for the man, the true Man must also be the woman's seed. Moreover, that mankind should continue on the earth is by the natural conception of the woman. Each is necessary to the other, and all of God, who frames the creature at His will, and for His praise.

Verses 13-15. "Judge in yourselves," etc. He is not content with alleging proofs from Scripture on this point; he will make God's people their own judges, and that upon the lower though important ground of natural sense. They might have inferred, from the natural distinction between man and woman, that to lift an unveiled face to her Creator was in the latter an unseemly thing. If long hair was given to her as a veil, to screen her from the gaze of men, much more should she assume a covering of face when seeking by her prayers to draw the eye of God immediately and especially upon herself.

Verse 16. "But if any one seem to be contentious," etc. In all that relates to the question of attire, the apostle, while earnestly exhorting his brethren, has delivered no command. He points out what is comely, and trusts, for the effect of his counsels, to their spiritual discernment and right feeling. But he knew that among the various characters of men there are some who are more easily commanded than advised, and who, in all cases where a doubt may be plausibly expressed, are more ready to debate than to follow in the way of peace. To such he directs his closing words on this needful, but by no means welcome, topic. He

would have them know, that in excepting to his counsel, they were condemning also the general practice, not only where himself or his fellows in the apostleship might be present, but in all companies which he knew and acknowledged as churches or assemblies of God. Nor in such assemblies was it usual to dispute the judgment of divinely inspired teachers, but rather to receive and follow it. Debate was not his own vocation, but to minister to willing ears the wisdom which he had himself received of God.⁵

Verse 17. "Now in this that I declare unto you, I praise you not," etc. The general expression of commendation with which he had prefaced his corrective words, when preparing to deal only with the minor irregularity already noticed, is changed to a tone of solemn and severe rebuke, as he turns

⁵ This verse has been variously interpreted, and I have given above what to me appears its genuine drift. The expression, "Churches of God," should not be overlooked. What is a Church of God? Surely an assembly of God's true worshippers, where God is acknowledged as both present, and ruling by His Spirit. The appeal which the apostle here makes to such assemblies is full of interest. They are contemplated as walking, not under extraneous surveillance, and following a single and positive statute, but as themselves full of vital energy, and capable of judging what is due to God, and suited to His presence. The end of apostolic ministry was so to build up Christians, that they should be able, when apostles were withdrawn, to keep the way of God through their traditions. By means of their inspired writings, the abiding Spirit will keep and nourish to the end the true children of the kingdom. There are *now*, therefore, as then, true "churches" or "assemblies of God." Not those which magnify themselves, and stand upon a doubtful pedigree, or by favour of the powers of this world, but wherever living saints are found united in a common subjection to the word of God, and owning one another in His love. What lives and is sustained by Him is *His*.

now to contemplate the grosser instance of disorder which remains to be considered, and which by its enormity casts into the shade all lesser derelictions, on the part of these Corinthians, of the traditions which they had received from him. Their coming together, which should have been for their mutual comfort and exhortation, and for their common strength and blessing, had become, through their lack of reverence and godly fear, an occasion of spiritual disaster and dishonour.

Verses 18, 19. "For first of all, when ye come together in the church," etc. Before adverting to the particular scandal of the desecration of the Lord's Supper, he repeats his earlier complaint of their intestine divisions, founded as it was upon an evil report, and testifies, by the partial credit which he gives to that report, the low opinion he had formed as to their⁶ real spiritual growth, notwithstanding the loftiness of their pretensions. Strange and sad as such rumours were, he had little difficulty in believing them, from their too obvious consistency with the gross moral evil which he had already reprehended, and summoned them to judge.⁷ Having stated at the beginning of his epistle the authority on which this evil reputation rested, he dwells no longer on it here, but prepares to deal at once with the flagrant mischief presently to be described.

But, as a prelude to this special censure, he first gives mournful and solemn utterance to that pre-science which he possessed, through the positive

⁶ Compare verses 2 and 23.

⁷ Chap. v.

teaching of the Spirit, of the apparent failure and practical disorganization of the Church of God, not at Corinth only, which the present dispensation was to witness in its progress, and of which the small beginnings were already visible to an enlightened eye. The divisions which even then existed within the still maintained external unity of the Church, must be followed in their season by the formation of distinct and mutually antagonistic parties.⁸ God would allow this in His wisdom, for the proof of such as clave in heart to Him. They who stuck to His testimonies would also keep His way, obeying the truth in the spirit of faith and love, and willingly subject to each other in His fear.⁹ Such as were contentious would separate themselves.¹ Self-love would lead restless and ambitious minds to make merchandise of souls, and of the truth which should have fed them. The apostle knew this; and because he saw, in the particular disorders which prevailed at Corinth, the working of that evil will which must eventually bear such fruits, he utters thus his sad

⁸ Such seems to be the true difference between *σχίσματα* and *αἵρεσις*, rendered respectively in A.V. "divisions" and "heresies." The former term declares a fact, the latter states the effect of a deliberate choice. The first may be described as an evil of a negative, the second of a positive, kind. Men cease to *cleave* to one another, and gradually fall asunder, through defect of divine love and the activity of individual will. They *reunite*, in sects or parties, by the operation of particular sympathies; and inasmuch as minds of a dominating power and capacity are too commonly tainted with a pride which frets against the positive restraints of Scripture, it has happened, not unnaturally, that the term "heresy," which properly means only "a selection," has come to be an universally accepted designation of false or anti-scriptural teaching.

⁹ Ps. cxix. 31, 32; Eph. v. 21.

¹ Jude 19.

prophetic warning as a safeguard to such as had an ear to hear.²

Verses 20, 21. "When ye come together, therefore, into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper," etc. Addressing himself now to the actual grievance, he begins by solemnly disowning their chief act of social worship. We may notice here, first, that it was an early habit of God's saints to come together to remember the Lord's death; secondly, that this was at first commemorated by a solid meal, which thence received the distinctive name of "the Lord's Supper;" and thirdly, that it was from this habit that the abuse arose which is so strongly depicted in the present passage. It is difficult for us, to whom the primitive customs of the Church are merely interesting traditions, to represent to ourselves so strange a scene of disorder as is here described. But as in so many other instances, the father's errors are the children's wisdom. It is to the riotous license which dishonoured the Corinthian Church, that we are instrumentally indebted for the precious teaching on the subject of the Lord's Supper, which occupies the latter verses of this chapter. Before, however, applying the remedy, the apostle lays more fully open the enormity of the evil. This is done in the following verse.

Verse 22. "What, have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?" etc. The first of the series of questions put in this verse, proves conclusively the fact that the supper to which reference is made was one in the ordinary sense. From what is stated in the verses following, it would seem that the apostle had

² Acts xx. 29, 30; 2 Peter ii. 3.

not left with them any special directions as to the time and manner of celebrating the Lord's death; trusting, perhaps, that a true spiritual feeling, such as in his presence seemed to animate them, would be sufficient to preserve them from any unseemliness or irregularity, when engaged in such an act. Full as he was of the constraining love of Christ, it could hardly have occurred to him as a possibility, that an assembly which had met for such an object should become a scene of bacchanalian disorder. But such is the flesh, when allowed its opportunity of handling the mysteries of God! And since they in their waywardness had thus made themselves naked to their shame, he does not spare them. Praise was impossible. They must bear the sharpness of the Spirit's censure, even as they had already brought upon themselves the burden of the Lord's temporal judgments, though, like Jacob, they had neither known the stroke nor laid it to their hearts.³

In the form of his expostulation he suggests the remedy for the abuse, which is afterwards repeated at the close of the chapter as a positive injunction. Let them eat and drink at home, for their own pleasure and the satisfying of their wants; using their liberty still under the eye of Him whose they are, and in whose name all things should be done.⁴ But that they should come abroad in that Name, and for the avowed purpose of doing it its highest honour, and then so act as if the Presence which they sought was further from them in their solemn meeting than when they were at home, might well both shock and anger the apostle's soul. The liberty

³ Verse 30. *Conf.* Isa. xlii. 25, and lvii. 17. ⁴ Col. iii. 17.

which they had thus abused must be their own no longer. No other hunger must henceforth be felt by those who sought the table of the Lord, save a longing for that in which faith only can participate, but which to the Christ-discerning soul is meat indeed.⁵

A double wrong had been committed by these thoughtless rioters. They had despised not God only, but His *Church*. This expression should be well considered, as it contains the very essence of the case. They had come together willingly indeed, but in entire unpreparedness of heart. *They* were assembled, but where was *the Lord*? It is a solemn thing to come together in that Name. An assembly of Christian worshippers is not a voluntary association simply. It consists visibly of men, but it has its name and true character from *God*, who is ever in the midst of His assembled people. By the Spirit He is present with His worshippers, and His people thus assembled are His dwelling. To behave, therefore, unseemly in His congregation is to affront Him in his house. Now it was this fundamental principle and sentiment that the saints at Corinth overlooked, or at least did not practically entertain. And as a further and but too natural consequence of this, a special wrong was done by them to their more indigent brethren in Christ. Forgetting God in the highest, they shamed His poor but precious saints by their selfish and disorderly proceeding. *His* house would have entertained them hospitably, but

⁵ The practice (not at Rome only) of taking the "Eucharist" fasting, is an example of the practical contrariety always found subsisting between factitious piety, how sincere soever in its purpose, and the true mind of the Spirit.

their assembly was, while such a spirit reigned, *their own*, not His. The charity of God was hindered, as it always is, by inconsiderate self-seeking. The Lord was not acknowledged as the present Master of the feast, and therefore all went wrong.⁶

Verses 23-25. "For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you," etc. To reproof he now proceeds to add instruction, conveying it, however, in terms which are themselves a fresh reproof. For he states again, with a formal and exact precision (for which *we* indeed cannot be too grateful), the institution of the supper as the Lord had personally communicated it to him, and he, as they should better have remembered, had delivered it to them. What we should first notice, in considering this passage, is the significant fact that it was from none of his predecessors in the faith, but from the Lord Himself, that Paul received his knowledge both of the ordinance itself, and of the manner and occasion of its institution. The Lord who called and sent him had also furnished him completely for the work. From the elder apostles he could receive no addition,⁷ while it was through him, rather than them, that the Spirit delivered the chief part of His permanent instruction to the Church.

⁶ It seems evident, from the testimony of early witnesses, that the periodical love feasts were, until the Spirit issued His prohibition in this chapter, usual occasions of remembering the Lord's death. As to the feasts themselves, they were a recognition, more or less cordial according to the spiritual condition of the guests, of that true fellowship which vitally characterises the household of faith (1 John iii. 14), and of which we have so bright and happy a manifestation in the first love of the Church at Jerusalem.

⁷ Gal. ii. 6.

Next, as to the order and character of this divine tradition. As might be expected, circumstances which find a natural place in the inspired narratives of the evangelists are unnoticed here. The passover is not mentioned, nor are the disciples, though their presence is necessarily implied. It is not as the *Master*,⁸ but as the *Lord*, that Jesus here appears. It was the night of his betrayal, the beginning of that horror of great darkness through which the Son of God must pass, that for our sakes He might finish obedience in atoning death. It was the night of the Redeemer's grief, in which the Judge of Israel must be smitten on the cheek, and the Holy One be numbered with transgressors; but to be followed quickly by the dawning of free and sovereign mercy on the world.⁹ If in the gospels we adore the *grace* of Jesus when meditating on His final passion, we are here reminded of the majesty of that *Presence* in whose name we meet to celebrate this true passover of God. And though a reluctant guest at such a feast should seem a thing incredible to those who by faith have tasted that the Lord is gracious, yet it is to be acknowledged, by all who duly reverence Him, that what the Lord prescribes is not a permission only, but also a command. As to the formula of Christian remembrance, it is indicated clearly in the brief but impressive record here given of the words and action of the Lord. "This is my body" is the simple sentence by which He consecrates for our sakes the bread which He had first taken into His hands and broken. And what we have thus seen Him do for

⁸ Ὁ διδάσκαλος. Luke xxii. 11.

⁹ John xii. 32, *seq.*; Rom. xi. 11-15.

us, we are to do for one another in His name. Further official consecration there is none, nor is there room even for an official distributor of this feast. The Lord's body is in His people's hands. In the communion of the Holy Ghost, they are called to break and share this precious morsel of remembrance.¹

So likewise with the cup. Supper was ended, and with it the Master's participation in the former things. The New Testament² of life and peace is handed to us for our several acceptance in this new and special cup of blessing, of which the Master would not drink. He will indeed taste yet again the joys of nature, when nature shall herself have first been freed from bondage, as an effect of His once finished work of redemption; and so He defers His further participation in the "fruit of the vine," until the day when He will drink it *new* with His chosen in the kingdom of His Father.³ But of the cup of the New Testament He cannot drink. His blood is not shed for Himself, but for His saints. With the cup is delivered to us also a discretionary injunction to drink it in remembrance of Him.⁴

¹ It is interesting to note that the words, "Take, eat," in v. 24, are wanting in all the best MSS. So also is the word "broken." The passage runs thus: *καὶ εἶπε, τοῦτό μου ἐστὶ τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν· τοῦτο ποιῆτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν.* "This is my body, which is for you [*conf.* John vi.]: this do [*i.e.*, break and distribute it] in remembrance of me." By the mouth of the apostle these words are spoken to the hearing ear, wherever it is found, the Son of man having given "His flesh for the life of the world."

² The reader will find my reasons for preferring to render with A.V. *διαθήκη* by "testament" rather than "covenant" in chap. ix. of the *Notes on the Hebrews*.

³ Matt. xxvi. 29.

⁴ As to the *times* of remembrance, see further on chap. xvi. 2.

Verse 26. "For as often as ye eat," etc. We have now the apostle's explanatory comment on the Lord's command. First, there is implied in his words a moral necessity of eating and drinking on the part of all who would evince their love to Christ by keeping His sayings; and, secondly, the Lord puts no restraint on the affections of His saints. As often as they will they may repeat, for their comfort and spiritual refreshment, an observance which He has enjoined on them for their spiritual well-being. Then, as to the special meaning and intent of this act of remembrance, it is to "show⁵ the Lord's *death* until He *come*." These solemn facts are the *termini* of the Spirit's present testimony, the doctrine of the resurrection intervening between them, and casting its precious and triumphant brightness equally on both.

The dying of the Lord was also His disappearance from the eye and knowledge of the world. He will again be seen and known by it at His appearing with His saints. The Church, which finds her righteousness in Jesus risen, by shewing thus His death both testifies the ground of her own hope, and accepts with joy her true position in this world as crucified with Him. The Lord's Supper is therefore, when truly celebrated, the appointed and especial means of sustaining the faith and hope of God's elect, as well as an emphatic testimony⁶ to the world

⁵ καταγγέλλετε. Ye "declare," or "preach." The Lord's Supper being an outward corroboration of the verbal confession of all believers.

⁶ A testimony, however, which is deprived of more than half its force by those who, in their ignorance of the true doctrine of the Church and her vocation, suppose the apostle's anticipations of

both of its unrepented sin in crucifying the Lord of glory, and of the impending certainty of His second coming in the clouds of heaven. The solemn nature of this ordinance, and the penalties attaching to its desecration, are further opened in what follows.

Verse 27. "Wherefore, whosoever shall eat the bread, or drink the cup of the Lord,"⁷ etc. The Lord's name is in each of these sacred tokens of His love, and as both are to be taken by those who would duly honour Him in His gracious ordinance, so to handle either unworthily is to incur a judgment rather than to taste a blessing. Now, it is evident that the term here used by the apostle may apply either to the personal state of the communicant, or to the manner in which the ordinance is kept. Men may be (and are, while still in unbelief) unworthy to keep it at all; or, being personally worthy, as sinners saved by grace, they may desecrate it by their wrong mode of observance.⁸ As to the saints of Corinth,

the Lord's speedy coming to be first impressions merely, which were afterwards modified by later revelations. It is difficult to understand what sort of notion such speculators entertain of divinely inspired teaching.

⁷ *Τοῦτο* is omitted in the best MSS. The A.V. is also unfaithful in translating *ἡ* by "and."

⁸ The most glaring instance of unworthy handling, in this latter sense, is the idolatrous celebration of "the mass." Not to speak of the utter subversion of sound doctrine, which is effected by gratuitously imparting to an ordinance of divine institution a character essentially different from that impressed on it by the Lord's own words, the assertion of the sufficiency of what is falsely termed "communion in one kind," is itself a pointed contradiction of the truth. For by ascribing to one form what the Lord recognizes only under the other, they dishonour both alike; the one by misrepresentation, the other by neglect. Further, they do, by means of this false observance (although self-styled the catholic

they were personally worthy, but conditionally unworthy; and their act took the quality of their estate.

The strong language of this verse will be best appreciated by a recurrence to the solemn scene of which the Lord's Supper is a commemoration. The death of Christ was by the judgment of God on our sins. By the grace of God He tasted death for all. But it was also, in the manner of it, a judicial act of man. Both believers and unbelievers are interested in this death. Faith, viewing it adoringly in God's own light, finds peace in the once shed blood of Jesus.⁹ Unbelief, or God-forgetting indifference, remains meanwhile under the guilt of those who killed the Prince of Life, or were consenting to His death. There is no room for neutrality in the pre-

and apostolic Church), excommunicate themselves practically from the *Church of God*, as represented by the apostles and their brethren; for he speaks of himself and them as both blessing and drinking the cup of the Lord (*conf.* x. 16, 21); and if they would show his death, it must be, not by eating, but by drinking also. Thus, while by their own inventions they, as far as lies in them, exclude what they choose to call the laity from the covenant of life (verse 25), they are self-condemned, in the presence of these Scriptures, as forsakers of the way of truth.

These last remarks apply also, in a less degree, to all those who, on various pretexts, while otherwise confessing Christ, avoid systematically or habitually the table of the Lord. "*We bless*," "*we break*," "*we drink*," says the apostle. But these do none of these things. Where, then, is their communion in the body of Christ? It is faith in the Son of God which saves and justifies a sinner, and amid all the confusions of the evil day, the Lord knoweth surely who are His; but it is difficult to estimate the spirituality of those who ignore a custom which the Lord thought of sufficient importance, not only to inaugurate in the presence of His first disciples, but to reveal especially from heaven to this chosen teacher of His Church.

⁹ Heb. x.

sence of such a fact. We believe or disbelieve. But to celebrate a Saviour's death without a living faith in Him is not to worship, but to mock Him—to have, therefore, the charge of the Lord's death on our souls, instead of being released by it from the burden of our sins.

But more than this. Believers may be really such, and yet in a most unspiritual state. Faith may be in suspense, and neither reverence nor godly fear be operating adequately in the soul. To take the Lord's Supper while in such a state would be to eat and drink unworthily. Themselves worthy by the grace of their redemption; their act, through their unpreparedness of heart, would be unworthy of their standing, and of Him in whose name and presence it was done. As Aaron's sons, though of true priestly birth and consecration, lost both life and office through their presumptuous disregard of the *then* ordinance of God,¹ so God's true worshippers and priests may now also bring His judgments on themselves through forgetting the holiness which evermore becomes His house. While we walk "as men," we are morally unfitted for the fellowship of God. And this was just the case with these Corinthians. The pride of knowledge threw them into Satan's snare. Instead of gathering round the table of the Lord with hearts softened and penetrated by the grace of their Redeemer, they had abused their privilege in the spirit of self-satisfied elation. In God's very presence they were trifling with His holiest things. But God is not mocked.

In verse 28 we have a general prescription, ad-

¹ Lev. x. 1, 2.

dressed indifferently to all believers, and intended to act as a preservative against the danger into which these heedless ones had run. "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat," etc. But simple and obvious as is the import of the apostle's counsel, it has been grievously perverted, in some cases even to the destruction of the gospel. Through the habit of confounding a worthy *reception* with a worthiness *to receive*, men have taught one another to look inward for such worthiness, instead of seeking and finding it in Christ alone. Words, meant by the Spirit to stir up the believer's conscience, and recall him to a true sense of his standing as a pardoned sinner and an adopted child of God, have been made the basis of a system of "sacramental preparation," by means of which those who in their ordinary state are considered, by themselves and their instructors, unfit for such a service, are taught to believe that a personal fitness may be acquired for performing at rare intervals this exceptional act of worship. But a doctrine which bids men look within them for personal worthiness in any sense, is not the teaching of the Spirit. And its effect will be worthy of its source. It will make sad and discourage the hearts of real, but weak and ill-taught Christians, while it will confer a false confidence on many who are not yet washed from their natural iniquity.²

Personal worthiness to sit at the Lord's table is a result of the same faith in Jesus, and His finished work, which makes believing sinners "*meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.*"³ They, therefore, who worthily celebrate the dying of

² Prov. xxx. 12.

³ Col. i. 12-14.

the Lord, both eat and drink in glad and solemn outward recognition of the blessed assurance which the Holy Ghost has already settled in their hearts, that in Him they have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins. They keep the Lord's passover within the blood-stained doors. The *moral* fitness of God's saints to keep this feast, consists in their having a conscience in harmony with their faith. If, therefore, they are told to prove *themselves*, it is not with the expectation of finding good where God sees only evil, but rather to remind themselves, in the spirit of a wholesome and searching self-judgment, of their abiding need of such a passover as God has instituted for their sakes. They are, in other words, to remember that they are *sinner*s, while boldly asserting their privilege as *saint*s. "Let him eat," says the apostle of the self-judging believer; for true self-judgment leads, as its effect, to a deeper and more solid appreciation of the grace in which we stand. Let him, then, eat; but let him bethink him duly of what manner of meat it is that grace invites him to partake, and how he came to be a guest at such a feast. Let him drink, also, but with a thoughtful remembrance in his heart of what that cup of blessing betokens to his soul.

Verse 29. "For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not discern that body."⁴ Truth judges what it cannot bless. It is a believer's right, through grace, to eat and drink;

⁴ The words "unworthy," and "of the Lord," are absent from *Cod. Sin.*, in common with A, B, and C. The verse stands thus in these authorities: 'Ο γὰρ ἐσθίων καὶ πίνων, κρῖμα ἑαυτῷ ἐσθίει καὶ πίνει, μὴ διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα.

but the guests at God's table must observe the manners of His house. There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ, but there is a righteous judgment of their ways. Because called to the fellowship of the Son of God, we are expected to walk in the Spirit, and to view things with the Spirit's eye. If the body of the Lord is not before us in the supper of remembrance, our eating and drinking is but a practising of vanity, and therefore a provocation of Him who in very faithfulness afflicts His people when they are not mindful of His ways.⁵ And thus it had fared at Corinth with some of these forgetful hearers of the Word.⁶

Verse 30. "For this cause *many* are weak," etc. The prevalent iniquity had produced as its effect a widely-spread infliction. Yet their hearts had been too slow to understand their real condition, until awakened from their spiritual stupor by the apostle's faithful admonition. As to those who slept, we need not imagine that they were principal offenders. It is more probable that, in this distribution of His judgments, the Lord may have culled thus early some of the best fruits of His husbandry, that those who remained untouched might, by the severity of their loss, be led to lay His dealings to their hearts;⁷ for this chastisement was directed, not at individual transgression merely, but especially at their corporate delinquency. Yet, as a sound private conscience is the main conservative of the healthy state of a community, he lays down in what follows a rule of prevention, bearing with equal force upon each

⁵ Ps. cxix. 75.⁶ James i. 25.⁷ Isa. lvii. 1.

man's secret, and upon the general conscience of the Church.

Verse 31. "Now, if we had judged [or discerned] ourselves, we should not be suffering these judgments."⁸ Their experience concerned him also; for the body of Christ is *one*. But besides this reason for his change of expression, there is another which is inherent in the subject which he is here handling; for self-judgment is at once the first duty and the hardest practical attainment of the Christian. In touching such a topic, therefore, the apostle could not but place himself by the side of those whom he exhorts. The principle stated in this verse is most important, and at the same time very full of comfort to those whose hearts are true to God. Yet so difficult of achievement is the conditional immunity here promised, that few, if any, have for any length of time enjoyed it. Has any church remained without rebuke? Has any man in Christ? Nay, chastening is a family mark of those who are of God.⁹ Yet there is such a thing as walking in the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.¹ On such there is no judgment. Moreover, disciplinary restraint is not necessarily judgment. The vinedresser is not *punishing* his plant when pruning it. Yet the time, as confessed by another witness, came early for judgment to begin at the house of God.² But to God's children judgment is mercy in a rougher shape. And so he proceeds:

⁸ Εἰ δὲ ἑαυτοὺς διεκρίνομεν, οὐκ ἂν ἐκρινόμεθα. We have the same word here as in verse 29. They discerned neither the Lord's body, nor their own true standing and character as the one bread. *Ante*, x. 17.

⁹ Heb. xii. 6, 7.

¹ Acts ix. 31; Rom. xiv. 17, 18.

² 1 Peter iv. 17.

Verse 32. "But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." He who is *coming* to judge the world is already, as the just Lord, in the midst of His own people. He will not do iniquity; but as many as He loves, He rebukes and chastens.³ As the apostle has, at the close of chap. ix., exemplified in his own person the effective energy of grace as the power of practical godliness, so here he shares with his brethren in the faith the conditions of exemption from the condemnation of the world. In the former passage the healthy state of a believer is determined by the steadfastness with which he follows on to know the Lord; in the present, we have a declaration of the means by which the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls fulfils His gracious task as the preserver of those whom the Father hath given Him out of the world.

Considered with reference to his standing as a man in Christ, the believer is already passed from death to life, and can no more come into judgment. He is *righteous* by his faith. But that his faith may live, and bear its fruits, it must be nourished and sustained by truth. If God has a people, He will not only save them, but will make them also partakers of His holiness. Sheep negligently tended stray, and must be sought. Children without due training are a shame to the father that begat them. It is against the otherwise destructive tendencies of nature that the power of God, and the faithful grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, are continually and effec-

³ Zeph. iii. 5; Rev. iii. 19.

tively operating. The righteous is with difficulty saved.⁴ But the difficulty of the undertaking is triumphantly surmounted by the Saviour, though, in order to bring His people into such a state as He can righteously acknowledge, He may have to use sharp rebuke no less than gracious and endearing tones.⁵ He deals with us according to our state, but on the basis of His own effectual work of redemption. We *are not* of the world, because delivered from it by His death and resurrection. If we conform to it, or inordinately seek its things, He will treat us *now* according to our ways, debating in measure⁶ with those whom He is pledged to save. Meanwhile, the world, already under condemnation, is left to run on in its evil course, until the measure of its iniquity be reached.

Verses 33, 34. "Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat," etc. Having thus vindicated the necessary claims of holiness, and tempered searching admonition with soul-sustaining comfort, he concludes by stating afresh the rule of godly order at the table of the Lord. The passage is of interest, not only as a "statute of the Lord"⁷ on a very important subject, but because it seems to have altered what had previously been a custom in the Church. Henceforth no sacramental feasts, after the former fashion, are countenanced by the Spirit. No natural appetite is to seek its gratification at the table of the Lord; for in the presence of those tokens nature is already dead, and they only, whose life now in the flesh is by the faith of the risen and

⁴ Μόλις σώζεται. (1 Pet. iii. 18.)

⁵ Titus i. 13.

⁶ Isa. xxvii. 5.

⁷ Chap. xiv. 37; Psa. xix. 8.

glorified Son of God, can taste worthily this passover of grace.

The essential point before the apostle's mind was, the restoration of his erring brethren to a sound and godly estimate of the ordinance which they had so grievously dishonoured; and having done this, he will not weaken the effect of his positive teaching by adding any farther expression of his judgment on minor questions of detail. If he came, he would confer with them on these, disposing even un-essential things in just and seemly order. But what he had written was the word of the Lord, for their reproof and correction. By observing it, they would be freed from His judgments, and receive His praise.

CHAPTER XII.

OUR attention is now called to a new and deeply important branch of divine teaching. That the doctrine of the Spirit, and His gracious operations, were among the topics submitted to the apostle in the communication to which he has referred,¹ is likely, but cannot be affirmed. Be that as it may, the subject itself is one of such interest to the Church of God, that in its treatment he has occupied the whole of this, and the two following chapters. Taken together, they present to us a large view of the mystery of that "body" which already has been briefly mentioned,² and which, next to the Person of its own ever blessed Head, is the object on which the eye of the Spirit rests with chief interest as a witness to the "present truth."³ In the chapter now before us, we are shewn the divine mechanism of the Church, considered as the body of Christ, in relation both to its Head and its several members, according to the effectual operation of the indwelling Spirit. The next discloses to us the true vital and animating principle of this body; while the third treats of the same body in relation to its proper

¹ Chap. vii. 1.² Chap. x. 17.³ 2 Pet. i. 12.

functional activity, whether in a state of health or of disease.

Verse 1. "Now concerning spiritual things,"⁴ etc. His usual formula, when desiring to awaken and fix close attention to what follows, is found here also. He would not have God's chosen ignorant of what it so essentially concerns them well to know. For as being themselves no longer in the flesh, but in the spirit, the Spirit's things are the proper occupation of those who are in Christ.

Verse 2. "Ye know that ye were Gentiles," etc. As a prelude to His positive teaching on the Spirit and His energies, he leads them back in memory to their former and natural state. And well is it for us to be often thus reminded, lest an indolent familiarity with truth should tempt us to forget what manner of persons we both were and are. As Gentiles, these Corinthian saints were naturally alien from Christ. But their evil condition was not negative only; they were the sport of the power of darkness, being "carried away to dumb idols, even as they were led." Not knowing the true God, they worshipped devils; not being led of His Spirit, they followed that other spirit which works still in the children of disobedience, and who swayed them by their lusts and fears. Such is an inspired description of natural godlessness. Nor let any reader of these notes imagine, that a Christless Englishman occupies a better or more dignified position, in the estimation of the Spirit of truth, than his Corinthian

⁴ *Περὶ δὲ τῶν πνευματικῶν*. The apostle's language is indefinite, but the context shews clearly that its scope extends far beyond the subject of "gifts" merely.

prototype. Less so, rather; seeing that natural ignorance occupies morally a higher ground than a guilty indifference to the declared testimony of God. Thus, then, they were, but had not been thus left. By the calling of God, they had been turned from their natural darkness to a saving knowledge of the truth. And they were conscious of the mighty change which had been wrought on them. For they had both light and knowledge. They knew and worshipped the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. But if so, how was this change effected? Were they the same Corinthians, only under a different training? or was their altered condition due to the working of some power extraneous to themselves? The apostle gives a distinct answer to these questions in what follows.

Verse 3. "Wherefore I give you to understand," etc. He begins by a reference to the cross, and to the language in which it was habitually vilified by the unbelieving Jews. The Jesus whom believers confess to be Jehovah, they declared to be a curse.⁵ Acknowledging the fact of the crucifixion, but rejecting its divine and ever blessed explanation, they covered the name of Jesus with the reproach which the law attached to the memory of every justly executed criminal.⁶ But it was not under the guid-

⁵ The true reading in both clauses of the verse is not *Ἰησοῦν*, but *Ἰησοῦς*, on the best MS. authority. So also *Κύριος* in the latter clause. The nominative gives additional emphasis to the passage. On the one side there is a positive imprecation, on the other a declarative confession.

⁶ Deut. xxi. 23. Compare the apostle's language in Gal. iii. 13. The difference between *ἀνάθεμα* and *κατάρατον* is the difference between position and description. A thing *devoted* is *ἀνάθεμα*.

ance of that Holy Spirit, which taught Moses how to lead their fathers,⁷ that they had chosen Barabbas and rejected Jesus, albeit it was He who had put upon the lips of undiscerning Caiaphas that prophecy of national redemption which must yet be verified in Israel's latter end.⁸ The apostle's words, then, are levelled, first, against the natural Israel, and, secondly, against all who (whether by their persuasion, or at the secret suggestion of the power which rules and leads the nations in the way of darkness), by refusing to confess Jesus as the Saviour of the world, are practically on the side of those who judged Him; for Gentile unbelief, like the uncircumcised soldiers who fulfilled the sentence of unrighteousness, makes a mocking distinction only between the divine Sufferer and those with whom He died.

If the *highest* honour is not freely and sincerely given to the name of Jesus, its only other place is utter degradation; for He was, either truly or falsely, the Son of God. Between "anathema" and "Lord" there is no other place which it can justly occupy. The wide space which seems morally to intervene between a living and adoring faith and a deliberate and positive denial of that name, is ignored by the Spirit, in His estimate of human character, as a nullity and a deception. With Him men are believers or unbelievers, confessors or deniers of the

The same thing *denounced* is *κατάρα*. Christ was made a *κατάρα* for the reason stated in the passage last referred to. In the estimation of the unbelieving Israelite He is *ἀνάθεμα*, or worthily devoted to death.

⁷ Isa. lxiii. 11.

⁸ John xi. 49-52; Jer. xxxi. 17.

Lord. Now, by the apostle's testimony, to confess Him truly is impossible, but by the Holy Ghost. "No one is able"⁹ of himself to make a genuine confession of the truth. From the dying thief, who first confessed His title, when through grace enabled to discern his Saviour in his fellow-sufferer, to the last of that multitude who stand in white about the throne of God, all who confess Jesus truly as the Lord, do so at the bidding and by the teaching of the Holy Ghost.

It will be at once apparent to the Christian reader, that the doctrine of this passage is equivalent to that which the Lord had, at the beginning of His earthly ministry, rehearsed in the astonished ears of Nicodemus. It is, in fact, a condensed summary of the common teaching of all God's witnesses on this fundamental and essential point. To *live* to God, we must be *born* to God. To receive the Spirit's teaching, we must ourselves be in the Spirit; and that truth may proceed from lips which "speak leasing" by the instinct of their nature, the work of divine regeneration must have first put truth within the inward parts. It is by a steadfast assertion of this cardinal doctrine that the root of pride is killed, and boasting excluded from the heart of man.

Verses 4-6. Having thus emphatically reminded his brethren, that in treating the subject of the Spirit and His operations he is dealing with something not accidental, but essential to their calling as God's people, he proceeds with his positive statement of doctrine—"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit." The same power that creates God's

⁹ Οὐδεὶς δόναται.

children endows also and adorns them. Varieties of distribution are to be distinguished, and each gift referred separately to their common source. Two things are clearly intimated in this statement of the apostle; first, the unity of the Spirit, and, secondly, His essential divinity; for of all gifts He is the single Giver, while no good or perfect gift is in the hand of any less than God.¹

But what He thus bestows is given for an end, and that end is the efficient service of the Lord. And this is expressed distinctly in the declaration next made, that "there are varieties of services,² but the same Lord." The same power which declares the Lord must also serve Him. As the Spirit witnesses to Jesus, and glorifies Him by the manifestation, to the eye of faith, of His perfections, so all spiritual service, from the labour of an apostle to the simplest act of kindness for the Master's sake, flows directly to one common object; for to us there is one Lord. We serve Him if we love Him, and are His disciples if we keep His sayings. But both the love and the intelligence which mark the child of God are fruits of that same Spirit who first taught him, as a ransomed sinner, to confess the Lord. The forms under which these gifts and services express themselves will be noticed presently; meanwhile the apostle propounds his third example of diversity in unity, by declaring that there are also "varieties of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all."

¹ James i. 5, 17.

² Διακονίῳν. Neither "administrations" nor "ministries" (though the latter seems preferable to the former) convey the full force of this expression.

Power belongs to God.³ What He wills He works, resisted or unresisted, in the armies of heaven, or with men upon the earth. Especially, however, these words relate to the present energy of God and its results, as these are shown, whether to the faith of His elect, or to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, in His creation and preservation of the Church.

The full, though informal, exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity, which these verses set forth, is not less striking than precious to the believer; while the *order* in which the three divine persons are mentioned is according to the character of the present dispensation. The *Spirit* is first named, because it is by His operative agency that life and godliness exist and are maintained. The *Lord* comes next, since it is to Him that the Spirit bears immediate testimony, and to the obedient acknowledgment of Him that all spiritual teaching tends. But that "the Lord is *God*," is the first principle of all revealed truth.⁴ Lastly, we have the name of Him who is invisible in His supremacy, though all-pervading in presence and power by His Spirit, declaring by His visible works His eternal power and Godhead as the Creator, and commending effectually to His chosen that love which He shewed openly to man, by sending His only begotten Son into the world.

Verse 7. "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each," etc. Having laid down generally the essential doctrine of the Spirit, he goes on to speak of the more prominent "diversities of gifts," as they discover themselves in their recipients, his present

³ Ps. lxii. 11. ⁴ Deut. vi. 4; Ps. cxviii. 27; Isa. xlii. 5, 8.

view being limited to those whose gifts have a more or less public and visible exercise. For there are secrecies of spiritual grace, as well as manifestations.⁵ With respect to these last, in their diversity they have one common aim; they are given "for profit." First, the receiver of the gift is enriched by the endowment, and if held in the spirit of humility and watchfulness, his possession will be his treasure also; if otherwise, it will prove a snare. Secondly, what is thus given is for the benefit, through its active and faithful exercise, of others.⁶ In the enumeration which follows, we should notice the order in which these varieties of manifestation are placed by the apostle.

Verses 8-10. "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom," etc. We have first to distinguish between "the word of wisdom" and "the word of knowledge." When the apostle spoke wisdom among the perfect,⁷ he was exercising this form of the Spirit's manifestation. And that this was a gift of a higher and less common order than the other is evident; first, from the general tone of his expostulation in the earlier part of his epistle;⁸ and secondly, from the concessions made in chaps. i. 5 and viii. 1. That the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God might be given to His saints, is elsewhere expressed as his fervent desire by the same apostle,⁹ while its rarity as well as excel-

⁵ If the reader will study carefully Rom. xii. he will see how the Spirit's public services and secret charities are there blended by the same apostle in one view.

⁶ For a general statement of the end of such manifestations, see Eph. iv. 12, 13.

⁷ *Ante*, chap. ii. 6.

⁸ See especially chap. vi. 5.

⁹ Eph. i. 17. *Conf.* Col. i. 9.

lence is sufficiently indicated in other passages.¹ We need not therefore marvel, that one who by special grace was so largely endowed with this admirable gift,² should place it at the head of all the other manifestations of the same Spirit. For knowledge, though essential to the saint, may be shared also by the unbeliever, though not surely as a spiritual gift. But even in this sense it is obviously inferior to the former. Wisdom can never be *abused*, but it is not so with knowledge. How seriously this may be perverted in its use we have already seen.³ As a descriptive phrase, "the word of knowledge" seems to mean that necessary and highly valuable gift which enables its possessor both to give spiritual information accurately, and to expound with precision the essentials of the faith by a right division of the word of truth.⁴ As a gift of the Spirit, it stands in contrast to those "oppositions of false knowledge," by means of which the spirit of error endeavours to resist the truth.⁵

"To another faith," etc. This faith is, of course, distinct from that which constitutes a believer, though of close kin to it in its nature.⁶ "The gift of God"⁷ is shared by all who are of God, and it is called, in consequence, the *common faith*;⁸ but among believers there are some on whom, for the comfort

¹ James iii. 13; i. 5.

² Besides his own words in Col. i. 28, see those also of his elder brother in the faith, 2 Peter iii. 18.

³ *Ante*, chap. viii.

⁴ 2 Tim. ii. 15.

⁵ Ἀντιθέσεις τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως. 1 Tim. vi. 20.

⁶ As if to mark more distinctly the separate quality of this gift, the apostle changes the connective word from ἀλλὰ to ἐτέρω.

⁷ Eph. ii. 8.

⁸ Titus i. 4.

and encouragement of their brethren, there is bestowed a special faith of active and demonstrative effect. The relative value of this gift is estimated in the following chapter. It cannot be said that all believers ought to have this gift, because it is a sovereign distribution of the Spirit. All who believe must live and walk by faith; but while trust in the living God is the vital property of all His children, the wielding of His power by a special faith is neither necessary nor safe for all. With respect to this gift it may be further said, that like all other particular endowments, it has its dangers with its benefits. Its *profitable* manifestation demands, in those who witness its effects, such a measure of the fear of God as shall preserve them from the temptation to idolize the visible instrument of His grace and power. Moreover, such faith may, as a virtue, be alone and dissociated from other qualities which belong to the character of one truly wise. Like other gifts, it tries the heart of its possessor, who, in his conscious reach and mastery of smaller things, may be found neglecting or even despising these spiritual exercises which tend to a deeper and larger understanding of the God whose faithfulness he knows so well.

“To another, gifts of healing,” etc. The apparent closeness of relation in which both this and the next mentioned form of manifestation stand to “faith,” is such that both one and the other might be naturally described as particular expressions of that wonder-working gift. That such an estimate, however, would be a most erroneous one, we are taught by the careful manner in which they are dis-

tinguished by the apostle. Each gift of the Spirit is perfect in itself, and fulfils its destined purpose according to the will and power of the Giver. Thus, when handkerchiefs or aprons taken from Paul's body drove away diseases from the sick, there was an exuberance of this particular manifestation.⁹ Faith may have been active in the receivers of the benefit, but not, in any extraordinary degree, in the dispenser. Moreover, the exercise of this and similar gifts was never *discretionary*. They were manifested only in their fitting season, and could only work effectually by the immediate will of God. Power is His, and always in His hands. If Trophimus were sick, the wish of Paul could not restore him.¹ If the threatened loss of Epaphroditus, his thrice-endearred associate, filled his soul with heaviness, he carried in himself no remedy for his distress.² His refuge in the time of need must be sought, not in God's gifts, but in the faithful mercy of the Giver.

"To another, the working of miracles [or powers]," etc.³ Whatever God works, in excess of the known powers of nature, is marvellous in the eyes of those who regard Him in His ways. If "healing" be miraculous kindness, there are other forms, not always beneficial in their immediate effect, under which Divine power is miraculously shown. The expulsion of the demon from the damsel at Philippi,⁴ and the infliction of temporary blindness on Bar-jesus,⁵ are opposite examples of this special manifestation of the Spirit. An earlier and more

⁹ Acts xix. 11, 12.

¹ 2 Tim. iv. 20.

² Phil. ii. 25-27.

³ *Δυνάμειων*.

⁴ Acts xvi. 16, *seq.*

⁵ Acts xiii. 5, *seq.*

solemnly impressive instance is afforded in the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira.⁶

“To another prophecy.” In the two kinds of manifestation last considered, the miraculous power of God bore only on men’s bodies; the gift of prophecy works only on their minds. Of prophetic ministry, as a standing endowment of the Church, he speaks more fully in chap. xiv. What is here stated is simply the general truth, that prophecy, under every form of its operation, is an immediate gift of the Spirit.

“To another, discerning of spirits.” What is here distinguished as a special gift is, as a general quality, possessed by all believers. All have an unction from the Holy One, and on all is enjoined the duty of trying the spirits, whether they are of God.⁷ But there is in some, by the Spirit’s special grace, a marked and extraordinary measure of this faculty, analagous, in this respect, to the relation in which “faith” as a particular gift stands to that which is common to believers. All true saints, if in a right state of soul, can “discern the Lord’s body” in the feast of remembrance, but not all are able to penetrate the subtler machinations of the enemy. The apostle was not ignorant of devices by which Satan could impose completely upon others; and by a faithful exercise of this faculty of spiritual discernment he was able to deliver his brethren from the snare. Nor will a faculty, so essential to the defence of the unwary sheep of Christ, be ever found wanting among them that are assembled in the faith of His own presence. The mutual relation of this and the gift im-

⁶ Acts v.

⁷ 1 John ii. 20; iv. 1.

mediately preceding, which will be further illustrated in chapter xiv., explains its position in the present series.

“Tongues,” in their varieties, are, like faith, distinguished by the stronger term of separation;⁸ and with the cognate but distinct gift of interpretation is closed the present list of spiritual manifestations, which presents a rich though not exhaustive catalogue of the varied operations of the Holy Ghost.

Verse 11. “But all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit,” etc. To confirm the cardinal doctrine of unity as underlying all the diversities of spiritual energy, and to preserve his brethren from the error of imagining that a gift was something entrusted finally to themselves, he again and still more emphatically reminds them of the true *worker* in all these ministerial activities. By remembering this, they would also be in less danger either of unduly exalting or perversely slighting any of these manifestations which, in all their formal variety, attest equally the presence and effective energy of God. Accordingly we have here ascribed immediately to the Spirit both the distributive will and the operative power which belong essentially to God. Himself dwelling in His people, He works His will among them through these diverse manifestations of His power. It is thus that the promised Comforter has become the immediate Guide and Ruler of the entire Church. For if Christ be, as He surely is, supreme in dominion, as the Son over His own house, His presence and Lordship are effectively acknowledged through the energy of that Spirit

⁸ ἐτέρω.

which is even as Himself. Having thus returned, according to His promise,⁹ to abide with His expectant people, His administration is according to the manner of His presence. The chief aim and labour of the Comforter is to build God's living saints together as the stones of His spiritual building, uniting them in the power of their common faith and hope, as He bears witness to the actual position and glory of Jesus in the heavens, and teaches them to wait for His return from thence, to fulfil His promise to His own. When the true doctrine of the Spirit is received, the essential oneness of the Church, as the mystic body of Christ, is no longer a remote abstraction, but a present and practical reality. It is then perceived that a vital unity of action pervades the entire body, and from that moment it becomes a part of our obedience to act upon the truth thus known. How earnestly the apostle sought to commend this doctrine to his brethren appears in what follows.

Verses 12, 13. "For as the body is one, and hath many members," etc. The human body, and its wondrous though familiar organism, is chosen by the Spirit as a just figure of Christ in His mystic completeness. The Church, which He now fills by His Spirit, is His own body and fulness. But this new Man is also *the Lord*. The Church is the fulness, therefore, of Him that filleth all in all.¹ The effective means by which *this* body² is prepared for Christ, are stated, first, with reference to the absolute power

⁹ John xiv. 18.

¹ Eph. i. 23.

² The preparation of His natural body is the mystery of *godliness*. The preparation of His mystic body is the mystery of *grace*.

of God: "by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body;" and secondly, in the form of an experimental appeal to their consciousness as believers: "and were all made to drink of one Spirit."³

In the former of these clauses, there is an evident reference to that "day of Pentecost," when the Holy Ghost descended visibly to appropriate the blood-cleansed worshippers of God, and empower them to bear witness to the name of Jesus. The assembly thus consecrated was the beginning of that *Church* which the Lord had undertaken to build upon the rock of His own name.⁴ And they who, as living stones, are built upon that rock, both bear His name and stand in His acceptance. Renouncing all other hope, and trusting in Him only as their

³ Πάντες ἐν Πνεῦμα ἐποτίσθημεν. The εἰς which in the *textus receptus* stands before ἐν Π. is wanting in all the best MSS.

⁴ Peter's confession was, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;" the divine revelation of His person being accompanied by a corresponding declaration of His title. God's Son is God's Christ—the anointed of *His* kingdom, whether now or hereafter—in heaven or on earth—or both. Hence, this title, prophetically given to the Son of David, becomes more than a title—a distinctive *name* of the Despised and Rejected of men. Israel's deferred glory (Zech. iv. 7) becomes the present and eternal foundation of His Church. It is Messiah with a kingdom not now of this world—the kingdom of God's beloved Son. (Col. i. 13.) The Church, thus founded, takes its name from its foundation. "The Church of Jesus," or "of the Saviour," is a phrase unknown to Scripture. Such an expression could mean nothing less than the entire company of the saved. But "the Church of God," or "of Christ," or, as the apostle here with more than boldness styles it, "*Christ*," consists of that number of God's called and chosen, who now know Him in His Son by faith, and are by distinctive description "partakers [or fellows] of Christ," and, therefore, also "of the *heavenly* calling; their Life being taken from the earth, and hid with God in heaven. (Heb. iii. 1; Col. iii. 1-3.)

righteousness and life, they are joined to Him in the unity of the Spirit.⁵ For to the name which they confess, He is the alone true and living answer. Thus they who are known, both here and in heaven, by that name, are really, though mystically, identified with Him to whom alone it properly belongs. *For* them, and *with* them, He is *Jesus*; a name which can never pass by communication beyond His blessed Person. *In* Him they stand under the same unction which declares Him to be the CHRIST. Thus the bold language of the apostle, in attaching to the Church that title of pre-eminent glory which belongs personally only to the divine object of her trust, is abundantly justified by a consideration of the true nature of the "grace wherein we stand."⁶ It is in Christ that the "Church," also, "of the living God" is revealed to the eye of faith.⁷

At Pentecost the Church was formed and acknowledged by her spiritual baptism. But on that great day, and for a season afterwards, the Church to which the Lord was adding daily His saved people consisted of Jews only. Hence, although to one who drew sound inferences from the doctrine of the cross, there could be ~~is~~ distinction of standing among those who had alike both died and risen in Christ, the apostle, in asserting here the unity of the body, thinks it needful to specify the original and

⁵ *Ante*, v. 17.

⁶ Rom. v. 2.

⁷ 1 Tim. iii. 15. The mystery of the body, as doctrinally stated by the apostle, both here and in the epistle to the Ephesians, is but an elucidation, in the revealing power of the Spirit, of what the Lord had said both *to* His disciples, and *of* them to the Father; though the time was not then come for them to understand His words. (John xiv. 20, xvii. 23.)

natural distinctions of those who through grace are partakers of like precious faith. "Jews or Greeks, bond or free," their common natural quality was *sin*, and their common blessing, as believers, is *righteousness*. Joined separately to the Lord by faith, they are members now in common of that one new Man which is of another origin and for another place.

To believe, then, in this day of grace, is to be brought to Christ, and included in that body which the Spirit has baptized, and which is animated and pervaded by His presence. There is no reference in this place to water-baptism. That, as an act of obedient recognition, has both its place and honour; but the all-embracing operation of the Spirit is not to be confounded with the particular compliance of a Christian with the Master's will. To believe is to be in Christ. To be in Christ is to be of the body, and therefore under the baptism of the Spirit. But not every believer is baptized with water, though none who love the Master will look slightly on any ordinance of His. But, baptized or not externally, these saints at Corinth had, as believers, tasted the sweet water of life. Jesus had given them drink. The Holy Ghost, unresisted in His gracious testimony by those whom God had called, had shed abroad in their hearts the saving love of God. What the Lord had said in parables was now fulfilled in fact. The Spirit had been given to believers, and they knew His presence by the glad affection of their hearts to Christ.⁸

⁸ John iv. 14; vii. 37-39. To explain the drinking of the Spirit, as is sometimes done, by water-baptism, is a preposterous subversion of the apostle's metaphor. Drinking is not *drowning*.

Verses 14–17. “For the body is not one member, but many,”⁹ etc. Having stated generally in verse 12 the analogy of the natural body to the mystic Christ, he now pursues the comparison into further detail, in order to enforce the doctrine; first, of the unalterable relation in which each member of Christ’s body stands to the body itself; and, secondly, of the inter-dependence and mutual sympathy of the members, by virtue of the single and common vitality of all. In the verses now before us, the former of these principles is illustrated by a simple but conclusive reference to the functional organism and habit of the natural body. Ease and efficiency are the result of an undisturbed exercise of those powers and faculties which operate instrumentally through the several members, as they obey instinctively the vital principle which governs the entire frame. To enforce a moral truth, he imagines a natural prodigy. Particular members are supposed to act for themselves, and not for the body. Would such an unnatural perversion alter the truth of nature? But if this idea be rejected as absurd, let the believer extend the analogy from nature to grace, and confess that an independent course of action, in forgetfulness of the relation in which, as a member of Christ, he stands toward the Church which is His body, is a not less real perversion of the Spirit’s order, and an

But the latter is the import of water-baptism. (1 Peter iii. 20, 21; Col. ii. 12.)

⁹ The entire passage, from *v.* 14 to *v.* 26, is properly descriptive of the natural body only, the formal application of it to the mystical body being made in *v.* 27. But as this lengthened description of what is physical is given solely for the sake of illustrating what is spiritual, I have treated it accordingly in the text.

equal distortion of the workmanship of God. The plain drift of the apostle's teaching is, that self-annihilation is the necessary moral condition of practical membership in the body of Christ. For such membership can belong in no wise to the *natural* man. But in Christ, His things, and not our own, are the proper occupation of our souls.

Verses 18-20. "But now hath *God* set," etc. His order is not ours. But our eyes, and hearts, and minds, have to be habituated to the good pleasure of His will. We are to own Him in His work, as well as worship in His truth. And as an educated taste is needed to appreciate the anatomical symmetry of the human form, so also is the cunning workmanship of God's spiritual house discerned only by the eye of a willing disciple of the Spirit. Nature is, to every thoughtful Christian, a monitor of spiritual truth. Diversity in unity, and unity in diversity, are her constant lesson. A believer cannot reflect on the structure of his own body, without having before his mind an image of God's true habitation by the Spirit; and thus his natural consciousness becomes the humble but efficient corroborator of his faith.

Spiritual gifts are therefore to be held and exercised, not only in the liberty of the Spirit who confers them, but in the interest of all who are of God. God's ministers are the servants of His Church. They are *debtors* to that Church, to the extent of such measure of the gift of Christ as they have severally received; while, as members of the one body, they are *creditors* also of the loving services of their fellow-helpers in the work. As to their local sphere of service, it is assigned to them

by the over-ruling providence of Him who fits them for their work. But their place is in the *Body*. Wherever there are saints assembled, there they should be at home, to give and to receive according to the measure of the grace bestowed on all.

Verse 21. "And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee," etc. From a general recognition, on the part of each believer, of his relation to the body, he passes to the scarcely less important subject of mutual recognition and support. Nothing is more likely than the consciousness of power of any kind, to inspire its possessor with a false idea of his own importance, and render him, in his own imagination, independent of the aid of others. But, God only excepted, whatever is elevated needs support. A teacher, if himself divinely taught, will look for aid and comfort from those whom he instructs. Yet wilfulness may change a guide into a tyrant,¹ or lead ill-taught and self-reliant saints to despise the very ministry of which they chiefly stand in need. But as the natural eye has its power of vision not for its own use alone, and must itself be often shielded or shaded by the hand, so spiritual gifts of larger and more elevated range are not less really dependent upon those for whose benefit they were bestowed. The apostle knew this, and delighted in its practical acknowledgment;² making much and frequent mention of the refreshing which he oft received from the loving ministry of others.³ Even from these faulty and straitened ones at Corinth, he looked to receive both comfort and refreshment on

¹ Acts xx. 29, 30; 3 John 9, 10. ² Rom. i. 12; xv. 24.

³ Chap. xvi. 18; 2 Tim. i. 16; Philemon 7.

his way.⁴ Let no gift, then, be coveted or valued on its own account, but with reference to its efficiency as a means of edification. But that the eyes of his brethren may be fully opened to the importance of this doctrine, he pursues his comparison to its furthest limit.

Verses 22-26. "Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary," etc. The language of these verses is, in its primary signification, as simple as it is just and expressive. Our interest is rather in its spiritual drift. Nor is this less evident than the former. The tendency of gift to exalt itself is checked by this natural comparison, which at the same time serves to cheer the humbler and less richly endowed believer, who might be tempted to imagine that honour belongs only to ministerial prominence. But in God's household honour follows duty, and the measure of duty is ability. As without a flock the shepherd would be nothing but a name, so for the proving of the Spirit's gifts there must be found within the body those for whose benefit these gifts were sent. That the strong may make a just use of their strength, the feeble must exist; and there must be ignorance that the word of knowledge may be something better than a vain display.

The habits of men are in accordance with the requirements of nature. In our treatment of our bodies, the resources of art are employed to give a comeliness which nature has denied. So is it also in the Church. The more abundant grace bestowed on some should find its happy opportunity in hiding the deficiencies

⁴ 2 Cor. vi. 13; x. 15.

of others. Love covers, as a garment, many sins; while the patient and assiduous ministry of grace makes the comeliness of Christ appear in many a soul which, for want of such culture, might languish unacknowledged by every eye but that of the great Shepherd of the sheep. In the bodily structure of his creature, God tempered all its parts together according to His own law of beauty and proportion; a gradation of dignity being observed throughout, with special compensation to the less noble but necessary parts. Moreover, all are bound intimately together, not only by their structural position, but by a chain also of sentient sympathy, which makes an injury or benefit to the least of all its members perceptible at once to the entire body. The presence of local disorder is felt as a common burden, while especial care is lavished on the injured part.

And if a schismatic natural body be, as it is, a prodigy beyond the range of human experience, should not a corresponding sensitiveness be found attaching to the new and lasting workmanship of God? Had the Corinthian saints appreciated, even in a slight degree, the moral beauty of this truth, they would have escaped much of the censure which their disorders had provoked. But with "babes"⁵ such knowledge was not to be found. When once their hearts had learnt to know worthily the Lord, in His true and permanent relation to them all, their common and mutual interests, as members of His mystic body, would be both acknowledged and observed.

In verse 27 we have a direct application of this

⁵ Chap. iii. 1.

corporate analogy to the assembly of God's saints. "Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." What is chiefly to be noticed here is the clear and forcible manner in which the apostle applies to a local assembly a description which, in its full meaning, belongs only to the entire Church of God. Wherever saints are truly gathered in His name, Christ is truly represented. His people are His Church. His Church is His body—a visible witness that He lives whom the world has lost sight of in the grave. The apostle could use this language to the saints at Corinth, because, though schismatic tendencies were clearly visible among them, they had not actually fallen asunder, and no sectarian position had as yet been taken. But from the time that sectarian distinctions are *established*, when Christ's sheep are folded in such sort that His name is no longer a sufficient passport for the believer who, as a partaker of the common faith, would move from fold to fold, Christ's body ceases to be visible. It does not cease to exist, nor is it less clearly presented to the eye of a faith which duly "holds the Head;"⁶ nor are His living members dislocated from the place assigned to them, and which they are finally to occupy when the body is revealed in all the glory of its Head—for a bone of Him cannot be broken; but, as a testimony among men, this truth is gone. A Christian is a member of Christ's body. Christians united are Christ's body. Christians, but disunited, are, so to speak,^{*} a lying truth. They witness truly to the grace that saves them individually, while their contented disunion is a practical contra-

⁶ Col. ii. 19.

diction of their confession as partakers of the common faith. For to justify a separate table, or a separate Church, there should be also a separate Lord, and another Christ. As well might the human body be dismembered, and yet remain a man, as that God's children should voluntarily segregate, and still retain their glorious title of the Church or body of Christ.

I would entreat the Christian reader not to turn hastily away from a consideration of this topic, now, alas, too commonly ignored. For they who are born *of* truth are also born *for* truth; to *live* by its confession and to adorn it by obedience. But while the Son of God is objectively "the truth"⁷ to the believer, a part of that fulness which the Comforter reveals to us in Him is, as we are impressively taught by the apostle, the doctrine of the indissoluble oneness of His body. Are we, then, confessing or denying, in act or by position, this distinctive glory of our common faith?

The question is a grave one, and should be gravely met. For in that coming day, when judgment must be passed on all that has been done, and not repented in His name, it is conceivable that many an ardent sectary, who has lived and laboured for his "cause," may be confounded by a reference, on his Master's part, to the scripture we are now considering; in like manner as, in the days of His flesh, He put to shame the sectarian disputers of that time.⁸ But we should endeavour, by a prayerful heed to what is *written*, to anticipate His judgment in that day. Let the

⁷ John xiv. 6; Eph. iv. 21.

⁸ "Have ye never read?" etc.

sincere disciple, then, reflect a little on his actual position. He is a member, perhaps, of some ecclesiastical denomination. If so, let him ask himself honestly these three questions: 1. Does the church, of which I count myself a member, consist (so far as godly and vigilant discernment can ascertain, what the Lord alone can ultimately determine) of God's "called" and "chosen" only? and, 2. Is the table, which I call "the Lord's," accessible freely to all who are truly Christ's? and, 3. Has "the manifestation of the Spirit" its practical recognition there, and its unfettered exercise? If either of these conditions are wanting, he may assure himself that his "church" has no claim to be regarded as the "body of Christ," though many of His living members may be found in it.

At the present day, particular ecclesiastical pretensions are of all things the most foolish. For it must be apparent, to all who are not willingly deceived, that of any two such pretensions, one, at least, must be false. Yet they exist, with more or less credit, in a world where whatever is erroneous finds a natural and kindly soil; but where truth in its purity has no settled resting-place, and, as an unwelcome stranger, is regarded with a jealous eye. To examine the several grounds on which these conflicting claims are based, would be a task both wearisome and invidious. Let it only be the aim of the believer first to know and then to practise truth, and he will need no other monitor than his own conscience in the sight of God, to determine what his course should be with reference to *any* system, which, while claiming acknowledgment as the Church

of God, is found wanting in its essentials, when tried in the balance of God's living word.

Tradition, if it be not apostolic, has no claim on our attention in this question. Now apostolic tradition is delivered to us in the writings of apostles. By their testimony, therefore, let the claims of modern Christendom be judged. But in these writings we shall look in vain for either of the three chief phases of modern ecclesiastical polity, viz., the church *catholic*, with a visible and mortal head; a church *national*, under secular control, and existing only by the royal or national will; or, lastly, a church *conventional*, or an assembly of worshippers who are held together, not by the true bond of perfectness, and in common subjection to the Lord, but by articles of agreement, which, in exact proportion to their stringency, exclude those who subscribe them from the general assembly of God's saints. Each of these forms of ecclesiastical position and polity receives its condemnation from a simple consideration of the Church to which this remarkable epistle was addressed.

The Church of God at Corinth was, as we have seen, in a state of disorder which called loudly for redress. Does the apostle seek to set them right by referring them to the example and authority of a metropolitan Church? Nay, they were themselves *God's Church*, and above that nothing stands but God Himself. It is, therefore, to bring them back to God, in the spirit of their minds, that he labours in both these epistles. To other churches there is no other than an emulative allusion. The apostle was anxious that his children at Corinth should not be left behind

by others in the race of faith and love. But as to dominion, even he who had begotten them in Christ Jesus by the gospel disclaimed it; while to say, "I am of *Cephas*," was no less offensive to the Spirit than to say, "I am of Paul."⁹ They stood by *faith*. If disorder was among them, it was because the *Lord* had been forgotten in His place.

Again, the saints at Corinth were not the Church of the Corinthian *state*. Nor was this difference an accident of time—the gospel not having yet spread far enough to embrace within its grasp the ruling powers of the earth—but an essential distinction of *kind*. For God's Church is the company of those whom He has chosen in Christ, and called by His gospel with a *heavenly* calling. They are reckoned no longer among the inhabitants of earth. For by their profession they are dead and risen with Christ, whose kingdom is not of this present world. A Christian state or kingdom should consist of regenerate men under the immediate government of Christ. A time is indeed at hand, when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ;¹ but that will not be until He who has gone to receive for Himself a kingdom shall return also, according to His word.²

⁹ Chap. i. 12. The Church has a voice, and that a mighty voice, when echoing faithfully the sayings of the Lord; and this power resides in the smallest assembly of true saints. (Matt. xviii.) But the Church has no *legislative* power. No canon is binding on the Christian conscience but the word of God. "Church law" is merely human tradition, which is found, now as ever, in conflict with the living truth.

¹ Rev. xi. 15.

² Luke xix. 12, *seq.* There are some who, while acknowledging and lamenting the confusions of Christendom, and perceiving more or less distinctly the unscriptural character of particular

Lastly, the saints at Corinth were not a voluntary association, simply, of Christian worshippers, under a self-chosen and self-regulated system of internal management. They were "the body of Christ," because joined livingly to Him by faith. They were "the temple of God," because indwelt by the Spirit of God. While, therefore, there was a total absence of human authority, there was (and should have been practically acknowledged) the abiding presence and power of the Lord. If disorders occurred, they arose solely through the activity of the natural will, and could be effectually remedied only by the discipline of God—by the purging out of wickedness, and a return in heart and conscience to the Lord.

Let me again beg the reader to remember, that when meditating on this chapter, we are not studying a curious page of "ecclesiastical antiquities," but a very important branch of the true doctrine of

ecclesiastical systems, find a false consolation in those parables of the Lord which indicate the progress of the present age. (Matt. xiii.) Wheat and tares are to grow together in the world. The Lord's eye can alone distinguish between true and false profession, etc. But in reply it must be said first, that the "world" in the parable is not the *Church*. And can any one who knows the Lord believe that, when describing apostacy, He has left no path of separateness open to the faithful? If Babylon is revealed to the disciple's eye, it is in order that he may come forth from it and its abominations. To sanction, by remaining in it, any system which, while calling itself a church, is found to differ in its constitution from the true building of God, is to deal treacherously with the Lord. He will occupy no temple made with hands. He is outside every system but His own. As the unwearied Shepherd of the sheep, He is found upon the mountains in the dark and cloudy day; but to enjoy the full light of His presence we must ourselves by faith go forth to Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. To excuse a false position by pointing to a prophecy which denounces it, is a strange way of honouring the word of God.

Christ. The sad and solemn fact, that the churches of history present, universally, a contrast more or less striking to the Churches of scripture,³ neither alters the meaning of apostolic teaching, nor frees the believer from the responsibility of endeavouring to keep the way of truth. As we turn naturally to the gospels, to study there the Spirit's portraiture of Jesus in His personal excellency and beauty, so must we seek to the epistles if we wish to recover the long lost lineaments of a genuine Church. And if the effect of such study is at first disheartening, because it seems to tell us of a time gone by, and of a glory which has ceased to shine, let such remember for their comfort, that it is not with Zion's mourners that the Lord is angry, but with them that are at ease. He is Himself the refuge of His people, and they who seek Him in the way of His testimonies shall find both Him and His companions.⁴ If, therefore, those who love Him, and think upon His sayings, are content to seek no other shelter than

³ It can hardly be necessary to remind the reader, that our question in the text is with ecclesiastical bodies, not with individual saints. Faith can live and act anywhere, except in wilful sin. Nor has the goodness of God allowed itself to be frustrated in its purpose towards His elect, by the unfaithfulness of those who have failed in their stewardship of truth. His word has gone forth, and will not return to Him void. The fulness of Christ (Eph. i. 23) will be attained, and the holy temple completed in the Lord (Eph. ii. 21), notwithstanding the dispensational failure of the Church. But to ignore that failure, and to rest with complacency in a state of things which the Spirit has declared to be symptomatic of the last and most evil times, dreaming of indefinite progress and improvement on the very eve of the Lord's awakening for the long impending judgment, is nothing but the beginning of that delusion which will cover all who are not walking in the light.

⁴ 2 Tim. ii. 22; 1 John i. 7.

His name, remaining steadfast in the faith, and keeping the traditions which they have received from *God*; letting nothing slip which they have once received, but holding that fast which they have heard from the beginning,⁵ the Church is truly represented wherever such are found. If to this they superadd conditions or inventions of their own, they do not indeed lose their individual place as members of Christ's body, but they cease to be, collectively, a witness to the truth.⁶

Returning now to our chapter, we find, in verse 28, an enumeration of the more prominent forms of the Spirit's manifestation, in immediate connection with the subject of Church membership. These gifts are also members,⁷ "set in the body by God, whose workmanship the body is." All are in and of the body, though the action of some may chiefly be outside it; as in the examples of "healing" and "tongues." The order in which they are here marshalled by the Spirit is worthy of attention. We have, 1. Apostles; 2. Prophets; 3. Teachers. It will at once be noticed by the reader, that no mention is here made of "evangelists," which, in Eph. iv., occupy an intermediate space between the prophets and the teachers. The reason is probably this: The apostle is here speaking of "the body of

⁵ 1 John ii. 24.

⁶ By the serious reader, no apology will be required for this digression, whatever judgment he may form of the argument and its conclusions. On the character of the present dispensation, to which reference has more than once been made, some further remarks may be found in chap. xi. of the *Notes on the Romans*.

⁷ Each gift, that is, residing in a member, though on one member many gifts might be bestowed.

Christ," and of its constituent membership—the Spirit's manifestation being treated in subordination to that leading topic. But an "evangelist," in the stricter sense of the term, has properly but little scope for the exercise of his ministry within the body. His sphere of service is the world, in which he stands as an ambassador of Christ, a preacher of divine grace and righteousness to men. Hence, in the passage to which reference has just been made, he naturally finds his place; since the apostle is there speaking, in a wider and more general sense, of the gifts of the ascended Christ to men. But, within the body, the preaching of reconciliation has properly no place, seeing that the true state of those who are members of that body is to be joying in God, through Jesus Christ, by whom they have received already the reconciliation.⁸

The prophet is distinguished from the teacher, and occupies evidently a higher ground. As a permanent gift to the Church, it differs from vaticination, and seems to imply an impulsive outpouring of divine truth, in necessary harmony with Scripture, but not taking the form of simple exposition. This last is rather the office of a teacher. But of prophesying more hereafter.⁹ The first three gifts, as being nobler in degree and of more permanent effect, are divided, as a class, from those which follow. Among those

⁸ Rom. v. 11. Such is, no doubt, the normal condition of true saints. But although the evangelist goes forth from the Church to preach to sinners in their natural state, the ministry of grace within the body may sometimes take a form, when addressed to negligent or ill-taught saints, very similar to the language of God's message to the world. For a striking example of this, see 2 Cor. v. 20, *seq.*

⁹ Chap. xiv.

which remain, we have two—"helps" and "governments"—not previously mentioned, and entitled therefore to our special notice here. The former, which, as a generic term,¹ has a very wide acceptance, might apply with equal propriety to such help as Apollos gave by his gifted zeal to them in Achaia which had believed through grace,² or to any species of practical aid and comfort which love might render in the hour of need; such as Phœbe, for example, gave, who was a succourer of many, and of Paul himself.³ And if it be asked why a term expressive of such varied service is here used as the designation of a particular gift, we may well presume that this intentional ambiguity was meant for the encouragement of those who, with hearts true to Christ, are yet little in their own eyes, and unconscious of those qualities which confer distinction in the sight of men. To such it is a boon to be reminded that God's work has need of helpers, and that no work of love is without its measure of effect in the edification of the body of Christ. A praying saint may be without name in the Church, but is a mighty helper in the Spirit's work. The apostle's own boast was to be a helper of his brethren's joy.⁴

"Governments" or "guidances"⁵ succeed to helps, to which also they stand morally in a close relation; for of all the varied forms which help may take,

¹ Ἀντιλήψεις. The word occurs here only. In Acts xx. 35 we have the cognate verb employed in the same general sense—"That so labouring ye should *support* the weak," etc.

² Acts xviii. 27.

³ Rom. xvi. 2.

⁴ 2 Cor. i. 24.

⁵ Κυβερνήσεις—"Pilotages." This word, like the preceding, is found once only in the New Testament.

none is more needed by the weak and erring of the flock than wise and skilful pilotage among the shoals of this present life. As this term, like the former, is generic, it may comprise within its meaning the particular functions of eldership and oversight elsewhere more fully described.⁶ Their position in this catalogue is in keeping with what was taught to the first disciples, as to masteries, by Him on whose shoulders lies the government of all.⁷ "Tongues" are last mentioned, and with reason, since, although powerful evidences to the incredulous of the divine presence and operative energy, they are of little or no account in the edification of the Church.

Verses 29, 30. "Are all apostles?" etc. The questions here put correspond morally with those already asked with reference to the natural body.⁸ Their obvious drift is to check the risings of carnal presumption, which might seek occasion for a false display, under cover of the general doctrine of spiritual liberty. The Spirit is indeed all-pervading, but His gifts are specially distributed, and liberty of action must be limited by the measure of enabling power. An apostle has his "signs." A prophet has his witness in the hearts of those who hear him. A teacher is commended or discredited by the word which he professes to expound. And so of the rest. What God really gives *He* also *works*, and His operation is ever worthy of Himself. The Lord is never truly honoured in the assemblies of His saints, where these differences of gifts and services are not duly recognized and felt.

⁶ 1 Tim. iii. v.; Titus ii. ⁷ Luke xxii. 24-27; Isa. ix. 6, 7.

⁸ Verses 17-20.

Verse 31. "But covet earnestly the greater gifts,"⁹ etc. If presumptuous folly is to be restrained, godly emulation is also to be encouraged. What God *has* given is to be acknowledged. What He *may* give is not indeed to be rashly anticipated, but is to be sedulously sought and waited for. To prove his love to Christ, by serving Him, should be the aim of each believer. But to wait upon His people is to serve Himself.¹ Such gifts are to be chiefly sought as will help the willing in their ministry of love. The greater gifts should be desired, that the more abundant fruit may follow. Now, the one great aim and labour of the Spirit is the edifying of the body of Christ. Gifts, then, which most distinctly make for that end, should be coveted by those who are ambitious after a godly sort. If the desire of the heart be pure, it will not fail to find the blessing that it seeks. If the gifts enquired for tend only to a vain display, they will be withheld in mercy, or bestowed in judgment. It is a deadly state of soul, to be asking *nothing* of the Lord.² It is an unhealthy state, to be asking only what concerns ourselves. If our hearts are right, we shall be asking largely, not for our own sake but for His.

But although among gifts there are degrees of excellence, there is a something spiritual which excels them all. Like God Himself, it is in measure common to all who are of God.³ But though vitally essential to the saints, it may be languishing and

⁹ Τὰ χαρίσματα τὰ μέζονα. This is the reading of *Cod. Sin.*, in agreement with all the better MSS.

¹ John xiii. 12-17, xxi. 15-17.

² Rev. iii. 17.

³ 1 John iv. 8.

half extinct, while more demonstrative spiritual energies are in full activity. The apostle has taught us the nature, and something of the relative value, of spiritual manifestation. He will show us next the way in which alone *any* special gift of God can be exercised with blessing and true honour to its possessor.

CHAPTER XIII.

TWICE only¹ has the word "charity" or "love"² been mentioned hitherto in this epistle, though the sentiment has ruled the apostle's pen from the beginning. Conscious as he was that the disorders which he had to deal with in this Church, so rich in other gifts, were chiefly owing to their barrenness of this first and most precious fruit of the Spirit, he does not begin by upbraiding them with this deficiency, but, addressing himself to their actual condition, he first seeks to set in order what lies most openly exposed to blame. Having done this, and in the foregoing chapter treated fully the subject of those spiritual manifestations which they prized so highly, though with so defective an apprehension of their true value and intent, he finds now his opportunity for letting freely forth his divinely inspired thoughts on that chief ornament of grace, for which, in their spiritual childishness, they seemed to care so little. For love is a thing which grows with knowledge,

¹ Chaps. iv. 21, and viii. 1.

² Ἀγάπη. Of the two English representatives chosen for this term by the authorised translators, "love" seems decidedly the most appropriate. For "charity," although a truly sweet expression, and one which has meanings in it not to be given adequately by any other word, yet even in its higher sense lacks something which the other has.

and is ever strongest in the wisest. Love is of God, and loving is conformity to God. Gifts of the Spirit are His also, but they may be dishonoured in their exercise by carnal wilfulness or self-seeking. A true gift may be falsely used, but true love is never wrong. To love one's brother is to walk in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in such.³ We become like the Master, not through a prosperous handling of what He has specially bestowed, but as we love one another for his sake.⁴ Had love been supreme among the saints at Corinth, neither party spirit, nor carelessness of walk, nor indifference to sin in others, nor greedy litigation, nor highminded pretensions, nor the desecration of God's holiest things, nor false practice in the exercise of spiritual liberty, would have been found. It is, therefore, with a singular propriety, that there has been introduced by the Spirit into this epistle His emphatic eulogy of love.

Verse 1. "Though I speak,"⁵ etc. Of all special gifts bestowed on men, that of persuasion is the most effective.⁶ In stating, therefore, his estimate of that which he desires to exalt above all other gifts, the apostle begins by a relative depreciation of tongues; casting contempt upon the noblest of

³ 1 John ii. 10.

⁴ John xv. 12.

⁵ It is very remarkable, that the *Cod. Sin.*, which is usually in agreement with the Vatican MS. and others of highest critical authority, here differs from them all, in the omission of the latter part of verse 1, and the whole of verse 2, except its two closing words. It runs as follows: 'Εάν ταῖς γλ. . . . ἀγάπην δὲ μὴ ἔχω, οὐθέν εἰμι· καὶ ἐὰν ψωμίσω κ.λ.

⁶ "Tongues," as a specific manifestation of the Spirit, are of course within the meaning of this verse, but do not appear to reach its limit.

organic endowments, in comparison with that which needs no speech to testify its presence, but is better known by deeds than words. For eloquence may be angelic, and yet false.⁷ Again, its matter may be God's own truth, and yet itself be blamable.⁸ For words which do not bring with them the warmth of a heart in present communion with the Lord, may indeed be profitable to the hearers; but are neither a joy nor an honour to the speaker.

Verse 2. "And though I have the gift of prophecy," etc. "Prophecy," "mysteries," "knowledge," and "faith," are here grouped together, for the evident purpose of declaring the futility of all official, or otherwise extraordinary operations of the Spirit; could such be detached, in our thoughts, from the great essential doctrine of the personal indwelling of the Holy Ghost? Love is a vital quality, while knowledge may be vain, and faith an empty boast.⁹ But a faith that lives and works, must work by love. Balaam and Saul are prominent examples of the manner in which God's Spirit might and did operate "extraneously on unregenerate men. And ever since the Spirit of Christ has become the abiding inmate of every true believer, other spirits also have not ceased to operate among men, which oppose the depths of Satan to the depths of God.¹ From the beginning of the gospel, there have been many false prophets in the world,² and the dispensation is to close with an unprecedented display of lying wonders, when the mystery of iniquity shall have worked out its appointed end.³ And it is possible that these may

⁷ Gal. i. 8.

⁸ Phil. i. 15.

⁹ Jas. ii. 17, *seq.*

¹ Rev. ii. 24.

² 1 John iv. 1.

³ 2 Thess. ii.; Rev. xiii.

have been partly in the apostle's contemplation; but the main drift of his language points rather to the day when even genuine gifts of the Spirit will be found, through their misuse, a loss instead of gain to him who had them; and what might have been done *lovingly* for enduring praise, will be found, through lack of love, fit fuel for the flame.⁴

Verse 3. "And though I bestow all my goods," etc. Neither almsgiving nor self-sacrifice implies necessarily a living faith. The most lavish expenditure of wealth for purposes ostensibly "charitable" may spring from motives quite alien from the life of God. So also the blind fervour of fanaticism may lead a zealot to the death, in the interest of a lie against the truth.⁵ And even *for* the truth men may exhibit any degree of active devotion, and incur personal risk in the support and furtherance of doctrines which have, nevertheless, no gracious effect upon their heart and conscience. "Many shall say in that day, Lord, Lord," etc.⁶ In this solemn repudiation of all works but those of love, the apostle, as his habit is, presents himself as the illustration of his own hypothesis. As sinners saved by grace, both he and his brethren stood on an equally sure foundation in Christ. As saints and servants of righteousness, each had his talent, and for each there is in store a recompence according to his work. The

⁴ *Ante*, chap. iii. 12-15.

⁵ It is noticeable, that both the Vatican MS. and *Cod. Sin.* read *καυχῆσθαι*, instead of *καυθήσθαι*, in the second clause of this verse. The sense will then be, "Though I give my body [*i.e.*, advance to meet, instead of fleeing from persecution to the death] that I may have a ground of boasting." For the sentiment see 2 Cor. xi. 17, *seq.*

⁶ Matt. vii. 21-23.

moral of his present teaching is not that active zeal is a thing undesirable, but that the culture of divine affection is of prior importance to any personal act. Love is the knowledge of God, and exists therefore as a living principle in every saint. But as in nature so also in grace, life and its powers will languish unless duly exercised and fed. Our calling is to emulate the God who called us. It is only by abiding in His love that we can keep His way.

Verses 4-7. "Love suffereth long, and is kind," etc. Having shewn us that to be without love is to be really destitute of what we seem to have,⁷ he turns now to contemplate objectively this essential property of life, that by depicting it faithfully in its character and habit his words may become a standing mirror of self-judgment for us all. The true lineaments of love are found only in the face of Jesus Christ. To learn it, we must study Him. Thus a really growing love is nursed by faith. It is by considering Him that we are changed into His likeness. But the process, though sure, is, alas! too often slow indeed.

Love's first distinction is "long-suffering;" its second, "kindness;" both one and the other being capital attributes of the Saviour-God. And if He is long-suffering to usward,⁸ we, whose calling is to imitate Him as His children, should in like manner both forbear one another in love,⁹ and be patient towards all.¹ If the kindness of His saving love has already graced us with His righteousness in Christ,² and is through Him to flow to us eternally,³ it should

⁷ Luke viii. 18.

⁸ 2 Peter iii. 9, 15.

⁹ Eph. iv. 2.

¹ 1 Thess. v. 14.

² Titus iii. 4, *seq.*

³ Eph. ii. 7.

seem to us a little thing to be kind to one another; and to array ourselves becomingly, as the elect of God, should be our chiefest care.⁴

"Love does not envy," though jealousy is in its very nature.⁵ God, who is the source and final object of His own desires, working as He wills, can envy none. Nor can that love which has its origin and hope in Him. Love covets earnestly,⁶ but not for its own sake. It is jealous over those who are its care.⁷ But because it knows God, it can neither crave addition to His gift unspeakable which it already has in Christ, nor can it look angrily on any who in position may seem higher than itself; for in God's light only it sees light. As love is of God, so envy is distinctively of Satan. It was a prime element in the original transgression, and was the spring of Cain's deadly hatred to his brother. And when the appointed hour came for darkness to sit in judgment upon light, it was through envy that the enemy prevailed.⁸ In God's presence it can find no place, though it hovers often at the threshold of the sanctuary. Moses was meeker than his servant, because Moses spake with God, while Joshua only spake with Moses.⁹ When the disciples wrangled for supremacy, the Master's back was turned.¹ In His presence emulation takes a downward course.

Love "vaunteth not itself."² True love is not an

⁴ Eph. iv. 32; Col. iii. 12.

⁵ οὐ ζηλοῖ. This word is used both in a good sense and a bad; strong desire producing in effect a true or false zeal, according to the quality of the ruling motive in the soul. ⁶ Chap. xii. 31.

⁷ 2 Cor. x. 2.

⁸ Mark xv. 10.

⁹ Num. xi. 27-29.

¹ Mark ix. 33, 34.

² Οὐ περπερεύεται. Gratuitous self-display seems to be the idea expressed by this word.

idler's ornament, but a debtor's obligation,³ and a learner's art.⁴ Love never seeks renown, but rather shuns it; though if real, it proves itself by deeds which cannot always remain hid. There was little of it in the words of Simon, when he drew upon himself the Lord's rebuke.⁵ There is much in what *Peter*, with a better knowledge of his name, has written in unenvying acknowledgment of the wisdom given to his brother Paul.⁶ Self-love seeks self-display; false love is known by the profusion of its words;⁷ but the fruit of the Spirit is a *working* love. And no true workman boasts of an unfinished work. This love was surely sleeping in the saints at Corinth when, while Paul was labouring, they reigned as kings.

"Is not puffed up." Self-importance is the internal counterpart of self-display, and is equally alien to a self-forgetting love. It most abounds where self-knowledge is most rare; and for this reason there was much of it at Corinth. Other knowledge might be found there in abundance; but in a just remembrance both of God and of themselves they were deplorably deficient. Hence it is to them only, of all the churches addressed immediately by the Spirit, that this very reproachful term is applied.⁸ Love is not thus, but flows most freely from a heart first broken and then healed by the effectual power of truth. We love God, because He first loved us. We love

³ Rom. xiii. 8.

⁴ Matt. xi. 29.

⁵ Mark xiv. 29.

⁶ 2 Peter iii. 15, 16.

⁷ Prov. xxvii. 14.

⁸ Chap. v. 2. The word occurs six times in this epistle, and once only elsewhere, in Col. ii. 18, where it is applied, not to real Christians, but to seducing teachers. Its kindred substantive, "swellings," has also its solitary place in 2 Cor. xii. 20.

the brethren, because they bear His image, and are His. While beholding the manner of His love, we are self-abased in wonder at His grace. In His presence pride is hidden from our eyes. It is when the Lord is out of our remembrance that this most unlovely form of "flesh" appears. Its best corrective is to turn again and view Him in the place His love has chosen for our sakes.⁹

"Doth not behave itself unseemly," or it would not be true love, to which modesty and unobtrusiveness attach as natural ornaments. Sincerity is never ostentatious, and truth has its own proprieties, which love knows well, and never violates. Its boldness is not shamelessness. How little of this comeliness of love was found among these weak Corinthians has already been made evident. Let us remember only, that when criticising their deficiencies we are learning to know and to correct *ourselves*.

"Seeketh not her own." But nature does. This single attribute declares sufficiently the origin of love. By this also may be clearly seen the inseparable connection between *faith* and love. If the heart has not a satisfying portion for itself in Christ, this self-neglecting love is an impossibility. Self-seeking may often betray itself in acts which, ostensibly, are works of love; nor is it ever wanting but when faith is in active exercise. It is by looking continually to Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, that we must seek to counteract this all-besetting tendency. He sought neither His own will nor His own glory; but, as the self-sacrificing Shepherd, He both seeks and finds His sheep. The apostle was like the Master

⁹ John xiii.

in his self-devoting love,¹ but he found few others of like mind. It is indeed a wide and sad gap that seems morally to separate the Saviour from the saved, when, as a general estimate of Christian disposition, the Spirit of truth affirms that "all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ."² It was an opposite quality to this self-neglecting love that animated the Corinthians, when they did the wrong they should have suffered, and forgot the Spirit they were of so thoroughly as to sue one another in the courts of Cæsar for "their own."³

"Is not easily provoked;" for it knows the arduous nature of its work, and expects both difficulties and obstructions; but because its labour is not for itself, it is exempt from the rufflings of personal disappointment. Just indignation may match well with love, irascibility does not. Jesus could feel the former on occasion,⁴ the latter never. But even the most devoted servant is not always as his Lord; and a flush of self-consciousness may perhaps have visited the face of the apostle, when inditing this brief sentence, as he called to mind the "sharp contention" which had once separated him from Barnabas, and which his true yoke-fellow has distinguished by a corresponding term.⁵ There is, however, another kind of provocation in which love delights, and of this he stands among men as our chief example still.⁶

"Does not impute evil;"⁷ for its office is to hide sins rather than expose them. What God did not

¹ Chap. x. 33.

² Phil. ii. 20, 21.

³ *Ante*, chap. vi.

⁴ Mark iii. 5, x. 14.

⁵ Παροξυσμός. Acts xv. 39.

⁶ Heb. x. 24.

⁷ Οὐ λογίζεται τὸ κακόν. "Thinketh no evil" seems too vague and general.

do in His righteousness to us, we who are sinners should not do to one another. Love shows this aspect most distinctly where grace is most appreciated. Nor is it a virtue likely to be idle for want of opportunity. Not a day can pass without an appeal to it in some shape ; for besides the multitude of real offences, there are appearances of an ambiguous kind which continually tempt our censure. But where a choice is possible, love chooses on the favourable side. It does not shut its eyes to sin, but openly rebukes it as God's witness, while forgiving freely all that is against itself. The apostle's assertion of this property of love is, at the same time, an implied protest against the unworthy insinuations which some of those at Corinth had not been ashamed to entertain against himself and his fellow-helper in the Gospel.⁸

"Rejoiceth not in iniquity." Love worketh no ill to his neighbour ;⁹ it cannot then rejoice in what is contrary to its nature. Itself the child of goodness, it can only grieve when evil practises and prospers. Its only interest in iniquity is to succour and befriend its victims. What hate spies out, love will not see. It waits for no man's halting, and wrests no man's words. It does not say, "So would we have it," when the righteous fall. Alas ! in a Christ-despising world iniquity rejoices against love. And what shall be said of the spirit which too generally characterises religious controversy ? To be "truthful in love,"¹ is found in practice to be the hardest of achievements, though the simplest and most imperative of Christian duties. In other words, conflict and

⁸ 2 Cor., xii. 16-18. ⁹ Rom. xiii. 10. ¹ Eph. iv. 15.

disputation are the very element of that nature which is by divine description "hateful and hating." Hence, even where contention is needful for the truth's sake, flesh seeks and too often finds its opportunities, thus augmenting the great sum of evil in the very effort to repress it in some special form. What love feels in the presence of the iniquity which it condemns, is best exemplified by Him who wept over the city which had killed the prophets, and where the hand of wickedness had hewn for Him already His appointed grave.² Love cannot rejoice in iniquity; but it

"Rejoiceth with³ the truth." God's love in His saints must languish or rejoice with the truth which both gave it being and is its proper utterance. Natural affection may use flatteries, and often manifests a practical indifference to truth. But both these things are held in abhorrence by real love. Its delight is in God, and therefore in the truth. The disciple whom Jesus loved, and whose inspired testimony leads the willing soul so far into the mystery of still unfathomed love, had no greater joy than to hear that his children walked in the truth.⁴ That his own witness is true is his continual confidence and boast.⁵

None of the many attributes of love deserves a more attentive consideration than this. For it is by detaching love from truth, and making it an ornament and commendation of what is false, that the father of lies achieves his principal successes in the world. But as "no lie is of the truth,"⁶ so no love

² Luke xix. 41; Matt. xxiii. 37. Compare also Jer. xiii. 17; Lam. i. 16; Isa. liii. 9.

³ Συγχαίρει.

⁴ 3 John 4.

⁵ John xix. 35, xxi. 24; 3 John 12.

⁶ 1 John ii. 21.

which is not governed by the truth is really "of God." And if not of God, it is, whatever its degree of plausibility, both partial and corrupt. For "by this we know that we love the children of God, if we love God and keep His commandments."⁷ But this implies both soundness in the faith, and subjection practically to the written word. Such love as God will own can only live with truth. The world's love thrives most upon the sacrifice of truth.⁸ For truth is a torment to the unregenerate mind. It is by a compromise of truth that a corrupt Christianity becomes a snare instead of warning to the world. It were well if, in the present day, truth's children watched their birth-right with more jealous care. They are not of the world, and a love which seeks any other fellowship than what is of the Spirit is not "the bond of perfectness," but rather that untempered mortar of which the walls of Babylon are built.

"Beareth [or hideth]⁹ all things." Love puts up willingly with everything but sin, and that, when confessed, it diligently hides. Love covers what ungodliness digs up,¹ sowing the seed of righteousness in patient disregard of all that nature would resent, or at which it might repine. It does not break under the weight of any secret,² and is not discouraged by

⁷ 1 John v. 2.

⁸ Luke xxiii. 12; Rev. xi. 13.

⁹ *Στέγει*. To "hide," "contain," and "suffer" or "endure," are the three meanings of this word. The first, which is its common signification elsewhere, is not found in the New Testament, unless this verse be an example. The second occurs in 1 Thess. iii. 1, 5, being there rendered by the equivalent term "forbear." The last has been already exemplified in chap. ix. 12 of this epistle.

¹ Prov. xvi. 27.

² Prov. xi. 13.

neglect. It can cheerfully encounter obstacles, because it has a steady and self-governing aim. The apostle bore all things for the gospel's sake. There is in true love all the force of *will*, and it is thus distinguished from mere sentiment. It has its positive not less than its negative virtues. It is not a duty only, but a *power*. Being of God, it must outlive all other things, and have the mastery eventually in every strife.

“Believeth all things.” Love is not folly, but the highest wisdom. It is not therefore idly credulous, though capable of trusting to the uttermost; for it lives on God; and knowing that with Him all things are possible, it counts nothing incredible that lies within the compass of His grace. The apostle's practice was a living example of this love. If he heard good tidings of his brethren, he believed it to the full,³ counting no measure of grace improbable where the giver is the Lord. If an ill report was brought to him, he believed it but in part. His knowledge of man forbad him to discredit any authentic rumour of disorder in the Church; while his knowledge of God, of His power and His faithfulness, still kept his trust from failing, even where the work of grace seemed ruinously marred.⁴ Love's sympathies are ever with the truth. It rejects, therefore, nothing, whether welcome or unwelcome, that is credible. Now, all goodness is credible of God; and all that is contrary to good, of man. Hence love's faculty of credence is discriminative in its perfectness; for to believe all things indifferently

³ 2 Cor. vii. 16; 1 Thess. iii. 9.

⁴ Compare Gal. iv. 20 with v. 10.

would be to place truth and falsehood on a common level, and to honour God and Satan equally.

“Hopeth all things.” As love’s desires are to Godward, so all its expectations are from Him. Seeking good only, it looks for the fulfilment of its wishes to Him who is able to do abundantly above what we can either ask or think. It does not limit God, and therefore is not daunted by the most unpromising appearances. The love of Paul to the Corinthians made him hope largely from them, though remotely. *Their faith* must first be increased, and for its increase he had hope in God.⁵ The love which God is proves itself upon a disappointed hope. As the Creator, He had just claims on his own workmanship; but the time soon came when it repented Him that He had made man upon the earth.⁶ Again, as the God of a covenanted people, He had righteous expectations; but they came to nought. The vineyard which He planted only bore wild grapes.⁷ If He nourished and brought up children, they rebelled against Him.⁸ His debtors mocked His claims, His sworn subjects treated His majesty with scorn. He said at last, “They will reverence my Son;” but this last hope of patient goodness also failed.⁹ But if Love lived and laboured here in vain,¹ coming to its own to be rejected by its own, and receiving at last its bitter death wound in the house of its friends,² it was yet animated by an expectation worthy of its strength. Death, instead of quenching it, should bring it to its wish. The flesh of Immanuel rested in the grave in hope.³ He died that He might cease

⁵ 2 Cor. x. 15.

⁶ Gen. vi. 6.

⁷ Isa. v.

⁸ Isa. i.

⁹ Matt. xxi. 33, *seq.* ¹ Is. xlix. 4. ² Zech. xiii. 6. ³ Acts ii. 26, *seq.*

to live *alone*. He took His life again that He might share it and its blessings with His friends. But His friends are those of His own choosing, and were God's natural enemies until reconciled to Him by the death of His own Son.⁴ If God's expectations from the creature were frustrated, it was that our hope in Him might be assured.

"Endureth all things." To endure is harder than to do, and love proves its strength by patience rather than by active zeal. It was from defect of this quality of love that Moses failed to bring into the promised land the people whom he had led forth from Egypt. God's love alone is able to sustain the burden of His people. Jesus took patiently the charge which love imposed, enduring, as God only can, the contradiction of sinners against Himself. For the joy that was set before Him He endured the *cross*. To be His disciples we have need of patience. It is, with faith, the badge of all who are of God; but its measure in each will be according to the fervency of love. Because Paul loved much he bore much also, enduring all things for the sake of God's elect.⁵ Like his Master, he took patiently all evil imputations, and gloried in tribulations from which nature shrinks. As God is distinctively the God of patience, so patience is the chief sign of apostleship in those who are true messengers of God.⁶ And if "we count them happy that endure,"⁷ let us remember, that what love does is not shewn to us for admiration only, but for imitation also.⁸

Verse 8. "Love never faileth," etc. It cannot fail

⁴ John xv. 16; Rom. v. 8-10.

⁵ 2 Tim. ii. 10.

⁶ Rom. xv. 5; 2 Cor. xii. 12. ⁷ James v. 11. ⁸ Eph. v. 1, 2.

nor cease, since it is the very life of God which they who are born of Him will live for ever in His presence, after all obstructions to its full development are gone. It is a nature, not a gift, save only as life is itself the gift of Him who is the quickening Spirit.⁹ But special gifts and manifestations of the Spirit must cease with the occasion which has called them forth. "Prophecyings," which are now the Comforter's chief means of edifying the saints, will exhaust themselves in the completion of their work. No prophet's voice is heard in heaven, where love has its open vision of unending joy, and where the promises of truth are finally made good. "Tongues," also, which differ in their speech, must cease. Their diversity on earth is a judicial badge of the common *distance* which separates the nations from the living God. And if God now through His messengers accosts men in their native tongue, it is that He may bring them to a knowledge which shall one day find its adequate expression in a new and nobler speech. In heaven there are many voices, but one speech. Meanwhile the ear of God is accessible, through Jesus Christ, to a far divided utterance of the common faith. Even "knowledge"¹ also shall then be at an end; such knowledge, that is, as we now call by that name. But as such an assertion is a natural paradox, he devotes in what follows some space to its elucidation.

Verses 9-11. "For we know in part," etc. To know God in Christ is our calling, and already the

⁹ John x. 28.

¹ Or "varieties of knowledge," *γνώσεις* being the reading of *Cod. Sin.*, with some other MSS. of note.

apostle has declared that the Spirit has been given to believers, to enable them to prosper in this knowledge. But that Spirit is *all*-searching, even to the depths of God ;² while to know Christ, and the power of His resurrection, is the avowed aim of the runner in the race of faith. And how vast a measure of divine knowledge is even here below attainable, through grace, Paul is himself our witness.³ Yet all this knowledge, though in its quality divine, and raised in its measure to the height of ecstasy, is to pass away. Nor is there anything incredible in this. For knowledge is in its nature limited by capacity, and we are little in the presence of infinity. Speech, and thought, and comprehension are, in the present life, according to the quality and power of our natural organism. Alive, by grace, to God, but in natural bodies, our perception and enjoyment of pure truth is, through the enabling power of the Spirit, real, and its measure capable of indefinite increase. Joy is the reflection of true knowledge, and joy may even here be *full*, yea, far beyond utterance, through the rich disclosure to our faith of the treasures of Christ's fulness. Yet the contentment of a Christ-fed soul proves, not its perfection of knowledge, but its comparative littleness of apprehension. *God* is to be known hereafter by His children, but as yet the sum of our knowledge is that we are "*known* of God."⁴

Both knowledge, then, and prophecy, which is its highest present utterance, are partial, though progressive. And whatever is progressive must eventually distance and lose sight of its beginning.

² *Ante*, chap. ii. 10-12.

³ Eph. iii. 4.

⁴ Chap. viii. 3 ; Phil. iii. 12.

“When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.” Now, although the Spirit’s things are constantly analagous to those of nature, they differ widely, not in kind only, but in the order and manner of their consummation. Nature fulfils itself by regular but slow degrees. But the scanty beginnings of true knowledge will be suddenly expanded to perfection, when the change from mortality to life takes place. And this difference is pointedly illustrated in verse 11. Between infancy and manhood there intervenes in nature a third state, of which no account is taken in this estimate of spiritual growth. The speech, and understanding, and imaginations of a child are outgrown and forgotten by the full-grown man. But the child’s language is a just expression of his thoughts; and if the changeful emotions of his heart are little, they are true. So is it, and so will it be with the believer as a new-born babe of grace. The light into which he is already brought is marvellous.⁵ He knows by name, and in a measure also experimentally, what it is to be, through faith, an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ. But what we are to be, not even the bosom friend of Christ could know while in the body.⁶ And when the time of change shall really come, and conformity to the image of the Firstborn shall be no more an aspiration but a fact, the joys which they now taste, who with a godly diligence add knowledge to their faith, will seem, in the retrospect, no better than an indistinct though pleasant memory of childhood.

Verse 12. “For now we see through a glass,

⁵ 1 Peter ii. 9.

⁶ 1 John iii. 2.

darkly," etc. We see, but not yet *God*; *that* is the final promise to the many sons whom He is bringing to His glory. In the meanwhile, the word which reveals Him hides Him also. If we look *into* it, all is light; for it presents to our faith a living and speaking likeness of the Lord. If we would look *through* it, all is dark; for truth is a riddle⁷ to the intellect, until with spiritual bodies we have conferred on us a mental organism capable of apprehending it. By a patient meditation of the Scriptures we obtain their comfort also;⁸ but the end of even an inspired search is to discover that the riches of wisdom and knowledge still belong to God—that His judgments are unsearchable, and His ways past finding out.⁹

It is well for all believers, and especially those younger in the faith, and therefore in more danger of highmindedness, to ask themselves occasionally what stock of spiritual knowledge they can really call their own. Whoever wisely catechizes his own heart will soon discover how small a measure he has yet attained of that which he is born to know. To be assured, upon the Spirit's word, that God is light, is joy to the full for those who have believed through grace. But let us try to search that light beyond the limits of its present revelation, and we shall only wander in a cloud. The excellent glory is above us, but the voice which comes from thence directs us now to *Jesus*, as our soul's true rest. Again, we see the Lord by faith, through the Spirit's testimony, who reveals Him. But while rejoicing in

⁷ βλέπομεν . . . δι' ἰσόπτρον ἐν αἰνίγματι.

⁸ Rom. xv. 4.

⁹ Rom. xi. 33.

His name, and knowing well His grace, what know we yet *mentally* of Him or of His things? Much may and should be known *about* Him, by those who turn to right account the record which God hath given of His Son; and such knowledge is the pasture of true faith, while mental cravings still remain unsatisfied. But we are in that day to see face to face. In the eternal brightness of that light which once, upon the mount, for a moment shewed the Saviour's glory to the saved, they who now trust in Him shall live and walk, alike in knowledge and in love. Till then, hope patiently awaits her coming joy.

Yet to know God is our birthright by His grace, and the Spirit is our guide to truth itself. And richly does He feed the willing sheep of Christ, while yet in His most abundant revelations He withholds more than He gives. He speaks to us indeed of depth and height, of length and breadth, and of a love of Christ which passes knowledge; but His very words admonish us of our present inability to measure what is yet our own. We all know, but in part. An inspired apostle has his measure,—a measure so large, that when handling the mysteries of God his words were as the words of God. "I know," and "we know," are a usual preface to apostolic teaching. But the mighty truths delivered by God's messengers they apprehended but in part. Wisdom's disciples learn that *God* is wise. His testimonies are indeed most surely believed¹ among His saints, but how little are they really understood! But in that day we shall know as we are known.

¹ Luke i. 1.

Verse 13. "And now abideth," etc. Having set the temporal and adventitious gifts of the Spirit in their proper relation to the life which they adorn, he closes this episode of love with a summary of what is vital and essential, faith, hope, and love being the standing constituents and tokens of salvation in those who are elect of God. Faith justifies; the just man has a hope which maketh not ashamed; and, being born of God, the new man loves. But because this last outlives the other two, it is greater than them both. Faith ends in sight, hope in fruition, but love never.² What we now hear of as laid up for us in heaven, we shall in the coming day both know and have. But it will be possessed and known in love. God, who is love, will be His children's prospect, and their rest. But if so, the chief aim of the saint, while waiting for his hope, should be to cultivate what is abiding;—to act here in the spirit of watchful and self-denying perseverance, as he will act spontaneously and without all hindrance in the life to come; to walk in that love with which Christ also hath loved us—a sacrificial love—an odour of sweet smell to God.

² Compare 1 Thess. i. 3, 4. I dissent entirely from the view of those who, building their hypothesis upon the word "abide," would carry faith and hope, as well as love, to heaven. There is a certain amount of plausibility in some of the arguments alleged in support of this view; but to my own judgment it is incongruous with the general drift of apostolic teaching. The *end* of faith is salvation; the end of hope is the grace to be brought to us at the appearing of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter i. 5, 13.) To discuss the question further would here be out of place.

CHAPTER XIV.

“FOLLOW after love,” etc. The preceding chapter has amply redeemed the promise given at the close of chap. xii. And now, having shewn to us alluringly the path of excellence, he exhorts us to pursue it. For such is the true course of godly ambition which, cheered and directed by the good word of grace, is taught to aim boldly at the highest mark.¹ But in the service of this higher aim there are lesser but yet precious things to be desired. The gifts of the Spirit are not disparaged, but vindicated, when placed in this just relation to their end. They are not therefore to be despised, but rather coveted. For what God gives will always be desired by those who know Him in His ways. And if love be first followed, gifts will be sought lovingly as well as eagerly. Their presence in the Church will then be not for ostentation, but to serve in their several uses the requirements of love. The less will be governed by the greater, and true edification be the result. But while all distinctive tokens of divine energy are to be prized, especial value should be set on prophecy, for reasons stated in what follows.

Verses 2-4. “For he that speaketh in an (unknown) tongue speaketh not to men,” etc. To justify

¹ Matt. v. 48; Eph. v. 1.

the prominence assigned to prophecy, it is here compared with what seems at that time to have been one of the commonest as well as the most conspicuous form of spiritual manifestation. That "tongues" had been unduly valued by these Corinthian saints, and the gift unseasonably used, may be inferred from the general tenor of this chapter, the chief aim of which is the correction of disorders arising from a free exercise of spiritual powers, without the qualifying accompaniments of soundmindedness and love. He begins, therefore, his task by a comparative definition of these very dissimilar gifts, one of which is in its exercise distinctively for *God*, and the other for men. He who had a "tongue" spake not to men, but to God. It is this non-communicative character that separates it so strikingly from all other spiritual manifestations. The very member which forms the active link of human intercourse and sympathy was in this case miraculously diverted from its natural use. Men spoke, but with an utterance not cognizable even by their own understanding. Their speech was addressed immediately to God, yet not in the ordinary communion of the Spirit. For neither praise, nor prayer, nor intercession could proceed intelligently while the understanding was in suspense. In his spirit the speaker was engaged with "mysteries," while his mind was inactive and out of communication with the minds of others. *No one* could understand him.²

² Οὐδείς ἀκούει. This mark is sufficient to distinguish broadly this Corinthian gift from the earlier manifestation at Pentecost, the chief glory of which was, that each man heard himself distinctly addressed in his own native dialect by the unlettered messengers of God. As a spiritual phenomenon, the gift of tongues

He knew that he was speaking, and that he spoke to God, but he looked for no effect on others. Without a divinely gifted interpreter, the only result of such utterances was that God was really operating, but men knew not either how or why.

“But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men edification, and exhortation, and comfort.” This definition of the prophet’s function not only puts it in marked contrast to the former gift, but, since honour is the wage of usefulness, it entitles it to take the highest place among those energies which love may use. The threefold description here given of the prophet’s ministry is sufficient to declare him a chief helper in the work of God. The evangelist, as an instrument of God, *makes* men, by calling dead sinners to the life of God. The prophet speaks to men, whom the Spirit acknowledges as such—to men in Christ—as an immediate oracle of God. Words, whether of edification in the way of doctrine, or of comfort, or of exhortation, are given him of God, that men may learn through his ministry the manner of the God with whom they have to do. But according to the eminency of this gift, so also is

is marked emphatically by its barrenness of social benefit. It was a blessing only to its possessor. Through interpretation he might profit others also, but this was a separate and not always a concomitant endowment. It may be noticed that we have no hint in Scripture of the presence of this gift in any other Church, though we are not warranted in thence inferring that it was elsewhere unknown. The apostle had this gift in a redundant measure (verse 18), and the elaborate manner in which provision is here made for the proper regulation of its exercise seems rather to imply that he contemplated as a probability a continuance of its operation in the Church. Still, its use is rather tolerated than commended (verse 39) in the assemblies of the saints, since by itself it was a hindrance rather than a help to edification.

the degree of moral danger which threatens its possessor, if it be not held and exercised in subserviency to love. For since in its operation and effect it is outward and objective, a prophet might be plying his gift to the real benefit of others, while his own soul was rather impoverished than blessed. The proverb indeed remains true, that the waterer shall himself be watered; but this implies an interest in the work depending upon something deeper than extraneous gift. Edification, exhortation, and comfort are in the prophet's *words*, and if himself in a right state, in his spirit also. For a soul in communion with God must be in sympathy with its utterances, and with those to whom it speaks. It will be remembered, that in the enumeration of spiritual gifts in chap. xii., the prophet is twice distinguished from the teacher,³ while of pastors no mention is there made. On the other hand, the present definition of prophetic ministry amounts nearly to what is indicated by the double designation of "pastors and teachers" in Eph. iv. But a prophet's ministry, though tending to the same results as teaching, has an occasional and impulsive character. A teacher, who waits duly on his calling, is a teacher *always*; and can exercise his ministry, whether publicly or privately, at his own discretion, and at stated times. But the true sphere of a prophet's gift is the assembled Church. When God's worshippers are gathered, not as they often should be, to listen to a teacher, but to wait on Him in the common fellowship of the Spirit, the prophet finds his opportunity as the helper, in a special sense, of that work of

³ *Ante*, pages 291, 309.

edification which the Church performs upon itself,⁴ through the efficient ministry of its several members in the liberty and power of the Holy Ghost.

The speaker in a tongue "edifies himself," the prophet edifies the Church. And this last must be the aim of those who desire truly to be fellow-workers with God. To what end, then, it may perhaps be asked, was the former gift? To such an enquiry there is a double answer; first, particular self-edification, and the power of mysterious converse with God, are not an unimportant benefit to the holder of such a gift. But, secondly, these tongues were, with other gifts of a visibly miraculous kind, an emphatic corroboration of a testimony which declared, not the name only and the Gospel of the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, but that He dwelt *personally*, by His Spirit, in all who called in faith upon that name. While, therefore, the believer needed not such gifts for the confirmation of his own faith, the indwelling Spirit being Himself the seal and witness of each child of God, they had, in the wisdom of God, their place and efficacy as the fitting accompaniments of a doctrine then so new, as well as naturally incredible, to mortal ears.⁵ Tongues, therefore, were, like other gifts, fit objects of desire, and to be honoured in their place. And so he proceeds:

Verse 5. "I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied," etc. He would that each might be severally edified, but rather that they might rejoice together in the Lord. A concurrent power of interpretation would place the "tongue"

⁴ Eph. iv. 16; Heb. iii. 13; Rom. xv. 14.

⁵ Heb. ii. 4.

on a moral par with prophecy. If otherwise, the gift indeed was good and precious, but its place of exercise was not the assembly of the saints. And by how much the profiting of many is to be preferred to the benefit of one, by so much did the speaker with tongues stand below the prophet in the honour which attends true service in the Church.

Verse 6. "Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues," etc. In his usual fashion he here enforces his general doctrine by a personal appeal. Let them only ask themselves why the prospect of his coming to them gave them joy. Was it that by an unseasonable display of such gifts and powers as served only to draw attention to himself, he might remind them more impressively of the distance which separated him officially from themselves? or was it not rather that by speaking to their minds, and hearts, and consciences he might enrich them more abundantly in Christ, whilst himself participating in the common grace? Four things are here specified, as tending directly to edification: "Revelation," "knowledge," "propheying," and "doctrine." Of the first we have an example in chap. xi., relating to the Lord's Supper.⁶ The second explains itself, and is plentifully illustrated in this, as in all the writings of the apostle. Of "prophecy" he has already given a sufficient definition in verse 3; while "doctrine" is a larger term, and in its widest meaning covers all the rest. It has, however, its distinctive signification also, which appears to be

⁶ Chap. xi. 23, *seq.* Compare 1 Thess. iv. 15, *seq.* "Revelation" was indeed pre-eminently the character of Paul's apostolic ministry, according to the declaration of the Lord at the time of his conversion. (Acts xxvi. 16.)

not so much the imparting of truths previously unknown, as the diligent and faithful inculcation of "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."⁷

Verses 7, 8. "And even things without life," etc. A natural comparison is here introduced in confirmation of pure spiritual teaching, according to the frequent habit of Him who is the Lord both of nature and of grace. The illustration is of the simplest kind, but conveys withal a powerful moral lesson. For there is a warfare to be waged by those whose calling is to fight the fight of faith; and they who would prove themselves good soldiers of Jesus Christ must listen to the tones of that trumpet which to the watchful believer will give no uncertain sound.⁸

Verse 9. "So likewise ye," etc. The pains which the apostle takes to make clear this almost self-evident truth are an indication of the extent to which wrong notions and false practice on this point prevailed at Corinth. Let us notice here that his language not only presumes a large diffusion of this particular gift among the members of the Church, but recognizes in each saint a capacity for that or any other gift which the Spirit in His sovereign distribution might bestow. It is a question not of *office*, and its ascertained responsibilities, but of *power*, and its wise and fitting use.

⁷ Compare Phil. iii. 1 with Heb. xiii. 8, 9, and 2 Pet. i. 12. The relation in which "revelation" stands to "prophesying," and "knowledge" to "doctrine," is obvious, and has been often noticed. But it should not be allowed to weaken, in our apprehension, the separate and distinctive force of each of these expressions.

⁸ 1 Tim. vi. 12; 2 Tim. ii. 3.

Verses 10, 11 pursue the subject in a strain which these naturally quick-witted, though spiritually dull, Corinthians must have felt to be not slightly reproachful; since, in order to restore them to their spiritual senses, they are required to digest these natural truisms. As in artificial sounds, so also in human speech there are varieties which sever man from man. But the Spirit's aim is not to sever, but unite. The point of his rebuke is this: Wisdom is the diet of the perfect; but wisdom is distilled by speech, and enters by the understanding. Unintelligible utterances, therefore, could not serve the ends of wisdom. But one of the marks of folly is a misappropriation of its means. And to this charge they would make themselves obnoxious if they continued to exercise the gift of tongues, without an interpreter, in their assemblies. Instead of edification, the true object of all spiritual ministry, disorder only and disunion could result from a habit which kept both heart and understanding in a state of inactivity.

Verse 12. "Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous," etc. He applauds their desire of spiritual distinction, and points out to them the means by which true eminence might be attained. The edifying of the Church, which is the Spirit's temple, should be the aim of those who seek His gifts. God's dwelling should also be His *rest*. But He can rest only where His truth is honoured and obeyed.

Verse 13. "Wherefore let him that speaketh," etc. To him that hath shall more be given. The possession of this precious but inefficient gift should incite him who had received it to seek also from the same divine source the needed power of interpretation.

For fellowship in the Spirit is a natural craving of that life which is of God. The consciousness, therefore, of being the subject of a positive energy of this mysterious kind would produce in a right-minded believer a desire that the truth which thus spake in him might not remain a dark and hidden saying, but be changed, through the same divine power, to an open testimony of light and joy.⁹

Verse 14 throws further light on the peculiar nature of this gift, which, when in a state of activity, produced as its effect a special character of communion, in which the understanding of the worshipper took no part, while in his spirit he addressed both prayer and thanksgiving to God, according to a purely spiritual and supernatural consciousness. The exercise of this gift was, as we are afterwards taught, quite voluntary; but if the gifted person once put himself under its influence, it necessarily dissociated him, while its operation lasted, from his fellow-worshippers. His state during that season was ecstatic, and can neither be defined with precision, nor in the least degree apprehended, except by those on whom the Spirit similarly wrought. The apostle, who knew what it was to be "beside himself to God,"¹ could sympathise with devotional

⁹ Fault has been found by some with the authorized translation of this verse, on the ground of its supposed inconsistency with what follows. But the difficulty is purely imaginary, and arises from the gratuitous assumption that "praying" in v. 13 is *public* praying. The evident meaning of the apostle is, that the possessor of a gift, in its nature unproductive of edification, should entreat the Lord privately to grant to him ability to impart to others what he had received. The verse is but a particular application of the general exhortation in v. 12, "Seek that ye may excel," etc.

¹ 2 Cor. v. 13, xii. 2-4,

ecstasy, and desire, it on behalf of his brethren, but assigns to it deliberately an inferior place in the scale of spiritual endowments; for while the understanding is in suspense, a man's proper individuality is in suspense also. He is moved, but does not move. He is an agent, and in some sort a voluntary one, yet without intention in his acts. He prays with his spirit; but while his understanding is unfruitful, he can neither intercede for others nor give thanks intelligently for himself. He is out of all present connection with his fellows, and therefore without practical efficiency as a member of Christ's body. The apostle declares himself unable to rest satisfied with such a gift.

Verse 15. "What is it, then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also," etc. *He will have his secret blessings, and his social also.* All that God gave he would use thankfully, but in the spirit of a sound mind. What he said to God alone, men need not know. What he prayed and sang with others, must be intelligible to himself and them. As in a former chapter,² we have found him devoting many words to the adjustment of a point of outward decorum, so here also he enlarges to a degree which an unreflecting reader might be tempted to think excessive, on this question of the right or wrong use of a particular gift. But his pen is under a surer guidance than his natural judgment; and we should learn, from his manner of dealing with this question, first, as a general principle, that spiritual order and comeliness are things essential to the profit of God's saints in

² Chap. vii.

their assemblies; and secondly, how to judge, by the tests which this chapter affords, the validity of ecclesiastical pretensions *of any kind* in which the true order of the spirit is systematically disallowed.

Verse 16. "Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit," etc. What is here chiefly interesting is the distinct recognition of the "unlearned,"³ and his place as a genuine worshipper in the assembly of God. The thoughts of the apostle are mainly upon *him*; for God's assemblies are not institutions for the vain display of gift, but means for the common and mutual edification of His saints. There is a hearing faculty in every true child of God. The babe in Christ has an unction from the Holy One, and knoweth all things. Whatever, in an assembly of worshippers, is unintelligible to the weakest member of Christ's body, is unprofitable for edification, though it may interest a few. Let us also note the use of the term "thanksgiving" in this verse. Already he has spoken of praying and singing. From these incidental allusions we obtain an accurate notion of true church worship in its several elements. Teaching is not worship. Nor is exhortation; though both, if really in the spirit, tend directly to its enlargement, and the elevation of its tone. But as in heaven there is neither preaching nor teaching, so also in a worship-meeting of true saints; while place will be found for whatever is of God, and seasonable words of exhortation, of comfort, or rebuke will assuredly be heard, according to the moral need of the assembly at the time, the

³ Ἰδιώτης. What is meant is any ungifted worshipper, and not merely those who had not the power of interpreting the tongues.

predominating tone will always be thanksgiving and prayer, with melody of heart and voice to the Lord.⁴ In such assemblies God will more frequently be addressed than men. How this verse and the one following condemn by anticipation the dead ritual of Rome, as well as the modern extravagancies of Irvingism, will forcibly suggest itself to every spiritual reader.

Verses 18, 19. "I thank my God," etc. Tongues had undoubtedly been overrated at Corinth; and now, lest he should seem to undervalue what they, through a lack of spiritual discrimination, had unduly prized, he solemnly thanks God⁵ for the more abundant manifestation of that self-same power in his own case. As a chosen messenger of God to the nations, he had at his command, besides the mysterious gift of unintelligible speech, an unlimited utterance, according to the exigencies of his vocation. But, in the Church (at Corinth, or elsewhere), he would be audible only in the spoken language of the place. For it is not as a stranger that God is known in the assemblies of His saints, nor does He speak there in a foreign speech; but, through His Spirit, ministers to His children's wants, by revealing to their hearts and understandings the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Verse 20 closes this part of the apostle's exhortation, by an appeal to the spiritual judgment of his brethren. They desired to be wise, and to be so esteemed. Let them, then, cease from a habit which

⁴ Compare 1 Tim. ii. and Eph. v. 19.

⁵ The reading *λαλῶ* (instead of *λαλῶν*), given by all the best MSS., confirms the A.V. of v. 18.

belonged rather to the simple. For nothing is more characteristic of childishness than an excessive or unseasonable use of what is our own. They should remember, also, that these special gifts were not their chief endowment as believers. "The mind of Christ" belonged to them as a part of their divine birthright. Let them endeavour to cultivate it to a manly point. Let them be babes in their harmlessness of walk, and willing ignorance of the world and its corruptions; but shew themselves men⁶ in their knowledge and observance of God and of His ways.

Verses 21, 22. "In the law it is written," etc. This appeal to the law⁷ is made (like the earlier one in chap. ix. 9) to corroborate his foregoing reasoning. He had appealed to natural usage and experiences; he now makes this general reference to the former testimony of the Spirit, not to establish any analogy of a historical kind, but to show yet more conclusively, that the gift of tongues is one in its nature incompatible with practical fellowship in the Spirit. It was God, indeed, who by this gift both wrought and spoke; but strangely, even as, in judgment upon Israel, He had filled their ears with the barbarous speech of the appointed scourges of His land. Tongues then were for a sign. But believers need no sign. The truth is in them, and they know, through grace, the Lord on whom they call. Signs are intended to operate by force of contrast—to

⁶ *Τέλειοι*, "perfect." *Ante*, chap. ii. 6, and iii. 1.

⁷ The word being here used (as often elsewhere), generically, for the Jewish Scriptures. The quotation is substantially from Isa. xxviii. 11, but is not in full verbal agreement either with the Hebrew or any of the ancient versions.

awaken by their strangeness attention to truth, either previously unknown, or unfaithfully forgotten. But prophecy is not a sign, but rather an expected provision of the God of all grace, for the supply of his children's spiritual needs. It is not, therefore, for unbelievers, though its faithful exercise may, as afterwards described, so operate indirectly even upon them as to prepare the way for their conversion to the Lord. But its proper object is God's people, and its just effect the edifying of the Church.

Verses 23-25. "If, therefore, the whole Church be come together in one place," etc. We have now a more immediate application of his general doctrine to the existing practice of the saints at Corinth in their ordinary meetings for worship. On considering the case put hypothetically in the verses now before us, two things at once become apparent. First, it was a habit, commended by the Spirit of God, for all who believed in any place to assemble themselves, from time to time, for the sake of common worship and mutual edification; and, secondly, if strangers were present at such meetings, it was *as* strangers, and entirely separate from God's living worshippers, the false imagination^s of "public worship," in the modern sense of the expression, being *as yet a thing* unheard of in the Church.

Moreover, the Church being thus assembled, the entire absence of any ritualistic system or order of "divine service" is made strikingly evident by the terms of the apostle's hypothesis. God's Spirit having His abode in the assembly, it is presunable

^s A notion founded on the utterly anti-Christian principle, that the natural man is able at his will to be a true worshipper of God.

that each of those present may have some sort of gift. Are they, then, to exercise them absolutely? or, are not a godly discrimination and discretion to be observed? This is plainly what is here implied. The effect of their all speaking with tongues would be to convey to an ungifted worshipper,⁹ and still more to an unbeliever, a suspicion of their madness. Ignorance would be stumbled, unbelief provoked to contempt. But if all prophesied, the effect would be an overwhelming conviction of the presence and power of God. The ignorant would find himself searched and enlightened; the unbeliever's proud indifference would be vanquished and shattered by the power of the truth, though not himself personally addressed; for when God speaks to men in their own language, there is a power in His words. The apostle does not mean to say that such are the ordinary effects of prophecy; he is purposely supposing a case, which, though possible, was not to be expected, and which is here stated solely for the purpose of manifesting more distinctly the essential difference existing between these contrasted forms of spiritual gift.

Verse 26. "How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one hath a psalm," etc. Passing now from hypothesis to fact, he proceeds to apply his rule of spiritual propriety to the prevailing habit of the Corinthian saints in their public assemblies for worship. The first thing to be noticed here is the full recognition, on the apostle's part, both of

⁹ *i. e.*, one who was neither a tongue, nor an interpreter, and therefore not in the secret of this peculiar form of spiritual manifestation.

the presence of active spiritual power under its varied forms of manifestation, and of a corresponding liberty of exercise, as things naturally inherent in a spiritual assembly. It must indeed be evident to the thoughtful reader that this is a rudimental principle, inseparable from any just idea of a Christian assembly; for since each constituent member of such assembly is regarded as a new creature in Christ, and all have alike drunk into the one Spirit, while the assembly itself is descriptively the body of Christ,¹ the absence of any such manifestation would indicate the lowest extreme of spiritual feebleness and lethargy; for *Christ* is where Christians are, if met in faith; and both liberty and power are where His presence is discerned.

But while at Corinth this fundamental principle was clearly seen and practically asserted, there was greatly lacking in their meetings another and essential element of genuine edification. Where God is not Himself remembered, and His presence felt, His very gifts, because unwisely used, become a hindrance to His children's blessing. Paul found it so at Corinth. Their opulence of gift revealed their poverty of wisdom and true spiritual sense.² He is obliged, therefore, to supply their lack of grace by laying down specific directions as to the exercise of those gifts which he rejoiced to acknowledge as marks of the Spirit's living energy among them, and whose presence he desired to see yet more abundantly manifested in the Church.³

Verses 27, 28. "If any one speak in a tongue,"

¹ Chap. xii. 13, 27.

² αἰσθησις. Phil. i. 9, *margin*.

³ Chap. xii. 31.

etc. To silence absolutely any gift of God would be to quench the Spirit, and therefore to commit a sin. The apostle does not so, but seeks to raise a barrier against carnal perverseness, and by regulating these acknowledged powers in their use, to bring more abundant glory to the Giver. He begins with tongues, as being at once the most conspicuous and also the most mischievous in their abuse. The thing most important to notice here is the entire disallowing of anything like *uncontrollable impulse* in these spiritual manifestations. Every genuine gift of the Spirit is subject to him who holds it and is responsible for its use. This is made very evident by the methodical regulation of the "tongues," a gift which, from its peculiar character, might seem entitled beyond others to claim exemption from fixed rules. And it is likely that this plea had been advanced by some who held this gift at Corinth. But the apostle here firmly asserts the principle, that in all that relates to the service of God the spiritual understanding must have an undisturbed supremacy, regulating the exercise of that gift even which, when in active operation, holds the understanding in suspense. Such utterances are both limited in number, and made absolutely conditional on the presence of an interpreter. No unintelligible speech is ever to be listened to by God's assembled worshippers. Let the tongue which God only understands address itself to God, but *privately*. For in the Church men ought to hear, and not God only.

Verse 29. "Let the prophets speak two or three," etc. An interpreted "tongue" being morally on a par with "prophecy," it is not surprising that the

same scope is allowed to both. Two, or at the most three, addresses are judged sufficient for the edification of the Church at any one meeting for worship. The teacher, as already noticed, has his own appropriate sphere and opportunities; but these are, or should be, distinct from church meetings.⁴ When a prophet speaks the rest must judge. No mention is here made of either prayer or praise, though it is evident, from what he has said above,⁵ that with these the intervals between the several prophesyings would be habitually filled. But who are to judge the prophets? First, their brethren of like gift; and, secondly, the entire assembly. The possessor of any gift should be the aptest to discern the Spirit in another. There is also, as we have seen, a special gift of spiritual discernment.⁶ But in this passage the apostle contemplates the whole assembly, since what is said to all is also judged of all. All who believe have the indwelling Spirit, and, in greater or less measure, the mind of Christ. All, therefore, are held competent to judge the quality of spiritual ministry. We are called alike to prove all things, and to hold fast what is good.⁷

⁴ The more faithfully we adhere to apostolic direction, the more will our blessing as God's worshippers abound. Nor will the above stated regulation ever be disregarded in true worship-meetings of God's saints. There are, of course, other occasions when saints may profitably meet in social intercourse, as helpers of each other's joy, when the interchange of thought is subject to no positive restriction.

⁵ Verses 14-16.

⁶ Chap. xii. 10.

⁷ The attempt often made to limit this discriminating power to the other prophets (*i. e.*, to an official ministry or "clergy") is not only gratuitous and arbitrary, but in plain contradiction both of the teaching of Scripture, and of the very nature of a spiritual assembly.

And if any should ask what reason can exist for criticising spiritual utterances at all, seeing that the Spirit who confers these gifts is Himself essentially *truth*? the answer is, that gifted men are *naturally* still *themselves*, and consequently that the purity of their speech will be exactly in proportion to the measure in which they succeed, by God's grace, in *governing* themselves. The corrupter is about their path, and seeks to mar the Spirit's gift by practising upon their fleshly minds. A watchful humility will be safe in the exercise of gift, while pride or heedlessness becomes the spoil of the deceiver. None are exempt from error but those who are preserved of God, who has respect unto the lowly, and will keep the lips as well as hearts of them that trust in Him.⁸

Verse 30. "If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by," etc. We have here a remarkable example of the sovereign power of the Spirit in His operations in the Church, as well as a recognition, on the apostle's part, of immediate dependence on that Presence as the essential condition of edification. If the Lord is the effective builder, His will must be supreme. To any one sitting by,⁹ in a listening company of worshippers, a special revelation might be made, not necessarily in correction of what the speaking prophet was delivering, but something which the Spirit judged to be more needful then and there to the assembly. In such a case, subjection to the present will of God would be practically mani-

⁸ Ps. cxxxviii. 6, and cxli. 3.

⁹ The "other," though a prophet now, by virtue of his revelation, need not have had any previous recognition as such. See below.

fested by an immediate silence on the part of the first speaker, and an equal readiness in the other worshippers to listen to this newer voice. For the ear of the Church is for the Spirit's word, who furnishes His vessels at His will. It may be reasonably supposed that this test of subjection was not very frequently applied, and that as a rule God's prophets would so exercise their ministry as to call for no interruption on His part; but that the case here put is of the essence of true spiritual order in the Church appears from what immediately follows.

Verse 31. "For ye may all prophesy one by one," etc. In considering this verse, we should bear in mind the apostle's earlier words respecting this much-to-be-desired gift.¹ When, after enumerating many forms of spiritual manifestation, he asked, "Are all prophets?" he confessed the partial distribution of this gift. When afterwards he pointedly extols it above other ministries, and sets it as the common mark of their ambition, he plainly intimates that what all diligently sought for all might find. And now, consistently with this, he recognizes the possibility of the *fulness* of this manifestation in an assembly of true worshippers. *Power*² resides in the Church as the temple of the Holy Ghost, and that power may operate more or less diffusively at the will of Him who dwells among His saints. Hence the breadth of the apostle's language—*all* may prophesy, that *all* may learn and *all* be comforted. The word thus emphatically repeated has an equal force in these three instances. To say that all prophets might prophesy, would be to utter a superfluous

¹ Verses 1, 5, chap. xii. 31.

² Δύνασθε.

truism;³ but to acknowledge that in an assembly of spiritual worshippers He who presides there may open, at His will, each mouth in turn to testify His presence, is to evince a just appreciation of the Church as Christ's body—a habitation, through the Spirit, of the *living* God.

In such an assembly *all* are *learners*, although each in turn may teach to whom the word of power has been given. The prophet has his privileges as a hearer also; and while by his ministry he comforts others, he needs also to be comforted himself. Edification is a mutual act; and although, through deficiency of faith and true spiritual energy, it happens mostly that in any assembly of God's saints a large majority consists of ungifted worshippers, and while also careful heed should be given to the restriction in the use of real gifts laid down above,⁴ there is clearly asserted in this verse a liberty of operation for the all-pervading Spirit, such as might fulfil both his own desire and the earlier wish of Moses,⁵ by making prophecy the common language of God's house.

Verse 32. "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." The holder of a gift is superior to what he holds; and as to rule his own spirit⁶ is man's natural duty, so the spiritual man is entrusted in like manner with the responsibility of self-control.⁷ Necessity is a not uncommon plea of

³ And to this they are reduced who, through a defective apprehension of the doctrine of the Spirit, are continually "limiting the Holy One" when treating this subject.

⁴ Verse 29.

⁵ Num. xi. 29.

⁶ Prov. xxv. 28.

⁷ This verse also clearly indicates a characteristic distinction between the older prophets, and those who are the Lord's gifts to

simulated gift. And as in all cases liberty of action must be regulated by ability, so even where true power is at work it needs both limitation and direction. The apostle here anticipates all the false pleas of spiritual extravagancy. Impulse is not enough to justify a prophet's speech. His judgment must concur with his impressions. For mind, though never *against* true feeling, is *above* it ever in the things of God.

Verse 33. "For God is not the author of confusion,"⁸ etc. A gift is not God, nor is it, in the manner of its exercise, an expression always of His will. But God dwells in the assembly, and in each particular saint. This solemn and ever blessed truth lies at the bottom of all special direction as to behaviour in the Church. What is expected of His worshippers is not so much a ready consciousness of any gifts or powers in themselves, as a deep and reverent sense of God's immediate presence. He is greatly to be feared in the assembly of His saints.⁹ His presence is in *all* such assemblies. And where He is felt in His supremacy both peace and order will prevail. His gifts will praise Him, and His saints will bless Him. All that is genuine will have its free and happy exercise, while natural wilfulness is awed into stillness before Him. Confusion is the fruit of human self-seeking, but grace acquaints us

His Church. The former spake as they were moved (*φερόμενοι*); instead of controlling, they were themselves under the absolute power of the impulse which the Spirit from time to time communicated to their minds. (2 Peter i. 21.)

⁸ The latter clause of this verse is by some detached from it, and treated as the beginning of the next; wrongly, in my judgment.

⁹ Ps. lxxxix. 7; Heb. xii. 28.

with the God of peace. And where the hearts of His worshippers are filled and quieted with His abounding peace, their outward habit will express their inward state.

Verses 34, 35. "Let your women keep silence in the churches," etc. The close connection of this injunction with what immediately precedes it is manifest. Where God is truly honoured, natural comeliness will also be observed; but nature revolts from such an inversion of God's primal order as is involved in the public ministry of women.¹ In a former chapter, the apostle has distinctly recognised the woman's liberty of both praying and prophesying; but in the churches or assemblies her voice must not be heard, save as a part of that one symphony of praise which should habitually rise to God from such assemblies.² Privacy is the woman's sphere, and subjection her appointed place, in relation to the man. Both law and gospel teach this equally, and true faith has observed it in every age. Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.³ If Miriam prophesied, it was to the women of Israel.⁴ If Deborah was raised up, it was a judicial token of dishonour to the nation which had lost its true manhood by departing from the Lord. If Huldah's voice is heard yet later in the day of Judah's backsliding, she speaks from the recesses of the "college."⁵

¹ Nature, that is, when unsophisticated by the lying plausibilities of Satan. Among the manifold tokens of the ripening of latter day iniquity to its crisis, I know of none more striking than the bold disclaimer now so often heard, and so extensively acted on, of the positive teaching of the Holy Ghost on this subject, even where the form of godliness is still maintained. ² Rom. xv. 6.

³ 1 Peter iii. 6. ⁴ Exod. xv. 20, 21. ⁵ 2 Kings xxii. 14.

The Scripture everywhere discountenances female prominence as something inconsistent with the original law of creation, and with the modesty and meekness which are the woman's chief adorning in the sight of God.

And lest it should be urged by any, that in times like our own, when primitive simplicity has faded almost to a dream, irregularity might almost be expected to distinguish any genuine energy of the Spirit, and thus an excuse be found for doing violence to the plainest apostolic teaching and command, it is well to remember that truth, once revealed in its perfection, is *subject to no change*; that God's assemblies are His *dwelling*; that what becomes His presence *once*, becomes it *always*, and the contrary. A certain apparent eccentricity may sometimes mark the Spirit's movement, as He labours in the world as a winner of men's souls; but He *never departs* from the law of His own house. As long, therefore, as spiritual worshippers are permitted to assemble upon earth, the apostle's injunction will be certainly obeyed by all who are under the true leading of the Spirit. Help is meanwhile provided for believing women in their desires after truth. Let the married question their own husbands, and the unmarried (who may have no nearer natural guide) seek the aid of women older in the faith;⁶ but on no pretence is what is *shameful*⁷ to be suffered in the Church.

Verse 36. "What? came the word of God out from you?" etc. Having ended his painful task of correcting their practical disorder, he puts now these

⁶ Titus ii. 3-5.

⁷ αἰσχρόν.

reproachful questions, chiefly as an anticipative rebuke of those false claims to spiritual competency which some among them might be tempted to set up, and which might lead them to affect an independence of the apostle's guidance and authority. They had borne themselves with little meekness, and had been wise in their own eyes. Were they then indeed the people, and was wisdom's seat with them?⁸ Were they original discoverers of truth? or had they not been called rather as aliens, by the word of sovereign grace?⁹ And, again, were they *alone* as receivers of this grace, that they should venture to adopt their own impressions as decisive of all questions, and despise the judgment of their brethren in the faith? That this sentiment was not too preposterous to be entertained by some among them, is made evident by what follows.

Verses 37, 38. "If any one think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual," etc. We have here a bold and distinct assertion of apostolic place and power, in comparison with lesser gifts. The chief of these is to confess an absolute subordination to one who, as God's apostle, represents with plenary authority the Lord who has commissioned him. The spiritual man will prove that he is such, by a ready and willing recognition of the signs of an apostle. If any were ignorant or indifferent, such a state of mind was neither safe nor creditable to themselves. Truth's children ought to know her voice; yet, if they preferred an indolent acquiescence to an intelligent and zealous approval of his claim, let them so

⁸ Job xii. 2.

⁹ We may compare with this his earlier exhortation in ch. iv. 7.

remain.¹ Those who were contentious, and turned a deaf ear to his words, would find his boasting unlike theirs; and that with his boldness of speech there was associated power also. Rival pretensions would, like Pharaoh's magicians, dispute to their own confusion with inspired truth. Some such there were at Corinth, who, if Paul came again among them, should have an opportunity of measuring their credentials with his own. Meanwhile, he now puts forth this general challenge for all time. His *writings* are the Lord's commandment.² Like others, he might err and speak unadvisedly with his lips, but his pen was governed by the Holy Ghost. It is thus that the Lord, who loves His Church, and would "sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word," has provided for the nurture and admonition of His own. Christ's sheep can own no guidance but the Shepherd's voice. But he had expressly deferred the communication of *many things* until the Comforter should come.³ Those promised things we now have in the apostolic writings, to hold and enjoy according to the measure of our faith. The epistles, therefore, though addressed to us by our fellow-disciples, and in form and character the utterances of men of like passions with ourselves, are, in their truth and substance, letters of the Lord. *Christ* speaks to us in all the varied tones of His inspired witnesses; a truth full of richest comfort

¹ It is not easy to determine the exact sense of *v.* 38. Something will depend on the reading adopted. Instead of the common ἀγνοεῖτω, *Cod. Sin.* and some other MSS. have ἀγνοεῖται.

² ἐντολή is the more approved reading.

³ John xvi. 12.

to the honest-hearted saint, as well as fraught with warning to the careless.⁴

Verses 39, 40. "Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy," etc. He finishes his exhortation by again calling on his brethren at large to seek zealously the better gift, whose superior value he has demonstrated so convincingly in the progress of this chapter. Tongues are to be tolerated, subject to the condition stated in verse 28; for God is to be owned in all His gifts. But the more they grew on in true spiritual knowledge, the less frequently would this kind of gift find room for exercise in their assemblies. Meanwhile, with an unfettered liberty, as in the sight of God, the order which becomes His presence is to be maintained.

Before passing to the next chapter, it seems right to enquire briefly how far the doctrine of divine order, in its relation to Church fellowship, has been practically observed since the apostle's time, and to what extent it is now visibly illustrated as a living truth. To do this effectually a little recapitulation may be necessary. We have first, in chap. xii., an explicit declaration of the oneness of Christ's body, both absolutely and in a local sense. Christ's people

⁴ Tradition neutralizes and virtually silences the Spirit's voice, by accepting an uninspired interpretation in a final and authoritative sense. Modern criticism, even when not avowedly sceptical, forgets too often its legitimate work, and concerns itself rather with the *men* whom God inspired than with their words. By this means apostolic testimony becomes gradually reduced to little better than a natural level. What Paul says is thought of and discussed, instead of the ear being opened to hear and to obey what the *Lord* has said by Paul. It is hard to say which of these two opposing tendencies works the more mischievously in the present day.

in any place—how numerous soever they may be, and therefore congregating in different assemblies—being His Church or representative “body” in that place. In chap. xiii., the love which gave itself for the redemption of the Church is declared to be the fundamental and abiding principle of service also *in* the Church ; no special gift being of any profit to its holder, unless exercised in the Spirit of true love. In chap. xiv., gifts already specified in chap. xii. are contemplated in their active exercise, and regulated in their use, especial reference being made to the abiding presence of *God Himself*, by His Spirit, in the assembly, a due remembrance of which solemn truth is expected to temper the otherwise unfettered liberty of gift. Human arrangements are unmentioned and unknown, as things in their nature alien to a spiritual assembly, the will and voice of God alone having authority within His house. Lastly, what Paul writes on these and other topics is “the commandment of the *Lord*.”

What we have, then, offered to our contemplation, as a just specimen and example of Church fellowship and godly edification, is a company of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, called by His name, and worshipping the Father in the power of the one Spirit. Such is a genuine Christian Church or assembly.

Now, a spiritual assembly can be governed and guided only by the Spirit. The moment it ceases to be so, and adopts fixed regulations of its own, it loses its true character. It may continue to consist of Christians only, but it will no longer be an assembly or Church of *God*. It is worth the reader's

while, therefore (not to say his *duty*, if a Christian), to ask himself candidly how far the aspect and habits of modern Christianity agree with this apostolic pattern of Church order. Among all real Christians, the personal divinity of the Spirit is confessed as distinctly as that of the Son. But in which of the manifold religious systems, which contain within them the living though divided parts of Christ's one body, is the presence and ruling power of that Spirit acknowledged and obeyed ?

From God to man, is the first and decisive step of spiritual decline ; and the apostles had scarcely fallen asleep before that step was taken, and the Church began to frame rules for herself, instead of being subject to the Lord. In popery we see the ripened fruit of this incipient apostacy, the alleged divine authority of the Church, as having the Spirit, being the fallacious pretext through which the art of Satan has contrived to rear this skilful counterfeit of God's true building. Those who disclaim popery have, for the most part, substituted some other form of human order, purer in respect of fundamental doctrine, but lacking still the essential character of a spiritual assembly or Church. For wherever human ordinances are accepted as a rule of polity, and the worship of God, who is a Spirit, is rendered outwardly by stated forms ; or, again, when Christian ministry is limited to any special class, and room is not left for the free exercise of all that is of God, the community which nominally claims to be a Church remains unsupported by the sanction of God's word. It may be an "Establishment," an "Interest," or a "Persuasion," or may be known by

any other watchword of sectarian distinction, but its pretension falsifies itself from the moment that it claims to be a *Church*. For God has been beforehand here with men, and by describing in His own inspired word the nature and constitution of His own true Church, has recorded an anticipative judgment of sectarian system under all its forms.

To what purpose, then, are we, whose lot is cast in these late days, to turn such scriptures as we have just been considering? First, their effect should surely be to place all those, whose eyes are opened to perceive the glaring discrepancy of Christendom with the living Church of God, in an attitude of penitential acknowledgment. Israel's true prophets here become our models. As they bewailed the ruin of their nation through the departure of the people from their God, so must each divinely enlightened Christian feel bound to confess, as a solemn and humiliating truth, that the Church has not, as a corporate unity, continued in the goodness of God. But, secondly, while taking willingly this low place of confession, we are under an equal obligation to assert without hesitation the unchanging truth of God. *The commandment of the Lord* is pure, enlightening the eyes;⁵ and such is the lasting force of apostolic teaching on these things.⁶ We are bound, therefore, if we would win the Lord's approval as keepers of His sayings, both to repudiate with a jealous decision all false ecclesiastical or spiritual pretensions, and to maintain the standing verities of grace.

Now we have already seen, I trust, distinctly, that

⁵ Psa. xix.

⁶ *Ante*, p. 361.

the grand truth on which the doctrine of spiritual ministry rests, and from whence all genuine service springs, is the abiding presence of the Holy Ghost. Let believers, then, confess this; not as an abstract dogma, but as a living and operative truth. Nor should this seem an obligation either strange or difficult to those who are "of God." Shall we worship the Father, confess the Son, and yet decline the immediate guidance of the Holy Ghost? Shall they, whose vital distinction it is that they have the Spirit of Christ,⁷ and with it an all-enabling power of divine knowledge,⁸ consent to the rudiments of men? If order is our aim, is God the author of disorder? If an efficient ministry be an object of anxiety, by whom shall Christ's sheep be effectually nourished but the Lord, who gives at His will the needed grace to each?⁹ Learning and mental culture are not despicable things, but neither of them is essential to the work of God. Where useful as accessories, or for the shaping of some needed channel of communication, they will always be found ready to the Master's hand. What He needs He claims. What His people individually feel to be wanting to their personal efficiency in His work, He enables them to acquire. But what is called "an educated ministry" is an institution of man, and therefore oftener found obstructive of true spiritual gift than furthering the vital work of God.

No godly reader will misconstrue these remarks. To depreciate learning would be as foolish as to flatter ignorance. What is here asserted is the standing claim of God to be the sole and immediate

⁷ Rom. viii. 9.

⁸ 1 John ii. 20, 27.

⁹ Eph. iv. 7-15.

ruler of His house, and the unchanging fidelity of Him who, having ascended on high, has given gifts for the edifying of His Church, which shall not be withdrawn until that Church has reached, in its effective growth, the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. But if, as we have seen, the visible foundations be destroyed, what yet can the righteous do?¹ *They can own God still, and give Him glory in His place.* Let them stay themselves upon the faithful promise of the Lord,² and boldly (while in humble and contrite acknowledgment of the general disorder) exercise the liberty which He has given them of meeting in His name, whenever and wherever so disposed. Let them be found exhorting one another, and so much the more as they see the day approaching,³ ministering to one another, as each one has received the gift, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.⁴ Let them honour, as in the sight of God, all genuine manifestations of the Spirit, while remembering diligently to try the spirits whether they are of God. The Lord will not be negligent of such as fear Him, and think upon His name.⁵

¹ Ps. xi. 3.² Matt. xviii.³ Heb. x. 25.⁴ 1 Peter iv. 10.⁵ Malachi iii. 16, 17.

CHAPTER XV.

ALMOST from the commencement of his epistle we have found the apostle engaged in noting and correcting errors more or less grave, both of thought and practice, in the saints at Corinth. But there remains yet another to be examined, of far more dangerous character than either of the rest. For among the evils with which he has already had to deal, none touched, at least *directly*, any fundamental doctrine of the faith. There had, however, crept in among them some who denied plainly the resurrection of the dead; and although he has, by his earlier teaching as to the body of the believer in its relation to the Lord,¹ already judged this folly indirectly, he has reserved to the last its formal and decisive refutation. The subject is accordingly treated in the chapter now before us with a solemnity and fulness worthy of the importance of the truth at stake. And we have surely cause to bless the wisdom of our God in allowing thus early² the father of lies to

¹ Chap. vi. 13, *seq.*

² God answers His adversaries according to the pattern of their folly. When the Sadducees at Jerusalem set themselves against the fact of Christ's resurrection, He confirmed the testimony of His messengers by irrefutable acts of power, wrought openly in the name of Jesus. (Acts iv. 16.) And now that philosophizing pretenders to the name of Christian assail the idea of a bodily

erect himself boldly against the faith of God's elect, and thus imposing on His inspired witness the task of demonstrating in such richness of detail this vital doctrine, and setting it in its true light before our eyes, as the practical basis of both faith and hope.

Verse 1. "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel," etc. There is a solemn abruptness in this transition from his previous tone of admonitory counsel to a fresh declaration of the elements of gospel truth. And although the recapitulation stated in these opening verses has an immediate reference to the main subject of the chapter, we do well to remember that a continual need exists in the Church of God for the repeated ministry of fundamental doctrine. We cannot safely treat God's rudiments as we do the first principles of natural science. For gospel truth is the soul's necessary meat, and true spiritual strength can only be acquired or maintained by a constant meditation of that which, as believers, we already *know*. It is against this, therefore, that the hostility of the enemy is unceasingly directed; for he knows well its efficacy as the true support of faith. Nor does he ever practise more successfully against Christ's unwary sheep, than when he dupes them into the self-flattering notion that an acquaintance with such doctrine is but a needful preliminary to the acquisition of a higher quality of knowledge, and that a truth which, in its simplicity, is food for babes, may be safely disregarded by those more ad-

resurrection in the abstract, as something contrary to human experience, the Spirit puts their empty reasonings to a shameful silence by filling the mouth of His chosen vessel with "sound speech which cannot be condemned." (Titus i. 9; ii. 8.)

vanced. But the apostle had a different estimate of the value of the gospel. To him, to write the same things was not grievous;³ and because he knew that it is in the eager pursuit of what is recondite, and demands mental effort for its attainment, that essential truth is most in danger of being corrupted or let slip, that he here, and so frequently elsewhere, recalls his brethren in the faith to the primal and ever-blessed testimonies of the Spirit of grace.

He reminds them—1. Of what he had originally preached to them; 2. Of their reception of his testimony; and, 3. Of the immediate and continued effect of his gospel on those who had received it. It gave them a firm standing before God and man. Now, what he had preached was the *gospel*. But God's gospel is so in a double sense. It is to men a message of glad tidings as to what God *has done* in grace for sinners through the dying obedience of His Son. It conveys, moreover, to the believer glad tidings of what He is *about to do*. The faith which rests on gospel testimony awaits in hope the fulfilment of gospel promise. In both these senses the apostle had declared at Corinth, in its fulness, the message which he had received of God; and his ministry had, through the blessing given to his labour, formed the Church to which these words of remembrance are now addressed.

Verse 2. "By which also ye are saved, if ye hold fast," etc. Salvation is here made dependent on

³ Phil. iii. 1. For further examples of the vigilant care of the Comforter, in exercising the minds of God's children on the grand elements of their faith, see Gal. *passim*; 2 Peter iii. 1; and 1 John ii. 21, 24.

three things—1. The word preached. 2. The sincerity of the believer's faith; and 3. His holding fast what he has received. The word preached is the message of pure and sovereign *grace*. God preaches peace by Jesus Christ.⁴ His gospel is by another description "the gospel of salvation" to them that know His grace in truth.⁵ To stand by a true and honest faith in such a gospel is therefore to be saved. But it is possible to credit the message, without in heart believing on the Saviour: to believe, as he here says, in vain, or with no serious acceptance of the doctrine as the word of *God*;⁶ for the gospel is preached among men for the *obedience* of faith, and not merely to win from them an indolent acknowledgment of its credibility, or a mental assent to its doctrines. God speaks, in the gospel of His Son, from His own heart to ours. When by the Spirit's power our hearts are opened to receive the message with an apprehension of its gracious meaning, we do not let it slip from our memories. They who are "called of God" will hold that fast which they perceive to be their life.⁷

Verses 3, 4. "For I delivered unto you first of

⁴ Acts x. 36.

⁵ Eph. i. 13; Col. i. 5, 6.

⁶ εἰ μὴ εἰκὴ ἐπιστεύσατε, "unless your believing was mere vanity," i. e., a rash and inconsiderate assent, as opposed to the "purpose of heart" which belongs to a divinely given faith. We must not confound this with the different expression at v. 14. He there affirms that both doctrine and faith are, on a certain supposition, empty and unreal, κενόν. Here he is characterizing the believer's condition according to the *quality* of his faith.

⁷ The reader will perceive that the (alas! too common) case of a true believer's backsliding, or temporary fall from grace, is not in question here. He is distinguishing a "faith unfeigned" from what is only such in name.

all," etc. We have now a categorical summary of his preaching, the three great facts here stated being alleged in support of the declaration just made of the saving virtue of the gospel. We may first remark, that in these words we have the essence of the gospel rather than its fulness, the death and resurrection of Christ being the two main pillars of salvation; for he is not now ministering out of Christ's fulness for the refreshment of his brethren, but rather contending for the faith once delivered to the saints. Hence he omits all mention here of the Lord's life, and the grace which it displayed; because, though a full statement of the record which God has given of His Son must rehearse the wondrous story of His humiliation and obedience unto death,⁸ yet the death and resurrection of the Lord are the two divine facts on which the believer's security immediately depends, and form, therefore, the prime topics of that gospel which the Spirit now addresses to the world.

In declaring the reason of Christ's death, the apostle expresses himself according to the acknowledged standing of those to whom he speaks. He does not say that Christ died "for sin," or "to sin," in general terms, but distinctively "for *our* sins." He thus again rehearses to his brethren what he had himself received, when bidden by Ananias to arise and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord.⁹ But if Christ died for our sins, it was "according to the Scriptures." We may perceive in his language here an anxiety to recall their minds from speculative wanderings to an implicit subjection to the inspired word. The fact of the Lord's burial

⁸ Phil. ii. 5-8.

⁹ Acts xxii. 16.

is insisted on, not only for the sake of its obvious connection with the controverted doctrine, and as a necessary part of the gospel when considered in its relation to anterior prophecy,¹ but on account also of its important doctrinal significance to the believer.² Lastly, and with such a change in his form of speech as serves to distinguish a final and permanent achievement from the necessary steps which lead to it,³ he asserts His resurrection on the third day, and this also "according to the Scriptures."

The view taken in this chapter of the resurrection of Christ, has reference to the error which the apostle is refuting; and that error has its root, as the Lord has Himself declared, in an ignorance both of the Scriptures, and of the power of God.⁴ Hence, in Paul's treatment of the subject, he not only corroborates his own teaching by a constant appeal to God's earlier oracles, but regards the resurrection purely as an act of God, of which the man Christ Jesus was the passive subject. That "God raised up Christ" is the very point of his affirmative testimony.⁵ Jesus, when dying, committed His Spirit to the Father; and in answer to the prayers which He had uttered in the days of His flesh, He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father.⁶ Now God's glory is the revelation of His power, and it is against this glory that the deniers of the resurrection aim their words. That God should quicken the dead is a thing *naturally* incredible even to those who

¹ Isa. liii. 9.

² Col. ii. 12.

³ Ἐγέρται. Not "rose," as in A.V., which conveys an idea foreign to the apostle's present argument, but "was raised," or, more strictly, "is risen."

⁴ Matt. xxii. 29.

⁵ Verse 15.

⁶ Heb. v. 7-9.

find no difficulty in believing their own spirit's immortality; for while nature reasons from its own self-consciousness, the "operation of God" is discerned only by the faith which is His gift. It is this, therefore, that the apostle undertakes to vindicate. The other and deeper view of the same doctrine, which regards "the Resurrection and the Life" as asserting His personal divinity, in *rising* from the dead, as an act of His own will and power,⁷ is not here noticed. Indeed, such teaching belongs rather to that wisdom which the apostle felt it hard to speak among these Corinthians in their state of spiritual infancy; for how should they, who could allow such a questioning of the truth of Scripture and the power of God, as is here implied, to find entrance into their minds, be in a condition to meditate worthily on the great mystery of godliness?

Verse 5. "And that he was seen of Cephas," etc. Having stated the doctrine of Christ's death and resurrection in the order of the facts, he proceeds now to confirm it by the testimony of witnesses both dead and living. That He was seen of Cephas is first stated, not as if the Lord had first appeared to him,⁸ but because he was the first of those who were ordained to be effective witnesses of His resurrection, in the power of the Spirit, by whom the Lord was seen. That He should show Himself to Simon⁹ earlier than to his brethren will cause no surprise to any who have an experimental knowledge of "the

⁷ John xi. 25, ii. 19-21.

⁸ Mark xvi. 9; John xx. 14.

⁹ This first interview with Peter is not described in Scripture, but probably occurred immediately after his return from the sepulchre, "wondering in himself," etc. (Luke xxiv. 12.)

grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." His appearing to the other disciples, described elsewhere with a precious minuteness as to time and circumstance,¹ is here noticed generally only, and with evident reference to their official calling as His witnesses.²

Verses 6, 7. "After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once," etc. Of this larger epiphany we have no other express mention made in Scripture,³ nor of the private interview with James. It is a question also to which of the two who bore that name the apostle here refers. The subsequent manifestation to *all* the apostles relates most probably to the parting interview recorded in Acts i. With respect to the meaning here belonging to the word "all," it may be used either with reference to the solitary instance last mentioned, and therefore be limited to the eleven; or it may, by an extension of the term "apostle," be intended to embrace all whom the Lord had acknowledged as His messengers in the days of His flesh.⁴ Throughout this remarkable passage there is a careful distinguishing of "apostles" from "brethren." For while all stood alike in His redeeming grace, the former had been separated for a special work, for which they were prepared by

¹ Luke xxiv. 36-48; John xx. 19-29; Acts i., etc.

² Acts i. 22. The number *twelve* is specified by the apostle as being the appointed number of the Lord's primary witnesses, the place of Judas being filled afterwards by one who had companied with the eleven *all the time* that the Lord went in and out among them.

³ May we suppose these to be identical with "the whole multitude of the disciples" mentioned in Luke xix. 37?

⁴ The seventy appointed and sent forth by the Lord in Luke x. will naturally occur to the reader. I rather incline, however, to limit the expression to the original band.

more than one conference with their Master before His final disappearance upwards from their gaze.⁵

Verse 8. "And last of all He was seen of me also," etc. Having marshalled this array of earlier testimony to the fact of the Lord's resurrection, he now offers himself as a new and decisive witness, whose ocular knowledge of the Saviour had been altogether of another sort. To the former witnesses He had shown Himself on *earth*, and in the things which He had spoken to them "pertaining to the kingdom of God," they had perceived nothing which forbade them to look still for Israel's restoration as an immediate hope. Only when in act to leave them had the Lord postponed indefinitely this expectation, and explained to them their intermediate task.⁶ But to Paul He had revealed Himself from *heaven*. Some notice has already been taken of the distinctive calling of this apostle, and the character of his ministry, in comparison with that of the twelve.⁷ The relation in which he *personally* stood to his predecessors is strikingly expressed in the similitude by which he illustrates it in this verse. Likening the apostolate to a family, he declares himself to be the last, and an abortion rather than a genuine birth. For he had not, like the rest, acknowledged Jesus of Nazareth as the hope of Israel. Instead of receiving his training at the Master's feet, as a willing disciple of the truth, he had been called to the work out of the very depth of spiritual darkness and alienation

⁵ Acts i. 3. It will be noticed that the apostle makes no mention here of the ascension. That is, of course, involved in what follows. But his subject is the gospel of salvation, which rests its claim to validity on the identity of the dead and risen Christ. (Rom. iv. 25.) ⁶ Acts i. 6-8. ⁷ *Ante*, pages 13, *seq.*; 196, *note*.

from the light. Such was his retrospective estimate of himself, as the verse immediately following more fully shows. But the figure he has chosen contains, it is probable, a prospective allusion also, and seems to mark him as an anticipative firstfruit of the nation that he loved so well.⁸

Verse 9. "For I am the least of the apostles," etc. This self-depreciation is both natural and sincere. He could not but rate himself far below those who had been with Jesus in His temptations, and for whom the thrones of Israel's kingdom are reserved.⁹ In their presence he would not call himself their fellow; for what they had preached and suffered for he had persecuted to the death. He could not, and ought not, to forget this; and we know, not from this passage only, how firmly and sadly it was held in his remembrance.¹ But if constrained thus to give God glory in the confession of his sin, much more was he bound to magnify the more exceeding grace which had chosen such an one for such a place. And so he proceeds:

⁸ The strict meaning of the word *ἐκτρομα* points rather to a child born from a dead mother, by what surgeons call the Cæsarian operation, than to an abortive weakling merely; and in the apostle's case this simile is sustained by fact. The already dead Jewish system gives miraculous birth to the chosen vessel who was to become what Israel should have been, and yet will be, when the mystery of the present dispensation is complete (Rom. xi.),—the effective messenger, namely, of mercy to the Gentiles. "The time" of the prophets was indeed fulfilled (Mark i. 15); the children were come to the birth, but there was no strength to bring forth. In a day yet to come, Jerusalem shall look with wonder on her children born without travail through the open revelation of her Lord. (Isaiah xlix. 21; lxvi. 7-9.) Meanwhile, her divorcement is the time also of the predestined calling of the Church.

⁹ Luke xxii. 28-30.

¹ 1 Tim. i. 13, *seq.*; Gal. i. 13.

Verse 10. "But by the grace of God I am *what* I am," etc. There is a deep emphasis in these words; for he was not less conscious of the special distinction to which he had been raised, as the pre-eminent "minister of the Church,"² than of his former dishonour as the "chief of sinners." Not numbered with the twelve, he is, by sovereign grace, entrusted with a work which, in its nature and effects, is to excel what God had wrought by them. His labours were not more abundant only, but of more abiding value. Not only did his ceaseless diligence, as a preacher of the truth, exceed the measure of the rest, but, as a chief among the anointed scribes of wisdom,³ he has become, in a fuller sense than any of his brethren, a perpetual nourisher of that Church which he had once sought to destroy. It is from his divinely guided hand that most⁴ of the great doctrines of the faith have received their fullest and clearest enunciation. Of some he is, as we have seen, the sole expositor. Thus he taught, and laboured, and endured, finding glory in the afflictions of the gospel. Yet it was not he who so excelled the rest, but "the grace of God" which was with him. Natural rivalry can have no place among those who are led of the Spirit. It is in simplicity and godly sincerity that he records not only his personal self-abasement, but this bold assertion also of pre-eminent official grace.⁵

Verse 11. "Therefore whether it were I or they," etc. Returning now to his main subject, he certifies the unison of all true apostolic preaching, as it re-

² Col. i. 25.

³ Luke xi. 49.

⁴ But not all, as the attentive reader of John's writings cannot but perceive.

⁵ Compare Eph. iii. 8, 9.

spects the elements of saving faith. The death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord of glory are the prime essentials of God's gospel. In their gifts, and in the manner of their calling, his witnesses might differ, but their testimony is the same. If any among those at Corinth seemed in danger of letting slip what they had once received, they were not only judged by the common voice of God's apostles, but were also witnesses against themselves, since their new opinions would belie their former faith.

Verse 12. "Now if Christ be preached that He rose from the dead," etc. Having fully stated the burden of apostolic testimony, and the personal evidence by which it was sustained, he turns now to confront those who, by denying in the abstract a bodily resurrection, were, wittingly or not, assailing the gospel in its central truth. There is an overwhelming weight of argument condensed into this brief question, which is logically unravelled, and applied with destructive effect to the false thesis of his antagonists, in the verses which follow. Nor does it convey a less pungent rebuke to those in whose presence he throws down this challenge to God's adversaries; for if the resurrection of Christ be, as it is, the main article of Christian faith (since otherwise we can have no living Saviour to adore and trust, nor living Lord to serve), how came it that any who believed in Jesus could fall into so blind a state as to admit into their minds a question as to the resurrection of the dead? It was a practical self-contradiction, not less gross than that which led the same apostle to charge folly on the Galatian saints. The latter were denying their original con-

fession as dead and risen with Christ, when they desired to be under the law; while these Corinthian reasoners were upsetting the doctrine of creation and redemption alike, by treating a *part* only⁶ of God's creature as the whole, and refusing to include in their Redeemer's triumph that body which, in its mortality, has been the standing proof and witness of the work of the destroyer.

We are not told in what manner these early corrupters of the faith contrived to mystify the doctrine of the Lord's resurrection, so as to admit of their nominally confessing "the faith," while denying the whole substance of the truth. What is more to the purpose, is to note the strange facility with which God's saints, unless maintaining their souls by faith in a watchful nearness to the Lord, may give temporary entertainment, at least, to the most worthless and soul-subverting doctrines when plausibly, and in self-flattering tones, presented to their minds. The manner in which the apostle meets this dangerous opinion is worthy, not only of our deepest attention for the truth's sake, but of our careful imitation also, whenever called on to meet any similar opposition to sound doctrine. He first convicts the error of contrariety to Scripture, and demonstrates to the believer its utter inconsistency with what he has accepted as God's truth; and afterwards refutes it upon natural grounds. Thus, as a true child of wisdom, he encounters folly with a double point.⁷

Verse 13. "But if there be no resurrection of the dead,"⁸ etc. This decisive declaration is grounded on

⁶ *i. e.*, the *soul* in separation from the body. ⁷ Prov. xxvi. 4, 5.

⁸ *Cod. Sin.* omits the clause *ἡ δὲ ἀν. ν. ὁ. ξ.*, and in verse 14

the assumption (not denied by these opposers) that Christ really *died*; and yet was, as they professed to hold, the living Lord of glory. The apostle will not hear of another body or another life for Jesus, distinct from that which He laid down for our sins. To do so would be to contradict His own ever blessed and emphatic words.⁹ They must be the same, or He whom man condemned is not the same as He whom God has justified—the dying and the living Christ are different persons. And so he proceeds:

Verse 14. “If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.” Plainly so. What he calls the gospel of salvation is but an empty sound, since the facts on which it rests are no facts at all; and, by consequence, the faith of God’s elect becomes a mere credulous imagination. All the abundant labours of Paul and his fellow-workers had been thrown away. They had sown in tears, to reap only in despair. The dead must still be sought among the dead, and the Name by which they had been called was a delusion only, not a truth. On their supposition, either the gospel and its fruits were no better than hallucination, and apostolic title and pretension a mere fanatical extravagance, or God had Himself been lending His miraculous powers in support of an otherwise incredible deception.

reads *καὶνὴ* instead of *κενὴ*. According, therefore, to this witness, the apostle’s argument runs thus: If Christ is preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead, and that He is not risen? But if Christ is not risen, both our preaching is vain, and your faith is *new*, *i. e.*, the Christ in whom you profess to believe is a Christ unknown to our gospel, etc.

⁹ John x. 17, 18; Luke xxiv. 39.

Verses 15, 16. "Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God," etc. There is a strong vein of irony in the apostle's reasoning. These deniers of the resurrection professed, no doubt, like their modern imitators, an enlightened zeal for truth. But so did Paul; claiming, however, a right to speak, not from his own wisdom, but "by the grace of God." Now he had testified of God that He had raised His Christ¹ up from the dead. He had built, moreover, his entire doctrine of the believing sinner's justification on this very statement; and somehow God had seemed to countenance his words. But in the presence of these more enlightened vindicators of the divine glory he is plainly convicted of false testimony. For God certainly did not raise up His Christ if, as they affirmed (and they spoke with confidence of what they *knew*), "dead men are not raised." In his fanatical ignorance, Paul had lied and spoken wickedly for God.² All knew that Jesus, whom he affirmed to be alive, had really died upon the cross. But if dead men do not rise, then Christ is neither risen nor alive. His brethren, who had more than a passing interest in this controversy, must judge between him and those whom he opposed; and to help them to a right decision, he repeats in still more emphatic terms the logical consequences of this new opinion.

Verse 17. "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain,"³ etc. Satan, as the deceiver of souls and the corrupter of sound doctrine, prevails commonly by a

¹ *Cod. Sin.* reads *τον Χ. αὐτοῦ*.

² Job xiii. 7, 8.

³ *ματαιά*. We have here a third variety of expression, with a corresponding change of meaning. The reference here is less

flattering appeal to the superior discernment of his dupes. Rational ideas, and conceptions which do not mock the powers of the intellect, are to be preferred to doctrines which call for the exercise of an implicit faith. But the Spirit of truth deals otherwise with men. In His estimation, the natural understanding is in utter darkness, and the light which can alone enlighten it must be received through an awakened conscience. By convincing men of *sin*, He shatters at a stroke the stronghold of intellectual pride. By revealing to us *Jesus*, He confers on us an understanding which enables us both to know that God is true, and that *His* thoughts and not ours are the measure of His truth. Hence this direct appeal of the apostle to the hearts and consciences of these Corinthian saints. They had learnt to know themselves as sinners, and to believe, on the former testimony, that their sins were forgiven them for Jesus' sake. But the very point of that testimony was, that He whom men had numbered with transgressors had been declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by means of His resurrection from the dead. He had been delivered for their offences, and raised again for their justification. And was such a faith, and the hope of glory built upon it, to be renounced in favour of a sophist's notions of possibility or fitness? Was the incarnation of God's only begotten a reasonable doctrine, but His resurrection a thing not to be believed?

directly to the intrinsic quality of the doctrine than to the believer's *expectations*. But his future is a dream, if there be no sound reason of his hope. And there is none, if the Christ in whom he trusts was never raised. *Ante*, p. 371, *note*.

Were they, in fine, prepared to take their sins upon themselves again? for there is no power in a dead, but unrisen, Christ to rid them of that weight.

And let the reader, whose heart may be as yet unestablished in the grace of God, pause here to note with what distinctness the converse of the apostle's proposition is implied in the statement of its terms. The anxious question which an awakened soul puts to itself is this: "Am I, or am I not, in my sins?" This question, if put by a sincere believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, must be answered by another: "Is Christ, or is He not, risen from the dead?" Such is the state of the question when handled by the Spirit of grace. All is made to hang immediately upon the fact of the Lord's resurrection, as that fact is affirmed and explained by His inspired witnesses. If this blessed truth is accepted in the simplicity of faith, the believer is no longer in his sins. Sin, it is true, is still *in him*, that is, in his unchanged flesh;⁴ but in his risen and ascended Saviour he is presented blameless before God.

Verse 18 concludes his chain of logical deduction from the adversaries' thesis, by declaring that, on their assumption, "they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished"—a dreadful, but necessary, inference from the premises, and in simple keeping with what goes before; for we are justified by faith. But if (as he has shown must be, upon their assumption) our faith is vain, then, instead of dying the death of the righteous, we must perish in our sins. We should notice carefully that, both here and throughout his argument, the notion of a permanent

⁴ Rom. vii. 18, 25.

state of incorporeal life is disallowed entirely by the apostle; for such a being would not be a *man*. Moreover, on this supposition, the work of *redemption* would not be commensurate with that of *atonement*; for the body is the dwelling-place and instrument of sin. Its final dissolution, therefore, would be Satan's triumph, and the lasting victory of sin. We learn also from this verse in what sense the sweet and triumphant phrase, "asleep in Christ," should be taken whenever it occurs in Scripture. It is with reference to the *bodies* of God's people, rather than their souls, that this language is employed. In their disembodied state, they are said to "be *with* Christ," on their departure from the present life⁵—to be absent from the body, but present with the Lord.⁶ But their dust rests as safely in the bosom of the earth, and with the same certainty of a resurrection in His likeness, as the body of the Lord once lay, for its appointed time, in the new-made sepulchre of Joseph.⁷

Verse 19. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ," etc. A just and natural reflection, on a survey of the foregoing hypothesis and its consequences. The gospel of God becomes no better than a mischievous delusion, since, instead of bringing life and incorruptibility to light, it allures the too credulous believer to a worse fate than his natural death in sins. If death must terminate their hope in Christ, His people are assuredly of all men the most miserable; for all they hoped for lay, or seemed to lie, beyond the grave. But if the dead rise not,

⁵ Phil. i. 23.

⁶ 2 Cor. v. 8; Luke xxiii. 43.

⁷ Luke xxiii. 50-53.

death reigns still, from Adam to Christ, and from Christ to an eternal night. To be a Christian, then, at this rate, is to be a fool indeed. And if the wretchedness of disappointment be in proportion to the sacrifices vainly made, then the Lord's apostles, and in an especial measure Paul, must claim, on this ground, a pre-eminence of woe; for both they and he had gloried in their sufferings for Christ; while his own peculiar boast was, that he "endured all things" for this now exploded "gospel's sake." But we need not further expatiate on this. The apostle has shown convincingly the nature and logical consequences of the declaration of his adversaries. It has been found to be both at variance with Scripture, and destructive of the faith which they professed. And now, exchanging the tone of a disputant for that of an inspired teacher, he proceeds, in the nine verses following, to reassert and expound the doctrine of the Lord's resurrection, declaring briefly, but in comprehensive terms, its manner, its order, and its ultimate results.

Verse 20. "But now^s is Christ risen from the dead," etc. Addressing himself generally to all who have an ear to hear, he delivers his testimony on this vital doctrine in a positive and oracular tone, as became one who knew, by divine inspiration, both what he said and whereof he affirmed. Assuming the Lord's resurrection as a fact beyond rational controversy, he proceeds to shew its consequences.

^s *Nυνὶ δὲ Χ.*, etc. The transition is abrupt, and the language elliptical. As if he had said: "You see what would follow from the hypothesis that there is no resurrection of the dead. But the matter is not so, as I have shown already, and shall further show," etc.

And first the risen Christ is declared to be the first-fruits of them who are asleep.⁹ It may be necessary here to remind the reader that the apostle is treating the doctrine of the resurrection in its bearing on the saved alone. An essential article of the faith had been attacked by these gainsayers of the resurrection, and in the interest of all believers he refutes the error while contending for the faith. What they alleged was in its nature destructive of true Christian hope; the apostle confirms and enlarges that hope by establishing triumphantly, and with a more abundant power of revelation, the point assailed. He deals, therefore, as his chief subject, with the resurrection of the *just*, confining his doctrine through the entire chapter within the limits stated in its opening verse. What he delivers is *gospel*, and for those who stand therein by faith. If any reject this doctrine of salvation, they will find hereafter that there is not less certainly a resurrection also of the unjust. Such must be called forth at the *end*,¹ that they may know the enduring anger of that "Judge of all" whose saving grace they have refused.

To the heart, then, and the spiritual understanding of the believer the risen Saviour is revealed, in the light of His ascended glory, as the accepted first-fruits of a harvest yet to come. Having paid in His blood the price of their redemption, and been consigned to the earth, according to the Scripture, as the solitary grain of righteousness,² He is now, as

⁹ τῶν κεκοιμημένων. The participle balances in meaning the verb preceding. *He* is risen, *they* still sleep, though represented in their living first-fruits.

¹ Verse 34. Compare John v. 25, 29; Rev. xx. 12, 13.

² John xii. 24.

the forerunner of His "many brethren," presented to our faith as a fulfilment of the Levitical type.³ The language of this verse embraces all who from the beginning have been justified by faith, save those only who "are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord."⁴ It is by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead that the promise made to the fathers is fulfilled, and "the sure mercies of David" are secured to God's elect.⁵ It is, moreover, with a strict propriety of speech that this descriptive title is here applied to the Lord. For whatever acts of divine power had been previously wrought, either interceptive of death, as in the translation of Enoch and the rapture of Elijah, or in the form of a miraculous recalling of the dead to mortal life, as exemplified in Lazarus, and others mentioned in the Scriptures, they all alike stand in an absolute dependence on the one decisive work of Christ in dying unto sin. Only He, who by means of death destroyed him that had the power of death,⁶ could either righteously arrest God's

³ Levit. xxiii. 10, *seq.* The rich significance of this figure, as an emblematic foreshadowing of the apostle's doctrine in Eph. ii. 6, will be appreciated by the spiritual reader. Compare also the application of the same distinctive term to the church in James i. 18.

⁴ 1 Thess. iv. 15.

⁵ Acts xiii. 32-35. For an emphatic statement also of the place which the Lord's resurrection holds in the apostle's "gospel" see 2 Tim. ii. 8-10. In Luke xx. 35-37 we have, in the Lord's own words, a general classification of His elect with reference to their common interest in that "world to come," which is in Scripture distinguished equally from "eternity" and "the present age." They are styled collectively "children of God, being children of the resurrection." With this also may be compared His words in John vi. 39, 40, where the expression, "last day," is evidently meant to distinguish the coming dispensation, or "the day of the Lord," from "the life that now is," or "the day of man."

⁶ Heb. ii. 14.

original sentence in its execution, or annul it, when fulfilled, in its effects. But by the grace of God Christ tasted death for every man. The flesh which He gave was for the life of the world.⁷ His *own* resurrection, therefore, is the first legitimate and necessary result of His victory of redemption. Himself seeing no corruption, because personally the Holy One, He stands now as the living representative of those whose bodies are indeed still "dead because of sin," but who are yet to see God in their flesh, to behold His face in righteousness, and be satisfied when they awake with His likeness.⁸

Verses 21, 22. "For since by man came death," etc. The second of these verses is the elucidation of the first. By man death came on man, whose description in his unfallen state is "living soul."⁹ By Man also is the resurrection of the dead. God kills and makes alive, but both for an equal reason. But the men respectively are Adam and Christ, or, as afterwards¹ expressed, the first and second man. The point here enforced is the proper manhood of the Lord. *How* death and resurrection are respectively "by man," the same apostle has elsewhere shown at length.² Adam's transgression consigns his race to death. The obedience of Christ has reversed that sentence, for His seed, by finishing transgression, and bringing in everlasting righteousness. We are justified by His *blood*. What is implied in the verses now before us is, that as sin has affected the human body in its consequences, so also will righteousness.

⁷ John vi. 51; Heb. ii. 9.

⁸ Rom. viii. 10, 11; Job xix. 25-27; Ps. xvii. 15; 1 John iii. 2.

⁹ Gen. ii. 7.

¹ Verse 47.

² Rom. v. 14-21.

Sin killed it; righteousness will quicken it. But these effects have an *outward* relation and resemblance also to their causes. Adam has children in his image; Christ, in *His*. Each represents his kind. The natural man is mortal, because death is in his parent. The spiritual man follows the destiny of that new and federal parentage which joins him to "the Resurrection and the Life."³

Verse 23. "But each in his own order," etc. That the apostle excludes from his present argument all consideration of the unbelieving dead, is manifest from the limitation stated in this verse, which contemplates those only who *are Christ's*, as the subjects of His quickening power at His coming. What should be of chief interest, however, to every reader of this chapter, is the distinct assertion here made of the personal advent of the Lord, as the next great event to be looked for in fulfilment of divine promise. If God raises the dead, it is "by Jesus Christ." But that the Lord will return in person for His saints, is both His own repeated declaration, and the constant testimony of the apostles.⁴ To wait for His Son from heaven⁵ is a part of the present calling of those who through grace have turned from idols to the living and true God. The Lord's words to His servants are, "Occupy until I come;"⁶ while to be "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," is a chief point in the lesson which the saving grace of God now teaches to the saved.⁷ But

³ John xi. 25.

⁴ John xiv. 3; Acts i. 11; Rev. iii. 11; Heb. ix. 28; x. 37; Phil. iii. 20, 21.

⁵ 1 Thess. i. 10.

⁶ Luke xix. 13.

⁷ Tit. ii. 11-14.

not only is the personal advent of the Lord the proper and immediate⁸ expectation of His Church; it is the time also for the fulfilment of their hope, who chose torture rather than deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.⁹ Nay, all who have hoped in God, and whom He owned as His true worshippers, have steadfastly looked forward to that day. Accepting their mortality as the sentence of God upon their flesh because of sin, they have died, as well as lived, *in faith*; persuaded of His power to fulfil His promises, and looking for redemption of both soul and body to the day when He should bring near for their sakes His own righteousness, and prove Himself their God in the revelation of His glory as their Saviour. That God should *come*, both in grace and judgment, has been the constant expectation of His saints; and both in figure, and by simple promise, His coming stands connected, in His word, with the bodily resurrection of His dead.¹ The sleepers then awakened will form the large majority of that great company of "holy ones" which are numbered as "myriads" by the Spirit of prophecy, and with whom the Lord shall come when He appears to judge this present age.²

Verse 24. "Then cometh the *end*," etc. By pre-

⁸ Immediate, that is, in respect of the declared nature and object of their calling; while for an unknown period of divine long-suffering the work of evil was to prosper on the earth. Considered as a dispensation, that period has its "latter" and "last days," and a godly discernment will have knowledge of the times; but for the believer, whether sleeping or awake, the distinctive hope of his calling is the personal coming of the Lord. ⁹ Heb. xi. 35.

¹ Hosea vi. 2, 3; Isa. xxv. 8, 9; xxvi. 19-21; Dan. xii. 2.

² Jude 14; 2 Thess. i. 7-10; Rev. xix. 14.

cise and emphatic terms of distinction,³ the apostle has distributed the great work of the resurrection, as a manifestation of divine power, into three definite and widely sundered acts:—1. The raising of the Lord Jesus. 2. The awakening of His own at His coming; and 3. The final emptying of every grave at the close of the Son's administration of the kingdom, when the dead not included in the first resurrection shall stand, both small and great, for judgment before God.⁴ And now, before inquiring further as to the nature and extent of this "kingdom," in contrast to the existing dispensation of the Spirit, it may be well to endeavour to remove from the inquiring disciple's path a difficulty which is sometimes felt, through an apparent incongruity of the apostle's language in this passage with the more general testimony of Scripture, as to the time and manner of the "end."

The belief, still prevalent among, perhaps, the majority of God's people, that the return of the Lord will also be the definitive close of all things temporal, and that He will appear only to preside at the great and final assize, is grounded, first, upon the general declaration, that there is a day appointed in which God will judge both the world and the secrets of men, by Jesus Christ;⁵ and, secondly, that this judgment will take place at His appearing and kingdom.⁶ A multitude of other passages, bearing on

³ Ἀπαρχή . . . ἔπειτα . . . ἔτι . . .

⁴ Rev. xx. 12.

⁵ Acts xvii. 31; Rom. ii. 16.

⁶ 2 Tim. iv. 1. This text, as it stands in the A.V., might, if taken alone, seem to justify the popular idea of the "judgment-day." But in all labour there is profit, and it is interesting to

the same solemn topic, will readily occur to the Christian reader; but those to which reference has just been made are enough to illustrate the point in hand. Now, of these passages, the first only gives assurance that there is a judgment day for every man, and that Jesus is the Judge. The second, as is explained in the note below, declares only that both quick and dead are the subjects of the judgment written, and that the judicial power thus ascribed to Christ will have its exercise in His administration of the kingdom which He is now gone to receive; but states nothing as to the limits and distinctive character of that kingdom, and leaves it still an open question, whether the living and the dead will be judged together, or at different times.

But these points, so full of solemn interest to the believer, have not been left without a clear solution in the word of God. Enough may be gathered from the Lord's own lips to prove conclusively that promises and expectations, which can have no possible fulfilment but at the resurrection of the just, are connected immediately with the present earth and its inhabitants.⁷ The passages which might be

note the effect of an honest textual criticism in elucidating the difficulties of Scriptural interpretation. On the united testimony of all the earlier MSS. (including *Cod. Sin.*), the sense of this passage is as follows: "I charge thee before God, and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge both quick and dead, *and* by His appearing, *and* by His kingdom," etc.—a change which turns it from an apparent contradiction to an emphatic support of the apostle's doctrine in this chapter. I give the amended text: Διαμαρτύρομαι ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ Χ. Ι. τοῦ μέλλοντος κρίνειν ζῶντας καὶ νεκροὺς, καὶ τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν αὐτοῦ, καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτοῦ, κήρυξον τ. λ.

⁷ Luke xxii. 28-30; Matt. xix. 28; Rev. ii. 26, 27.

alleged, both from the apostolic and prophetic Scriptures, in confirmation of this general statement, are far too numerous for insertion here. I shall beg the reader's attention at present only to the words of God's last witness, when recording "the revelation of Jesus Christ," and whose declarative testimony on these topics is in strict and circumstantial agreement with the apostle's doctrine in this chapter. For we are there expressly told—1. That at a time appointed the kingdoms of this world are to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.⁸ 2. That the Lord will come *personally* to execute the vengeance written against those who are found, at the close of the present age, in array against His name.⁹ 3. That "the time of the dead" will then have come;¹ and, lastly, and with especial reference to the crisis so described, that that "time" is divided into two epochs: "the first resurrection," comprising only His departed saints, whose time will then be come to *reign*, while "the rest of the dead" are left still in their graves, until the days of the kingdom are accomplished. As to the duration of this kingdom, and the consequent interval between the first and second resurrection, it is limited expressly to *a thousand years*.²

⁸ Rev. xi. 15.

⁹ Rev. xix. 11–21.

¹ Rev. xi. 18.

² Rev. xx. 4–6. The "Revelation" is addressed, as its title implies, to those who stand, by grace, in the secret of God's counsel, and aim at the honour promised by the Master to those who desire to serve Him. (John xii. 26.) Like all other scripture, it lies open to the eye of every man, but it is a riddle rather than a revelation to the natural mind; while to the believer its light will be scanty or abundant, according to the measure in which the state of his own soul resembles that of him to whom these things were shewn. The main action of the book is comprised within

There is, then, a kingdom presently to be revealed, of which men, in their mortal bodies, are, in part, the subjects, and over which God's risen and translated saints are set in a subordinate fellowship of dominion with the Lord. Angels, and authorities, and powers, are already made subject to Him who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God;³ but the time is at hand when He, who has gone hence to receive a kingdom, will return also to assume the throne which attaches to His title as the Governor of the nations, and Lord of the whole earth; for He is, by the Father's counsel, appointed heir of *all things*; and the decree has long been declared which secures to the once rejected Son of David, not the kingdom of His father only, but the supreme and acknowledged sovereignty of the world and its inhabitants.⁴ Where His word now runs as a witness,⁵ His power will then be felt in effectual government. The inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness when His judgments are in the earth.⁶

With respect to the introduction and establishing of this kingdom, it will be by righteous, but progressive, conquest. He will send forth truth to

the cessation of living apostolic testimony, and the second coming of the Lord, which grand and decisive event is the true burden of the prophecy. Its opening warning is, "Behold, He cometh;" its closing promise is, "Behold, I come." The Church is noticed under various aspects, and in different situations, both on earth and in heaven. Nor are the elect of Israel forgotten. But the *kingdom*, and what leads to it, is the chief topic of the book. In the passage here quoted, we have a visional fulfilment, both general and special, of the gospel promise: "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him." (2 Tim. ii. 12; Rom. viii. 17; etc.)

³ 1 Peter iii. 22.

⁴ Heb. i. 2; Ps. ii. 6-9.

⁵ Ps. xix.; Rom. x. 18.

⁶ Isa. xxvi. 9.

victory, when He has first settled it triumphantly in the place where it was once rejected in His person.⁷ Zion will welcome her Redeemer in that day;⁸ “and in mercy shall the throne be established: and He shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness.”⁹ But as the sword of David went before the sceptre of Solomon, so also will Messiah gird His sword upon His thigh, and, like His father after the flesh, will be a man of war, before He fills the kingdom and dominion under the whole heaven with His peace. At His coming, He will find His enemies arrayed against Him, and the son of perdition at the acme of his power.¹ He will seem to be within reach of the goal of his imaginings, when he plants the tabernacles of his palace in the glorious holy mountain;² but his destruction, and that of his infatuated followers, will be the first act in that process of subjugation which is to characterize Messiah’s kingdom. And if it seem strange to any that “peace and safety” should be declared by the same witness to be the watchword of the world,³ at a time when the hosts of the nations are marshalled for battle in the valley of decision,⁴ let it be remembered—1. That such words, when uttered by the lips of wickedness, are themselves a war-cry against the Lord of Sabaoth, and a final provocation of His wrath.⁵ 2. That it is by the ruthless destruction of those who are fenced by divine truth against the

⁷ John xviii. 36, 37.

⁸ Ps. cxviii.; Isa. lix. 20.

⁹ Isa. xvi. 5; Ps. ci.

¹ Rev. xix. 19; 2 Thess. ii. 8.

² Dan. xi. 45.

³ 1 Thess. v. 3.

⁴ Joel iii. 12, *seq.*

⁵ Isa. v. 18–20; James v. 1–5; 2 Peter iii.

seductive power of his flatteries, that the wilful king will seek to establish the world's peace as the crown of his own pride;⁶ and 3. That the mustering of confederated Gentile hosts against the weak remnant of the house of Israel will seem, to the eyes of those who seek their evil wishes through the mist of a divinely sent delusion,⁷ the surest pledge of such a peace as they desire, by crushing out effectually God's last remaining witness upon earth. It was by condemning and killing the Just One that blinded Israel sought to take by wrong the inheritance which yet shall be their own through the redeeming virtue of that blood;⁸ and it will be through an effort to exterminate finally the remnant of the seed of God that the wicked one will vainly hope to seize Immanuel's portion for himself.

But it will here be asked by some, If Judea be the *locus* of the Lord's appearing when He comes to reign,⁹ and the remnant of Israel the people for whose deliverance He will appear, what becomes, in the meanwhile, of the *Church*, which in the present dispensation is the one engrossing object of the Spirit's care? To this it must be answered, that the Church will in that day be, in *fact*, where in desire she has ever been, *with Christ*. The apostle, in the outline which he here so distinctly traces of the *order* of the resurrection, leaves quite unnoticed what the Scriptures elsewhere testify as to the manner in which the partakers of the heavenly calling are to be put in possession of their hope. Nor was it needful for him to digress for this purpose from the immediate

⁶ Ps. x.; Rev. xiii. 15.

⁸ Luke xx. 14.

⁷ 2 Thess. ii. 11.

⁹ Zech. xiv. 4.

point of his teaching, when writing to those whose views of God's unfulfilled counsel had been formed mainly on his own personal testimony. To such "the coming of the Lord," which in verse 23 of this chapter is mentioned simply in connection with the decisive act of power which is to signalize it, presented itself habitually under a threefold aspect. For by the genuine disciples of the Spirit the now absent Lord is looked for—1. As the hope of the Church;¹ 2. As the Messiah of Israel; and, 3. As the promise of the nations,² and the emancipator of the still groaning creation.³ And in like manner, as "the day of the Lord" is used in prophetic language with a latitude of meaning, which admits of its application both to a particular crisis in the history of man, and to the entire period of the reign of which the apostle speaks, so also is the "coming" spoken of sometimes *generally*, as in the present passage, at others with a pointed reference to some one of those different purposes for which He is about to leave His present position at the right hand of the Father. For example, His coming to receive His people to Himself is not the same thing as His coming to be glorified *in* His saints, or His coming to Zion, or His coming to judge the nations, though each and all of these stand in a close moral relation to each other, and are equally connected with the doctrine of the resurrection. But what He is to the Church must not be confounded with what He is and will be to His beloved, but still blinded, Israel. The promises to one are not identical with the promises to the

¹ Tit. ii. 13.

² Acts iii. 20, 21; Rom. xi. 26.

³ Rom. viii. 19, *seq.*; Hag. ii. 7.

other, but vary according to the distinctive calling of each. Now the Church knows Christ no longer after the flesh, but sees Him, and by faith is joined to Him, in *heaven*, from whence also she expects Him to conduct her thither as His bride. But Israel knows nothing of Messiah apart from earth and its associations. He is, to a Nathanael, the Son of God ; but He is also *Israel's* king.⁴

And as with Christ, so also with the final Antichrist. There are already many Antichrists, for every opposer of the truth is such ; but the last one is distinguished by an aim which marks him as the special adversary, not of the partaker of the heavenly calling, but rather of the godly *Jew*. For the Church's testimony condemns the world at large,—declaring Jew and Gentile to be dead alike in sin, and pointing to the crucified and now exalted Jesus as the refuge from the wrath to come. It neither vindicates, like Judaism, a special pre-eminence in favour of one race of men against the rest, nor does it *regard the earth at all* as its present habitation or inheritance. As it is not numbered among the families of men, being neither Jew nor Gentile, so its true nature is a riddle to the natural mind.⁵ And so also are its calling and its destiny. It is contemplated variously by the Spirit, both in its purity and its apostacy, as well as emblematically shewn to us in both these opposite conditions. The Lord will reap His harvest from the earth, to garner it in heaven. His angels will cut down the clusters of the vine of the earth, when ripe for the winepress of the wrath of God.⁶ That the true bride will be translated to

⁴ John i. 49. ⁵ 1 John iii. 1. ⁶ Rev. xiv. 14–20.

her home before the Antichrist is finally destroyed is certain, not only on the positive testimony of those scriptures which tell us of the Lord's intentions, both in going and returning, with reference to His Church, and which announce the marriage of the Lamb in heaven before the riding forth from thence of the divine Avenger and His armies,⁷ but from a consideration also of what is written as to the practisings and final object of the Man of Sin. For it is evident that earthly dominion, and especially the possession of the Holy Land, is the definitive end of his ambition. He will claim divine honours, but in connection with that place where alone the throne of divine government has been hitherto set up.⁸ But Christians have no *present* interest in Palestine,⁹ nor does their testimony direct itself against particular objects of earthly ambition, but rather against the assertion of natural right in any shape. It is not, then, as adversaries of those who are taught to make cheerful sacrifice of everything but conscience for the Lord's sake, doing just homage to any form of government which God may suffer to exist on earth, and not disputing Cæsar's claim to anything that Cæsar's hand has been permitted to acquire,¹ that the armies of those nations are arrayed which have agreed to give their power to the beast. His eye is no longer roaming over the surface of the earth in quest of God's hidden ones, but is fixed upon *Jerusalem*;² a proof both of the cessation of the "offence

⁷ John xiv. 3; Acts i. 11; Rev. xix.

⁸ Dan. ix. 27.

⁹ Christians, that is, who are instructed in the true nature of their calling, and not misguided by false traditional teaching.

¹ Matt. xxii. 21; 1 Peter ii. 13, 14; Rom. xiii.

² Rev. xvii. 13, 14; Zech. xii. xiv.

of the cross," in the evangelical sense of the expression,³ and of the activity of another form of divine testimony which more directly contradicts his claim. The confessors of the *Father*⁴ will have gone, as Enoch went, to take possession of their promised mansion in His house, before the time arrives for proving judicially to men, that "He whose name alone is *Jehovah* is most high over all the earth."⁵

As our present subject is the *resurrection*, the doctrine of the kingdom has hitherto been contemplated on its lower side, and with reference to its visible inauguration upon earth. But in close connection with the "coming" of which the apostle speaks, there are changes also to be wrought in *heaven*. As it is written, in that day "the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth that are on earth,"⁶ etc. As yet there are "spiritual powers of wickedness in the heavenly places,"⁷ against which the Church is called to fight the good fight of faith, and which must presently be cast forth finally from thence, that the heirs of salvation may enter on their rest. The accused and their accuser will change places in that day.⁸ There is an evident analogy in the resulting effects of the great work of redemption, as they are exhibited in the upper and nether spheres of Christ's dominion, when He quits the Father's throne to take possession of His own. He will clear the heavens of those who are still suffered to infest

³ Gal. v. 11. ⁴ Chap. viii. 6; John xvi. 25. ⁵ Ps. lxxxiii. 18.

⁶ Isa. xxiv. 21-23. Compare Rev. xix. 19-21, and xx. 1-3, 7.

⁷ τὰ πνευματικά τῆς πονηρίας ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις. Eph. vi. 12.

⁸ Rev. xii. 7-12.

them, before He rids His land of the oppressor. He will settle in their promised mansion those who here have no continuing city, and are as dead men only upon earth,⁹ before He again chooses Jerusalem, and inherits Judah, His portion in the holy land.¹

One further word as to the manner of this first resurrection, and the corresponding change which is to come upon God's living saints. It will be with the body as with the Head; with the rest of God's chosen family as with the First-born from the dead. The world knew Him not; and the same world knows not them.² No man saw Jesus rise; but His open grave was an attestation of the fact, both to the affrighted keepers of the sepulchre, and to those who came to seek the Living among the dead. Nor is it anywhere affirmed in Scripture, that the rapture of God's saints will be witnessed by any mortal eye. The voice which awakens those who sleep may or may not be audible to men.³ What is alone certain is, that in an instant both the living and the dead in

⁹ Col. iii. 3, 4; Heb. xiii. 14.

¹ Zech. ii. 12; Jer. xxxi. 38-40.

² 1 John iii. 1.

³ And even on the former supposition, its effect may be no more than to excite a passing exclamation of surprise and doubt; as when some said "it thundered," and others that "an angel spake," when the Father's voice gave audible reply to Jesus at the grave of Lazarus. But in truth there is nothing in the apostle's language, when describing this event (1 Thess. iv. 15-17; 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52), which necessarily implies the world's cognizance of what is done; for the voice, the shout, and the trump, though surely piercing every ear to which they are addressed, need not be audible to any others. As the voice of the Spirit, which wakes dead souls to life, is but an idle wind to those to whom the word is not divinely sent, so may it also be when the (in one sense) lesser miracle is wrought, of changing bodily mortality to life. (Luke v. 23, 24.)

Christ will be changed and taken from the earth.⁴ The Church will be gone, but its counterfeit will still remain, to pass through the last phase of its apostasy, and be found at the end among the marked worshippers of the beast. Events, which already move with such rapidity that the most notable phenomena of human history are presently forgotten in the presence of some fresh and more immediately interesting fact, will then move faster still. The disappearance from among men of those whom God has sealed⁵ will, doubtless, leave its impression on their minds, and generate we know not what surmisings in their hearts; but these will be soon effaced and forgotten in the agitation and excitement of that "short time" which is allotted to the devil to complete his evil work.⁶ And even as the Lord, who had gone up into heaven in the presence only of His chosen witnesses, made an open demonstration of His power on the day of Pentecost, so also will the truth of their testimony who have confessed Him in the presence of a gainsaying generation be confirmed when He appears in glory with His saints.

To proceed now with our chapter :

Verse 25. "For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet." It is the despotic⁷

⁴ Verse 52. ⁵ 2 Cor. i. 22, v. 5; Eph. i. 13, iv. 30. ⁶ Rev. xii. 12.

⁷ The best thing in principle becomes the worst, when handled by the natural will. That goodness should reign, and honour flow downwards from hands worthy to dispense it, is the just ideal of government. And while popular institutions are practically a welcome refuge often, in a world whose foundations are out of course, from the heavy yoke of despotic power in the hands of wickedness, the *maxim* that legitimate authority rises upward from the masses, is in plainest contradiction to the truth of God.

character of Messiah's kingdom, rather than its beneficial effect upon its subjects, that the Spirit dwells on here. That the power which belongs to God only should be vested in the hands of Man, and administered in righteousness to the glory of His name, is the wonder and praise of that long promised reign. By man has come earth's misery, and by Man will come her peace. What Jesus taught the twelve to pray for will be granted in that day. "The Father's will" will then be done on earth, not as it was when Jesus was its only doer, but *as it is in heaven*, where all powers bow to Him. There is an absolute contrast, in this respect, between the existing dispensation and that which is to come. *Persuasion* is the Spirit's method as the minister of gospel grace. *Compulsion* will wait upon Messiah's sceptre in the coming day. As yet, the calling of the justified believer is to suffer for the name of Jesus, who warns him that not peace, but tribulation, is his portion in the present world; but in the days of His kingdom "shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace, so long as the moon endureth."⁸ But this peace will be the fruit of righteous conquest. There will be no more *natural* readiness to accept the yoke of Christ's supremacy in that day, than there is to listen to the word of grace in this. Satan will indeed be bound, and in the absence of the tempter, and the presence of the great Restorer, the nations who now forget God will remember and turn unto the Lord.⁹ Yet

⁸ Psalm lxxii. 7. This subject cannot be pursued further in this place, but is more fully treated in the *Notes on the Psalms*.

⁹ Psalm xxii. 27, compare Psalm cxxxviii. 4, 5.

their homage will not always be sincere. Large, indeed, in comparison with the present dispensation of longsuffering, will be the outpouring of the Spirit in that day; but though all nations will be worshippers, all will not be converted heartily to God. The dread of a judgment, both immediate and inevitable,¹ will impel even the most reluctant to do homage at Jehovah's footstool. His enemies shall bow before Him, but in heart they will, alas, be adversaries still.²

Nor will His kingdom end without the application of a decisive test to this apparent unanimity of Gentile worship. For a little season Satan must be loosed again, and suffered to make final trial of his craft as the seducer of mankind. He will prosper to his wish, but his last success will also be the definitive perdition of himself and those who have preferred his delusions to the living truth of God. The chaining of the devil, and his final casting into the lake of fire, are the first and last acts in the triumphant reign of Christ.³ Thus the progress of righteous subjugation begins and ends with what is *spiritual*, the natural man being involved in the destiny of one greater than himself, and to whom he had perversely rendered the obedience which is due to God alone.

Verse 26. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." No enemy of God escapes destruction, and the general waster is the last destroyed. For the believer, both death, and sin, which is its cause, are already at an end.⁴ Old

¹ Zech. xiv. 17-19.

² Psalm xviii. 44, *margin*.

³ Rev. xix. 1, 10.

⁴ 2 Tim. i. 10; Heb. ix. 26.

things are passed away, and all things become new.⁵ The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was the assertion of His victorious title as the Captain of Salvation; since by dying once for all to sin, He had both abolished death, and destroyed him that hath the power of death, that is, the devil.⁶ But while truth is crowned with glory in His person, its effective conquests run on to the close of time. While mortality attaches to mankind, this enemy is still in force, though as the instrument of His will only, who is the Lord of the living and the dead. Death must first swallow up all other victims, in fulfilment of God's righteous judgment upon sin, before it is itself consigned (together with the grave to which it leads) to that fiery abyss which must finally receive whatever in its nature is opposed to God.⁷

With the destruction of this final enemy, the kingdom of the Son will cease. For there is an end to all delegated power and authority, even as the existing creation, which is the sphere of His dominion, is of limited duration in all its parts. The earth, whose foundations He had laid of old, and the heavens which are the work of His own hands, will give place at His almighty word to another and more lasting witness of His power.⁸ Such, then, will

⁵ 2 Cor. v. 17.

⁶ Rom. vi. 10; Heb. ii. 14, v. 9.

⁷ Rev. xx. 14, 15. The imagery of this passage is in strict keeping with the figurative expressions used elsewhere in Scripture to describe the ultimate effect of Divine vengeance upon sin and its fruits. *Conf.* Psalm xxi. 9, xviii. 8; Isa. xxiii. 14; Malachi iv. 1. Our God is a consuming fire. Death and Hades follow the destiny of sin, which gave them birth. The latter is no longer found in the creation which God then will own; the former are hidden from the remembrance of the living in the second death.

⁸ Heb. i. 10-12.

be the last act of the kingdom which Jesus is now gone to receive, and which He may at any moment be expected to inaugurate. The preliminaries have long been arranging themselves in fulfilment of prophetic truth, and His heavenly bride has long been waiting, though too often in a slumberous attitude, for the day of her espousals. Meanwhile death reigns, and Satan is at large; while violence and fraud seem only to find freer scope under the false shelter of will-worship, and an earthly-minded form of godliness. But the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, though His longsuffering to us-ward is salvation.⁹

Verses 27, 28. "For He hath put all things under His feet,"¹ etc. From the Christ and His coming kingdom the apostle turns now to Him from whom the heir of all things has received His many crowns. In Ps. ii., we have a declaration of the decree; and in Ps. cx., the oath of royal and sacerdotal investment. But the quotation here made from Ps. viii. is a still more comprehensive assertion of that universality of dominion which belongs to Jesus, by divine appointment, as the second Adam; things in heaven, as well as things on earth, being alike comprised within His rule, while the only manifest exception to this general subjugation is the God whose wisdom and power He personally is, and who has set Him thus in righteousness over all His works.

The second of these verses describes the merging of Messiah's temporal dominion in the eternity which

⁹ 2 Pet. iii. 9, 15.

¹ It is remarkable that the first clause in each of these verses is wanting in *Cod. Sin.*

succeeds it, and which will exhibit to a faultless creation the unclouded glory of God. The spirit of prophecy, after noting to its end the course of natural time, looks onward to a further and unending day, in the light of which there are descried a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, and where sin and its consequences are alike unknown.² God and His tabernacle are there, and He will have His lasting dwelling among *men*. "He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people; and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God;" language which vividly portrays the moral difference subsisting between that final "day of God,"³ and even the coming millennium of the reign of Christ. Under the *present* dispensation, to be a "man" and "dweller upon earth" is to be a subject of the prince of this world, and an alien from God. His children have, by faith, a new and spiritual manhood in the second Adam. In the time of the *kingdom*, to be a man will be to be a subject of the just Lord, and a conditional partaker of the blessings of His reign, Israel and the Gentiles being united, though not confounded, in the general bond of peace which shall then encompass all but the active rebels against Shiloh's throne.⁴ But in the *day of God*

² 2 Peter iii. 13; Rev. xxi. 1-3.

³ The words of Peter, when seeking to engage the hearts of his brethren with things to come (2 Peter iii. 10-12), are such as to embrace both the millennial period and the ulterior state. The dissolution of the elements, and the passing away of heaven and earth, of which he speaks, coincide historically with the post-millennial session of the Judge of all; after which the time of peace on earth and goodwill toward men begins, in its *absolute* sense, and is continued in eternal righteousness.

⁴ Isa. xix. 23-25; Micah iv. 1-7; Zech. xiv. 16-19.

distinctions of race are found no longer upon earth. The Creator and His work are in a lasting harmony of rest. What He once repented⁵ shall be no more in remembrance. Mankind shall be His people and His praise. The Father will be acknowledged in His natural and paramount supremacy, and the Son, in His place of filial subjection, will be still the medium through which alone the light which God is sheds its beams upon the work of His own hands; for in Christ, creation, whether now or then, both stands, and will for ever stand, since it is He who is both its effective origin and its all-pervading truth.⁶

Verse 29. "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead?" etc. Having thus completely reaffirmed the doctrine of the resurrection, and traced it in its operation to the end, the apostle applies now, with some abruptness, a personal argument to those who, among the saints at Corinth, were wavering in their faith on this essential point. They had been *baptized*. But if so, with what meaning and intent? What ideas did they attach to a rite of such general observance in the Church of God? Now, if they rightly understood the substance of that outward and symbolic act, they were stultified entirely by their reasonings against the resurrection of the dead; for as the apostle elsewhere teaches, and as was doubtless everywhere acknowledged in the Church, the two things indicated in that ordinance are death and resurrection. They, then, who are baptized are baptized for the dead; *i. e.*, that which they undergo in their mortal bodies, they undergo on behalf of their own dead selves. A baptized Christian is

⁵ Gen. vi. 6.

⁶ Col. i. 17; Rev. iii. 14.

figuratively a successor to his former self. Being dead with Christ, by faith in Him crucified, they are risen also with Him through faith in His resurrection. Their act of baptism was done, then, "for the dead;" but, says the apostle, if the dead rise not, this ordinance of Christ becomes mere folly, even as the faith to which it witnesses is also vain.⁷

Verse 30. "And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?" This error is not only refuted by their own profession, but shamed also by the spectacle of apostolic patience and devotedness. They were in peril every hour, counting themselves willingly as sheep for the slaughter, for the name of Jesus. But why this indifference to personal risk, if their hope in Christ was only in this mortal life? Philosophy might seek a medicine for the natural ills of life by

⁷ Such I believe to be the true meaning of this much disputed passage. The reader who is dissatisfied with this explanation may peruse at his leisure a large variety of others, on which I will make here only this general remark, that they all of them suppose a reference on the apostle's part to some limited and special custom. But this hypothesis is, in my judgment, a sufficient condemnation of all such interpretations; for it is hardly credible that, when conducting an argument of this kind, the apostle would appeal to any use or habit not of general recognition and observance in the Church. Such an appeal would be of no moral force at all, since the objector might justly reply that such customs proved nothing but the fact that certain Christians did a questionable thing. Still less would he allow himself to refer approvingly (as some strangely suppose) to a custom of a superstitious kind. By doing so, he would have brought his own name under the stigma which he elsewhere applies to the "many who corrupt the word of God." The phrase, *οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν*, is quite comprehensive enough to embrace all baptized Christians, and no partial or special construction of a divinely appointed ordinance can be reasonably supposed to have been in the contemplation of an inspired teacher, when thus solemnly arguing a fundamental point of truth.

asserting the immortality of man's nobler part, and vaguely anticipating a compensating futurity for the soul when liberated from its burden. But the apostle knows nothing of a disembodied *man*. The death which speeds the believer to his better portion, is a prelude to his being *found* in Christ, in the day when he is clothed in the bodily likeness of the Lord. The prospect which truth opens in the gospel concerns men personally and *entirely*, and not mentally or spiritually only. He keeps, therefore, logically to the point of his argument when thus referring to his own habit of life and its motives.⁸

Verse 31. "I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus, I die daily." There is a double significance in these words. First, they express forcibly, in confirmation of his previous question, the readiness with which he at all times tempted mortal hazard for the gospel's sake; and in this sense his language carries with it something of reproach to those addressed. But, secondly, it declares the true secret of his constancy, and the sustaining spring of the martyr-spirit that was in him, by thus referring them to *death* as a daily experience of his soul. For how should he, or they, be rejoicing truly in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, if they did not daily bring to their remembrance their death as natural men, and the manner of that death, by feeding, by faith and in the Spirit, on the flesh and blood of the crucified Son of man? Had these Corinthian saints been thus habitually nourishing their souls, they would have been less entangled in vain and fruitless questionings, and less open to

⁸ *Ante*, pages 385-6.

the large, yet loving, censure of him who watched thus for their souls.

Verse 32. "If, as a man, I fought with beasts⁹ at Ephesus," etc. It was from Ephesus that the apostle indited the epistle, and the reference here made to the crisis of personal danger through which he had passed is probably specified on account of its recent occurrence. But of its real nature we have no certain information, though the Corinthians doubtless knew. Was he, then, seeking the praise of men when he incurred such risks, or had he not respect rather "to the recompence of the reward?"¹ Surely all was vanity, if there is nothing after death. Was the gospel a speculative opinion, or the truth of God? But if the latter, its hope must be verified by others than its actual possessors, if the dead rise not. For all its promises are made to us as *men*, and are secured to us in Christ, who is Himself a man?² But disembodied spirits are not men. Finally, if the dead rise not, then atheistic recklessness becomes the soundest wisdom. For if there be a God, He is the God not of the dead, but of the *living*. But they who claim to know Him in His Son, confess that in this world they are *dead*, and

⁹ Ἐθνηριμάχῃσα. The aorist seems to point to some particular instance of ill-usage, though it is unlikely that the tumultuous scene described in Acts xix., and at which Paul was not personally present, is intended. It is expressly said that he left Ephesus immediately after that event; nor have we any scriptural proof of his subsequently revisiting that city. What we have in the text is a strong expression, descriptive of the savage character of the opposition which he encountered in that citadel of Gentile superstition, which on some unrecorded occasion may have placed him in jeopardy of a literal exposure to wild beasts.

¹ Heb. xi. 26.

² 1 Tim. ii. 5.

that they are saved by *hope*; all which becomes a mere delusion, if they who entertain that hope are not to enter *personally* into life.

Verse 33. "Be not deceived," etc. To the doctrine and admonition already delivered he now adds some words of sharp rebuke, exemplifying thus the precept which he has laid down elsewhere for the guidance of his younger fellow-labourer in the gospel.³ And first he shames the inconsistency of their dalliance with a vain and barren philosophy by an apposite quotation from one of those poets whom they had been wont to honour as their moral guides, before their ears were opened to the oracles of God. The hearts and minds which faith had purified were in danger of corruption through this leavening of divine truth by merely natural thought. An abuse of Christian liberty had both exposed them to the contaminating effects of idolatrous intercourse, and had made their minds a prey also to the sleight of men. Intellectual vanity was gradually supplanting faith in God, and misty imaginings were fast hiding from their view the lineaments of truth. What wonder, then, if, when contemplating this threatened frustration of his work, he felt his spirit stirred to a vehement utterance of indignation and rebuke?

Verse 34. "Awake to righteousness, and sin not," etc. What they had been idly discussing as a speculative question is a truth essential to the glory of God. Their state as disputers was a state of *sin*. To pursue their present course would be to put their very souls in jeopardy; for they were Sadducees, not

³ Titus i. 13.

Christians, if they settled down in this erroneous belief. In vain would they claim to know God while denying the chief glory of His work. It was time, then, for them to awake up from the spiritual slumber into which the enemy had lulled them through the unsuspected effect of these evil communications; for it is evident, from the latter clause of this verse, that there was already "a mixed multitude" among the true people of the Lord.⁴ The same laxity of discipline which had winked at the gravest moral disorder, had suffered the intrusion into God's assembly of some who were believers in name only. Natural cleverness was claiming for itself an equal recognition with true spiritual gift, and the things of Christ were freely handled by some who themselves were ignorant of God. The same spirit which had led to their resorting to the world's tribunals for the settlement of their personal disputes, was now operating in the midst of their assembly to the corrupting of the faith of God's elect; and the apostle stigmatizes both these forms of evil with the same expression of reproach.⁵

Verses 35, 36. "But some one will say, *How* are the dead raised up?" The doctrine of a bodily resurrection has been sufficiently asserted for all minds really subject to divine teaching; but there is a class of objectors who, without denying flatly any positive doctrine of the faith, assail it indirectly by lamenting, with a simulated candour, the embarrassments they meet with when endeavouring to weigh divine facts in the scales of human experience. And

⁴ Numbers xi. 4.

⁵ *Ante*, chap. vi. 5.

it is against one of this numerous class,⁶ and the double question here imputed to him, that the apostle now directs his speech. Without dwelling on the presumptuous character of such questions, implying as they do an ability on man's part to comprehend beforehand a prospective work of God, he proceeds first to demonstrate the folly of such objections, while to both questions he afterwards returns a distinct and adequate reply.⁷ The difficulties which seemed to cast so threatening a shadow on his faith would have been quite taken from the path of this professed disciple of the truth, had he pondered with a wiser eye the ordinary processes of nature, or reflected soundly on his own habitual acts. The apostle is astonished at the *senselessness*⁸ of those who, while postponing faith to knowledge, were so dull in apprehending what was daily open to their view. The God who had instructed man in the necessary arts of life⁹ was Himself capable of higher things. The daily bread which feeds the sceptic is a silent witness of the truth which he denies; for the grain must die before the plant can live. Nature is everywhere a parable of grace for a divinely educated eye.

Verses 37, 38. "And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be," etc. In the preceding verse the *fact* of the resurrection is

⁶ The natural forefathers of those "Christian" infidels of our own closing day, who fill the air with protestations of their reverent zeal for truth, while questioning the essential doctrines of the faith. Self-assertion is, in its nature, a denial of God. And it is this spirit which now seems hurrying the evil day of man to its appointed crisis.

⁷ Verses 42-44.

⁸ The apostle's term of reproach is "*Ἀφρον*," not *μωρό*.

⁹ Isa. xxviii. 23-29.

illustrated; in these he describes the manner of the change. The seed which man deposits in God's earth God quickens at His will, bestowing also on each kind its proper body. The husbandman knows two things well: first, that from seed sown he expects a crop; and, secondly, that what the seed produces, though the same in nature, is in form unlike itself. And so also is it with the husbandry of God. But there is a difference. The tiller of the ground may sow in hope; but though the earth is in covenant with its Creator,¹ both seed and harvest may be smitten by His hand in judgment. But the hope of the believer is subject to no doubt. Founded on the sure word of promise, and already verified in Him who is its firstfruits, the resurrection of God's saints, in the bodies which God has prepared for them, is far more certain than the reappearing of the tender ear in spring. While faith draws aid and comfort, yea, and deep instruction also, from the work of God in nature, its hindrances lie mainly in the dim-sighted activity of the natural mind. The latter clause of verse 38 is important, from its direct bearing on the question of personal identity, and the consequent mutual recognition of the children of the resurrection in the coming day. Each grain of God's true wheat will have its own body, but not in the same measure of increase. All will appear in the likeness of the Firstborn from the dead, but with greater or less excellence of place, according to the grace and wisdom of Him who will fulfil His promise in that day.

Verses 39-41 expand further the doctrine of

¹ Gen. ix.

diversity, as involved in that of the resurrection from the dead. The variety of the Creator's work, of which we all are witnesses—earth teeming with His living creatures, and the lights of heaven uttering His praise—is a figure and promise of the ultimate display of the Redeemer's glory, when He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied. There is a glory attaching to all bodies which the hand of God has made. Beauty belongs to kind and place, and varies in its character with these. Hence a difference in glory, both in the upper and the lower worlds; while heavenly bodies differ not from earthly only, but specifically also from each other. The four points illustrated by the natural analogies here described are: 1, personal identity; 2, an altered form; 3, mutual diversity; and, 4, perfection of kind, or *glory*. Taken together, they form the apostle's general reply to the questions put in the objector's mouth at verse 35. In what follows we have an application of this fourfold analogy to the resurrection of the bodies of God's saints.

Verse 42. "*So also* is the resurrection of the dead," etc. Having cited nature as a witness to refute the petty and dishonest pleadings of the carnal mind, he now goes onward in another strain, convincing the reason, and at the same time strengthening the heart of the believer, by an anticipative rehearsal of the mighty act which is presently to reveal the Redeemer's praise in its completeness. The Lord is for the body, and the body for the Lord,² and He will deal with it accord-

² Chap. vi. 13.

ing to the righteous perfection of His claim. Nothing can exceed the grandeur and depth of the apostle's language, when thus viewing the contrasted effects of sin and righteousness with reference to the human body, and delivering his triumphant answer to the sceptical enquiries of those who measured wisdom by themselves.

"It is sown in corruption." Such is the end of the activities of natural life. Mortality is only death deferred, the frame of man being doomed, from the first transgression, to return to dust. But the Lawgiver can make alive as well as kill.³ And since grace and truth have come by Jesus Christ, the same Spirit who, as the witness of condemnation, seemed to make man's burial his end,⁴ now magnifies His office as the glorifier of Jesus. Judgment has sown what mercy is to reap. What nature reluctantly submits to as inevitable, and in its willing ignorance of death's true cause is contented to accept as its appointed close, the believer is taught to contemplate as a needful, though humbling, stage in the progress of his hope. As the husbandman sees gladly the seed vanish from his sight into the ground, because he looks for a more excellent return; so is it with the saint who commits the body of his departed fellow to the earth. When we bury our brethren, we do a willing, though solemn, sacrifice to truth. It is a sinful body, and corruption is its badge of shame. But it has been purchased in righteousness by the Lord, who now entrusts it for awhile to the safe keeping of the earth, which once was His own grave. It is sown in corruption, to be raised in

³ James iv. 12.

⁴ Gen. iii. 19.

incorruption. *Immortality* is an attribute of that life which is already our own in Christ, because of righteousness,⁵ but bodily incorruption is to be its outward and abiding form.

Verse 43. "It is sown in dishonour," etc. If corruption expresses the effect of a mortal condition, dishonour is a confession of its moral degradation. Our bodies are bodies of humiliation, and the grave is their hiding-place of shame. The pride of nature may refuse to own this, and princes that *had* gold seek vainly to maintain a shadow of their state in the desolate houses which they build for themselves;⁶ but the worm is their brother still, and all the efforts art may make to avert, or at least defer, the dissolution of this earthly frame, do but the more emphatically witness to the present victory of death. But if sown in dishonour, it is raised in *glory*. The death of a believer is the seal of his life-long confession as a sinner and a worm. His resurrection will be the consummation of his hope as a partaker, in Christ, of the righteousness of God. Glory is the natural ornament of righteousness, as dishonour is the inseparable consequence of sin. A visible conformity to Him who is the true Image and Glory of God is the end of their expectation, who now wait, as the heirs of salvation, for the Son of God from heaven.⁷

"It is sown in weakness," etc. No man hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit. That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is man: neither can he contend with him

⁵ Rom. viii. 10.

⁶ Job iii. 14, 15.

⁷ Rom. viii. 29; Phil. iii. 20, 21; 1 Thess. i. 10.

that is mightier than he.⁸ Such is the lament of the royal preacher of vanity. A dead body is the most perfect and most piteous expression of weakness; an organism only fit for life, yet lifeless and surrendered to decay. The life of man is but a battle of self-preservation. All his toil is for his mouth, and ends with this mute confession of his impotency. All flesh is grass, and all alike withered by the Spirit of the Lord. Fading as a leaf, our iniquities hurry us as an angry wind to the dishonoured darkness of the grave.⁹ But if sown in weakness, it is in the faith of Him who, after being crucified in weakness, now liveth, and will live for ever, by the power of God. When Daniel saw the heavenly vision, his strength forsook him, and his comeliness was turned into corruption.¹ When John saw Christ in glory, he too fell lifeless, till revived by the gracious word and touch of his Redeemer.² But when awakened in His likeness, they, with all others who partake their hope, will find themselves endued with strength to sustain the very sight of God. That they shall see Him, is the crowning promise to His children. They will be like Him, for they shall see Him as He is.³

Verse 44. "It is sown a natural body," etc. We have here the limit and climax of sin's victory. From dust to dust is the history of Adam as a sinner. Neither corruption, dishonour, nor weakness, are necessary accidents of humanity. Death came by sin, and is the judicial end of that body which is its abode. What is thus sown will never reappear in

⁸ Eccles. viii. 8; vi. 10.

⁹ Isa. xl. 7, xlv. 6.

¹ Dan. x. 8, 16, 17. ² Rev. i. 17, 18. ³ Rev. xxii. 41; John iii. 2.

its original name and condition. Yet its identity is preserved. It is the body still of him who occupied it when alive. *Our mortal body* must be quickened;⁴ but "it is raised a *spiritual* body." The statement of this contrast is also the introduction of a new term into the apostle's argument, which requires and receives its proper elucidation: "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." The first of these statements is a truism, and makes no necessary call on our faith; the second is a revelation which faith only can receive, since it contradicts all natural experience, and is as yet among the things not seen. But though what is natural may be naturally known, faith loves to draw its knowledge, even of things visible, from the living oracles of God. Accordingly, he proceeds:

Verse 45. "And so it is *written*," etc. We have in this verse, first, a quotation to prove the vital origin of the first man; and, secondly, an inspired definition of the last and true Man, whose glory is yet to be revealed. Adam was formed before he lived; but from the time that God's breath gave animation to the man which He had made, the body has its proper designation from the life which fills it.⁵ But if Adam had his name as well as form from earth, and had life only as his Maker's second gift, the last Man is essentially "a quickening Spirit." The apostle's doctrine in this passage regards the Lord's person as the word made flesh, but with more especial reference to the resurrection, as the true

⁴ Rom. viii. 11.

⁵ It is *σῶμα ψυχικόν*, from the *ψυχή*, or "living soul," which the man became. (Gen. ii. 7.) The force of the apostle's teaching is less apparent to the English reader.

sphere of display for the life which is in Him. In the days of His flesh He could say, "As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself;" and, "As the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom He will."⁶ But Christ in the flesh, though personally the same as Christ after death, was not so *relatively*, either to God or man; for He took flesh that He might *die*—not of necessity indeed, as other men, but as a willing victim *by the grace of God*, His life on earth being preparatory to His death, that the Scriptures might be so fulfilled. As the obedient "Son of Adam," He took away the reproach of His father from before His Maker's face, doing that which Adam, and all others naturally sprung from him, had failed to do; for all had sinned, and come short of the glory of God. As the child of Israel also, He repaired the breach, by honouring the law which they had broken, and thus lawfully removing it and its terrors by submitting for their sakes to its curse, after having first deserved its blessings, and obtained its witness, as the only doer of the will of God. But though He died for that nation, He is also a propitiation for the world. He is *God's Lamb*, provided for Himself, and offered and accepted on account of human sin. While, therefore, the glory of the Only-begotten was visible to eyes which the Father's grace had opened to perceive it, and while by His acts and words the despised and rejected Son of man continually shewed Himself to be Jehovah, speaking and doing what God only could either speak or do, the things written con-

⁶ John v. 26, 21.

cerning Him had an *end*, and that end was sacrificial death.

It is in the resurrection that the distinctive title here ascribed to Jesus receives its full and emphatic vindication. It was the quickening Spirit who said, with reference to His own resurrection, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."⁷ It is as alive from the dead also that He is declared to be "the Beginning," and assumes the keys of death and Hades as His right.⁸ He is thus, in His risen glory, "the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;"⁹ or, in other words, He is revealed as the proper and abiding Image and Glory of God—the truth, of which the first man was the shadow.¹ Like His natural predecessor, He gives of His own to His progeny; the first man communicating sin and death, while the word of the last is, "I give unto them eternal life."² That they might have life, and have it more abundantly, He had come into the world; and all who hear His voice already live, and are named "the children of the living God,"³ by faith in Him. Their calling is to wait in patient hope until, through the redemption also of their bodies, they enter openly on that inheritance, of which the indwelling Spirit is the earnest and the seal.⁴

Verse 46. "Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual," etc. The order of these opposites is now declared. Nature comes first, and runs its course to its appointed goal. Death must precede resurrection,

⁷ John ii. 19-22. ⁸ Col. i. 18; Rev. i. 17, 18. ⁹ Rev. xiv.

¹ Rom. v. 14. ² John x. 28. ³ Hosea i. 10; 1 John iii. 2.

⁴ John x. 10; Rom. viii. 23; Eph. i. 14.

and what is finite that which has no end. Originally a figure of Him that was to come, the first man had bestowed on him a name and honour which he was unable to retain. The second supplants in righteousness the first.

Verse 47. "The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven."⁵ We have here put in contrast the material beginning and constitution of the first man, and the heavenly origin of the second. And here we may note the characteristic reserve of inspired wisdom when speaking of the mystery of godliness. What is natural is expressly defined; what is spiritual is referred to its origin, but undefined. The first man is earthly by derivation, and earthy by constitution.⁶ He is both *of* and *for* earth. The blessings of Paradise were suited to the nature with which his Maker had endued him. He was not made for heaven. Elective love foreknew and blessed its objects in the second Man before the earth was created, from whose dust the first was made; but the creature formed was formed for earth, and earth's dominion. He was perfect in his place and first estate, and could not look beyond the end of his creation. It was only when found personally unworthy to remain in perpetuity on earth, and sent forth from the seat of earthly joy to toil his way to death, that grace opened to the outcast of Eden a sure though distant view of heaven. God, and the quickening power of

⁵ The word "Lord" in verse 47 is generally acknowledged to be an interpolation, no MS. of note containing it. Nor even as a gloss is it a judicious addition; the local origin, and not the name, of the second man being the point here stated.

⁶ Ἐκ γῆς, χοϊκός.

His righteousness, became his refuge from the sentence passed upon him as a sinner. But the second Man is distinctively "from heaven." "I am from above," is His own declaration of his local origin. "I came down from heaven;" "I proceeded forth and came from God;" and other such words were spoken by One who was really a man, but who, though "made of a woman," was, in His essential origin, neither earthly nor of the earth.⁷ The apostle's language refers primarily to the mystery of the incarnation, and finally to the expected coming of the Lord, in quickening power, as the second and triumphant Master of creation.

Verse 48. "As is the earthy," etc. There is an identity of *kind* between the stem and the branches. Mankind are but Adam multiplied indefinitely; the redeemed will be a multiplied diffusion of the life and bodily likeness of the Man from heaven. Yet between these two classes there is a further and essential difference. In nature each man has his *own* Adamic life, and lives or dies upon his own account, derivation from a common source conferring at the same time a separate and independent existence upon each member of the human race. In Christ it is otherwise. We live, but in Him in whom alone is life; we live by the faith of Him.⁸ Adamic life is continuous by *succession*, spiritual life is life *eternal*. The children of the "earthy" know themselves and their descent, though their ancestor

⁷ Such expressions as "branch," "fruit of the earth," etc., relating not to His essential origin, but His coming in the flesh, according to the Scriptures.

⁸ Gal. ii. 20; Col. iii. 3, 4; 1 John v. 11.

is only now a name. The children of the "heavenly" will know themselves, and understand their lineage perfectly, only when they see Him as He is.⁹ That the Sanctifier and the sanctified are all "of one" is a truth on which the Spirit now nourishes the faith of God's elect. They are as He is, even now, in promise; they will be so, in fact, when He arrives to claim them in person as His own.

Verse 49. "And as we have borne the image of the earthy," etc. The force of the divine reasoning in the foregoing verses is here collected into a triumphant assertion of the truth in question, on behalf of all true believers, whether dead or living. Viewing God's saints in Christ, he treats their mortal image as a thing already gone. His language is a bold and worthy expression of that faith which disallows things visible in favour of the things unseen, and holds *truth* firmly as a pledge for *facts* to be. While, therefore, mortality is our condition here, it is no longer our *nature*, but is borne by us as an incongruous burden; for glory, and not humiliation, is the proper habitation of the Christ which dwelleth in us. As men, we were born into this world to die out of it again, according to the common appointment of all flesh. But Christ has died, and is risen again, the Firstfruits of them that are asleep. And His death and life are ours also, by the grace of God. The harvest, then, shall surely follow in its time. We have borne for a while the image of the earthy as our *own*. We acknowledge it no longer, now that we are *Christ's*; but, living by the faith of Him in a body which is "dead because

⁹ 1 John iii. 2.

of sin," we expect our proper likeness in the day when mortality shall be swallowed up of life.¹

Verse 50. "Now this I say, brethren," etc. To have a title to God's kingdom, we must ourselves be born of God.² To inherit it, in fact, we must be changed in form as well as nature. "Flesh and blood" is a scriptural designation of humanity while living;³ "corruption" is its name when dead. And God's saints are men, and subject to the common lot of men, though Christ be in them, and they are the Lord's. The truth which, as "flesh and blood," they have received, must change their original constitution as God's creatures, or they cannot enter on their promised heritage; and it will do so, when the Christ now hidden is revealed in His transforming power. The point of this verse, as, indeed, of the entire doctrine of the chapter, is, that man cannot be disintegrated. A halt or maimed *body* may, by the Lord's figure, enter into life; but a *bodiless* human *spirit* has no place in God's kingdom, or record in the Lamb's book of life. God's saints, then, whether dead or living, must undergo a further change than the conversion of their hearts to Him; and it is the certainty and manner of this change that the apostle was commissioned by a special revelation to declare. And so he proceeds:

Verse 51. "Behold, I show you a mystery," etc. Like the kindred passage in 1 Thess. iv. 13, *seq.*, we have here the positive addition to our faith of a knowledge which the believer is expected to oppose to the ever shifting speculations of philosophy. And

¹ Rom. viii. 10, 11; 2 Cor. v. 4; Ps. xvii. 15.

² John i. 12, 13, iii. 3, *seq.*

³ Matt. xvi. 17; Gal. i. 16.

first let us note the tenor of his words. When he says, "*We* shall not all sleep," etc., does he mean himself and that generation of believers? Such is the shallow fancy of those who would in our day correct apostolic error and shortsightedness by the sagacity of "modern thought." But as Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, so is there an unbroken identity in the generation of God's children. The Scripture speaks to such with reference, not to their own particular time and what belongs to it, but to the counsel and promise of the living God. Thus certainty and uncertainty belong alike to every divinely governed mind. We *doubt* that we shall sleep; we *know* we shall be changed. That Paul personally looked for Christ's appearing, as the true and instant hope of the believer, is everywhere manifest in his writings. But of the time he knew nothing. Moreover, he was himself a learner, while instructing others in the way of God. From time to time distinct revelations were made to him, both of what related personally to himself, and of what it concerned both him and us to know. He was told he was himself to die; and in the epistles to "his own son in the faith," he looks with a clear prophetic gaze through the lengthened vista of the present "age." He speaks of "latter days," as Moses did, and with mournful distinctness of the "last and perilous times."⁴

Yet to look for the Saviour's personal return was both His own repeated charge to His disciples, ere He hid Himself in heaven from their view, and is repeated by the Spirit as a constant burden, both of

⁴ Epistles to Tim., *passim*. Spec. 1 Tim. iv.; 2 Tim. ii. iii. iv.

exhortation and of comfort, in the mouths of all His witnesses. Nor is there any contradiction in these things, if due regard be had to the nature of the Christian's calling and position while on earth; for since by faith he is both dead and risen with his Lord, he is detached entirely from this world and its course. While tarrying on earth, he is no longer its *inhabitant*. As a partaker of the heavenly calling, he is of necessity a stranger here below. But if a stranger, he is not a fortuitous wanderer, but, if he truly know his calling, a missionary of the grace that saves him. He is for Christ a light and witness, in the midst of darkness and denial. He is here to occupy and suffer till the Master come, watching out patiently his measured hours, uncertain whether they will bring him to the Morning of his hope, or close in welcome yet expectant sleep. Knowing the special purpose of the Lord's return to heaven, he is not allowed to know how long His gracious business may detain Him there. Thus patience has its perfect opportunity. Nor is his vigil without its suitable beguilement. As a disciple of the truth, he is taught to have knowledge of the *times*. He has unfolded to him, by the Spirit, both the secret of the Lord, and the mystery of iniquity. He foreknows the progress of the day of evil, and is warned to note the darkening shadows of its close; but the limit of divine longsuffering he does not know. There is a sameness in principle, but a notable diversity of character, between what Paul and his companions saw, and that which now engages the attention of a watchful saint. But both they and we have a common and definite expectation; and if our eyes, instead of

waxing feeble with the lengthening night, are opened to see special symptoms of the coming day, let us gird yet more tightly the girdle of truth upon our loins, and hope on to the end for the grace which is to be brought to us at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

“We shall not all sleep.” There will be found some, even at the end, who, in the midst of general apostasy, will be found still waiting for their Consolation. The cry, “Behold, the Bridegroom cometh,” which has many times been feebly raised, will sound forth in a louder note when the hour of its fulfilling is arrived. While the world is wrapping itself securely in the mantle of a willing ignorance, and when baffled calculations have left at fault those servants who have sought too carefully for notes of time, and vainly tried to make chronology a key to truth; those who have been content to stay their souls upon the Spirit’s testimonies, and to wait because the Master bids them wait, counting His “quickly” to be really soon, because their faith is nourished not by human reasonings, but by the words of Him who cannot lie, shall see their Hope indeed. Like Enoch, they will change from faith to sight, and from patient expectation to the wished-for presence of the Lord. God took him; and the same great God, who is also our Saviour, Himself shall come and fetch away from earth whatever is found ready for Him in that day.

Verse 52. “In a moment,” etc. It will be an instantaneous change. The preliminaries may seem to be of slow fulfilment, but the finishing will be of God, who speaks, and it is done. The act will have no observers upon earth; for the time taken in

effecting it is too brief for the operation of natural perception. A twinkling eye is sightless for that time. It will be "at the last trump" that this change will come. What, then, is meant by this expression? No more, I believe, than this, that the Spirit's final call will be addressed to the bodies only of God's saints as distinguished from their souls. All through the day of grace the note of preparation has been heard; not given, as men give it, with a numbered and foretold precision,⁵ yet falling distinctly on the ears which God has opened to receive His truth. "The trumpet shall sound." If we ask specifically, What trumpet? the apostle's answer is, "The trump of *God*."⁶ It is God who quickeneth all things.⁷ Such, therefore, is a fit description of that sound which is to wake the dead in Christ; and not to wake them only, but bring their bodies forth from their forgotten graves in the glorious likeness of the Son of God. The voice of the Archangel will be an accompanying proclamation of the Saviour's presence, but it is by the mighty power which belongs to God alone⁸ that "the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

Verse 53. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption," etc. Man is mortal, his body is corruptible. That God may be glorified as a Redeemer, there exists the double necessity here stated by the apostle; for man, whether on earth or in heaven, is indivisible. The first clause of the verse relates to

⁵ Though there is probably an allusion here to the well known military usage of the Greeks, the third and last blast of the trumpet being the signal for the army to begin its march.

⁶ 1 Thess. iv. 16. Compare, for the expression, Zech. ix. 14.

⁷ 1 Tim. vi. 13.

⁸ Phil. iii. 20, 21; Titus ii. 13.

the dead, the second to the living and expecting saints. But in the new creation there is a reversal of the order of the old; for the man of earth was formed before he received that life which was presently to be withered by the sentence passed upon him as a sinner; while now the quickened soul can boast of her redemption, though groaning still within the earthly house. But God's first work must be recreated also, and made the worthy dwelling of the last.⁹

Verse 54. "So when this corruptible," etc. This prospective day of triumph had been shown, with other glories of the Christ, of whose sufferings they also spake,¹ to Israel's prophets. But they saw it in a different connection, as is evident, when we compare the language of prophetic vision with the apostle's testimony as to the mode of its fulfilment. Isaiah plainly speaks, in the passage here partly quoted, of the coming day, when the Hope of Israel will at length be manifested to their opened eyes, and the reproach of Jehovah's people will be taken from the earth. The vail of the covering spread over all nations shall in that day be destroyed, and the banquet of salvation spread upon that mountain which has so long been forsaken and despised. What this vail of darkness is the Scriptures elsewhere teach. The false desire of Israel, and the deceiver of the nations, will fulfil his course, and the whole world will wonder after the beast. Of the prophet's declarations, the apostle here selects one only, which he is taught to apply immediately to the dead and waiting saints, and to their promised

⁹ 2 Cor. v. 1.

¹ 1 Peter i. 11.

union with the Lord at His appearing. His appearing, then, will certainly precede the removal of Israel's reproach. As already shewn,² the translation of the partakers of the heavenly calling to the place of their appointed rest is a fore-ordained preliminary to the world's regeneration, and the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise in the place where it was made.³

Verse 55. "O death, where is thy sting?"⁴ etc. With a second quotation, and from another witness, he completes the "saying" of that spirit of prophecy which is the testimony of Jesus. Like the passage just reviewed, this also stands, in its original position, in strict connection with the fortunes of Israel. It is the brightest and the most abrupt of the many bright and abrupt outburstings of joyful promise which relieve, from time to time, the dark and awful burden of Hosea's prophecy. Jehovah Himself shall be their king. But how? When He came as the true hope of the tribes,⁵ He was rejected. Saul had been their choice, but Jesus their aversion. Yet a brighter revelation of His glory should convince them, when first the measure of their judgment was

² *Ante*, pages 397-403.

³ It is noticeable that the apostle does not add the words immediately succeeding his quotation, "The Lord God will wipe away," etc. *That* promise also is applied elsewhere, and in its appropriate sphere, to those whose victory is celebrated, not on earth, but in heaven, before the throne and in the presence of the Lamb (Rev. vii.); and is yet again repeated, with a general and final application to the whole body of the redeemed, at the close of the story of triumphant grace. (Rev. xxi. 4.)

⁴ The MSS. here differ in their reading. *Cod. Sin.* agrees with some others of high value in repeating *θάνατε*, instead of "ἄδη, in the third clause. As the Hebrew, however, has לִינְשׁוֹ, I cannot doubt that the ordinary reading is the best.

⁵ Acts xxvi. 7.

fulfilled. Israel shall return unto the Lord their God when, as the Redeemer of Jacob, He returns to Zion. Meanwhile, the Spirit claims this prediction as a present ornament of Christ, to be displayed openly in the day when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe.

Verse 56. "The sting of death is sin," etc. If death is sin's wages, sin is also death's sting; for without it death would be no other than a healthful sleep, if we could associate it at all in our thoughts with God's blameless image; but in deed it has no name nor existence, save as the effect of sin. It is called, moreover, a sting, because of that lasting poison in it, which works not only temporal death, but prepares the impenitent sinner also for that judgment which is after death. The relation, moreover, of the law to sin, a point so fully handled by the apostle in his other writings, is now for the first time noticed in this epistle. This is interesting, and instructive also. The Corinthian saints were, as a body, Gentiles, and not Jews. They had, therefore, not been personally under law. But it behoved them, equally with others, to know the true nature of the law and its effects, both to enlarge their knowledge of the God with whom they had to do, and to preserve them from the snare which Satan ever seeks to lay for the feet of the unwary, by undermining grace through a pretended zeal for holiness. In the second epistle, we shall find him dealing with this subject more at large; at present, it is concisely stated as an accessory only to the greater matter which he has in hand.

The sting of death is sin. But that bitter smart

has been effectually cured, for the believer, by the transference of all our guilt to Jesus, "who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree."⁶ The strength of sin is the law; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But Christ is become the end of the law for righteousness to every believer.⁷ By bearing also its judicial curse, He has changed it from an accuser to a justifying witness on behalf of those who once pined hopelessly beneath its yoke.⁸ These three, then—sin, death, and the law—are reviewed together as the captive spoil of Jesus; while to us belongs the duty of shewing forth the praise of Him who, as the Umpire of that great strife, has crowned with glory the great Captain of our salvation; and so there is added, in the name of all believers, the triumphant doxology which fills the following verse.

Verse 57. "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord." Such is the present and eternal strain which they are taught to raise, who sing with the spirit and the understanding also. Knowing the truth as revealed to them in Jesus, they celebrate already that great triumph which He has personally won, and whose honours He now wears in heaven, while waiting for the moment when His victory shall openly become their own. They declare their own glory by extolling Him. To God, who did not spare His Son, and who has raised Him from the dead for our justification, believers now give thanks. There is, then, a resurrection from the dead, and of this the living Spirit

⁶ 1 Peter ii. 24.

⁷ Rom. iii. 20; x. 4.

⁸ Gal. iii. 13; Rom. iii. 21.

of the risen Saviour is our indwelling witness. Bestowed upon us as an earnest until the redemption of the purchased possession, He teaches now the willing lips of God's true worshippers to sing and praise the power of redeeming love.⁹

Verse 58. "Therefore, my beloved brethren," etc. Having thus gathered back both their thoughts and his own from topics of controversy and rebuke to the solid and abiding blessing of the "common faith," his note is changed. Love only flows at the bidding of such truth. His heart is on his brethren in the joy and comfort of their common hope. Still, while glorying in this fresh and full assertion of their sure salvation in the Lord, he remembers their liability to be moved away from the hope of the gospel. Hence the hortatory character of this closing verse. To profit fully by his words, we should revert to his earlier testimony as to the standing and completeness of the saints in Christ.¹ He would have his brethren to stand steadfast in the faith; to be unmoved by other words than those of God; to abound always in their joyful apprehension of the work of the Lord, and so to be untempted to rely on their own works, and change in the spirit of their minds from grace to law; for all that relates to our justification He has wrought, while He is personally our sanctification in the Father's sight. For our sakes it is that He has sanctified Himself, that we also might be sanctified through the knowledge of the truth in Him.² To abide in Him is the beginning and the end of that good fight of faith which the disciple is taught to wage as a good soldier of Jesus

⁹ Ps. xxi. 13.

¹ Chap. i. 30.

² John xvii. 19.

Christ. The apostle's labour was to "keep the faith," and to maintain it he was content to suffer as an evil-doer unto bonds.³ The Lord's finished work is our victory, and a believing assurance of it is our strength to labour in His name.⁴

³ 2 Tim. ii. 9.

⁴ John xvi. 33. The "work," *ἔργον*, is the Lord's. To abound, by faith, in the knowledge of it, with a practical effect on our walk as confessors of His cross, is our "labour," *κόπος*.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT remains to be considered of this truly wonderful epistle, though of inferior interest to the subject of the foregoing chapter, is not less precious as a part of the inspired Word. With counsel and exhortation of a lasting efficacy, it contains not a little that throws light on the apostle's personal history, as well as on the habits and mutual relation of those several assemblies of saints which, in their local separation, are constituent parts of the one living Church of God, as they were contemplated and acknowledged by this faithful overseer of the flock.

Verses 1, 2. "Now concerning the collection for the saints," etc. Three things principally claim attention here. 1. The distinct recognition of local independency among the "churches," together with their common subjection to the Spirit's voice; 2. The general and divinely approved observance of "the first day of the week;" and, 3. The common recognition, on the part of the Gentile saints, of the special debt of compensation which they owed to their brethren of the circumcision, as having been made by grace partakers of their spiritual things.¹

¹ Rom. xv. 25-27. In 2 Cor. viii. 13-15 he deals more largely with the subject of practical charity on the footing of common grace; but distinctions once divinely established never lose their moral value in the eyes of those who know His mind.

Of the order given to the churches of Galatia we have only this brief mention. The occasion and direction were the same in both instances, Achaia and Galatia being merely geographical expressions of the temporary sojourn of God's single, though often far divided, family. But the main value of this incident is in the precedent thus furnished by divine authority for our guidance in all cases of a similar description; for the Lord is always here in need, and our next dearest privilege to the saving knowledge of His person should be, to seek for and befriend Him as He suffers in His saints.

As to the choice of the first day of the week for this adjustment of account, it stands doubtless in close moral relation to the habit (apparently of universal observance in the apostolic times) of meeting on that day to remember the dying of the Lord.² It was fit that their obligations to their brethren in the faith should be associated closely in their minds with that deep and everlasting debt of love which all owed alike to Him who had redeemed them by His precious blood. In the second epistle, this subject of giving and receiving is handled more at length. It is enough to notice here the apostle's evident aversion to impulsive and hurried contributions, on the spur of his own presence. He had rather that they should bethink them spontaneously, and always, of the liabilities of grace,³ than that his personal exhortations should produce in them a

² Acts xx. 7. I accept also John's words in Rev. i. 10 as a proof that, although in one sense all days are alike to a believer who by faith stands already in the new creation, the day of the Lord's resurrection is intended to be had in an especial remembrance by His saints until He come.

³ Rom. xiii. 8.

readiness which the constraining love of Christ had failed unaided to effect.

Verses 3, 4. "And when I come," etc. Though he gives directions as to the manner of collection, and labours to bring them to a practical observance of "the new commandment,"⁴ he will assume no official control over what their love might give. And that the extreme punctiliousness which always characterized his administration of pecuniary affairs was not without cause, we have a wonderful and deeply humbling proof in the second of these epistles.⁵ Kept by the wisdom from above,⁶ he so acted as to cut off occasion from them that sought occasion, while zealous in the furtherance of every good thing in Christ which he perceived to be in them.⁷ What the Corinthians sent must come from them, warm with their love, and tendered by the hands of their own messengers; for it was not only a faithful discharge of trust that was desired in this work, but a promotion of true edifying, through an interchange of brotherly kindness between the Greek and Jewish saints. He would gladly be associated with their messengers, if such a course seemed fitting when the time arrived, since he had nothing more at heart than the destruction of the barriers of prejudice on either side, and the practical union of those who were already one in Christ.

Verses 5-7. "Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia," etc. He here traces out his intended circuit of labour, with chief reference to his expected visit to themselves. His original

⁴ John xiii. 34.

⁵ 2 Cor. xii. 16-18.

⁶ James iii. 17.

⁷ Philemon 6.

purpose was to see them before passing into Macedonia; but the intelligence which he had received from them of Chloe's household had led him to prefer an epistle to a passing visit.⁸ Left to himself, he might have hastened rather than delayed his visit upon this account; but under the sure guidance of the Spirit he is led to deal more wisely with their state. The *Lord* should first speak with them through his written word. Knowing that what he wrote had with it the weight and authority of a divine command, he labours by this means to bring back first their souls to God, that when he came he might be among them, not as a reprover, but a comforter. In the fellowship of the gospel they should strengthen him also, and help him on his way. But he defers his visit, that the effect of his letter may be first made manifest. And we have reason to bless God for his change of mind.

Verses 8, 9. "But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost," etc. The first of these verses marks distinctly the place whence the apostle thus addressed his brethren, while the second informs us further of the circumstances under which his letter was indited. It was not the slow fruit of leisure, but the fervent effort of a love which could not be diverted from its aim. With a wide door of service open to him, and that of a character well fitted to engross his energies as an evangelist, his heart yearned with the grieved and anxious spirit of a father towards these his ill-conditioned children in the faith. How earnestly he longed for them appears more touchingly in what he wrote to them a little later.⁹ Having thus freed his

⁸ 2 Cor. i. 15, 16.

⁹ 2 Cor. i. 23; ii. 4.

heart, for a while at least,¹ from the pressure of its burden, he is wholly in the work before him ; the Lord opening a door which Satan vainly tried to close.

Verses 10, 11. "Now if Timotheus come," etc. It is unlikely that Timothy was the bearer of this epistle. From what is said in an earlier chapter,² he appears to have been despatched to Corinth immediately on the receipt of the untoward tidings of disorder there. The uncertainty here implied as to his arrival, is no more than that expressed in the preceding verse as to the length of his own contemplated visit. The Lord might or might not have permitted Timothy to come. It is likely that this mission was also the first introduction to the saints at Corinth of his younger fellow-worker in the Gospel. The terms in which the apostle speaks of him invite this inference. His youth and constitutional timidity are commended to their sympathy, while a large claim is made on his behalf to the general obedience of the Church. For as the apostle's chosen coadjutor, he would bring with him a plenary authority, while he trusted also that, as an example of true godliness, he would do no shame to his official place.

The office of Timothy was quasi-apostolic, though not derived immediately from God. The presbytery had sanctioned and openly acknowledged the gift which, by Divine direction, had been conferred on him through the putting on of the apostle's hands.³ Moreover, special prophecies had been de-

¹ 2 Cor. ii. 12, 13.

² Chap. iv. 17.

³ 2 Tim. i. 6.

clared respecting him.⁴ When, therefore, Paul describes him as working the Lord's work even as *himself*, he evidently separates him from the common, though honoured, class of teachers and pastors of the flock. In the person of Timothy a fitting instrument was discovered and appropriated by an inspired wisdom; while to him there was in turn entrusted the charge of seeking out fit recipients of the traditions which had been committed to himself.⁵ How soon this power of transmission failed, and flesh assumed a formal title which the Spirit only could sustain in truth, is but too well known to all who read "Church history" with an enlightened eye. To enlarge on it at present would be out of place.⁶

They must not, then, despise his younger representative; a warning not at all superfluous, when it is remembered that there were some at Corinth who had viewed Paul's own presence when among them with a feeling of contempt.⁷ By the power of

⁴ 1 Tim. i. 18; iv. 14.

⁵ 2 Tim. ii. 2.

⁶ It may be worth while, however, to record a protest against the attempts which are occasionally made—sometimes by gifted individuals themselves, oftener by their more devoted followers and admirers—to revive this claim to apostleship in the minor sense. With respect to all such pretensions, one simple test is always at hand: a genuine apostle may be known by *signs*. What these are may be learnt from a perusal of such scriptures as 2 Cor. xii. 12, and vi. 3, *seq.* Grace and spiritual power are things which are their own commendation to them that are themselves of God. But authoritative claims require in all instances some distinctive warrant from God. His true apostles have long since gone to be with Christ, leaving among their latest testimonies an emphatic warning against all such claims. The words of God are finished; to add to or abridge them is a sin of equal magnitude and danger. (Acts xx. 29–32; 2 Peter iii. 2.)

⁷ 2 Cor. x. 10.

his letter, however, he will secure a worthy reception for his fellow-labourer. Who among his other yoke-fellows are contemplated in this passage is uncertain. As to Timothy's further movements, he would learn the apostle's wishes from this letter, unless he had (as is probable) already received private instructions from himself. It is noticeable that he was unwilling to leave Timothy among them at the present time, not judging him to be the fitting instrument at such a crisis. He had tried to procure for them a visit from Apollos; and had he consented, the present epistle might never have been written. But God had better thoughts for us and them.

Verse 12. "As touching our brother Apollos," etc. We cannot wonder either at the earnestness of Paul's entreaty, or the steadfast refusal of Apollos. Putting honour on his fellow-workman, and aware of the place he held in the hearts of many of the Corinthian saints, he urged him much to go, relying on his grace and wisdom if he went. But a like true-heartedness deterred Apollos from the task. He knew, as well as Paul, that he too had partizans at Corinth; and while that spirit continued to manifest itself he had no mind to go. He would expect more from Paul's letter than from a visit of his own at such a time. Moreover, he had other work in hand which he judged more pressing than what Paul proposed. The latter was desirous,^s at least, that the Corinthians should know his wish in this respect, and left it to themselves to divine the cause of their brother's unwillingness to come. The statement is

^s This is more strongly marked in *Cod. Sin.*, which has before *πολλὰ παρεκάλεσα* the words *ἐγὼ ὑμῖν ὅτι*.

one of much interest and value, not only as an indication of the grace that was in both these men, and their oneness of spirit as the servants of their common Lord, but also as a striking example of that personal independence which ever characterizes true spiritual labour. Timothy might be directed as one subject to his father in the faith; Apollos, as one whom God had separately called, was answerable to the Lord alone. At a convenient time he would not be found wanting in his place.

Verse 13. "Watch ye," etc. Other helpers might be wanting, but the Lord is ever with His people. To themselves, therefore, they must look as in His sight, and learn in His strength to bear worthily the name by which they are called. The fourfold admonition contained in this verse addresses itself to those points in the character of the Corinthian saints which have already been reviewed. 1. He had chidden them for desiring to reign here below as kings, and had shown them, by their own example, how such unseasonable ease tends only to dishonour. Let them no longer *luxuriate* in truth, but use it as a girdle to sustain them on their watch. 2. They had moved away, to a certain extent, from the hope of the gospel, and the very foundation of their faith had been shaken, through listening to the fallacies of those among them who denied the resurrection of the dead. Let them cease from vain disputings, and abide in that which they had heard from the beginning. Let the words of God give rest to their minds as well as hearts. "The faith" is here, as often elsewhere, expressive rather of the doctrine held, than of the quality which leads men

to embrace it. The apostle's parting boast was, that he had "kept the faith;" and he would have his children emulate his zeal, that they might also share his crown.⁹ 3. They had shown but little spiritual manliness when they allowed themselves to be so outwitted by their adversary, and pushed down from their proper excellency as partakers of Christ, as to be again "carnal" in their ways. It was unmanly to yield to the enemy the ground they were anointed to defend. It was unmanly to consult their present ease, and be contending eagerly for earthly gain, instead of walking in the path the Master trod. It was unmanly also, with such manifold endowments as they had received, to make so puerile a use of them. Let them be babes indeed in malice, but in fortitude and wisdom be as men. 4. They had once seemed strong, when he who had begotten them was weak; but illusions were now yielding to the force of truth.¹ There would be left in them but little strength, when they viewed themselves attentively in the mirror of his words. This he knew, and seeks therefore to reassure them by a fit word of encouragement. Let them find strength where he had found it—not in their own profession of the faith, but in the grace which is in Christ Jesus. Self-confidence had proved their feebleness; in returning and resting in the Lord, they should find a renewing of their strength.

We may notice also the *order* of this exhortation, and the natural succession of its parts. Only they who watch will stand fast in the faith; it is the steadfast and confirmed believer who alone can

⁹ 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

¹ Chap. iv. 10.

“play the man” for Christ; and, finally, it is the growing and right-hearted saint who gathers strength with knowledge, and becomes emboldened to do valiantly for truth, being strengthened with all might to suffer joyfully according to the glorious power of God.²

Verse 14. “Let all your things be done with charity.” The more excellent way is again presented to their view. It is, or should be, with the moral qualities of the believer as with the special gifts and powers of the Spirit.³ Watchfulness, steadfastness, vigour, and decision, are all subordinate to love in the thorough furnishing of one “approved in Christ.” If this first and last virtue of the new man be not in habitual exercise, no others will bear acceptable fruit.

Verses 15, 16. “I beseech you, brethren,” etc. The honourable mention here made of Stephanas’ house, and the reason assigned for it, are of much practical interest. That the earliest Corinthian converts (who were also among the few whom he had baptized) should have a special place in Paul’s regard was natural, while the same cause would, even in the absence of any marked personal grounds of commendation, have conferred on them a certain distinction in their brethren’s eyes. But they were conspicuous also in another sort. They were known at Corinth, not only as the first who had confessed the Lord, but by the devoted zeal with which they followed in His steps. For His sake they had given themselves willingly to the service of the saints. They sought not their own things, but the things of

² Col. i. 11.

³ Chap. xii. 31.

Jesus Christ; and the apostle here acknowledges them as his fellow helpers, and claims for them, on their brethren's part, a due reciprocation of love and subjection in the fear of God.⁴ Of the family thus honourably mentioned, we know only that they did thus addict themselves, and received thus early a foretaste of their Lord's applause. But they are recorded by the Spirit as models of encouragement to those whose hearts may prompt them to do likewise. In what forms, or what measures of ability, they did their service, we cannot know until the day of recompence arrives.⁵ The point of interest to notice is, that without any special call, or, as far as appears, any marked distinctive gift, but animated solely by the love of Christ, they boldly took the path to which that love invited them, and received, not for their sakes only, this prompt acceptance of their work. The Lord has volunteers as well as slaves. If Paul had a commission and a bond,⁶ the free-will offering of Stephanas is not less acceptable in its place as a fruit of that charity which never fails, but will find its occupation in any and every condition of the Church. The zeal of Stephanas appears to have led him forth beyond the regions of Achaia; for he served the *saints* wherever they were found: and that among them all he loved best to minister to him to whom he owed himself, as a believer, we may well suppose.

Verses 17, 18. "I am glad of the coming of Stephanas," etc. Of Fortunatus and Achaicus, we only know that they were of the Church at Corinth,

⁴ *Conf.* Heb. xiii. 17; Eph. v. 21.

⁵ Chap. iv. 5.

⁶ Chap. ix. 16.

but whether members or not of the house of Stephanas can only be conjectured. The coming of these brethren was grateful to his spirit, since in their persons he seemed to have and taste again the comfort of their common love. From their hands he most probably received their letter of enquiry,⁷ and to them he is generally believed to have entrusted the epistle now before us. He was, moreover, refreshed, not only through private intercourse with these brethren, but also by their public ministry of Christ. I think this a fair inference from the latter clause of verse 18. We should err greatly to suppose that apostolic presence, in a meeting of spiritual worshippers, operated as a tie upon their ordinary liberty. Such an idea would be a practical falsifying of the doctrine laid down for us in chap. xiv. Rather may we imagine that in such presence whatever was really of the Spirit found a freer scope. When he says, "Therefore acknowledge such," it is as if he would, after personally tasting it, commend the refreshing ministry of these beloved brethren to those who might perhaps, but for such commendation, have been slow to appreciate the blessings which the Lord had planted in their midst.

Verses 19, 20. "The churches of Asia salute you," etc. We have now a few of the usual salutations with which the apostle loved to finish his epistles. For though he wrote from God, and in the name and power of the Lord Jesus Christ, he wrote in the communion of the one Spirit which inhabits the entire body. Such messages of love, therefore, are natural and suited ornaments to the writings to which they

⁷ *Ante*, page 157.

are attached. He had boasted among the Asiatics of the Lord's work in Achaia, and now the Asian churches make him the medium of their loving greetings to their otherwise unknown brethren and fellows in the faith. Aquila and Priscilla send *much* love, for they had known them well, and wrought among them in times past.⁸ Of this very interesting pair, of whose thorough devotedness to Christ the Spirit gives from time to time such expressive notices, we may here remark, that they appear to have settled for awhile at Ephesus, after a sojourn of no great length at Corinth, whither they had retired when expelled from Rome by the persecuting edict of Claudius. Eventually they are found again at Rome. Wherever they went, they seem not only to have laboured sedulously for the truth, but to have opened their house as a place of meeting for the saints.⁹ With respect to this habit, it remains only to say, that as at the beginning of the gospel it obtained the marked commendation of the Spirit; so also will it, doubtless, be an acceptable service, when rendered in the like spirit, as long as there are members of Christ's body remaining upon earth.

"All the brethren" are, presumably, the Ephesian saints, though we may take these words in a wider sense, and accept them as a bold interpretation of that love which he knew to be existing in every soul that is alive to God.¹ As to the demonstrative expression of their brotherly affection, it may be said, that while holiness and love are things of God, the

⁸ Acts xviii. 2, 18.

⁹ Rom. xvi. 3-5.

¹ Verse 22. Comp. 1 John iii. 14.

actions which declare them may vary with the habits and conventional observances of men.

Verse 21. "The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand." As this autographic salutation is declared to be "the token in every epistle,"² though appended formally to only three, we remain still in doubt as to the number that were written in his own hand, being certain only as to two.³ Nor do God's words vary in value, for the heart of the believer, whether written originally by the hands of Tertius or those of Paul.

Verse 22. "If any one love not the Lord," etc. There is a solemn propriety in this malediction on the hypocritical professor of that Name. He does not curse unbelievers, but those who have their portion with the unbelievers.⁴ Carrying back his thoughts through the diverse topics of this epistle, and reflecting on the doubtful state of some among them, who, though nominally Christian, had not as yet the true knowledge of God, he is moved thus distinctly to invoke the decision of that day⁵ when those who have loved the truth they knew, in the living person of their Saviour, will be severed finally from those who have loved and served themselves.⁶ *Love* is here insisted on instead of faith, because its presence or absence is the true test of the genuineness of faith. The state of the Corinthian saints was such as to call for admonition of the strongest kind; and as the epistle began with a protest against the desecration of the Name by which they all were

² 2 Thess. iii. 17. ³ Gal. vi. 11; Philem. 19. ⁴ Luke xii. 46.

⁵ The words "Maran-atha" being the Syriac for "the Lord is at hand."

⁶ 2 Thess. ii. 10-12; Phil. iii. 18, 19.

called, through the schismatic will-worship which prevailed among them, it was fit that they should be thus reminded, both of the imminency of His coming for whom they all professed to look, and of what it is that will receive the crown of blessing in that day.⁷

As to the form of execration here employed, it stands in close connection with the formula of saving faith already stated in an earlier chapter.⁸ Our sentence *then* will be according to the present state of our hearts. As we esteem the Lord, we shall ourselves be estimated in that day. If He has the chief place in our hearts, we shall be enthroned with Him in glory. If He has not, then He is practically "anathema" with us, and we shall be "anathema" to Him. No true believer shrinks from such a test; for there is no true believer who does not discover, when examining his heart, that, in spite of all for which he may condemn himself, his love is for the Lord.

Verses 23, 24. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," etc. Their love to Him is a witness only and effect of His own true grace to them. In that they stand, and to that which can alone sustain them Paul commits them now for safe keeping, with a parting word of brotherly affection from himself. His office, as an inspired reprover of their ways, had removed him to a distance from them till his words were said, but his heart is still with them as his beloved children in the faith.

⁷ James i. 12.

⁸ Page 282, *note*.