

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS  
ON  
THE SECOND EPISTLE  
TO  
THE CORINTHIANS.

BY  
ARTHUR PRIDHAM.

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“EVERY WORD OF GOD IS PURE; HE IS A SHIELD UNTO THEM THAT  
PUT THEIR TRUST IN HIM.”

PROV. xxx. 5.

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## PREFACE.

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THE preparation of the following pages, under pressure of a very trying and protracted kind, has been a laborious but truly welcome diversion from other efforts of a needful though less congenial description.

Without the generous and unexpected aid of one who had read approvingly my other "Notes," I could not have ventured on the cost of further publication. With thankfulness to God, therefore, I accept this as a hopeful token, that what is now (like my earlier volumes) offered to *His Church at large* will not go forth without a blessing at His hands.

My desire is, to help the joy of those who already have believed through grace, by endeavouring to exhibit, in a cursory manner at least, the true drift and bearing of an epistle which seems in not a few respects to speak closely to our latter-day ecclesiastical condition. Like all other inspired writings, it is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;"<sup>1</sup> and although its doctrinal passages are usually more familiar to the minds of Christians than its less attractive and less

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 16.

studied parts, it may be safely affirmed, that these last will be appreciated, by the thoughtful and sincere believer, in proportion to his own soul's real growth in Christ.

If, as I cannot but think possible, in the attempt to state, honestly and without reserve, what I believe to be the Spirit's meaning in Paul's words, I offend the prejudice of any true lover of the Lord, I would entreat such an one to ask himself thoughtfully whether his dissatisfaction arises from a misrepresentation of scripture on my part, or an undue subjection to traditional teaching on his own. I speak as to the wise, and in the sight of God; but I dare not be a judge in my own case. To offend in any way against the generation of God's children will be always distressful to a true witness of God;<sup>2</sup> but to put boldly forth His words, and, as far as it is known, to set the way of well-pleasing openly before the feet of those "who will walk godly in Christ Jesus," must surely be the first care of all who seek His glory in their work.

Utterly unworthy as I personally feel of any part in such a ministry, I cast my labour and its imperfections, together with all other burdens, on the faithful mercy of Him who is the living "Reason of my hope."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ps. lxxiii. 15.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter iii. 15.

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NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

ON THE

SECOND EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS.

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CHAPTER I.

“PAUL an apostle,” &c. (1, 2.) His opening salutation differs from that prefixed to the former epistle in some points worth noticing. First, it is less formal. Paul is an apostle, but his *calling* to that office is not again mentioned, his claims to the title having already been sufficiently vindicated.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, he here names as his associate Timotheus, whom, at the date of his earlier epistle, he had supposed to be among them as his messenger and fellow-helper.<sup>2</sup> Thirdly, the church at Corinth is addressed by its simple designation only, and with no descriptive amplification as before. And lastly, the immediate scope of his address is limited to the saints then locally “in Achaia,” instead of appealing, as in the former case, to the common ear of “all who call upon the Lord.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. ix.      <sup>2</sup> *Notes on First Corinthians*, page 442.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* pp. 2-4.

But with reference to the last distinction we do well to remember that Paul's recorded words are not his *own*<sup>4</sup>—that whatever God commits to writing is intended, under all its forms, for the nurture and admonition of all who are of God. And if godly edifying be, as it should ever be, the desire of His saints, its attainment will be not a little furthered by an attentive consideration of the circumstances under which the several inspired epistles were indited, and the causes, so far as these are discernible, which have given to each of them respectively its own distinctive character.<sup>5</sup> Nor is it difficult, in the present instance, to account for the altered tone of this second letter to the saints at Corinth, when we duly consider the relation in which the writer stood on these separate occasions to those whom he addressed.

There had been laid on him in the former case the solemn duty of reproving, exhorting, and correcting, with divine authority, a church which had fallen into a state of varied and alarming disorder. In addition to moral delinquency of the gravest kind, and much else that was allowed among them quite unworthy of their calling, there had arisen in the midst of their assembly a positive opposition to the truth. The very foundation of the faith had been assailed by the philosophizing unbelief which had been negligently suffered to find shelter for itself within the fold of God. Everything was out of course, and the general condition of God's house, and living witness among men, was such as could be rectified only by a special intervention of His own authori-

Cor. ii. 13, xiv. 37.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

tative word. And we have seen in what manner Paul was enabled "by the grace given to him" to execute this necessary but unwelcome task. His style was then suited to the occasion, and so also is it now. The effect of his first letter was made known to him before the commencement of the second, and it was under the cheering conviction that he had not wrought nor trusted God in vain that he prepared to address himself again to those whom, in the midst of their aberrations from the way of God, he had loved and yearned after as his own children in the faith.

He writes now partly in explanation of what they had misunderstood, partly in commendation of their obedience and readiness of mind, and partly also in further admonition and reproof, continuing thus the work which by grace he had so prosperously begun. His pen moves not less earnestly, but by a different impulse. Joy has supplanted sorrow upon their account, and anxiety in great part given way to thankfulness. Yet he is conscious that his task is not complete, and in his manner of fulfilling it he evinces in a marvellous sort the qualities of that wisdom which is from above;<sup>6</sup> disclosing to his still partly-estranged brethren, in a matchless strain of tenderness and wise rebuke, the state of his own heart towards themselves, and exposing by the bright moral light which flooded his own path of pure and upright service the false pretensions of those who, while urging successfully on the Corinthian saints their rival claims to recognition as apostles and ministers of Christ, were seeking not *them* but *theirs*,

<sup>6</sup> James iii. 17, 18.

caring not for the flock of God but for themselves.<sup>7</sup> Let us now more closely note his words, which are as usual prefaced by a direct greeting from the Living Source of apostolic inspiration.

Verse 3. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," &c. Of the heart's abundance the mouth speaks, and we have in this strong and joyful outburst of thanksgiving a rich expression of that language which comes naturally from every believing soul that, on its emergence from deep personal exercise under the hand of God, is enabled to give utterance to its feelings.<sup>8</sup> We *bless* God as we *know* God; and our blessing grows in fervency with that subjective intelligence of His ways which it is the end of all divinely-sent affliction to confer.<sup>9</sup> Paul's trials had been deep and many, but their effect had been to strengthen and enlarge his faith in a more abundant knowledge of the God of his salvation. As a suffering witness of Christ his afflictions were his glory also, while as a nursing father of God's Church, the special anxieties which so often and so sorely pressed upon his spirit had been met by that comfort which divine sympathy metes forth from its exhaustless fulness in Christ, according to His perfect knowledge of the necessities and longings of our hearts.<sup>1</sup> And now he comes forth from the furnace, with an increase of both confidence and joy, to declare to his brethren those names and attributes of the One God of their worship,<sup>2</sup> the meaning and value of which he had been learning, not for Paul's own sake only, under the direct training of His hand. As

<sup>7</sup> Chap. xi.

<sup>8</sup> Dan. iv. 34; Ps. cxvi.

<sup>9</sup> Ps. cxix. 71; Heb. xii. 10. <sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 27. <sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. viii. 6.

he had before fulfilled his honoured charge as a witness and expounder of His glory as the just God and Saviour of His Church, so now it is given him to commend to our hearts the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as "the Father of mercies and the God of *all* comfort." He is to be known and trusted thus by all who through grace confess Him in His Son.

Verse 4. "Who comforteth us," &c. Truly in his happy case tribulation had wrought patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope.<sup>3</sup> But let us note, before further contemplating this particular example of suffering and triumphant faith, both the comprehensive language of this verse and the breadth of its application, describing as it does, under one only of its aspects, the effective operation of that love of God in Christ, which is at once the life and the exhaustless portion of all who put their trust in Him. God is distinctively the Comforter of His people,<sup>4</sup> and the prophetic song of Israel is a part of the present worship of the Church.<sup>5</sup> His praise is the glad and experimental recognition on His people's part of what He is and does.<sup>6</sup> And forasmuch as He is perfect in His works and ways, it should excite less of wonder than of thanksgiving and hopeful trust in our hearts as they weigh thoughtfully these words of His apostle. For to say that in *all* troubles God comforts us, is but to say in other words that He comforts in a manner worthy of Himself. Tribulation is among those "creatures" which He has ordained for the special illustration to usward who

<sup>3</sup> Rom. v. 3, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Isa. li. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Isa. xii.

<sup>6</sup> Ps. cxlv.

believe of His faithfulness and grace as the Creator.<sup>7</sup> The number and variety of our troubles are but the appointed means of manifesting more abundantly the endless consolations of His love.

To appreciate these words of the apostle in their application to himself, we must bear in mind the circumstances under which he had composed his former letter. His tears flowed with his words; and while he wrote under a perfect consciousness of divine inspiration and authority, his epistle was that of an inspired *man*. Distress was working deeply in his heart as he indited it; and fears too assailed him which he could not always still, as he awaited the effect of what he wrote. He had been cast down lower than the reach of merely Christian sympathy; his trouble was proportioned to his more abundant measure of the mind of Christ, and could be assuaged only by a comfort straight from God. And God had not failed him, but had matched His consolation to His servant's need with a redundancy which testified its source. With a heart therefore charged to overflowing with what it had received, he prepares now to review, as in the sight of Him who had thus blessed him, his experiences, both generally as a minister of God, and especially those in which the saints of Corinth were more directly interested. And as a prelude to this he here utters an unlimited challenge of *all* troubles, and of any kind, which Christian hearts can harbour, offering himself to our confidence, not as a self-cured physician, nor in the spirit of Job, when in his own sufficiency he sat as one that comforteth the mourners,<sup>8</sup> but as one whom

<sup>7</sup> Rom. viii. 35-39.

<sup>8</sup> Job xxix. 25.

God had first emptied and then filled with the fulness of His own effectual grace. The strength of his language is according to the depth from whence it comes, for he is speaking in the Holy Ghost; in the name of his Almighty Comforter he undertakes what God alone can truly do. Such is the rich fruit of an experimental faith which out of weakness is made strong, not for itself only, but to bear in willing love the burdens of the weak.<sup>9</sup>

Verse 5 explains and further justifies this unlimited confidence of boasting by a reference to the Lord's mediatorial grace—a distinctive token always of true spiritual teaching. As his sufferings were for Christ, so also did his comfort flow to him *through* Christ in a more abundant measure. To suffer for that name was an emphatic privilege of his vocation;<sup>1</sup> nor did He who had thus made him a chosen vessel for Himself forget him in the hour of his need. The Lord had stood by His afflicted and sorely-pressed servant, and revealed Himself with a more than compensating fulness of blessing to his soul. The anticipative benediction of the mourners<sup>2</sup> was already tasted in his case. Nor were these experiences of Paul his own merely, and to end with him; both in his afflictions and his joys his brethren in the faith have an equal interest if a lesser share, as he proceeds to show.

Verse 6. "But whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation," &c. His afflictions and his comfort are alike both of and with the gospel, and therefore by the power and in the com-

<sup>9</sup> Heb. xi. 34; Rom. xv. 1.

<sup>1</sup> Acts ix. 15, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. v. 54.

munion of the Holy Ghost;<sup>3</sup> and, as he has already taught us in the first epistle, an all-pervading vital sympathy is felt in each member of the mystic body of Christ.<sup>4</sup> But his language here deserves a closer attention, especially on account of the important secondary meaning which in this verse, as in some other passages,<sup>5</sup> attaches to the word "salvation."

The apostle's statement is, that whether troubled or consoled, his experiences are "for the consolation and salvation" of his brethren; and further, that this result is wrought in them<sup>6</sup> by their own participation in a like experience. In other words, their endurance of sufferings for Christ is treated as a moral condition of both comfort and salvation. And this, which is the constant testimony of the Spirit, will be found in perfect harmony with the positive doctrine of free grace. By grace we are saved through faith, and the Object of that faith is the crucified and risen Son of God. God is in every sense the Saviour of His people, and their salvation will be completed when they are presented before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.<sup>7</sup> Till then their salvation is a *hope*, but a hope which maketh not ashamed, a *good* hope through grace<sup>8</sup>—the Saviour who is for us with the Father being in His ever-blessed Person "our hope."<sup>9</sup> If the *means* of this salvation be enquired, it is *by* Christ, and *through*

<sup>3</sup> 2 Tim. i. 8; Phil. i. 7.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. xii.

<sup>5</sup> Phil. i. 1, 19; ii. 12; 1 Thess. v. 8, &c.

<sup>6</sup> ἐνεργουμένης. Compare the marginal reading of English version. In the *Cod. Sin.* the clauses of this verse are transposed, and the words καὶ σωτηρίας are omitted from the second. <sup>7</sup> Jude 24.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Thess. ii. 16; Rom. v. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Heb. ix. 24; 1 Tim. i. 1.



Christ, and *in* Christ; by His *blood* we are justified as sinners, and both are and shall be saved, as His people, by His *life*.<sup>1</sup>

But as faith joins us to the Lord, and puts us instrumentally “in Christ,” so affliction is an appointed means of rooting and grounding us more deeply in His love. It is because our standing is by faith that the Spirit’s language is so varied in its tones. For faith is not intellect, nor is saving truth an abstract proposition; truth for the believer is *Christ*, in His person, His work, and His word. It addresses itself, therefore, to our *hearts* through the gracious and positive teaching of the Spirit. When dead in sins we were wakened up to life by God’s effectual calling; being so, we work out, by the will and power of another,<sup>2</sup> the salvation which is now become our hope. We know, by its own good report, the blessing which we are called to inherit, and advance with joyful eagerness to meet it. But our way lies through a wilderness where only faith can live; and it is for the trial of that faith that we are suffered to endure temptation.<sup>3</sup> We work out our salvation by abiding, with a contrite spirit and subjected will, in Christ. God’s work, *in* us as well as *for* us, is wrought of God; and God’s dealings with His chosen are according to His knowledge of their frame. As, therefore, “chastening” is elsewhere<sup>4</sup> declared to be an essential token of true sonship, so “tribulation” is allotted to the follower of Jesus as an inseparable companion of his way. That joy in God, which is the crown of the reconciled believer’s

<sup>1</sup> Rom. v. 9, 10; Heb. vii. 25.      <sup>2</sup> Phil. ii. 13; 2 Thess. i. 11.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter i. 6, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. xii. 6–8.

faith,<sup>5</sup> is known most deeply by those who seek and find the footsteps of the Man of sorrows; the same blessed Spirit who, as the Comforter, reveals to us the rich wealth of our portion in the Beloved, being our guide also through those stages on "the way of life," which lead indeed to more abundant joy and peace, but which our nature would not fail to shun.

If in the present instance we compare the relative condition of these joint inheritors of tribulation, the difference is marked indeed. Not only were the afflictions of the apostle more varied and abundant in their kind and measure, but they were borne by him in a widely different spirit. What Paul encountered willingly, and in the full consciousness of divine comfort and support, passing through trouble as one led, and accepting his burdens as a token of his Master's love, these Corinthians were undergoing with reluctance and by the force of circumstances, rather than as an expected adjunct of their calling. Their own remissness and disorders were an occasion of afflictions which they should have learnt and known by other means. Yet the lot is a *common* lot, as the faith of which it is the shadow is common also to His children by the grace of God.<sup>6</sup> Hence the breadth and unreservedness of the apostle's language in this verse. Their sufferings should work for them what his had wrought for him, and both should redound alike to the praise of Him who by wisdom and prudence brings His many sons to glory according to the good pleasure of His will.

Verse 7. "And our hope of you<sup>7</sup> is steadfast,"

<sup>5</sup> Rom. v. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Acts xiv. 22; 1 Pet. v. 10; Titus i. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Rather "on your behalf," ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν.

&c. Thus he comforts both himself and them by this reference to their common liabilities and hope, while as the stronger he gives honour to the weaker by imputing to them anticipatively a degree of spiritual experience which they had as yet but very imperfectly realized. For he trusted to produce in them a mind and spirit like his own by relating to them, in the unreserved confidence of love, the story of his own afflictions, and letting them understand in how large a measure they were interested in that which had befallen him for the Master's sake, when at a distance from themselves.

Verse 8. "For we would not have you ignorant," &c. He states here with more fulness of description the moral effects upon himself of the trial to which he already has referred more briefly in the first epistle.<sup>8</sup> It is of less importance to try to determine historically the particular crisis to which his words relate,<sup>9</sup> than to note the impression that it left on the apostle's mind, and the results arising from it, not only to himself, but more remotely to us also, for whose sakes this record was preserved. That the danger which threatened him was excessive is certain from the terms in which he has described it.<sup>1</sup> One whose life was continually in his hands, and

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 32. *Notes on First Corinthians, in loc.*

<sup>9</sup> The scene at Ephesus (Acts xix.) will naturally occur to the reader; and in that chapter we are told distinctly to what instrumentality Paul owed his exemption from the hazardous consequences of personal contact with the excited votaries of Diana. But there are good reasons for doubting that this incident is here in the apostle's mind. See the preceding note.

<sup>1</sup> Let the reader also note the opposite character of his language in chap. iv. 17, when viewing his temporal afflictions as a minister of grace in the light of the resulting glory soon to be revealed.

who felt himself marked as a sheep for the slaughter,<sup>2</sup> must have seen something in this trial, whatever it was, of more than ordinary fierceness, and must have felt the crisis to be of a character more than usually appalling ere he wrote these words. In its presence he despaired of life. And here we have shown to us, in a manner not less instructive than interesting, the behaviour exhibited by a chosen vessel of the Lord, whose daily boast it was to be already dead and made alive again with Christ, when confronted by immediate and overwhelming peril for the sake of the testimony which he bore.

With Paul, as with an earlier sufferer for the truth,<sup>3</sup> "fear was on every side" from the malignity of man, while in both heart and flesh there was a natural faintness<sup>4</sup> as he looked, and seemed to look in vain, in any quarter for an outlet of escape. His faith indeed did not fail him, yet his natural spirit quailed; for he was a man of like passions and infirmities with ourselves, and it is the heart that really is afraid, which finds its sheltering rest in God.<sup>5</sup> He had been brought intentionally by the sure Guide of his steps into a juncture which was the appointed means of teaching him, apostle as he was, the experimental force and meaning of the doctrine which formed both the basis of his hope as a believer, and the burden of his message as a minister of God. And so he proceeds,

Verse 9. "But we had the sentence<sup>6</sup> of death in ourselves," &c. If he sought within him for relief, "death" was the only answer. The more he was

<sup>2</sup> Rom. viii. 36. \*

<sup>3</sup> Ps. xxxi. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. lxxiii. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Is. lvi. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Or "answer," margin.

pressed, the more vividly and conclusively was the fact of his helpless mortality forced upon his consciousness. He was learning, as God's Spirit teaches it, the intrinsic value of his manhood as a child of Adam. And there was need of this. The shadow of this great death was permitted to come over him, not only to demonstrate the power and faithfulness of God as his deliverer, but for the more effectual destruction of all self-reliant confidence, and a corresponding increase of positive and simple trust in God. That an inspired apostle who had been converted, as Paul was, by an immediate revelation of the Lord in glory, and who had many years before been rapt in heavenly vision to the paradise of God, and who carried in him also in commemoration of that scene a constant and painful remembrancer of the vanity of his flesh,<sup>7</sup> should need this further lesson, and for such an end, ought not to be lightly estimated on our parts who read his words. It may well be treasured in our hearts as an admonition of humility and self-distrust. But nature, though dead judicially, lives in us still; and so instinctive a principle is self-confidence, and withal so interceptive of true spiritual blessing, that all God's saints have felt the furnace of affliction in a degree proportioned to the honour they were destined to attain. To be qualified to speak worthily of "God which raiseth the dead," Paul must live and walk in a self-emptied realization of His light and strength. Himself a living man, his answer to any who enquired of his state must be, "Not I, but Christ;" and this not only as expressing the final expectation of his soul,

<sup>7</sup> *Infra*, chap. xii.

but as the present truth and substance of his life now in the flesh.<sup>8</sup>

Verse 10. "Who delivered us from so great a death," &c. Such was the lesson, and he had learnt it well; self-knowledge had been compensated by a richer knowledge than he had before of that God whose glory is to know and succour them that put their trust in Him. In the threefold celebration of God's saving power here expressed we seem to have, 1. His retrospective acknowledgment of redemption as a deliverance from eternal death;<sup>9</sup> 2. His experimental confession of the guiding and preserving faithfulness of Him in whom he put his trust; and, 3. An anticipative assertion of triumphant boldness and assurance such as faith has been ever wont to utter, when meditating on the changeless character of the God on whom its care is cast.<sup>1</sup> If we know God truly, we know Him as the faithful keeper of His word; and as remembrance follows and sustains our present faith, so experience works a hope in the same God which maketh not ashamed.

The life of a believer is a progression from danger to danger, yet from strength to strength. He begins to live, spiritually, as one escaped,<sup>2</sup> and though safe in the Redeemer's care, his adversary is about his steps until his rest be gained; yet he is compassed

<sup>8</sup> Gal. ii. 20.

<sup>9</sup> ὅς ἐκ τηλικούτου θανάτου ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς. It is possible that he means no more by these words than a strong expression of his recent peril and deliverance, but such language seems rather to point to his exemption from that irremediable death which threatens finally God's adversaries, and of which the savage fury of Paul's persecutors was a brief though contrasted figure to his mind.

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. vi. 18.

on his pilgrimage with songs of deliverance. As his lesson is to learn God as a *Saviour*, his personal course and circumstances are divinely regulated to that end. Taught from his earliest knowledge of the Father to supplicate Him for deliverance from evil, he is not to count it a strange thing if fiery trial come, since otherwise a practical experience of God's delivering power would be unacquired. Salvation, though a work wrought already for eternity, is the daily lesson of a growing faith. And this not only in a purely spiritual sense, by eating Him who gave Himself for our sins as the daily meat of our souls,<sup>3</sup> but externally also as we fulfil our numbered days. He that is our God is a God of salvations,<sup>4</sup> and our changes are ordered for the proving of His many names. Sickness, privation, and trouble of any kind are, with outward persecution, permitted as occasions of sustaining and delivering Love. Grace knows how to deliver even from those snares in which our own folly or carelessness may have entangled our feet; but it is in the paths of righteousness that the manner of the God with whom we have to do is most thoroughly and richly learnt. For as the Son of God Himself learnt obedience through the things which He endured, waiting patiently, yet with prayers and tearful supplications, till the great deliverance should come from Him in whom He put His trust,<sup>5</sup> so are we also, if disciples, conducted by the Spirit through a similar experience. His steps become ours also in proportion to our faith. To serve Him we must follow

<sup>3</sup> 1 John vi. 57.

<sup>4</sup> *Notes on the Psalms*, Ps. lxxviii. 20.

<sup>5</sup> *Notes on the Hebrews*, chap. v.

Him, and His followers will, in their measure, taste His cup.<sup>6</sup>

Verse 11. "Ye also helping together by prayer on our behalf," &c. A most important principle is illustrated in this verse. Bold as the apostle is in personal faith, he remembers that the God in whom he trusts has His dwelling also by His Spirit in the Church, and that if deliverance came to one who served God in His gospel, it should come in answer to the desires of others in addition to his own. As his trials were endured for the elect's sakes,<sup>7</sup> they are of common interest to all who are partakers of like precious faith, and they were allowed to fall on him not only to work, as we have seen, his own spiritual furtherance and increase, but to call into active exercise the grace also which dwelt in them. God could and would deliver His servant at His will, but His will pursues this method of accomplishment. Prayer should be made for Paul, and that prayer be answered, and be followed on their part by a more abundant thanksgiving for mercies which they would then feel to be more peculiarly *their own*. The apostle did not doubt this, and his confident anticipation of such a response to his appeal attests the strength of his own deep reliance upon God. Aware as he was of the efforts which the enemy was making to deprive him of the place which justly belonged to him in their affection and esteem, he foils the deceiver by these means. He disarms their unfriendliness by calling for their help; by making them his intercessors he tries the surest method of rekindling their waning love. And thus the partial estrangement of which he had com-

<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter ii. 21; John xii. 26.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 10.



plained in his former letter, and which lingered still, though in a less degree, would be replaced by a deeper and kindlier sympathy when God had shown Himself attentive to their prayers on Paul's behalf.

Verse 12. "For our rejoicing<sup>8</sup> is this, the testimony of our conscience," &c. The moral foundation of his boldness of speech, both as a rebuker and consoler of his brethren, is here laid open to our view. He has the witness of his conscience in the sight of God to the single-eyed and willing steadfastness with which he had from the time of his calling continued in the grace of God. In simplicity<sup>9</sup> and godly sincerity he had held on in his toilsome course. God was Himself the light by which he had threaded a safe passage through the world, and of God was the wisdom by which, like David in the vigour of his early love,<sup>1</sup> he had gone in and out before those who bore the name of Christ. By the grace of God he had walked both in love towards his brethren and in wisdom towards them that were without. He had a method and a policy of which Satan was the object, as he afterwards explains;<sup>2</sup> but as respected his own course and interests as a man among men in the world, his walk as an accredited apostle of Christ, and his behaviour in the Church, which is the house of God, had been as open and intelligible as the sunshine. No man could know him or observe his ways without perceiving, and if honest acknowledging, that Christ was the spring and motive of all that His devoted servant said and did. For this he

<sup>8</sup> Or "boast," *καύχησις*.

<sup>9</sup> Or perhaps "holiness," *Cod. Sin.* giving *ἀγιώτητι*.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. xviii. 5, 14, 30.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. ii. 11.

lived, having no other aim; and because he had not swerved from this,<sup>3</sup> it was his glory also to declare it an occasion in the spirit of that better egotism which, when natural boasting is excluded,<sup>4</sup> extols itself only to make more visible the grace and glory of God through Jesus Christ. And if this had been his conversation generally, both in the church and in the world, much more so towards these saints at Corinth, though they had but ill learnt the lesson set before them in his ways.

Verse 13. "For we write none other things unto you than ye read or acknowledge," &c. He will justify his glorying, not by his own words only, but will compel their attestation on the part of those whom he addressed; for what he wrote they read also in the handwriting of God. If they searched the Scriptures, they would find a corroboration both of his doctrine and his manner of life. He claimed to be a follower of Christ, and they had good opportunity of judging the validity of such a claim. For he was not unknown by face to them as to some others who yet fed upon his words.<sup>5</sup> If they lived to God, it was because Paul had begotten them through the gospel; and if as believers they read their own hearts rightly, they would find Paul's witness there. If they called to mind his ways when with them, or made enquiry concerning him of other churches, they should acknowledge that he spoke truth only when in his own person he thus magnified the grace of God. And his confidence is

<sup>3</sup> Yet when men only are in question, the rule of godliness has always its exceptions. *Notes on First Corinthians*, p. 212, note.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. iii. 27; 1 Cor. i. 29, 31.

<sup>5</sup> Col. ii. 1.

strong, that what they then acknowledged, they should acknowledge to the end.

Verse 14. "As also ye have acknowledged us in part," &c. Nor had they altogether failed to do him his just honour. There is much tender force in the language of this verse, in which encouragement is blended with affectionate reproof. They should have owned their spiritual father, not "in part" only, but unanimously, and in the same spirit in which he still acknowledged them—wholly, and heartily, and with longing desire in the bowels of Jesus Christ. His griefs and joys were with them, and on their account; for he thought of them in Christ, and in the prospect of the coming day. And let us note well the constant recurrence in all apostolic writings of this reference to the day of the Lord Jesus. As a doctrine it is impressed continually on the memory of the church; while as a moral power it is a constant endeavour of the Spirit to bring it to bear directly on the daily walk of the believer, both as a regulator of conscience, an argument of patience, and an efficient stimulant of all true spiritual affection.<sup>6</sup>

Verses 15, 16. "And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before," &c. Having reminded them thus touchingly of that day when all actions will have their final estimate, and nothing be commended but what is proved to be of God, he turns now to notice more precisely the charge of fickleness and insincerity which, in his absence, had been whispered into the ears of the Corinthian saints by some of his detractors, in consequence of his

<sup>6</sup> Rom. xiii. 12, 13; 1 Peter i. 7; 1 John iii. 1-3.

having deferred his promised visit to that church. It had been his intention that his personal return to them should follow almost immediately their reception of his first epistle, that by his presence among them he might both confirm the effect of his written admonitions, and communicate to them yet more abundantly the blessings of the gospel. The particular facts connected with this change of purpose are noticed further on. In these verses, and those immediately succeeding, he takes occasion not only to upbraid their want of confidence in himself, and by a candid though reluctant exposition of the facts to turn their censoriousness to self-reproach, but much more to wean their souls from all such intermediate reliances, and bind them more closely to the alone unfailing stay of faith. To keep the *Lord* between him and themselves is his continued effort as a faithful minister of Christ.

He had allowed his original intention to become known at Corinth, and had afterwards apprised them of his change of plan,<sup>7</sup> without then explaining the reason of this change. This omission had been turned skilfully to mischievous account by Satan, whose ceaseless endeavour is to sow discord among brethren, and whose special object then was to shake if possible the confidence of these Corinthian saints in Paul, both generally as an inspired witness of God, and more particularly as a divinely-appointed guide and regulator of the churches. The apostle's remonstrance is grounded upon a knowledge of this fact.

<sup>7</sup> The "second benefit" here spoken of has reference to his earlier intention, as expressed in 1 Cor. xvi. 5. See *Notes on First Corinthians*, in *loc.*

Conscious also as he was of a more than merely *pastoral* anxiety on their behalf, he could not but feel grieved at the evident readiness with which these injurious imputations had been listened to at Corinth, and that love like his should be requited by suspicion and mistrust. Since therefore they had profited so little by what he had shown them of the more excellent way<sup>8</sup> as to think this evil of him, he will stand, as one arraigned, on his defence. And first he lets them know, what indeed they should have already understood, that to neglect them was never in his heart. His intent had rather been to confer on them a double grace, not only paying them the visit which he seemed to grudge, but shaping his journey into other parts with a special reference to them. But God had willed otherwise, and that for their sakes and for ours.

Verse 17. "When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness?"<sup>9</sup> &c. Had he then shewn weakness or inconstancy in forming or abandoning his purpose? or was the imputation on their parts of a faulty motive consistent with their previous knowledge of the man? There were evidently some at Corinth who were not ashamed of such conclusions from appearances; but in thus judging after the flesh, and measuring Christ's chosen vessel by themselves, they would find that, while they vexed indeed

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. xiii. 5.

<sup>9</sup> τῇ ελαφρίᾳ, &c.—"The lightness which you have been imputing to me." It should be noticed also that *Cod. Sin.* agrees with A B and C in reading βουλόμενος, instead of βουλευόμενος. This change seems to harmonize more exactly with the ἐβουλόμην of verse 15. If this reading be adopted, the proper meaning of his words will be, "With this wish then in me," &c.

his spirit, they condemned none but themselves. Whatever inferences they might draw from facts, he would prove to their confusion that he was neither the sport of impulse nor the slave of his own will, but that his glory was to be a quick and ready observer of the Master's eye. What he *desired* was from love to them, what he *planned* was in subjection to the Lord's good pleasure, and what he *wrought* was by His enabling and directing grace.

This spirit of precipitate censoriousness, which is among the commonest of our natural instincts, is exactly opposed to the true mind of Christ. The apostle here seeks accordingly to shame it to a perpetual stillness, by reminding his brethren of the solemn truth (so easily let slip by us at all times) that, for the doing of things good, both will and power belong to *God alone*; that purposes, even though formed by an apostle, and with the worthiest end, are subject to the alterative operation of that will, and that with such an one as Paul, therefore, there could be neither "yea" nor "nay" in any final sense. It was not as one at his own disposal that he scanned the future, but as the waiting receiver of his Lord's commands. He had learned under the power of His hand the secret of his own intrinsic nothingness, and the vanity of fleshly counsel; and as one who stood above them in the school of God, he both warns and instructs them by this gentle yet forcible appeal.

Verse 18. "But as God is true, our word<sup>1</sup> toward you is<sup>2</sup> not yea and nay." As is his wont, he here

<sup>1</sup> Or "preaching," margin. Comp. 1 Cor. i. 18.

<sup>2</sup> \*ἔστιν, and not ἐγένετο, is found in all the best MSS.

hastens abruptly from himself to Christ. It is as if he should say, Judge me as you will, but ask yourselves meanwhile who and what is he whose character and conduct we are canvassing, and in what relation do we stand to each other in the sight of God? Content to be nothing in himself, he is a witness still and messenger of God. Be it that fickleness was found in him, or that vacillation seemed to mark his character, what had they, when they heard him, gathered from his *words*? To them and to their consciences he will appeal. As a preacher of the faith, their true interest in him must be grounded on the quality of his testimony, and their hearts would tell them that his word among them was no doubtful or uncertain sound. It was and is the living voice of truth. Let them cease then to watch and criticise his acts, and stick rather to those everlasting testimonies which must judge both him and them. Let his ways be estimated by his doctrine, and his doctrine referred to their own consciences in the presence of the Lord. Tried by that standard, they would find him, if in appearance a deceiver, yet still true.

Verse 19. "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you," &c. We have now an emphatic declaration of his doctrine in its cardinal and essential principle. What he and his fellows preached was "THE SON OF GOD, *Jesus Christ*." His filial Name is, like His generation, from eternity, though untold among men till the fitting time.<sup>3</sup> His personal designation, with the unction which belongs to it, was conferred upon Him when He took the

<sup>3</sup> Prov. xxx. 3, 4, viii. 24, &c.; Micah v. 2.

likeness and nature of a man, but will abide with Him for ever.<sup>4</sup> The *Person* of the Lord is the sum of apostolic teaching; the special doctrines of Justification, Sanctification and Redemption flowing, as from their vital source, from the eternal verity that Jesus is the Son of God. This testimony, which the Spirit bears through all His witnesses, constitutes emphatically, and in some sort distinctively also, what Paul calls *his* gospel,<sup>5</sup>—his mission not having been originally, like that of the eleven, to certify to Israel the true Messiahship of Jesus, but to publish to the world from the outset of his apostolic course the saving grace of God in the gospel of His *Son*.<sup>6</sup> To glorify that Name was the end of what he preached and taught, whether as a chosen expounder of God's mysteries or a proclaimer of His love to men.

And He whom Paul's testimony thus set forth among them was not yea and nay. Doubt and uncertainty may attach to a secondary name or an imperfect message, but the preaching of the Son of God is the declaration of positive and final Truth. In Him is "*yea*."<sup>7</sup> The Word made flesh, and attested

<sup>4</sup> Matt. i. 21; Heb. xiii. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Rom. ii. 16, xvi. 25; 2 Tim. ii. 8.

<sup>6</sup> And thus the *παῖς* of Peter, when addressing the children of the prophets (Acts iii. 13, 26, iv. 27, 30), which is the word rendered "servant" in Matt. xii. 18 and elsewhere, becomes *υἱος* in the lips of Paul when he begins to discharge his general debt to mankind (Rom. i. 14-16) as an anointed ambassador of Christ. (Acts ix. 20.) On the special character of Paul's calling and ministry more will be found in *Notes on First Corinthians*, pp. 132, 196, 376.

<sup>7</sup> Every word in this interesting passage is full of rich significance. In verse 18 we have heard him affirming the endurance of the word or doctrine which was preached, and now, after reminding them of what they had once heard, he proceeds, ἀλλὰ



by the Spirit as the Doer of the Father's will, is the living and lasting affirmation of the finished love of God. From eternity the wisdom and power of God, He is revealed also in the gospel as His Righteousness. God speaks now to us in His voluntary mercy by His Son, and leaves to those who willingly receive His words the place only of contented and astonished listeners. The work of deliverance has found its fitting Workman, and *is done*; and salvation now means simple faith in Jesus Christ.

Verse 20. "For all the promises of God *in* Him are 'yea,' and by Him therefore are 'Amen,'<sup>8</sup> to the glory of God by us." Himself the end and chief object of all promise, He is become in His mediatorial glory both the channel of supply to all who receive the grace of God in truth, and the medium of their responsive praise.<sup>9</sup> To the certified promises thus declared to the faith of God's elect in the Person of the Son, the church now sets the seal of her Amen,<sup>1</sup> affirming thus adoringly, to the glory of God the Father, what the lips of Jesus have first spoken to her heart.<sup>2</sup> All lesser words and tokens of God's kindness are comprehended in His chiefest gift; for

*ναὶ ἐν αὐτῷ γέγονεν.* In Him "yea" has been *done*, and therefore *is*. The promise is fulfilled in fact, and "yea" is in Christ the eternal answer to the desire of every *living* soul.

<sup>8</sup> *Cod. Sin.* agrees with all other MS. authority of note in reading *διὸ καὶ εἰ' αὐτοῦ Ἀμήν.* The authorised version, though on the above evidence inexact, conveys nevertheless a rich and truthful meaning, reminding us, in its iterative affirmation of the blessedness belonging to the heirs of promise, of the similar and yet stronger declaration in Heb. vi. 17, 18.

<sup>9</sup> John i. 16; Heb. xiii. 15.

<sup>1</sup> John iii. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. iii. 14. Let the reader bethink him of this personal name and its significance, as he ponders in the gospels the precious "verities" of Christ.

in Christ is *life*, and with life what comforts also and adorns it. And this which was the fathers' distant hope is now, by the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh, assured yet more abundantly to us.<sup>3</sup> Glory, and honour, and immortality belong to Him, and in Him are bestowed in promise on His saints. In Him who is eternally "the Word of God" we hold, if believers, by an everlasting covenant of righteousness whatever good thing God has spoken aforetime. Nor let us forget, while meditating on these things, that judgment as well as mercy is included in the Father's provision for His own. The promises of God are of two kinds; the first absolute, the second conditional in their effect. By the former the salvation of God's children is secured, according to the appointment of Him who has prepared for glory the foreknown vessels of His mercy. The latter are administered in faithfulness by Him who judges His own house, and who declares His intention of *correcting* His erring children not less explicitly than He has pledged Himself, in Christ, to their salvation. Good and evil happen to us according to the existing tenor of our way. If we please God, we are kept securely in His peace; if otherwise, affliction comes to warn us from the way of danger, and restores us to Himself. The rod is no less a promise than the crown, and both are equally the portion of all whom God receives.<sup>4</sup> God's promises are but a measured exposition of His thoughts, and His thoughts have reference both to our natural condition and the resources of His grace. Now in Christ God's very fulness dwells, and that in

<sup>3</sup> John x. 10.<sup>4</sup> Ps. lxxxix. 32, 33; Heb. xii. 6.

the likeness which He took for our sakes;<sup>5</sup> and this concentrating of God's mercies, in the living and effective Verification of His promises, is declared to be "to the glory of God *by us*."

They who praise God glorify Him, and their praise must be according to their knowledge of Him and of His ways. Now what was promised to the fathers is enjoyed by us. They waited for salvation, we adore the manifested Saviour. The end of our faith is already received by us through the witnessing Spirit, who sheds abroad in our hearts the love of God. We have therefore, in the last clause of this verse, an emphatic utterance of that "word of wisdom" which it belonged to the apostle to speak openly among "the perfect,"<sup>6</sup> and an explicit declaration of the preeminence which it has pleased the only wise God our Saviour to bestow upon the "church of the first-born."<sup>7</sup> Each promise that the ear of faith has drunk in through the word of grace from the beginning was surely to the glory of the Promiser; and although their Salvation had not yet appeared, the Spirit moved the lips of God's prophetic worshippers to rich anticipative praise;<sup>8</sup> but the summing up of *all* in Christ, and the presentation of Him in His fulness to the church, is in an especial sense "to the praise of His glory,"<sup>9</sup> who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will. The Lord is sole Heir by natural right and worthiness of all that God can give; and all that is vested personally in the Beloved

<sup>5</sup> Col. ii. 9, 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Notes on First Corinthians*, chap. ii. 6 *ad fin.* and xii. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Ἐκκλησία πρωτοτόκων, Heb. xii. 23.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Sam. xxiii. 5; Pss. and Prophets *passim.*      <sup>9</sup> Eph. i. 12.

is the portion now, by faith, of those who are called into the fellowship of the Son of God.<sup>1</sup> Already Christ is glorified in them, and will be so openly at His appearing.<sup>2</sup>

Verse 21. "Now He which established us with you in [or unto]<sup>3</sup> Christ is God," &c. In the act of magnifying his office as a preacher of the faith, he hides himself beneath the mighty truth which he proclaims. It is indeed through apostolic testimony that God is thus glorified in the church, but in participation of the common grace the inspired witnesses and the receivers of their message share alike. It is God who *establishes* them both in Christ. And let us notice well the force of this declaration, that we may escape the not uncommon error of those who, while ascribing to God the original conversion of the soul, would throw on the believer the responsibility of maintaining or confirming himself in Christ, dividing thus the effective work of salvation between the Saviour and the saved—a notion which nature might herself refute. For infants are not self-sustaining, nor is the title to a promise the merit of the recipient, but the bounty of the giver. It is by warning and teaching that God carries on His work; but to the end, as at the beginning, it is His alone.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. i. 9.

<sup>2</sup> John xvii. 10; 2 Thess. i. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Εἰς Χριστόν. Christ is here represented as the end (*terminus ad quem*) of the effective operation of God as the establisher of His people in the grace of life. The doctrine of this clause is, therefore, equivalent to that of Peter: "Sanctified unto obedience," &c. "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation," &c. (1 Pet. i. 2, 5.) We are established "*in* the faith" (ἐν τῇ πίστει) "with reference to Christ." (Comp. Col. ii. 7.)

<sup>4</sup> Col. i. 28; 1 Cor. i. 8; Phil. i. 6.

God, then, works *in* as well as *for* His saints. But He also “hath anointed us.” God’s saints were His “anointed” ever,<sup>5</sup> because viewed and named prospectively in Him who was to come; but now the mission of the Comforter has turned the fathers’ hope into a present truth, because Jesus, upon whom the unction of the Spirit naturally came, has been glorified as our Forerunner in the heavens. In the former epistle we have had declared to us the doctrine of the Spirit’s baptism.<sup>6</sup> We have here a statement which seems rather to draw our thoughts towards the wondrous dignity and blessedness of God’s elect, as being made both kings and priests by virtue of the Name in which they are presented before Him. They which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall *reign* in life by one—Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup> In His kingdom His companions have a royal place, while an eternal pre-eminence belongs to Him whom God hath anointed with the oil of gladness *above* His fellows.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile it is written, that as He is so are we also in this present world.<sup>9</sup> If we walk by faith we walk *in Christ*; and even as God anointed Jesus of Nazareth, when He stood in His meekness here below as His Elect in whom His soul delighted, so also has He now bestowed on us, for Jesus’ sake, both an unction and descriptive designations which belong by personal right to none but Him.<sup>1</sup> His name and honour are upon us in the sight of God, and of the

<sup>5</sup> Ps. cv. 15.    <sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 13, *Notes, in loc.*    <sup>7</sup> Rom. v. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Heb. i. 9. See further, as to fellowship with Christ, *Notes on the Hebrews*, chaps. i. and iii.    <sup>9</sup> 1 John iv. 17.

<sup>1</sup> 1 John ii. 20; iii. 1; Col. iii. 12.

principalities and powers in heavenly places. We are both graced and entitled in the Son of God.<sup>2</sup>

Verse 22. "Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." Two further acts of God with reference to the mission of the Holy Ghost are here affirmed, the second of which shall be more attentively considered at a future page.<sup>3</sup> As to the former, it has its own precious significance as distinguished from the anointing just described. Let us first remember that it is *in Christ* that we are sealed,<sup>4</sup> in whom we are brought nigh to God. Then, as to the import of this sealing, it has plainly a double aspect, being at one and the same time both appropriative and exclusive. God's seal, like that of men, attests His special ownership, and bars all foreign intrusion upon that which He thus separates and hallows for Himself. It has further an official force, God's witnesses being thus accredited to those who will receive His testimony. The Father's seal was first set upon His only-begotten, whom, as "the Son of man," He had sent into the world.<sup>5</sup> None could know the Son but the Father, who had sent Him;<sup>6</sup> while His words and works alike declared Him as the Holy One of God. And in Christ God's seal is also on His Church, and on each several member of the congregation of the living. Like Jesus, they are sanctified to God and known of Him;<sup>7</sup> like Him, too, they are unknown of the world.<sup>8</sup> Christ's spouse is as a fountain sealed.<sup>9</sup> To the believer the living Spirit has become,

<sup>2</sup> Eph. i. 6; Jas. ii. 7.    <sup>3</sup> *Infra*, chap. v. 5.    <sup>4</sup> Eph. i. 13.

<sup>5</sup> John vi. 27.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. xi. 27.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. viii. 2; 2 Tim. ii. 19.    <sup>8</sup> 1 John iii. 1.    <sup>9</sup> Cant. iv. 12.

since Jesus has been glorified, what circumcision was to Abraham, who first believed the promise of the Seed.<sup>1</sup> It is to us a seal of redemption, both finished and to come, of present forgiveness, and of visible glory in the day of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Verses 23, 24. "Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet to Corinth," &c. His apology (commenced at verse 15) had been interrupted by the rich digression which we have just been considering, but now, having sought by a direct reference to the root of their common blessedness to recall his brethren to a sounder mind, he proceeds to state explicitly the reason of his continued absence from Corinth. His manner of doing this is consistent with the position in which he finds himself placed through the malignant folly of his detractors. As one who stands on his defence is wont to cite his witnesses, so Paul calls his. He has but One, but his invocation is decisive: for the dissipating of this injurious misunderstanding, and a confirmation of that confidence which his former letter had already to so large an extent restored, he backs his own assurance by an oath of God.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rom. iv. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. i. 7; iv. 30; Rom. viii. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Comp. Heb. vi. 16. Should there appear to the thoughtful reader a want of harmony between apostolic practice in this instance and the Lord's command (Matt. v. 34, *sq.*; comp. Jas. v. 12), the true solution of the difficulty lies in the difference between a promissory oath and an oath of attestation. The present is not the only instance in which the same apostle has strengthened his bare assertion by some weightier appeal. (1 Cor. xv. 31.) The moral foundation of the prohibition above referred to is the natural impotence of man. Power belongs to God, who, in grace to His chosen, has confirmed His promise by an oath (Heb. vi. 13);

And if to some who read this passage the smallness of the fact in question should seem disproportioned to the greatness of his words, such an impression would imply but an imperfect apprehension both of the situation and the writer. Paul's earnestness was proportioned to the interest at stake. Accustomed to regard with absolute indifference the current of human opinion as it affected himself merely, he stood jealously upon his character as an accredited minister of God. He knew well that in public estimation a man's personal repute commends or discommends his words, and that if his adversaries could plausibly attach to him a reputation of fickleness or insincerity, no stronger hindrance could possibly be thrown in the way of his ministerial acceptance. Hence his manifest anxiety, both here and elsewhere, to clear himself from imputations which, as a man, he would have utterly disdained to notice, but which he carefully refuted, lest in him the doctrine of God should be defamed.

When he here assures the saints at Corinth, that to spare them was the motive of his absence, he inflicts on their spiritual dullness a well-merited reproof. For surely they had read his former words to little purpose, if they had not gathered from them what he now declares. Had they, then, so suddenly and so completely purged out from among them all

but for the same reason it is fitting that conscious weakness and uncertainty should stay its assertions on a higher Name. Such a citing of his Maker as the witness of his words, as we have in the text, is but a more solemn and emphatic manner of reminding us that Paul's matters are also *God's* matters—that what he says and does are not on his own free motion, but as the willing slave of Christ.



that old leaven of which he had then spoken as to make them feel that his presence with them would be an occasion only of rejoicing? or were they anxious to make proof of his threatened visitation with a rod? Think of him as they might, he had his thoughts and yearnings also toward them. God is now cited as his witness, that the motive which withheld him from his desire, no less than theirs, was not as they supposed. That he might be able to joy *with* them, he must first joy *in* them; and this he could not do while yet so much remained, as the sequel of this letter shows, of allowed or unjudged evil in this church. When *God* had recovered His true place among them, His minister would gladly join them in a common celebration of His praise. Meanwhile he deferred a visit which in their existing state would be a grief and not a joy to him.

But lest this strong asseveration of his claim to an unfettered discretion as an apostle of Christ should seem to offer occasion to any who, with necks little used to the Master's yoke, were ready to charge His servant with a disposition to lord it over God's heritage, he hastens to anticipate all such imaginings. His words are not those of a master, but of one who had received mercy of the Lord to be *faithful*.<sup>4</sup> Neither he nor his fellows in the ministry had rule over their *faith*. If faith came, as it did, through their testimony,<sup>5</sup> its object was the *Lord*, to whom their first obedience was due, and then, for His Name's sake, to those also whom the Lord had sent.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Rom. x. 17; 1 Cor. iii. 5.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. ix. 1, 2; xiv. 37.

To be helpers of their brethren's joy is the true aim of all who for the love of Jesus seek to feed His flock. There is with much tenderness no little pungency also in this affectionate disclaimer of what they seemed so much to dread. If they asked their hearts, they would find a witness there to the truth of what he said; for their estrangement from the father that begat them had not tended to the furtherance of their joy. It had been better with them while they venerated him than since they had begun to judge him. Separated in the spirit of their minds from God, they had been fretting rather than rejoicing,<sup>7</sup> and had unworthily requited him to whom instrumentally they owed their very souls with capacious jealousy and coldness. Full of knowledge and abounding in the Spirit's gifts, they were yet lean and miserable in their souls; for out of God's presence there is neither love nor joy. And their instability of mind was a fruit of their littleness of faith. Had Christ been really dwelling in their hearts by faith, Paul would have been both less talked of at Corinth, and more loved.

To help them back to their lost joy, he throws them again upon its proper spring, by reminding them of Him with whom both he and they must have to do. If they honoured God by thankfully accepting what He gave, they would draw both strength and comfort from the ministration of His servants; but they must lean on *Him* and not on them; for we stand not by imitation or example, but by *faith*.

<sup>7</sup> Prov. xix. 3.

## CHAPTER II.

CLOSELY as this chapter is connected in its subject with the latter verses of the first, there is little reason to regret their separation at this point. That we “stand by faith” is a monitory maxim of the Spirit well fitted to suggest a reflective pause, not only to the saints at Corinth, but still more to us who ponder the apostle’s words in our later and more perilous day. Through neglect of it, what once lived is now dead,<sup>1</sup> and false confidences, which are snares only of destruction to those who are deceived by them, have multiplied themselves within the kingdom of the Son of man.<sup>2</sup> It is, moreover, by a watchful remembrance of this fundamental principle that God’s children are preserved most effectually from yielding to that hurtful tendency to censoriousness and self-complacent ease which belongs ineradicably to our nature. But although Paul, who sought perfection for his brethren,<sup>3</sup> will only satisfy their wishes after a godly sort, he has no desire to withhold from them the explanation which they ask. And so he proceeds—

Verses 1, 2. “But I determined thus with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness,” &c. He had purposed indeed, but not according to

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xi. 20.<sup>2</sup> Matt. xiii. 41.<sup>3</sup> Chap. xiii. 9.

the flesh; he had weighed the matter well and wisely in the balance of the sanctuary, and to the grace of the Lord Jesus, who had so largely blessed his earlier epistle, he would trust, while still deferring for awhile his visit, for a further blessing on his pen. The decision which had exposed him to so much obloquy was a fruit of his heart's true longing for them in the sight of God. He might have hastened to them on the first intelligence of their disordered state; but his hands must then have borne a rod,<sup>4</sup> and his official firmness and severity would have veiled a heavy and reluctant heart. But his thought was not to visit them in heaviness; he trusted that when the fit occasion came his personal intercourse with those whom he so truly loved should be renewed in the same joy and comfort of the Spirit in which it had begun.

With these feelings in his heart he had indited his first letter, and in a like mood, though with the cheering consciousness that his work was already prospering by the grace of God, he now prepares a second. Already a change had been wrought among them, which made glad the heart of God's apostle; but much more must yet be done before one who felt as Paul did what was due to God, in the order and manners of His house, could find himself at ease in their assembly. And in a hopeful anticipation of this he writes again. The exercise of magisterial authority—a thing so idly coveted by many to their own dishonour—was at once his legitimate right as an inspired apostle, and his hearty aversion as a partaker of the grace of Christ. If he returned

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 21.

to Corinth, he trusted that it should be in such sort that his outward demeanour should not contradict the inward affection of his love. Apostolic censures and effective discipline must not indeed be spared, if on their parts persistently provoked; for fidelity to God may not be forgotten in favour of His children's waywardness. Yet he keenly felt that these, if needful and salutary in their case, could bring no joy to him; for his comforters must be their altered selves. Such were some of the musings of this fervent but patient minister of Christ, as he poised in the scales of godly expediency the conflicting claims of duty and of love. But it was not thus that they had judged of him!

Verse 3. "And I have written *this same* unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow,"<sup>5</sup> &c. Far less reason as he now has for remaining at a distance than at the date of the former epistle, he still hesitates. Instead of coming at once to enjoy the partial blessing which had been wrought among them, and which he afterwards so gratefully records,<sup>6</sup> he will labour by a second letter to complete the work of restoration which had been begun at Corinth by the first; for, indeed, there lingered still among them much which made joy impossible so long as it remained unjudged;<sup>7</sup> and surely the terms in which he here continues his apology are such as might well kindle shame in the hearts of those addressed. It

<sup>5</sup> The apostle's use of the aorist in both this and the following verse has led many to conclude that in both he is referring to his original letter; but this view is in my judgment scarcely compatible with the context. In Diodati's version the distinction is made which I have here observed.

<sup>6</sup> Chap. vii. 6, *sq.*

<sup>7</sup> Chap. xii. 20, 21.

is the voice of a love which hopes all things, and is not easily provoked: the Lord lives in His servant's words. If they had lost confidence in him, he trusted still in them; for he reckons on them in the Lord, and in His light he views them not as they are, but as they should be as the bearers of that Name; and of this his letter is his witness. He ought to have joy of them, for they were his own children in the faith; nor will he doubt that when they read and thought upon his words, they would commend both his motive and his work.<sup>8</sup>

Verse 4. "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you," &c. Returning now to his earlier epistle, he reveals to us the state of mind in which it was composed. If his language had in it the necessary sternness of truth when dealing with things hateful in the sight of God, there were emotions of another kind at work within his heart. While they were reigning as kings in the thoughtless pride of their position, and forgetful of Him whose grace had raised them to that place, he was humbled and abased; while they were puffed up in the presence of notorious scandals, he was in an agony of grief. With many tears he wrote. Nor was his anguish without cause, for they whom he loved thus tenderly had been indeed brought low; through their ignorance of their own hearts and of Satan's wiles, they had been entangled deeply in his snare. The beauty of the Lord was marred grievously among them, and well nigh effaced through the allowed working of the flesh; and the crowning proof of their deep spiritual declension was the

<sup>8</sup> *Conf.* Gal. v. 10.

readiness which many of them showed to look with suspicion upon the man to whom, as God's messenger of life and grace, they owed their souls.

But if indignation pointed many of his words, he wrote only to make manifest his love; and if sorrow was at that time the dominant emotion in his soul, there lay beneath it the deep spring of an unaltered joy. For he thought of them not only as they showed themselves in the much faultiness of their ways, but with reference to Him who suffers not His own sheep to be plucked out of his hand, although the enemy may for a season seem to have them at his will. And although, in their self-reliant ignorance, they had wandered far from Him, and shame instead of praise belonged to much which they allowed, he would not doubt their willingness to listen to the Shepherd's voice. As to himself, from his letters they should learn his love; they would find in them no flattering speeches, but the faithful and searching remonstrances of truth. As a wise steward of God's household, he would deal forth to them seasonable meat; "wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ," should address them through his pen, and from speculative and self-elating vanities they should be recalled to "the doctrine which is according to godliness."<sup>9</sup> If he made them sorry for a while by what he wrote, their very shame should bear them inward witness of the truth and abundance of his love.

Verse 5. "But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved *me*; but in part, that I may not overcharge, *you all*." He turns now to speak of the

<sup>9</sup> 1 Tim. vi. 3.

particular instance of wickedness which had been the immediate occasion of his first epistle, and which, both on its own account, and much more because of their laxity respecting it, had called forth from him so strong and solemn a rebuke.<sup>1</sup> But he now refers to this humiliating topic in terms which clearly indicate the powerful effect which his words had wrought in respect at least to this most flagrant shame. The haughty indifference which had so grievously dishonoured both themselves and the Name which they confessed had disappeared. Instead of being puffed up, they were contrite and indignant; and, with a zeal more than proportioned to their original remissness, they were now set for the maintenance of that practical holiness which evermore becomes the house of God. The opening of their eyes had been the affliction also of their hearts, and the guilty cause of their grief had been promptly and willingly cast forth from their assembly, in fulfilment of the sentence already pronounced by the apostle. But this reactive zeal for holiness had led them to a point which touched closely on an error opposite to that which they so eagerly renounced. They were in danger of forgetting the true end of godly discipline, which is not merely the infliction of due punishment on the offender, nor even the purging of God's house from manifested evil, nor the cessation of offence to the world by a public repudiation of that which had caused scandal, but, with and beyond all these, the effectual restoration of the wanderer to the ways of righteousness and peace.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. v.



Divining accurately their condition from the report which Titus brought,<sup>2</sup> and perceiving clearly that the same tempter, who had once prevailed against them through their pride, was now plotting to ensnare them through their very zeal against iniquity, he thus wisely and gently allures them into a better way. Commending their obedience, and sharing heartily their grief, he lets them know the altered relation in which their repentant willingness had placed both him and them. While their indifference lasted he reproached them; but now that they are mourning he appears both as their comforter and the judicious moderator of their zeal.<sup>3</sup>

Verse 6. "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which *was inflicted* of many."<sup>4</sup> The point here mainly kept in view is the necessity of church fellowship in giving a true effect to the discipline of God within His house. Apostolic authority might and did, when needful, deal summarily with an evil-doer, or a teacher of false doctrine;<sup>5</sup> but the normal

<sup>2</sup> Chap. vii. 6, *sq.*

<sup>3</sup> The language of verse 5 is peculiar, and has been variously rendered. The spirit of the context seems to require that the words *ἵνα μὴ ἐπιβαρῶ* should be referred not to the offender, but to those aggrieved. Expressed freely, the sense of the passage appears to be as follows: "If any have caused grief, it is no longer I who suffer, but you also: if a judge of your remissness, I am a sharer also of your burden. I would not lay it all on you, though by your act the wrong must be redressed. And now that you have shown your readiness of mind, I, who insisted on your duty to the Lord, may ask you further to fulfil His law." (*Conf. Gal. vi. 2.*)

<sup>4</sup> Rather "of the majority," *ἐπὶ τῶν πλειόνων*. This change from "all" to "most" points probably to those dissentient spirits to whom he afterwards refers as still practising iniquity within the house of God.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Tim. i. 20.

administration of divine censure on a Christian is by the common decision of his fellows. *Self-judgment* is God's standing ordinance for all who are of God ; a principle which has its application not less to churches than to individual saints. And this is strikingly exemplified in the instance now before us, the sufficiency of the punishment consisting in the fact that, by a solemn and corporate act of exclusion, the offender had been driven by his own brethren from the fold of Christ ; cut off, not from the *Lord*, whose discipline is a part of His covenanted mercy, but from the assembly of His saints ; from all present participation, therefore, either in the fellowship of the Spirit or the comfort of love.<sup>6</sup> And the sufficiency of what was thus inflicted by the will of God was speedily made evident by its result.

What is required at the hands of God's obedient children, in their treatment of examples of unrepented sin, is not only that the evil-doer should be chastened—the Father who judges can and will correct his erring child—but that an assembly which claims to be “of God,” and therefore to reflect His holiness, should purge itself openly from all complicity with that which God abhors. It is hardly necessary to add that the principle here illustrated is one of lasting obligation on believers, how small or weak soever may be the company which acts in such a case. For let it always be remembered that discipline belongs originally, not to the *Church*, but to her *Lord*, who also governs His own house, and that His house exists wherever living saints are

<sup>6</sup> Phil. ii. 1.

found, if only they are walking steadfast in the faith. The measure, therefore, and limit of genuine church discipline is the express commandment of the Lord. What He hates we should hate also; what He refuses must be rejected by us in His Name. Be the offence doctrinal or moral, the *Lord* is the alone true standard of appeal. What contradicts God's truth must be itself denied; what outrages His holiness must be condemned. Leaven is to be watchfully purged out, wherever it is found working in the otherwise "new lump" of grace;<sup>7</sup> its evil energy can be effectually counteracted only by an implicit obedience on our parts to what has been decided already by the Lord.<sup>8</sup>

God's saints receive His words.<sup>9</sup> Wherever, therefore, anything condemned by Scripture is laid for judgment before the conscience of a genuine church or assembly, there will be a verdict both ready and emphatic according to the spiritual tone of those immediately concerned. And such discipline, because it is of God, tends directly to the general edification by excluding that which works disorder in His house. Church law, on the contrary, being at its best but Scripture at second hand, and deriving its efficacy not immediately from God as the dweller in His own habitation,<sup>1</sup> but from human tradition or enactment, is and must ever be a continual source of schism. For the church is not her own, but Christ's; nor does she regulate herself at her discretion, but is in all things subject to the Lord,<sup>2</sup> who by His indwelling Spirit holds an immediate

<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. v. 7.    <sup>8</sup> *Notes on First Corinthians*, chap. v. *passim*.

<sup>9</sup> Deut. xxxiii. 3; John x. 27.    <sup>1</sup> Eph. ii. 22.    <sup>2</sup> Eph. v. 24.

dominion over all who truly know their place and standing as members of His mystic body. Provision, therefore, for the maintenance of godly order is found in Him only who is a present help in time of trouble, and who holds His people in His hands. Like every other godly act, true discipline is wrought by *faith*; while ecclesiastical rules or conventional agreements among Christian men, which either require or forbid what is not required or forbidden by the word of God, are by their own decision self-condemned.<sup>3</sup> To return.

Verses 7, 8. "So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him," &c. The manner of spirit which should regulate all disciplinary action in the church is affectingly described in these verses. Obedience to the Lord had cleared the Corinthian saints from complicity with the evil thing, and as a recompence the Lord had added to their sentence the effective weight of His own immediate judgment. Deep sorrow had succeeded in the heart of the offender to presumptuous folly. There was an equal acknowledgment of his guilt and of its punishment. And now the same inspired voice which called for judgment on the wicked person, while his wickedness remained, bespeaks for the broken spirit of the penitent the relentings of a godly compassion, and the restoratives of brotherly affection. They should forgive him freely whom the Lord forgave; for he had sinned against themselves as well as Him; and as their sentence was His own, so also should they show themselves ready to return in love to the

<sup>3</sup> On the subject of church order, &c., see further in *Notes on First Corinthians*, chaps. xii. and xiv.

delinquent, when they saw that he had bowed himself with true contrition in the sight of God.

The work of restoration, like all other works of *God*, must be complete; it must be as perfect and decisive as the act of judgment. The restored delinquent is not to be tolerated only, but affectionately welcomed back. His absence, if their hearts were right, must needs have been the grief of all, and his return should be their common joy. Respect was to be had also to his state, and the cause which had produced it. He had been plunged into deep affliction through their act, and needed a special consolation at their hands. As one whom God had wounded also, they should heal him by the love of God, and with His words. By doing this they would approve themselves to Him whose chief delight is mercy, and in whose grace alone they stood who had thus judged. But this work of restoration, though prescribed by apostolic counsel, could be effected only by themselves; and if their *hearts* went not with such a work, it surely would be wrought in vain. Paul's language is accordingly in perfect harmony with the situation; as an asserter of *righteousness*, he is peremptory and precise; when he speaks of *grace* to the offender, he reasons only and persuades. He commands no longer, but entreats. Nor does he doubt that as they had obeyed his summons to deal justly with iniquity, so also would they prove their willing readiness to follow the yearnings of his heart toward this divinely-chastened straying of the flock.<sup>4</sup>

Verse 9. "For to this end also did I write to

<sup>4</sup> Ps. cxix. 67.

you, that I might know the proof of you," &c. He is referring here, perhaps, to both his letters, but more especially to the former. They had obeyed when called on to judge righteously; they are now invited to the happier office of ministering grace. It was to prove the reality of their professed subjection to the gospel of Christ that he had written as he did, and if he now writes further, it is still for the same end. What they did, whether in rejecting or receiving, must be to the Lord, and in compliance with His will; for we are in all things "sanctified unto obedience,"—as no longer our own, but His.<sup>5</sup> Nor are His commandments ever grievous to those in whose hearts the Master dwells by faith. And let us note here adoringly the merciful wisdom of our God in making a particular evil the occasion of a lasting good to those who love Him and seek Him in His ways. To the still faulty condition of the Corinthian assembly we owe the addition of this second letter to the first, that for our sakes even more than for their own a complete example might be furnished, both of the manner and intent of godly discipline, for the perpetual guidance of the church.

Verse 10. "To whom ye forgive any thing, I also,"<sup>6</sup> &c. As in the former case the apostle had already judged the sin at which they were conniving, so now his forgiveness leads the way to theirs. But let us mark carefully his words: if he had forgiven

<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter i. 2; 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

<sup>6</sup> *Cod. Sin.* agrees with other ancient MSS. in writing  $\delta$  κεχάρισμαι ἢ τι κεχάρισμαι—"what I have forgiven," &c. The difference is unimportant.

anything (and in the spirit of his mind he had), it was for their sakes, and with the plenary authority of Christ; but the announcement of this pardon to the penitent must be through *them*; without them he would neither bind nor loose. Let them, then, freely allow the relatings which he imputed to their hearts; for, as their father, he judged theirs by his own; but let them in so doing recognise the responsibilities which attached to them no less than him. For inasmuch as the Church is the habitation of God through the Spirit, it is the seat of both grace and righteousness. The duty of judging, and the privilege of healing and forgiving, are alike held by the saints as a trust, to be discharged by them in faithful obedience to the Lord. Unity of sentiment is in either case a necessary pre-requisite to an act which, to be valid, is the act of all. This principle is here expressed by the apostle with emphatic clearness. Let the initiatory movement come from him or them, its *true* origin is the governing Spirit of Christ, and all who are subject to His leading will concur with His intent. As, therefore, Paul's spirit had been present with them when they passed their sentence of exclusion,<sup>4</sup> so now also is he with them both in heart and word, to commend their fidelity and stimulate their love; the same presence and power of the Lord Jesus Christ being the sanction and efficacy, whether of judgment or of grace.

Verse 11. "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices." What then were these schemes of Satan which Paul watched and sought to frustrate with such earnestness?

Doubtless among them was the desire, by driving its subject to despair, to make divine discipline an instrument of destruction, not to the flesh only, but to the spirit also; and to this reference is made in verse 7, where the possibility of the offender's being "swallowed up with overmuch sorrow" is stated. But this was not the chief anxiety of the apostle,—the ulterior safety of "the spirit in the day of the Lord Jesus" was the very end of the punishment inflicted.<sup>8</sup> He saw clearly with the Spirit's eye that the enemy meditated a far deeper plan. What he was plotting to destroy was not the happiness of a particular soul, but the structure of God's beautiful and holy habitation. Nor is it surprising, when we remember that the oneness of that Church which is Christ's body is a cardinal doctrine of the faith of God's elect, that Satan's efforts should be eagerly directed to a practical nullification of this truth. And Paul, whose knowledge of Satan and his methods was proportioned to his knowledge of the Lord, would have the eyes also of his brethren opened fully to this danger. If in the exercise of apostolic power he had acted either in grace or judgment against the feeling and conscience of the Church, disunion of heart and judgment must have been the result. A forced compliance on their parts might have preserved the semblance of true unity, but its spirit and blessing would have fled. Two cannot walk together unless they are agreed;<sup>9</sup> and if God be at variance with His saints, disorder and sorrow must afflict His house until their hearts are recovered to His will. Hence the extreme anxiety of Paul as

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. v. 5.<sup>9</sup> Amos iii. 3.



to the effect of his first letter; and hence also the guarded and explicit terms in which he treats this question of restoration. None of those in whose minds Satan was seeking to foster a schismatic spirit in the Church should have it in his power to turn this case to a plausible account. It should be seen by the willing unanimity with which they acted in this matter, that God's house was not divided against itself.

Verses 12, 13. "Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel," &c. The painful agitation and suspense of the apostle's mind while awaiting the return of Titus, whom he seems to have despatched to Corinth with a special charge to note the effect of his first epistle, and to bring back an immediate report, are here forcibly described. The man whose truthful boast it was, that to him to live was Christ, found in the then state of the Corinthian saints, a hiding of the sunshine of that life. Against opposition from without he stood firmly, like the Rock on which he built his trust; but his heart failed him at the thought of the working of mischief and disorder within the fold of God. The account which he here gives of his proceedings is full of the deepest interest. For a while, after sending off his former letter, he appears to have remained at Ephesus, occupying busily and hopefully in the field there opened to him of the Lord;<sup>1</sup> and it is not unlikely that he went straight from thence to Troas, at the time when he looked for the return of Titus, whom he had directed to expect him there. On his arrival,

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xvi. 8, 9.

though he found not his own messenger, he found that the Lord, who on his first recorded visit to that place gave him little encouragement to stay,<sup>2</sup> had distinctly set an open door before him for His work.

Now Paul's business at Troas, as elsewhere, was the *Gospel*; to that he had been called, and He who called him was now pointing to his task. And surely, when faith is in its perfect exercise, where the *Lord* is *rest* is, for the mind that is stayed on Him. But Paul found no rest at Troas for his spirit. He is plainly acknowledging a weakness which he charges on himself, although the cause of blame was not in him but them. Paul's errors (for he was a *man*) are examples of the danger of accepting a godly motive as a final warrant for an act, without due reference to the immediate will of God.<sup>3</sup> It was so here. Caring as none other cared for the estate of God's heritage at Corinth, in his eagerness to know it he avoids a nearer duty to the Lord Himself. Forgetting, in his deep anxiety for them, that the Great Shepherd only can preserve His flock from the destroyer, he is less comforted by the covering presence of the Lord than distressed by the absence of his brother. God only can sustain with calmness the care of His own house.<sup>4</sup> Paul's work was at Troas, but his heart at Corinth, and to get at once into its immediate vicinity he tears himself from what would otherwise have been his chief delight. A stronger faith would have detained him at Troas by his Master's side, but he hurries into Macedonia upon a doubt. Now our own.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xvi. 8, *sq.*

<sup>3</sup> *Notes on First Corinthians*, p. 212, note.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. iii. 2-6.

counsel may deprive us of a present blessing, but cannot guide us into rest.<sup>5</sup>

Perfection is found only in the Perfect One; and if an apostle's weakness is recorded, it is with a view to our strength. Let us meanwhile remember that Paul's fault was but an ill-regulated virtue of the highest and, in our day at least, the rarest kind. Zeal for the Lord and for the honour of His house led Paul, as it had Elijah, further than his faith. What heart had he to gather other souls to Christ, if those already won were going again astray? If Christ's epistle was becoming illegible at Corinth, how should he hope to kindle a brighter and more enduring light at Troas? Knowing well that no true sheep of Christ shall perish, he was a stranger (while acknowledging his debt to Jew and Greek alike) to that feverish urgency which often leads men to regard oral preaching as the first and last duty of true Christian service. To preach the word, to testify the gospel of the grace of God, was indeed his commission and his joy—and his thoughts of the solemn nature of his calling as an evangelist we shall presently consider—but his *care* was for the Church. That God's light should shine forth from His house, and that men who gave attention to the tidings of salvation should not be offended and thrown back from Christ upon themselves by the spectacle of a divided or corrupted Church, was the absorbing desire of his soul, and with passionate earnestness this wish finds a constant expression in his written

<sup>5</sup> Chap. vii. 5. See further, as to the deeply interesting moral phenomena resulting from the incongruity of the treasure of God with the earthen vessel which contains it, chap. iv. 7, *sq.*

words. He *lived* only while his brethren stood fast in the Lord.<sup>6</sup> Alas! what shape would zeal like his take in the Babel of those closing days?

At this point a marked change may be noticed in the apostle's style; and as in the former chapter he had turned the charge of personal fickleness to an occasion of magnifying the excellency of his ministry, and the abiding faithfulness of the God of promise, so here also he pauses in the midst of his apology to give utterance to the fulness of his heart, as he thinks upon the marvellous power and abundance of that *grace* of God which made Paul's personal infirmity the means of its triumphant manifestation in whatever place he was. Henceforward through the next four chapters<sup>7</sup> his language, though addressed occasionally to the Corinthians, is raised by the intrinsic greatness of the theme which fills him to an elevation where, for a season, all personal or special topics are left out of mind. They are hidden in the light and majesty of those eternal verities of which he presently begins to speak. The joy which he had experienced at the coming of Titus, though it colours perceptibly the whole of this remarkable passage, is yet left in a subordinate place. For it is of God and of His doctrine that he speaks.

Verse 14. "Now thanks be unto God, who always leadeth us triumphantly in Christ,"<sup>8</sup> &c. The state of the Corinthian Church might stir in the apostle's

<sup>6</sup> 1 Thess. iii. 8.

<sup>7</sup> The thread of his personal narrative is resumed at chap. vii. 5.

<sup>8</sup> τῷ π. θριαμβεύοντι ἡμᾶς. That this is the true meaning is plain, on a comparison with Col. ii. 15, the only other passage where the word is found. The apostle serves his service as a willing trophy of the grace which first subdued and won himself.

heart the opposite emotions of both grief and joy; but go where he might, in the fulfilment of his allotted course, he went in the light and power of the victory of God. If in disquietude of spirit he had for their sakes turned away from an open field at Troas, in other places he would yet be found effectually witnessing of God. For "*the Gentiles*" were his sphere of labour; always and "in every place" his presence was a manifesting of the grace and power of God.

Two things are implied in the language of this verse—the *quality* of Paul's ministry and its *effect*. First, it was distinctively the ministry of *God*; He is manifested in the gospel of His Son. Then, as to its specific character, it was absolute power operating in free and most abundant grace. And God's chosen messenger was himself a living parable and witness of the truth which he declared. Both the grace and power of his doctrine were emphatically illustrated in the preacher. It was a "once persecutor and injurious"<sup>9</sup> who now magnified the name of Jesus; it was in a weak and contemptible bodily presence<sup>1</sup> that the resistless power of God displayed itself, whether in demonstrative signs and tokens, or in the far more wondrous effect of Paul's testimony upon the souls of men. As to the power by which God wrought His victories, it was through the foolishness of preaching; for it was in *Christ* that He was triumphing. With the sentence of death in himself, Paul went as God led him by His Spirit; and where he went, there was made known through the doctrine of the gospel the Name and effective

<sup>9</sup> 1 Tim. i. 12-17.

<sup>1</sup> Chap. x. 10.

power of the living God. Truth was then listened to which God only could reveal, and results followed which made it evident, even to those who hated what they heard, that power as well as grace was in the word. To those who hearkened willingly, the tidings of God's love in Christ were glad indeed. The good which men had vainly sought for in themselves, or in the works of their own hands, or by the false light of philosophy, was now rained upon them freely from on high. With a joyful yet solemn astonishment they became aware at the same time of the hopeless guilt and ruin of their nature, and of their own priceless value in the sight of God. Jesus, the Son of God, had lived and died on earth, that the Father might in His name be manifested in the world in the fulness of an absolute and unupbraiding mercy; and now, direct from heaven, there was sent a message which called mortals from the gloomy prospect of the grave and its undiscovered secrets, to the assured and ever-blessed contemplation of eternal life. For that life, which is the light of men, was manifested in the person of God's crucified and now exalted Christ. And even as sweet odours were wont to greet the nostrils of those who fed their eyes upon the blazonry of an imperial triumph, so also, by the ministry of His chosen vessel, was the fragrance of His name, who alone is WORTHY, diffused through every heart which had been opened to behold by faith His glory through a glad reception of his words.

But according to the blessing of this great salvation, so also was the corresponding danger which impended over those who heard without receiving it

the rich message of God's love. For His gospel tells of judgment, without remedy, prepared for those who in the day of grace despise the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering.<sup>2</sup> How Paul felt, as the conscious instrument of such a ministry, is impressively declared in the concluding verses of this chapter.

Verse 15. "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish." What apostolic preaching is to *men* has been stated in the foregoing verse; we are now told what God's messengers are to Himself, when contemplated in the resulting effects of their ministry. The words are bold, but true. Knowing nothing among men but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, Paul felt that what he preached on earth was both attested by angels and approved of God. For what he set forth in his testimony was the Son of God, the fulness of all grace and truth.<sup>3</sup> Let men listen or forbear, the proclamation of that Name is a continual incense before God; and in His hand shall the pleasure of Jehovah prosper, whether in judgment or in grace.<sup>4</sup> If His pardoned people are accepted in the Beloved who presents them, the *enemies* also of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs.<sup>5</sup> In the saved and in the lost<sup>6</sup> the will of

<sup>2</sup> Rom. ii. 4, *sq.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ante*, page 23, *sq.*

<sup>4</sup> Isa. liii. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Ps. xxxvii. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Some prefer to render the words σωζόμενοις and ἀπολλυμένοις by "being saved" and "perishing." The difference is not material, and derives importance only from a false doctrinal inference which is often drawn from the distinction. It is clear that until the Church is in the visible presence of her Lord, God's children are safe only in their Saviour. Their personal salvation, in its final sense, is "ready to be revealed." (1 Peter i. 5.) In the

God must be performed, and the doer of His will, in grace or judgment, is the Son; a saviour of Christ goes up to God from that fire which is never quenched. The light which makes glad the heavenly Jerusalem, is the flame also to consume the adversaries in the day of wrath.

Verse 16. "To the one," &c. To God Christ's work is ever sweet in both its opposite effects. Not so to men. It is sweet with the promise of eternal life to the believer; it is to the unbeliever bitter as the foretaste of eternal death. We have in this verse an explicit statement of the alternative which alone remains for those who have at any time received into their ears the testimony of God. His word can never be without effect. If its offer of life be persistently rejected, its rejection is the unbeliever's self-pronounced verdict of eternal death.<sup>7</sup> "To the one," says the apostle, "we are a saviour of death unto death,"<sup>8</sup> &c. These words declare with

grace of God they stand by *faith*. And as the possibility of drawing back unto perdition is always contemplated, and the Scriptures distinguish between those who live and those who only have a name to live, salvation is treated in the Spirit's language as a thing past, present, and to come. That God *hath saved* His people, and called them with an holy calling, is a fundamental doctrine of the faith (2 Tim. i. 9); while the same witness twice assures his brethen in a single passage that they have been and "are saved," conveying his meaning clearly by the perfect tense. (Eph. ii. 5-8.) Yet Timothy is reminded and exhorted to cleave to those inspired Scriptures which from childhood he had known, and which were able to make him "*wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*" *By faith* we are justified, and *through faith* we are and shall be saved. See further on this point *Notes on First Corinthians*, p. 17, note.

<sup>7</sup> Acts xiii. 46.

<sup>8</sup> *Cod. Sin.*, with all the better MSS., reads *ἐκ θανάτου εἰς θάνατον* and *ἐκ ζωῆς εἰς ζωὴν*. The radical truth conveyed



solemn distinctness and precision the contrary results of faith and unbelief. "From death to death." Such is the Spirit's summary of the course of unrepentant man. Born, as a child of the first Adam, to die, he lives only to sin; and sin, when it is finished, brings him, through the judgment, to a second and eternal death. Refusing instruction from his Maker, and slighting the grace of his Redeemer, his punishment will be commensurate with his offence. Because he has despised the birthright of sovereign grace, he must enter on his final portion, as a natural heir of wrath, with the superadded condemnation of rejected love.<sup>9</sup>

So also with the saved. Their story is "from life to life." Foreknown and foreordained of God in Christ, they begin to live from the moment when the quickening word of truth finds entrance to their hearts.<sup>1</sup> Self-judged, as well as divinely convicted as sinners, they awake, through faith, to righteousness in Christ. By the Spirit, which has quickened them, they confess that Jesus is the Son of God, the Lord; and in Him whom they thus acknowledge they possess both light and life.<sup>2</sup> To them God's messengers are beautiful and welcome for the tidings which they bring;<sup>3</sup> for their words are, to the believing soul, full of the sweet odour of a hope that

amounts to this: the cross is preached; the unbeliever, admitting the fact of the crucifixion, denies the person of the Lord; for to withhold a hearty confession is, in the Spirit's estimation, to deny. The believer, confessing the living One now declared to be the Son of God, &c. (Rom. i. 4), finds life where nature can see only death.

<sup>9</sup> Eph. ii. 3; Heb. x. 28, 29; Rom. ii. 4-9.

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 29; James i. 18; 1 Peter i. 23-25.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 3; John xx. 31; Eph. v. 8.      <sup>3</sup> Rom. x. 15.

maketh not ashamed. Knowing and believing the love that God hath to them, through its ever-blessed demonstration in the cross, they prove their own election by adding charity to faith and hope.<sup>4</sup> In such the ministry of Christ is in a special sense an odour of sweet smell to God. Having shed abroad in their hearts by His Spirit the knowledge of His perfect love, He now gathers from their lips an acceptable sacrifice of praise through Jesus Christ. The mercy He delights in God enjoys for ever in the glorified vessels of His mercy.<sup>5</sup> But to the saved and to the lost He is alike God, and His ministry is worthy of Himself.

And if such be indeed the consequences which result inevitably from the preaching of God's gospel, can we wonder at the solemn earnestness of the meditative question which forms the last clause of this verse? His words shall have their answer from his own pen in the following chapter; meanwhile let us wisely ponder what he asks, and seek in our own hearts for something corresponding to the feeling which filled the heart of the apostle as he wrote these words. For we are living in a talking and a busy age, when human energy seems often willing to render, as it vainly thinks, good service to what it conceives to be the cause of God; but it is an unalterable declaration of the Spirit, that neither might, nor wealth, nor wisdom, as of man, can ever work the works of God.<sup>6</sup> Who is, indeed, sufficient

<sup>4</sup> 1 John iv. 16; Rom. v. 8; 1 Thess. i. 3, 4.   <sup>5</sup> Rom. ix. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Zech. iv. 6; 1 Cor. i. 19. And yet there are modern evangelical optimists who, with an equal disregard of apostolic sentiment, and of the sure word of prophecy which has depicted for

for these things? The man whom God teaches has the answer in himself; but if, as his own words plainly tell us, Paul's estimate of his responsibility, as one who spake for God, was even then not generally shared by those who took in hand to minister His word, still more heedful surely should we be whose lot is fallen upon a day when human sufficiency is the most alluring form of that great lie of the devil which deceives the world.<sup>7</sup>

Verse 17. "For we are not as many<sup>8</sup> which corrupt the word of God," &c. A truly sad and solemn proof is afforded by this verse of the rapidity with which doctrinal corruption may spread itself among the professed servants and expounders of the truth. As in the *fulness* of his teaching, so also in its *purity*, Paul had but few associates. Even in those early days, the snare of popularity was enfolding the majority of those who ventured on the public handling of God's word. Seeking their own and not the things of Jesus Christ, and preferring the praise of men to the honour which is only of the Father,<sup>9</sup> they spoke of the world, and gained as their recompence the attention of the world.<sup>1</sup> Thinking less of the Author or of the ever-blessed Subject of their message, than of those whom they addressed, they sought to render palatable to the natural mind a doctrine which can never cease to be an offence to unregenerate men.<sup>2</sup> Thus the new wine of the king-

us "the last times," are not afraid to say that it needs only a proper development and application of "preaching talent" to convert the world.

<sup>7</sup> Rev. xii. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Rather "the many," οἱ πολλοί.

<sup>9</sup> John xii. 26.

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iv. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. i. 6.

dom turned to water in their hands.<sup>3</sup> Half-truths and philosophic wrestings of the Scriptures took the place of the clear and faithful utterances of the Spirit, and as the natural effect of this evil working, there was already beginning to appear upon the earth the first form of that awful phenomenon—so strange and abhorrent to the mind of the Spirit, yet alas! so familiar to us now as an all-pervading social fact—a professing body with the outward name, and holding traditionally much of the true doctrine of Christ, as distinguished from that which is really alive to God by faith.

It was not thus that Paul and his like-minded fellow-labourers occupied for Christ, in the joyful hope of His appearing. His course was fashioned by his doctrine, and his doctrine made both him, and all others who received it in the fulness of the Spirit's power, suffering witnesses of the faith which they professed. His speech, as an expounder of God's truth, was neither of nor for himself; but as of sincerity, but as of God, and in the sight of God, he spake in Christ. And Christ also spake in him; for as an inspired witness his words were not his own, though with the thoughts which produced them his own spirit had the fullest fellowship. What he received through the revealing power of the Holy Ghost became his own experimentally, though not originally. But his present words relate rather to the spirit in which, as a

<sup>3</sup> *καπηλεύοντες τὸν λόγον τ. Θ.* "Driving a traffic in the word of God," and, after the too prevalent fashion of dealers in human food, "adulterating" it. It is an exact metaphorical description of the evil work complained of by the apostle; expressing as it does both the fraudulent gains of the unfaithful teachers, and the unsuspected loss of the deceived.

man in Christ, he lived and laboured in that name, than to the discharge of his extraordinary functions as an apostle. In what he writes, therefore, he is an imitable pattern to ourselves. Sincere in the confession of his own nothingness, he was not less bold both in his persuasion of the truth which he declared, and in the consciousness of the sustaining power of His grace for whom he spoke. All that God gave him he told out, with much trembling often,<sup>4</sup> but with a simple fidelity to Him from whom He sought approval,<sup>5</sup> and with love unfeigned towards them to whom he spoke. Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, he kept back nothing that was profitable, and did not shun to declare *all* the counsel of God to those who outwardly professed to know His Name.<sup>6</sup> And of such a manner of testimony he felt that he both might and ought to speak, when writing to those who had been unwarily listening to some of the many corrupters whom he here describes. It was a part of his stewardship to warn as well as feed the flock of God.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Gal. i. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Acts xx. 19, 20-27.

<sup>7</sup> Col. i. 28.

## CHAPTER III.

“Do we begin again to commend ourselves?” &c. (1.) His last words were in their tone apologetic and in solemn vindication of his office as a minister of God; and as if, while glorying in the grace which had clothed him with his mission, he felt humbled at the necessity of naming any other name than that of Christ, when writing to His Church, he here checks himself, and continues his communication in an altered strain. It was indeed a strange position in which he stood towards his own spiritual children, when thus submitting afresh to their scrutiny the credentials of his official calling. Did it become either him or them that like a stranger he should stand without and knock doubtfully for admission into their assembly? Had he no anterior claim upon their hearts and ears? If Apollos even had come thus commended,<sup>1</sup> had Paul the same need? or if he went elsewhere upon his general mission, could their letters add effect to the pretensions of one whom God so visibly and mightily accredited in every place? Others might need such introductions, and that caution in the reception of strangers was both necessary and in very imperfect exercise at Corinth, was evinced by the more than doubtful

<sup>1</sup> Acts xviii. 27.

character of some to whom they had already yielded unwarily a high and authoritative place; but was he to be classed with them? Let their own hearts answer as they read his words.

Verse 2. "Ye are our epistle, written on our hearts, known and read of all men." The effect of this bold but truthful and touching declaration, both on the heart of the Corinthian Church, and on the conscience of the false apostles who were infesting it, we may conjecture only, while ourselves acknowledging the overwhelming force of his rebuke. It was even so. To themselves, if in their right minds, to others always and without question, they were his open and plainly written letter of attestation. Christ spoke for him by the very lips of those at Corinth who now questioned him; for the name which they confessed they learnt from Paul, and from whom else did they receive in like measure the knowledge which distinguished them, and which, by their misuse of it, had puffed them up? But this letter was written also in his *heart*. Forced as he was to chide them in their ways, and to complain of their lack of love to him, they were not less his boast as an apostle of the Lord. Men who observed him, and noted what he said, could not be altogether unacquainted with these discontented saints. For he spoke of them to others as men are wont to speak of what they hold most dear. All in other places who knew the apostle personally, knew Corinth also, or that part of it which Jesus owned, and assuredly no Christian man could come as a stranger to that city and long remain in ignorance of Paul and of his fruitful labours there.

Verse 3. "Forasmuch as ye are manifested as an

epistle of *Christ*," &c. But if the servant was commended by his work, how much rather the Lord in whose name and power he had wrought. The characteristic description here given of the Corinthian saints is both unique in its terms, and strikingly expressive of the nature and intent of the Church of the living God when considered in its present relation to the world. It is a living epistle of the absent Christ, ministered or presented to the eyes and consciences of men by means of apostolic labour.<sup>2</sup> The Church, by her confession of the faith once delivered to the saints, becomes to the world as an open letter from the Lord. By her life and testimony, He who was dead and whose hidden life and presence with the Father are the secret of His own elect,<sup>3</sup> still speaks and gives moral proof that He both lives and manifests His power as the Shepherd and Ruler of the flock which He has bought. From what follows, it is evident that an analogy is here intended between the stony missives of Jehovah, which were entrusted to the hands of Moses, and given to declare His name and pleasure to the children of Israel, and the

<sup>2</sup> Paul assumes here, for himself and his fellows in the work, the functions of a tabellarius or letter-carrier simply. What the world is to notice is not so much the individual devotedness of God's apostle, but the wide-spread testimony of churches or assemblies of genuine believers which should appear as the result of apostolic preaching. The Church in its unity is the natural medium of communication between Christ and the world. If, as we have with shame and sorrow to confess, her visible unity and the bright light of her holy separateness are long since departed, He yet speaks through her living though scattered members; making His true Church still His living messenger to men, even as God by the same Church is making known the manifold riches of His wisdom to the angels and principalities in heavenly places. (Matt. v. 13-14; Eph. iii. 10.)

<sup>3</sup> Col. ii. 3; 1 Peter 2-3.



sending forth His church into the world as a living and acting corporate witness to the name and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup>

The Lord being dead thus speaketh. The cross and guarded sepulchre were the witness of His death and burial. His Church, since the day of Pentecost, is the irrefragable witness that He lives. It is by the animating power of the Spirit that the name of Jesus as the dead and risen One, and who is presently again to be revealed, is now read out distinctly to the ears of men, and manifested to their consciences wherever God's true saints are found. Like His typical predecessor, He has sent forth into the world a posthumous communication from Himself,<sup>5</sup> though of another tone, and with a general address. For that Jesus *died* is the only point of gospel verity that is admitted *universally* among mankind. His Person, as the Resurrection and the Life, is accepted in *Christendom* as a cardinal doctrine of its profession, but discerned and truly worshipped only by the faith of God's elect. "By the Spirit of the living God" that truth is graven on His children's hearts; and where this faith lives Christ has a voice for men. Himself Jehovah's Messenger and message to the husband-

<sup>4</sup> Ex. xxxiv. 1; John xiii. 35; xvii. 21. The analogy is obvious. Jehovah was "the God of Israel," Christ is "the Saviour of the world." The tables were Jehovah's witness to His people, the Church is Christ's living epistle to the world. Israel heard but turned away; the world saw and read but refused, and yet refuses Him who thus speaks from heaven. Lastly, in the former case the law was made void by the commandments of men; in the latter, the Church, the power of whose testimony consisted in her separation from the world, has by mingling with it become the betrayer rather than the witness of the name by which she is called.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Chron. xxi. 12, *sq.*

men, who killed and cast Him out of the vineyard of the Lord of hosts,<sup>6</sup> He is now "believed on in the world" through the effective testimony of those in whom by faith He lives.<sup>7</sup> The language of the latter clause of the verse is in close keeping with the tenor of the better covenant.<sup>8</sup> The tables of stone, which were shaped by human hands, and on which God wrote the witness of man's natural distance from his Judge—a record effaceable only by the atoning blood of Jesus<sup>9</sup>—are now replaced by the warm pulsation of those hearts which almighty love has both formed and chosen as its own abode.<sup>1</sup>

Verse 4. "And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward." What trust? Is he here contemplating his own efficiency as a minister of the Church by the grace of God, or the effect of that ministry? I cannot doubt that the latter is the chief meaning of these words, though the former is of course involved. In the preceding verse we have had before us a particular view of the calling and prime function of God's Church. And although, to the eye of one who saw as Paul saw, Christ's epistle, then exposed to men at Corinth, might seem unsightly through both blottings and erasures, and its authenticity half doubtful because of the faint tracing of God's finger and the strongly marked interpolations of the flesh, he did not stagger at this evidence of the adversary's power, but trusted still through Christ in Him who is above the adversary in his pride. Paul knew the manner

<sup>6</sup> Matt. xx. 3-7, *sq.*; Isa. v. 7.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 16.

<sup>8</sup> As to this and its present application to the Church, see *Notes on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, chap. viii.

<sup>9</sup> Ex. xxxiv. 1; Col. ii. 14.

<sup>1</sup> Eph. ii. 10; 1 John iv. 16.

of the God with whom we have to do, whose way it is, while keeping His unchangeable intent before Him, to try His people's hearts by allowing opportunity for that which is in the creature to discover itself. Corruption was already working in the Church at Corinth, and the time should come (as we are witness) when, not at Corinth only, Christ's epistle should be consumed by the fire of human and satanic wickedness, as Jeremiah's roll was burnt upon his hearth by the infatuated king of Judah.<sup>2</sup> But the creature's efforts are in vain against the work of God. If His testimony was allowed to die at Corinth or Philippi, and candlesticks which once shone with the light of the sanctuary have long since been removed, Christ's letters have been seen and read in other places, and to other generations. That the gospel of God's kingdom should be preached among all nations for a *witness*,<sup>3</sup> was a revealed purpose which might be accelerated in its fulfilment by the devotedness of Christ's apostles, and of such as might seek to imitate their faith, but which could not be arrested either by the unfaithfulness of those who named His Name, or the avowed hostility of men.

Faith thinks and sees with God, who is its trust. Expecting nothing from the creature, it relies with patience on the word and will of the Creator. And thus the man whose marvellous appointment it was not only to call into life the churches of the Gentiles and regulate them by his care, but to prophesy distinctly the corruption and eventual apostasy of what had once confessed the name of Christ, takes comfort to his heart when thinking upon God. His work,

<sup>2</sup> Jer. xxxvi. 22, *sq.*

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xxiv. 14; Mark xiii. 10.

of which Paul was a willing and delighted instrument, should yet praise *Him*. Christ's letter should remain, in spite of all defacements, as God's witness upon earth, until the time arrived for it to be taken to the bosom whence it came,<sup>4</sup> that with it and in fulfilment of its testimony its divine Writer might appear, to the confusion of His adversaries, in the avenging brightness of His glory.<sup>5</sup> In the form of the apostle's declaration of his confidence, we may see a reflection of Christ's own intercession with the Father when, in view of the world's rejection of His own as of Himself, He set forth in their hearing both His immediate and remoter wish.<sup>6</sup>

Verse 5. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as *from* ourselves,"<sup>7</sup> &c. The thoughts of man are not the thoughts of God; nor is an apostle of Christ an exception to the general case. His words here are an answer to his despairing enquiry, when measuring the ministry entrusted to him against any human or created strength.<sup>8</sup> He was indeed, in view of all that could oppose, unshaken in his trust; but it was because he trusted no longer in *himself*. He had learnt thoroughly the lesson which the Master sets for all whom He will acknowledge as disciples.<sup>9</sup> Of "self-help," the fairest of nature's idols, he would know nothing as a minister of *God*. That which in things temporal is both right and indispensable, is a thing to be renounced and an obstacle to be vanquished, in the true service of Christ. For in the former case both thought and

<sup>4</sup> John xvii. 18, xiv. 3.

<sup>6</sup> John xvii. 21, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Chap. ii. 16.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Thess. i. 6, *sq.*

<sup>7</sup> ἀφ' ἑαυτῶν . . . ἐξ ἑαυτῶν.

<sup>9</sup> John xv. 4, 5; chap. i. 9.

action are our own (though in the management even of our own we do well to remember whose we are),<sup>1</sup> in the latter Paul confesses that he can neither think nor act as from himself. For the thought is parent of the work, and man's thoughts can neither plan nor regulate the work of God. But if thus self-emptied, it was that he might be filled more completely with the energy of God. He boasts of a sufficiency for the work he has in hand, and in declaring its source, he gives glory to Him to whom power alone belongs. "Our sufficiency is of God." In that Name, and to His praise, Paul could and would assert his fitness for the office which he claimed. And now, having thus eliminated from the question of spiritual ministry all shadow of human authority or even sufficiency, and referred both the method and the doing of the work to its divine Originator and Performer, he passes in the following verse to a consideration of the ministry itself, viewing it in contrast to that which had been wrought in earlier times, by the will and at the bidding of the same Eternal Author, but for another purpose, and by a different and secondary means.

Verse 6. "Who also hath made us able [or sufficient] ministers of the New Testament,"<sup>2</sup> &c. We have in this verse a comparison—first, of the two covenants in kind, and, secondly, of their effects. First, what is now ministered is *new*, and in its essential character is *not* letter *but* Spirit. It is plain

<sup>1</sup> Thess. iv. 11; John iv. 13, 14.

<sup>2</sup> That the authorised version is right in here rendering *διαθήκη* by "testament" is, I think, clear from the apostle's reasoning in Heb. ix. 15-17. *Notes on the Hebrews, in loc.*

that law and gospel are here put in contrast, and we do well to note carefully the drift of the apostle's teaching. And if it should occur to any to enquire why in an epistle to a Gentile Church there is introduced so full and elaborate a treatment of this subject, two answers may be fairly given; first, because the glory of the gospel cannot be fully seen except in its relation to the law; and, secondly (and this last is what seems to have been the immediate occasion of the apostle's words), it belonged to the point he had in hand—the magnifying, namely, of his own office as an apostle of Christ, to expose to the withering light of truth the false grounds on which, as Jews and teachers of the law, his detractors at Corinth advanced their claims to the attention of the Church.<sup>3</sup> Knowing that wherever Christ was preached the habit of the enemy was to corrupt the simplicity of the faith by confounding together the opposite principles of law and grace, he is never weary of insisting, as he here does, on their absolute contrariety to each other in the mind of the Spirit.

In declaring that his ministry is not of the letter but of the Spirit, he not only affirms their essential difference, but indicates also distinctly the limits within which the “letter” or Mosaic institution was confined. It had to do with man in the flesh, or in his natural state, but not as a new creature in Christ.<sup>4</sup> By it God spoke to men about themselves and their obligations, and called on them to show themselves righteous if they could. The law gave nothing, but

<sup>3</sup> Chap. xi. 22.

<sup>4</sup> On this distinction, see further in *Notes on First Corinthians*, p. 65, note.

promised life upon obedience. Now the apostle excludes "the letter" from his ministry as an ambassador of Christ, while he elsewhere recognizes its continued validity and importance as a means of charging sin upon the consciences of evil-doers.<sup>5</sup> But his *ministry* is of another order—of grace, and not of sin. The gospel is emphatically "apart from law," though witnessed by the law: the one is old, the other new; the one "the letter," the other distinctively "the Spirit."<sup>6</sup>

So also in their effects—"the letter killeth." Its declaration of divine requirements is but a sentence of death upon a creature naturally alien in heart from God, and without ability to change its kind. The law worketh wrath, because by the law is the knowledge of sin.<sup>7</sup> But if the letter kills, "the Spirit makes alive."<sup>8</sup> The absolute incompatibility of law and gospel cannot be more forcibly put than it is in this concise declaration of the apostle. Grace does not act until law has done its worst: we die to live.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Tim. i. 8-10.

<sup>6</sup> But though nothing can be clearer than the distinction here stated, it may be needful to remind the reader, that what is *written* is the "spirit and life" of God's present ministration. (John vi. 63.) No idea is more mischievous in its tendency than that which has led some to infer from Paul's language here, that gospel teaching is no longer *literal* teaching; *i. e.* that its doctrines are not to be apprehended through the natural sense of words, but are recondite, and to be discovered only by a deeper search than babes can make; that the Holy Ghost, in fact, still speaks in parables, instead of declaring openly the truth of God. The teaching of the chapter now before us should itself be a sufficient corrective of a notion so utterly at variance with the whole tenor of apostolic testimony; but as it is the chief refuge of the modern Sadducean form of Satan's lie, it is needful to put the simple on their guard.

<sup>7</sup> Rom. iii. 20, iv. 15.

<sup>8</sup> ζωοποιεῖ.

The Spirit quickens because the gospel is the witness, not of man but God—the manifesting of His kindness and His love to man;<sup>9</sup> good tidings therefore to as many as through a knowledge of the truth are weary of themselves. For in it God now reveals *Himself*, making manifest the savour of His knowledge as the living God, the Saviour, to the believing receivers of His word. This is its perpetual and ever-blessed distinction. Finding man dead through “the letter,” which writes him down impartially as he is, and therefore declares a curse to be the sum of all his natural prospects,<sup>1</sup> God breathes upon His slain ones with the breath of life eternal through the gospel of His Son. Life is the burden of the Spirit’s testimony—life absolutely, and on no harder condition than that man should believe God, and honour Him according to His words.<sup>2</sup>

Verses 7, 8. “But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones,<sup>3</sup> was glorious,” &c. Having stated the essential distinction of his ministry, he proceeds now to further illustrate, by a more detailed specification, the opposite characters of the dispensations of law and grace. And first, we have the law delivered at Mount Sinai distinctly characterized as “the ministration of death.” His own

<sup>9</sup> Titus ii. 4.

<sup>1</sup> Gal. iii. 10. The tables of the covenant were the depository of “the letter” in its essence. They stand therefore in this description as representative of the whole Mosaic institution, sacrificial ordinances as well as special enactments all standing in an inseparable connection with the tables. But it is with the principle of the institution rather than its accessories that the apostle is dealing in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. ii. 10; 1 John v. 11, iii. 23.

<sup>3</sup> More exactly, “in letters graven on stones,” &c.



experimental knowledge helped him to this definition,<sup>4</sup> the soundness of which is not only apparent as a doctrinal statement, but is verified also in every heart that God has taught. Nothing in the legal ministry brought or could bring with it the true savour of life; for the law is not of promise, nor of faith.<sup>5</sup> Distinctions are sometimes attempted between the "ceremonial" and "moral" law, by those who would keep Moses without losing Christ, but in vain.<sup>6</sup> Neither life nor perfection were by law. Its purpose was to demonstrate and reaffirm, as the result of a second and special experiment upon the capabilities of fallen nature, the original sentence passed on the first man.<sup>7</sup> It was therefore distinctively the ministration of *death*.

Yet this fatal ministration was "in glory."<sup>8</sup> What God does glorifies Him, whether as a Legislator or a Saviour. He is righteous in His judgments, and is glorified as He is known. But the glory of the former ministration, though it clothed with an outward radiance the person of the Mediator, shed neither light nor joy into the people's hearts. It was a brightness which dazzled and repelled, but had no power to attract, and shed no vital warmth into the soul. Moreover the glory which Israel beheld was settled in the face of one who was mortal only, and subject as a servant to the law which he delivered. And the servant abides not in the house for ever.<sup>9</sup> The law

<sup>4</sup> Rom. vii. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Rom. iv. 14; Gal. iii. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Gal. v. 2, 3. This point is treated more at length in chap. vii. of my *Notes on the Hebrews*.

<sup>7</sup> Compare Gen. ii. 17, with Ezek. xviii. 4.

<sup>8</sup> ἐν δόξῃ.

<sup>9</sup> John viii. 35.

which Moses ministered he also broke, and came like others under its judicial sentence.<sup>1</sup> That glory, therefore, must be done away. But if that former ministration had its honour, in how much more abundant glory shall the ministration of the Spirit be?<sup>2</sup> For that which quickens must excel what only kills. And while the first could speak only of Jehovah to His people as of One who dwelt afar off, and in a darkness not yet to be penetrated, the latter brings the living God within His people's hearts, and reveals to faith the true and abiding brightness of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

Verse 9. "For if the ministration of condemnation be glorious, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory." The positive character of the ministrations thus opposed to each other having been shown, he now reviews them with reference to their moral effects, which are found respectively to be condemnation and righteousness. The law could *describe* righteousness, and exhort men to its attainment; but because it sentenced the ungodly, its effect upon Adam's children could be only condemnation. As many as are of the works of the law are under its curse. On the other hand, the gospel is the positive ministration of righteousness, for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith. The absolute contrast of law and grace, and their mutual exclusion of each other,

<sup>1</sup> Num. xxvii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> ἔσται. The future is here used, because the apostle is contemplating the definitive end and result of these contrasted ministrations. That which is now perceived by faith only will be openly revealed at the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

are shown convincingly in this comparison. The law, as the rule of right, claims everything and judges the delinquent; the gospel *gives* everything, and reserves its condemnation only for the despisers of the grace of God. Annulling the former condemnation through the blood-shedding of the Just One, it is to the believer the ministration of eternal righteousness, since he stands, by grace, before God in the name and merits of His own beloved Son.<sup>3</sup>

The ministration of righteousness exceeds in glory that of condemnation, by all the difference which exists between a just exaction and sovereign grace and love. The God of glory thundereth, and breaks the cedars with His voice.<sup>4</sup> The same God reveals a brighter glory when he preaches peace by Jesus Christ. His angels who ministered at Sinai the terrors of the law are rapt in wonder as they look, with a still unsatisfied desire, into the mystery of redeeming love. It is to declare His own righteousness that God now sends forth His living message by the Spirit,<sup>5</sup> a thing more glorious than the proof and condemnation of man's sin.

Verse 10. "For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth." The superiority of the latter ministration is now still more emphatically asserted by means of this triumphant hyperbole. The first has *no glory* in comparison with the last. His style is a part of the natural language of the Spirit when tak-

<sup>3</sup> On the subject of righteousness generally, and the special topic of the merits of Christ, the reader is referred to chaps. iii.-v. of *Notes on the Romans*.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. xxix.

<sup>5</sup> Rom. iii. 26.

ing of the things of Christ to show them unto men, since figures fade before realities, and partial glimmerings are forgotten in the presence of the perfect day. Positive and peerless excellency is the claim universally asserted by the inspired writers, when speaking either of the Lord's ever-blessed Person, of His work or its effects. The record which we have of the transfiguration is a perfect and wondrous illustration of the apostle's language in this verse. Moses and Elias are there seen in glory, but that glory radiates no longer from the face of Moses. His official honour as the legal mediator is past and forgotten in the presence of that Life which is the light of men. Both the lawgiver and his later fellow-servant, the jealous vindicator of the covenant,<sup>6</sup> are seen in the brightness of His glory whose face was shining as the sun.<sup>7</sup> And they that saw them knew that they talked with their Redeemer of the work which He should presently accomplish at Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup> But their appearing was with a view only to the final obliteration of their personal pre-eminence, in the presence of His majesty who is the Lord of Glory. They vanish in the cloud that overshadows them, while from the excellent glory there comes forth the Father's testimony to the Son, as the sole authentic speaker of His words.<sup>9</sup>

Verse 11. "For if that which is done away was by (or through) glory, much more that which remaineth is *in* glory."<sup>1</sup> With these words we reach the climax of the apostle's comparison of the first and second

<sup>6</sup> 1 Kings xx. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Matt. xvii. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Luke ix. 31.

<sup>9</sup> Luke ix. 31; John iii. 34.

<sup>1</sup> διὰ δόξης . . . ἐν δόξῃ.

ministries. The first with its transitory glory is annulled, the past is obliterated by the present; Moses the servant is dead, but Jesus lives. The last being come abides as it began, its ever-blessed minister being Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. As in the former epistle he had laid down the maxim, that when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away ;”<sup>2</sup> so here the unalterable perpetuity of *grace* is asserted as its crowning claim to the pre-eminence. All else was temporal, but *eternal life* is the distinctive burden of the gospel.<sup>3</sup> Perfection only can *remain*, all short of this is in its nature only transitory and provisional; but God’s righteousness is, like Himself, eternal, and can know no change. The former covenant affirmed His righteousness, but did not *minister* it. If justice and judgment are the habitation of Jehovah’s throne, the face of that throne was still kept back from the gaze of men, within the thick darkness where God said that He would dwell. “The way into the holiest of all was not made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing.”<sup>4</sup> All the ministry of that tabernacle was imperfect, and ordained for change. Its priests continued not by reason of death. Its sacrificial ordinances made an annual remembrance of *sin*. Cherubim of glory might overhang the mercy-seat, but they were seen by the eye of no worshipper who paid homage at the worldly tabernacle. The solitary representative of Israel passed in and out once only in the year with blood, not to gaze in adoring leisure at the brightness of God’s presence, but with trembling to accomplish his allotted service,

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xiii. 10.      <sup>3</sup> 1 John ii. 25.      <sup>4</sup> Heb. ix. 8.

under mortal penalties in case of ceremonial remission or irregularity. For the law made nothing perfect.<sup>5</sup> If glory then appeared at the dedication of the temple, it sent forth also from its brightness a *cloud* which filled the house and stopped the service of the priests; God intimating in this solemnly expressive manner the inadequacy of the then existing ordinances to fulfil His praise.<sup>6</sup>

But if the transitory ordinance was thus glorious, much more shall that which remains exceed in glory. For the darkness is passed, and the true light now shineth, no more to be dimmed or eclipsed by the intervening shade of death. The living and true God now shines forth visibly in Jesus for the eye of faith, even as in a very little while His eternal brightness will become the manifested home and rest of the many sons whom He is bringing to His glory.<sup>7</sup> All here is changeless, because all is essentially divine. God reveals Himself in Jesus as He really is, and beyond this nothing is or can be. All promissory office and shadowy observances are verified and have their end in the revelation of the Word made flesh. Instead of carnal ordinances, there is now the operation of the eternal Spirit. By Him the Lamb was led up to the altar, and by Him also the effects of that one offering are now attested in the gospel. What *man* could do, as Satan's slave, to forfeit blessing and make life a thing impossible, has been made evident through the institution and historical development of the legal dispensation. What *God* can do, as the provider in His own Christ of a more abundant grace,

<sup>5</sup> Heb. vii. 19.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Kings viii. 10-11.

<sup>7</sup> 1 John ii. 8; Heb. ii. 9-10.

has been proved in the descending and ascending of the Son of Man, and will be celebrated everlastingly in the Church which learns her song of praise from Him.<sup>8</sup>

Verses 12, 13. "Seeing then that we have such hope. we use much plainness (or boldness) of speech; and not as Moses," &c. From the ministries to the ministers is a natural transition, and Paul as the representative of all who "testify the gospel of the grace of God,"<sup>9</sup> now compares the manner and intent of his own ministry with that of Moses. Let us first notice the peculiarity of his language: "having *such* a hope." Hope has been ever the possession of God's witnesses who have obtained a good report through faith, and it is as characteristic of our own dispensation as it was that of the fathers, who, for the sake of the far-off promises which they embraced by faith, confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.<sup>1</sup> But the hope of the fathers, instead of being brightened and brought nearer by the law, was obscured and indefinitely intercepted by it, though it could not be altogether disannulled.<sup>2</sup> Under such a dispensation, instead of a clear-sighted faith which fed upon God's word of promise, and kept patient watch until what He had said should be performed, there was a conscience of sins and a bondage of spirit through the fear of death.

Such was the moral condition of the just man under law, while under the pressure of that yoke God's prisoners of hope were sustained both by legal figure and prophetic promise. They waited for Israel's

<sup>8</sup> John iii. 13; Eph. iv. 8-10, iii. 21; Heb. ii. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Acts xx. 24.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xi. 13.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Gal. iii. *passim*.

consolation, and mourned on in hope. But the believer now rejoices in the possession, in yet more abundant measure, of that which the godly circumcision only sighed for as their hope. To them the Spirit was a promise only; to us it is God's indwelling and witnessing seal and presence. Their hope was emancipation from sin's guilt and bondage; we stand by grace in the liberty with which Christ hath already made us free. Through the Spirit we are waiting, not for righteousness, but for the *hope* of righteousness by faith. Justification is our *state*, if believers, in the sight of God; and peace with Him is its effect, and the hope which belongs to such a state is *glory*.<sup>3</sup>

With such a hope and such a ministry, and in the conscious power of a divinely-lent sufficiency, Paul might well be bold. But his language in verse 12 has reference more to the character of his ministry than to any personal sentiment. Hence the force of the contrast in the following verse. What Paul preaches, Moses veiled. To make the marvellous truth of God's gospel as clear as daylight to the human conscience, is the first duty of those whom the Lord now sends forth as heralds of His grace. Whatever is recondite or enigmatic is not now of God. Babes receive that which, when digested, makes them men; and, when remembered, puts a crown of wisdom on the head of age.<sup>4</sup> It could not be thus with Moses, who was indeed the open minister of law, but the veiled prophet of grace. The action of Moses in covering his face is here described as something intentional, and in keeping with his office as the

<sup>3</sup> Gal. v. 5.; Rom. v. 1, 2.

<sup>4</sup> 1 John ii. 12-14.



minister of that which he knew to be imperfect in its character, and therefore not of permanent effect. The lawgiver was a witness also of a better thing than law. To deliver his present message to the people he lifted the veil, which was again replaced when the commandment had been uttered. Before God he was unveiled, and looked with open vision on the mystery of Jehovah's ways, but to Israel his covered face was an emblem of the incomplete and unsatisfying nature of the ministry committed to his charge.<sup>5</sup> If we compare this verse with his earlier words,<sup>6</sup> we shall find the purpose of God and the condition of the people concurring to the same effect—they *could* not steadfastly confront the brightness which was settled in the face of Moses, nor *might* they do so. For the time of reformation was not come. They were, for the time then present, put to learn another lesson. The "perfect law of liberty" was not proclaimed, and could not be, to a people not yet made acquainted with their slavery as carnal and sold under sin. God was teaching them through Moses, but by means of ordinances which were designed to show them their true condition as born sinners in His sight, and without power to redeem themselves. The law was their schoolmaster to Christ. Faith did not come till Jesus came.<sup>7</sup> Israel's belief

<sup>5</sup> Alford's note on this passage, in which he points out and corrects the common error as to the time and object of the veiling of Moses, is interesting and valuable. <sup>6</sup> In verse 7.

<sup>7</sup> Gal. iii. 23, 24. That is *perfect* faith; which does not justify prospectively like that of Abraham, but by receiving in Christ the gift of righteousness finds present peace with God. Such faith must rest immediately upon its manifested Object. The relative conditions of the believer under law and under grace is seen on a

in Moses did not justify, but rather bound on them the hard fetters of an unfulfilled commandment. They could not see to the end of that which was to be done away.

Verses 14, 15. "But their minds were blinded," &c. A striking description is here given, and by a thoroughly competent witness, of the effect upon the natural mind of a divine revelation. Their eyes deceived their minds. They beheld a glory which they knew to be of God, but misinterpreted entirely what they saw; mistaking what was transitory only for God's end, and falsely inferring, from what they then beheld, that righteousness must be attained—if attainable at all—by the law which prohibited their sins. Such is the natural infatuation of a heart whose deceitfulness is always most fatally exercised upon itself.<sup>8</sup> Indwelling sin deceives by the commandment.<sup>9</sup> Thus the remembrance of the ancient promise to the fathers, and of the deliverance from Egypt which God wrought because of it, as well as of the multiplied mercies with which Jehovah's grace had since responded to their murmurings, forsook the heart of Israel in the presence of the specious impossibilities of law. The imperfect ordinances should no doubt have told to them a different tale, and led them onward in hope and desire

comparison of the doctrine of justification, as presented respectively in the Old Testament and the New. In the former, God's oracle is promissory on this point, "The just *shall live* by faith; in the latter, which contains the doctrine of Jesus Christ come in the flesh, it is testified that "by Him all who believe *are justified* from all things;" being justified in His blessed Name, who is now revealed as our righteousness. (Hab. ii. 4; Acts xiii. 38, 32.)

<sup>8</sup> Jer. xvii. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Rom. vii. 11.

toward the better things to come, of which they spake; and such was their effect on those among the people who were Israelites indeed, but the national heart was besotted by the gross delusion that a carnal ritual was God's final truth; and that men, though themselves mortal on account of sin, could find rest for their souls, under divine direction, through the works of their own hands.

And as with the generation which came forth from Egypt, so also with their children, after long centuries of an experience which might have disabused them of their dream. "We know that God spake to Moses," was their plea for rejecting God in person, when Jesus was among them as a minister of the circumcision, the end and witness of all national promise.<sup>1</sup> Nor have they been persuaded, though One has risen from the dead.<sup>2</sup> Going about still to establish their own righteousness, they refuse submission to the righteousness of God.<sup>3</sup> They search the Scriptures, but because the veil of their fathers' unbelief is still upon their hearts, they discern not Him of whom both law and prophets speak.<sup>4</sup> That which is flesh is flesh; and, until quickened by the Spirit, they can see in its true light neither their own sin nor the righteousness of God. The veil, which is done away in Christ, has dropped from Moses' face upon the nation's heart. What he sees is shut out from them, and thus a restricted and preparatory revelation has become to their blinded minds an argument of self-complacent unbelief.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John ix. 29; Rom. xv. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xvi. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. x. 3.

<sup>4</sup> John v. 39, 40.

<sup>5</sup> Luke ix. 30; Acts xxvi. 9.

They trust in Moses, while they disbelieve his words; having his person in a false admiration, and boasting in his name, while refusing credence to his written testimonies. Thus his words are to them darkness and not light; Moses is dead, and the expected Prophet not yet come. They see no longer any signs, and grope in the noontide of the gospel as in the blackest night. Moses is read and preached in every synagogue, but his blessing is untasted, and the curse still cleaves to the rebellious house, because the veil is yet upon their hearts.<sup>6</sup> Yet there is hope for that people in their latter end.

Verse 16. "Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away." The wrath is come upon them to the end, but there *is* an end.

The cry sent up by the spirit of Christ, long ages before they filled the measure of their sin,<sup>7</sup> shall be answered in His time. They shall be turned. Forgiveness is recorded for that nation in the dying prayer of Him whom in ignorance they slew. Their hearts shall turn to Jesus, when that day comes which the Lord hath made.<sup>8</sup> In that day shall Jacob's eyes be opened, and his ears unstopped. The time and manner of the fulfilling of the long-dormant national hope is not here intimated, but has been elsewhere fully shown by the same inspired witness, when expounding to us heedless and short-sighted Gentiles the economic mystery of God.<sup>9</sup>

Verse 17. "Now the Lord is that Spirit," &c. We may note, in the first place, that the opening words

<sup>6</sup> Num. vi. 22, *sq.*; 1 Thess. ii. 15, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Ps. lxxxv. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Ps. cxviii.

<sup>9</sup> *Notes on the Romans*, chap. xi. *passim*.

of this verse present a convertible preposition:<sup>1</sup> "The Lord is the Spirit," or, "The Spirit is the Lord." But this declaration of the essential oneness of the Son and the Spirit is incidental merely, the point of the apostle's teaching being rather to affirm the identity of Christ's *person* with the doctrine of the gospel. To understand this we must revert to verse 6, where the letter and the spirit are first placed in definitive opposition to each other. Having in the intervening verses reviewed the two ministrations in their contrasted features, and weighed them in the scales of everlasting truth, to the triumphant assertion of the excellency of the second over the first, he now hastens to place the better ministration and its blessings *objectively* before the heart and mind of the believer, by presenting the name and person of the Lord as the living substance of all that can be addressed by the Spirit of grace in the Scriptures to the ear of faith. It is as if he should say, "I have spoken of the opposition of the Spirit to the letter, and proved to you the excellency and abiding glory of the former. Now the Spirit of which I speak is the *Lord*, and the ministration of the Spirit is the ministration of *Christ*. For it is He to whom the Holy Ghost bears witness, and the proof that any professed ministration of God is really of the Spirit is that it leads the hearts of all who receive it immediately to Jesus." It is thus that *faith*, instead of languishing under the superadded weight of knowledge, is strengthened and refreshed by it; when doctrine is found still to lead to Christ personally, and not merely to things, earthly or heavenly, con-

<sup>1</sup> ὁ δὲ Κύριος τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν.

nected with His name. In a mind that is truly spiritual, a meditative handling of doctrine must always ripen into positive communion with the Lord.

"But," he continues, "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." The Spirit who *is* the Lord is, under an altered designation, the Spirit *of* the Lord. Divinely and essentially one, though personally distinct, Christ and the Spirit of Christ are, as might be expected, so spoken of in Scripture as to bring into prominence sometimes the former, but much oftener the latter of these inseparable truths.<sup>2</sup> Now the Spirit of the Lord is the Spirit of the *Son*, and where He is the reign of bondage has an end.<sup>3</sup> It is evident that the first intention of the apostle's words here, is to place in contrast the state of the believer, as sealed with the Spirit, and that of the "conclusion," who are still under the dominion of "the letter"—Jerusalem which now is being in bondage with her children, while our mother is Jerusalem above;<sup>4</sup> and humbly yet boldly to assert, and by faith to abide and walk in, the liberty with which Christ has made us free,<sup>5</sup> is in truth the main business of Christian life. But liberty of conscience in the sight of God is not the only effect of the presence of the Spirit of the *Lord*. His very title indicates the new relationship in which the captives which He has liberated stand for ever to Himself. He is indeed our own, and that in the unmeasured fulness of a love which knows no bound. But we are also *His*; now and for ever He remains the *Lord*; and they

<sup>2</sup> Rom. viii. 9–11 affords a striking example of this. *Conf. Notes on the Romans, in loc.*

<sup>3</sup> Rom. viii. 15, 16; Gal. iv. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Gal. iv. 25, 26; Phil. iii. 2, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Gal. v. 1; 1 Pet. iii. 15.

that own Him by this Name confess themselves His slaves. Hence spiritual liberty is bondage of another and more welcome sort.

To serve the living and true God is the end of our redemption by His Son. The whole question of Christian obedience stands in an immediate connexion with the doctrine of the Spirit, as here stated; our calling being now to serve no longer in the oldness of the letter, but in the newness of the Spirit. When that Spirit dwelt *with* the disciples, in the bodily presence of the Master, their actions were governed by the law of His lips, who, while He kept them in the Father's name, spake still in promise of yet better things; and the mission of the Spirit was the fulfilment of His words. Christ *in* us is even better than Christ with us, if only our faith respond truly to the doctrine which our lips confess, even as to be found in Him is the promised consummation of our hope.<sup>6</sup> Nor is it the sweet bondage of personal service only that is here involved, but the communion of saints, and all that pertains to the building and directing of God's spiritual house; the feeding of His flock, and the offering of that sacrifice of praise continually which is the prime function of those who already are a holy priesthood in the Lord. Entire freedom from all human ordinance, and absolute subjection to the rule of Him who is the Son over His own house, are the true conditions of all acceptable service in the Church of God.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> John xiv. 17, xvi. 7, *sq.*; Col. i. 27; Phil. iii. 9.

<sup>7</sup> In his relation to the world the believer is placed under an opposite sanction. He is to submit himself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. (1 Pet. ii. 13.) For a larger view of this

Verse 18. "Now we all, with open face," &c. To the general statement of the doctrine of this better ministration there is now added a description of its moral and practical effect on the believer, according to the measure of his faith. What may naturally strike us in the first place in considering this verse is the breadth of the apostle's language: "We *all*," &c. And this universality of effect is but a simple and necessary result of the operation of the moral power which produces it. None are Christ's who have not the Spirit of Christ; and as surely as Christ's almighty power will in the coming day transform the bodies of His people from mortality to life, and from dishonour to glory, so also does His Spirit now exert a morally transforming power on the character of all those who are truly His. The difference is this: we shall know in the instant that produces it our outward change; we are but slowly and imperfectly conscious of such an internal transformation as the apostle here describes. Joy in the Holy Ghost is its producing cause, and like the light in the face of Moses, it is discovered rather from without than from within.

It is a habit of the inspired writers, when stating or elucidating fundamental doctrine, to speak affirmatively of what ought to be the practical consequence of faith in Christ; while to aid us in that self-fashioning,<sup>8</sup> which is a chief moral attribute of God's true children, words of exhortation, of direction, of warning and encouragement, of commendation and

liberty, and of the regulating principle which should govern its exercise, both positively and relatively, see *Notes on First Corinthians*, chaps. xii-xiv.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Peter i. 14, 15.



rebuke, are abundantly furnished in the testimonies of the Spirit. Unbelief and carnal-mindedness are treated as exceptional phenomena in that which is descriptively "the household of *faith*," while communion of heart with the God of their worship is contemplated as their natural condition.<sup>9</sup> Believers then are said with open (or unveiled)<sup>1</sup> face to behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord. The inferred comparison is obvious between Moses, whose face was habitually veiled, removing his covering only when he either delivered God's message to His people, or went into the tabernacle to appear before Him, and the anointed disciple of Christ. With the latter there is no such change. Going in and out in the liberty of full salvation,<sup>2</sup> we find pasture everywhere in the light of God. We look, if guided by the Spirit, ever on the Lord, who is mirrored to us in all parts of the inspired word. If Moses is read, his words are to us, by the Spirit's exposition, the true word of *Christ*. That Spirit, as the witness of Jesus, discloses to us everywhere what Israel could discover nowhere, the true light of the glory of God. The former things receive new meanings, or, to speak more soundly, their true significance is now revealed to us by the sole true Interpreter of God. His word is to the spiritual man the genuine reflector of Himself. Grace and glory shine in all its pages, as they are turned for His children by the Teacher of all truth.

We see, but we are also seen. To see Jesus as the Spirit shows Him to us is to borrow something of His likeness; and as Moses was strange to the Israelites

<sup>9</sup> 1 John i. 3; Rom. viii. 14.     <sup>1</sup> ἀνακεκαλυμμένη προσώπῳ.

<sup>2</sup> John x. 9.

when divine light filled his countenance, so also is it with the true believer in comparison with other men. The world knoweth us not, even as it knew not Him who now a second time presents Himself to men in the persons of His saints. We are changed, and that progressively, according to the proportion of our faith. All are changed, though often the weak or world-loving believer bears still but too strong a resemblance to his former self. As the brief story of the first Adam, and his continued likeness, is "dying and to die,"<sup>3</sup> so life, with an ever-growing increase of its power and enjoyment, is the law of the new nature which is given us in Christ. The last Adam, the true image and glory of God, is before us in the living word of grace.

And if it be asked in what *special* sense the glory of the Lord is said to be thus displayed to the believer's gaze, the true answer, as I venture to affirm, is not that bright display which angels now look upon in heaven, and which is revealed also to the eye of faith,<sup>4</sup> but rather that manifesting of His personal excellency in the dying act of His obedience, which, more than all other acts and situations with which His blessed name can be connected, shows us who and what He is. The focus of the Saviour's glory is the CROSS; and thither must we go in spirit, not only as lost sinners to find absolution from our guilt, but as accepted saints to learn the unfathomed treasure of His love.

And as we feast by faith on Him who gives to us His own flesh to eat, we become assimilated morally to Him. They who thus "look to Jesus" follow also

<sup>3</sup> Gen. ii. 17, margin.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. ii. 9.

in His strength and light. And they who are growing in the grace and knowledge of their Saviour are becoming daily stranger to themselves and to the world. New habits follow from new aims; if we set the Lord before our hearts, we shall find rest to our souls only in the doing of His will.<sup>5</sup>

Our change is from "glory to glory." As all true believers have received out of the fulness of the Son of God, and grace answering to the Fount from whence it flows,<sup>6</sup> so also are they led progressively along the path of light. Glory is the end and also the beginning of their course; for they begin with the knowledge and confession of the Lord of glory, and He is Himself their way and end. Abiding in Him, and He in us the hope of glory, we pass on under the Spirit's guiding hand until changed, suddenly and for ever, into the outward likeness of the Lord. God had begun this work in these Corinthian saints, and although to any other eye than His there might seem but little progress on their parts, the work should prosper ultimately in the hands of Him who had begun it, to the praise of His faithfulness as well as grace.<sup>7</sup>

The language of this verse is very positive; but it may well be asked, Does it faithfully describe the experience of all saints? Are all conscious of this changeful growth, passing from strength to strength, and making increase with the increase of God? Alas! too often the honesty of his heart compels the self-judging Christian to disown his own participation in such progress, and to turn away disconsolately

<sup>5</sup> Matt. xi. 29; John xiii. 17.

<sup>6</sup> John i. 16.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. i. 8, 9.

from this glowing description of his better self. Back-sliding and declension may rather be the answer of his conscience than the joy of victorious conflict. And if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Yet let not such despair. For them too were these words written, though for a time the evil heart of unbelief may have shown itself in strength again as the effect of their carelessness of walk. But their very sorrow is their hope; since if they were not really "of God" they would not thus lament their distance from Himself. Their distress is the form in which the Spirit applies to their consciences His invitation to repent and turn again to Him who does not change. If we return to the Lord, He will return also to us. He is the same for ever, and does not fail to answer to His Name. Insincerity and doubt are His aversion, but repentant confidence is His delight. If the love of other things has for a while estranged us from the true rest of our souls, the mirror of God will faithfully reflect upon our consciences the reality of our state. Instead of Christ and His blessedness, we shall see *ourselves* only in the word, and the misery of self-upbraiding will be our inward experience, instead of that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. For the veil is on our heart until it turn again to Him. But He waits still to be gracious, and is the swift and effectual comforter of them that are of contrite heart; for He is the *Healer* as well as Saviour of such as show their wounds to Him.<sup>8</sup>

These remarks will seem to some digressive, but

<sup>8</sup> Isa. lvii. 17; Ps. cxlvii. 3; Heb. xii. 13.

they may also peradventure meet the eyes of others to whom they may, by the grace of God, be seasonable meat. I close this chapter by repeating, that for all that are Christ's the apostle's words hold good, and that to prove them and enjoy their precious meaning, we need only to direct the eye of our faith to Him of whom he speaks. If a worldly-minded Christian is an unfaithful likeness of his Master, it is because he is not habitually "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord." It is "from the Lord the Spirit"<sup>9</sup> that the moral change proceeds of which he speaks, and while we grieve that Holy Spirit, our inward experience must be darkness, and not light.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>9</sup> ἀπὸ Κυρίου πνεύματος, of which the marginal translation is "of the Lord the Spirit." I prefer "from," both as a more exact representative of ἀπὸ (as in the clause immediately preceding), and because it seems to express more distinctly the doctrinal significance of the phrase.

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iv. 30; v. 8-10.

## CHAPTER IV.

HAVING fully demonstrated in the foregoing chapter the excellency of the present ministry of grace, and magnified his own office as an inspired messenger of God, he proceeds now to open still further the nature and fulness of the gospel committed to his trust; and this he does in the tone not of an authorized teacher of divine doctrine merely, but of one who so *lived* the truth of which he spake, as to find experimental description the most ready and effective mode of conveying to us, who read his words, the sublimest and most precious verities of God.

Verse 1. "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not." One effect of his subjective knowledge of the grace of God we have had already stated;<sup>1</sup> we now have another, bearing less directly upon his public testimony, but which acquaints us with the secret moral power through which patience wrought in him her perfect work. Let us always remember that Paul is before us continually under a twofold aspect. He speaks first as a vessel of sovereign mercy, and secondly as a highly honoured partaker of the afflictions of Christ, for His body's sake, which is the Church.<sup>2</sup> But though he is so constantly before our view in the latter of these

<sup>1</sup> Chap. iii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Verse 15; Col. i. 24.

characters, and obliged often to repeat at length his apostolic claims, it is in the deep and abiding recollection of the former that the true spring of all his constancy is found. Less than the least of all saints, in his own self-searching estimation,<sup>3</sup> there had been given to him this ministry by the same gracious will which had stopped him when intently speeding on the way of death, and revealed to him the Light of life and peace.<sup>4</sup> While therefore his heart swells with a just elation as he thinks of the incomparable glory of his ministry, he remembers the hole from whence he had himself been digged,<sup>5</sup> and pays adoring tribute to that mercy which he had personally received. And the mercy thus remembered is his confidence and stay throughout his course. The Lord, who had put such an one into the ministry, was his surety that he should run on without fainting and with final triumph to the end of his appointed race.<sup>6</sup>

Verse 2. "But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty,"<sup>7</sup> &c. As "glory is the pre-eminent character of the ministration of the Spirit, so "shame" is the fruit and lasting badge of all the evil-working which opposes it; and as a divinely-prospered minister of the grace in which he stands, he here freely opens to us the secret of his great and continual success. Standing by faith as a new and risen man in Christ, he has renounced all methods of the flesh. For him they lie buried with his sins where Jesus lay. To please God, as a faithful servant of Jesus

<sup>3</sup> Eph. iii. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Prov. xiv. 12; Acts xxvi. 9-13, *sq.*

<sup>5</sup> Is. li. 1.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Tim. i. 12, *sq.*; Phil. iii. 12-14.

<sup>7</sup> τῆς αἰσχύνῃς—"shame," as the margin more correctly renders it.

Christ, and in the enabling power of His sufficiency, is now his care, and not to seek favour for himself. Like the Master whom he served, he received not honour from men.<sup>8</sup> Bent only upon winning souls and keeping them for Christ, he uses a better wisdom than his own, discarding utterly from his ministry all artifices by means of which men's minds may be captivated or their favour won. He was *God's* minister, and in the handling of His word he was careful only that his own ideas or imaginings should neither prompt nor decorate his speech. To speak in God's gospel as he *ought* to speak, required more than a willing exercise on his part of the gift within him. It needed, and needs still, that instant supply of the Spirit's grace which is God's answer only to dependent prayer.<sup>9</sup> His mission was to preach *the truth*. The gaining of converts was to be looked for as the result of faithful testimony, according to the sovereign good pleasure of Him who calls men by His gospel, but was not to be the *first* thought of His messengers, but rather to show themselves approved to God.<sup>1</sup>

Deeply impressed by a sense of the divine character of his ministry, Paul dreaded nothing more than its being leavened by any of the histrionic shifts of human rhetoric. As one who gloried only in the cross of Christ, the holy simplicity of his walk should commend the plainness of speech with which he gave bold utterance to the whole counsel of God. There were many, as his own words have assured us, who even at that early hour of the day of grace were vainly endeavouring to make flesh the associate

<sup>8</sup> John v. 41.

<sup>9</sup> Eph. vi. 19, 20.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 15.



of the Spirit's work;<sup>2</sup> and it was his anxious care that from such blame his own service should be free. As Christ's apostle, he was not *seeking* truth (as others might profess to be), but openly declaring it. Philosophy is man acting upon man; the stronger and more elevated mind essaying to direct and benefit the weaker and more ignorant. Not so the gospel. It is the commanding voice of God, speaking in Christ to men universally, and speaking of His grace indeed, but also of His *will*. His commandment is eternal life, to those who by faith obey Him in the gospel of His Son.<sup>3</sup> Now God sent His Son into the world, not to amend or cure mortality, but to supplant it by a better life.<sup>4</sup> Hence His gospel is no answer to men's natural wishes, nor helper to their previous aims. It undertakes not to restore man to himself or elevate him to a higher natural level, but to liberate him *from* himself, and from his fetters as the slave of sin and death, by bestowing on him a new name and nature in the *Lord*.

It is at the *conscience*, therefore, that the Spirit aims His arrow of conviction, when publishing the gospel of the grace of God. To *every* human conscience<sup>5</sup> there is addressed by God's ministers an intelligible message from above. God speaks to His creature as He knows him, and by the light of His word reveals him to himself in the naked helplessness of his condition, when confronted with the God who made him and with whom he has to do. Men are not humoured by the Spirit into an acceptance of the grace of God. They are warned, they are

<sup>2</sup> Chap. ii. 17.

<sup>3</sup> John xii. 50; 1 John iii. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Jno. x. 10; 1 Jno. iv. 9.

<sup>5</sup> πρὸς πᾶσαν συνείδησιν ἀνθρώπων.

invited, and at the will of Him who bears effectual witness to His Son, as many as are pre-ordained to life eternal are *drawn* also, by the winning cords of love, to Jesus as the welcome refuge of their souls.<sup>6</sup> The saving grace of God is openly declared to all, and all who are willing to draw nigh to Him are welcomed in Christ with the cordiality of perfect love; but nature has neither heart nor eye for such a love as God commends to us in the cross of His own Son.

Verse 3. "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." In an earlier chapter he has distributed the hearers of the gospel under the two designations of "the saved," and "them that perish."<sup>7</sup> And now that he has declared so distinctly the universal aspect and bearing of the ministry of grace, he accounts, in this and the following verse, for the solemn fact of its rejection by the world. Truth is manifested to the consciences of both Jew and Gentile, and yet the *gospel*—or good message of God—is hid from the majority of them that hear. It was found that but few hearkened diligently to what was equally addressed to all, and that even when conscience was pricked, the heart too often still remained unmoved, or at least unconquered, by the open and fervent pleadings of the Spirit of grace. So long as God kept silence, men had seemed eager in their search for truth; but now that He was sending forth His embassy of peace, and revealing wisdom in its rich perfection in the person of His Christ, the tidings, though inaugurated by ostensive signs and tokens of the omnipotent goodness of Him who

<sup>6</sup> John vi. 44, 45.

<sup>7</sup> *Ante*, page 55.

sent them, fell flat upon the general ear. Was, then, this result to be attributed solely to the perverseness of nature, or was there besides some positive and decisive antagonistic power at work? The apostle deals plainly with this question in the present passage, first by reiterating the solemn declaration previously made, that the rejectors of the gospel are "the lost," and then exposing clearly to our view the agency of that "power of darkness" by means of which the light of God is debarred an entrance into the human soul.

Verse 4. "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not," &c. The title here given to Satan is the boldest and fullest admission of his existing power over man that the Scriptures contain. By the Just One he had been styled the "*prince* of this world,"<sup>8</sup> when He prepared to yield Himself into his hands, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. Having first proved Himself the alone effective denier of the devil's right and power over men, by fulfilling His course as the gracious Healer of them that were oppressed by him, He thus—because Israel would none of Him—transfers judicially His own just title to the stranger, whose lying voice they followed rather than His own. And now that the full gospel of saving grace is proclaimed among men by the commandment of the everlasting God, the invisible opposer of the truth is recognized by the Spirit as the *god* also of this world. The point of distinction is as clear as it is solemn. By rejecting the *Man* approved of God, the world showed itself ready to receive His rival.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> John xiv. 30.

<sup>9</sup> John v. 43; 2 Thess. ii. 9.

By refusing Him who now speaks to men from heaven by His Son, the "crooked and perverse generation"<sup>1</sup> of the present age of grace give evidence, by their aversion from the way of life, that their minds are governed by another god. For he to whom men yield their wills is entitled to be called their god. The only true God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, calls now on all men to repent and turn to Him. The father of lies, on the other hand, dissuades men from welcoming the glad tidings of salvation, by flattering them in their own imaginations. Like Israel, the Gentiles also have a blinded mind, and although in them the spirit of unbelief is fostered by other means, it is in both essentially the same natural hatred of the light of God.<sup>2</sup>

Satan is fitly called the god of the present age, because what began with rejected mercy will end in the temporary enthronement of iniquity in the place ordained eternally for Christ. From the first men mocked the Holy Ghost,<sup>3</sup> and the close of God's patience with their hard thoughts and speeches against His truth will be the consenting homage of the nations to the beast, to whom the dragon gives his power and his seat—a seat offered in vain to Jesus by the tempter, and conferred on his willing dupe by the destroyer.<sup>4</sup> As to the methods of this blinding, they are as various as the lusts of men on which he practises, but *self-trust*, in some form, is

<sup>1</sup> τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου. This expression is found here only, and has evident reference to the limited age or period of divine long-suffering. In John xiv. the word κόσμος is used, which carries with it a moral rather than a temporal force.

<sup>2</sup> John iii. 20; Rom. i. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Acts ii. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Luke iv. 5, *sq.*; Rev. xiii. 2, *sq.*

universally the source of that unbelief which disallows the glory of the Saviour. And this is made very manifest by the apostle's language in this verse, in which the aim of the god of this world is said to be the intercepting and diverting from the hearts of men "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

There are two senses in which Christ is in Scripture called "the image of God:" first, as the incarnate revealer of divinity to man; and secondly, as the manifestation to the whole creation, whether earthly or heavenly, of its appointed Head. In the former sense, we find the apostle in another place describing Him as "the image of the *invisible* God,"<sup>5</sup> and in verse 6 of this chapter we shall have this aspect of the mystery of godliness presented to us more distinctly, but in the words which we are now considering, we have to do rather with the latter. It is "the glory of Christ," as the last Adam, the true "Image of God," which is here asserted as a chief feature in that "gospel" which the world rejects. That God has "*glorified His Son Jesus*," was among the earliest announcements of the Spirit, by the apostle of the circumcision;<sup>6</sup> while to the Gentiles it was declared, by their appointed messenger, that a day had been appointed in which God would judge the world in righteousness, by "the *Man* whom He had ordained," but in whose Name, as the crucified Son of God, salvation is now freely preached to all who will believe.<sup>7</sup>

It is by the setting forth of Christ in glory, as the

<sup>5</sup> Col. i. 15; John i. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Acts iii. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Acts xvii. 31.; xiii. 38-48.

one acceptable Man, that the opposition both of Satan and of those in whom he works is especially provoked. For it is to the first a decisive token of the nullifying of his works,<sup>8</sup> since in the person of the Son of man the Seed of the first victim of his lie looks down in judgment on him from the throne of God; while to the latter it is a formal and definitive disallowing of all natural right or claim to God-ward, since the first Adam has been superseded by the last. Ever since sin found entrance into the world, the title originally conferred on the first man was lapsed and vacant until Jesus came. For a sinner is no just image of His Maker; and by the Spirit's testimony all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Fallen nature is by another description "dead in sins."<sup>9</sup>

*Worthiness* was born when *Christ* was born; and the incarnate Son of God, who made the Father manifest in His own ever-blessed presence, when found in fashion as a man, is the natural inheritor in righteousness of that title which the first man lost through sin. He is in truth and sanctity God's image and glory, even as He is the beginning also of His creation. Creation's *beginning* is its *Head*.<sup>1</sup> *Before* the Adam who prefigured Him,<sup>2</sup> both by divinity of nature and as the true Object of divine counsel, He supersedes at His incarnation the historical "first man." His *Son* by the mystery of His generation, He is Himself the light and only life of men,<sup>3</sup> and is now self-declared as both the beginning and the end.<sup>4</sup> This Jesus was and is *essentially*, and death and resurrection work no

<sup>8</sup> 1 John iii. 8.

<sup>9</sup> Eph. ii. 1-5.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. iii. 14. ἀρχή appears to have this double meaning here.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. v. 14.

<sup>3</sup> John i. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Rev. i. 8, cxxi. 13.

change in Him or in His nature. He that descended is the same also that ascended.<sup>5</sup> But although this personal glory belonged to Him as His natural birth-right, and even in the days of His flesh its brightness shone, though indistinctly, to the still beclouded minds of His elect, it is by His re-ascension to the place from whence He came, and the sending down from thence of the promised Comforter, that His name and righteous titles are published openly to the world, with a general summons to the nations for the obedience of faith.

Now to confess the Son of man once lifted up and smitten to the death, as the bearer in His own body of their sins, and now glorified upon the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens as the meritorious holder of a right both human<sup>6</sup> and divine, is the wisdom and the joy of God's elect. But it makes a demand upon man's heart and conscience which nothing but a divinely given faith can meet. To the natural man the preaching of the cross is foolishness

<sup>5</sup> Eph. iv. 10; John iii. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Christ's exaltation is declared to be the reward of His humiliation and obedience unto death, and that the Lamb was slain is the chief burden of the ceaseless song in heaven. But the eternal celebration of His acts and sufferings are but a commemoration of His *personal* worthiness. The Lord's obedience, when as Jesus of Nazareth He walked "approved of God" on earth, was that of a very man; but *who* was the Man? Analogies all fail in the presence of perfection. If the first Adam had abode in innocency, earth would still have been his place; but the last Adam, though He served His service as the Son of the first, wrought according to the excellency of His person as *the Word made flesh*. He did human duties, but in a super-human manner. His merit therefore as "the man Christ Jesus" entitles Him not to earth only, but to what is above earth—to heaven—to creation in its full extent, of which He is by original birthright the true Head.

instead of wisdom, and dishonour instead of glory. For it calls for the abdication of all that man naturally either trusts or glories in, and lays in the dust of death that virtue and "dignity of nature" which haunt men's imaginations incessantly as visions of an impossible fulfilment. Until the grass and its flower have been withered by the breath of God, the gospel as the seed of life eternal may fall, but does not germinate effectively within the heart of man.<sup>7</sup> So long as he is unregenerate, he is never more alien in the spirit of his mind to the true doctrine of the cross than when in his most religious mood. For whatever moral or religious convictions and aspirations are operating among men, short of the pure faith of the gospel, they rest alike on the assumption, tacit or avowed, of an inherent *personal* sufficiency. Defect, weakness, and even sin, may be and are acknowledged, in a certain sense; but the ruinous bankruptcy of a sinner's state is in heart denied, and therefore Christ crucified is denied also in reality, even where outwardly and perhaps even ostentatiously acknowledged. For the doctrine of the cross is void of all true meaning on any less assumption than the irremediable ruin and death, in God's sight, of the natural man. What the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven seeks to show to man, in the testimony of the gospel, is the double recovery both of their lost *God* and their lost *selves* in the glorified person of the Lord Jesus Christ. They know that by searching they cannot find out God; they know also, if they will but own the truth, that they are not intelligible to themselves. Satan on the other hand endeavours,

<sup>7</sup> 1 Peter i. 23-25.



with a success limited by God's sovereign will, to counteract and frustrate this, through his manifold and ever-changing methods of deceit, by means of which mankind in general are kept under the double delusion (chief and most deadly of the fruits of sin); first, that if God's favour is to be enjoyed at all, it must be as an answer in some sort to our merit; and, secondly, that the title and conditions of the life to come must be sought for, not in Him, but in themselves. While therefore pure atheism is altogether a rare and exceptional form of unbelief, false religion is its commonest type; and of all its forms, until that last Antichrist appear who gathers all false creeds and erring doctrines to himself, as to their common centre, the latest and most fatal is that which on a false theory of redemption builds its dream of general security, and giving to carnal presumption the name of Christian faith, sees only in the gospel of Christ's glory an ampler license of the natural will.<sup>8</sup> Such never see "God's image" in the living truth which they profess to know; for they seek only in His gospel for themselves and their own things, and their works and ways will be found in their result according to the motive and power which produced them. Worship, though rendered ostensibly to God, if it be not in the Spirit, is refused by Him whose name is thus dishonoured, and assigned by the Holy Ghost to the god of this age, the spirit which now worketh in the children of disobedience.<sup>9</sup>

Verse 5. "For we preach not ourselves," &c.—a constant peculiarity of true spiritual ministry. Like the forerunner of the Lord, at His first coming, so

<sup>8</sup> Jude 3, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Eph. ii. 2.

they whom His Spirit now fills with the message of His grace, are a voice only crying in the great world's wilderness. Their message is Jesus crucified and glorified, and presently again to come. But the pith of their testimony is that Christ Jesus is *the Lord*. If Paul speaks of *his* gospel, it is not because he is in any way its subject; as a man he occupies no exceptional place, but glories in that cross which attests both his condemnation in himself, and his eternal justification in the Saviour. If he differs—or seems to himself to differ—from other men, it is only in the profounder estimate he formed of his own vileness, in the presence of the Lord who had redeemed him. But while he, and those who were like-minded, were thus hidden in their message, yet by their faithful labours in the gospel, they declared themselves to be the willing slaves, for Jesus' sake, of those whom they served and honoured as bearers of the name of Christ. The moral force which upheld him in this often thankless ministry of love, is more fully shown as we proceed. He is now occupied rather with the engrossing subject of his ministry.

Verse 6. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts,"<sup>1</sup> &c. Nothing can be clearer or more impressive than this language in its explicit reference of all true conversion to the immediate will and power of God. Our reception of the light of life is affirmed to be an effect of His own absolute and original act. God

<sup>1</sup> The best MSS. (including *Cod. Sin.*) read *λάμψει*, instead of *λάμψαι*. If this change be adopted, we must translate—"God who said, Light shall shine out of darkness," &c. This reading restores also to *εἰπὼν* its more usual sense.

created light: He quickens the dead souls of His elect, bestowing on them, in and through Christ, a new and different life from that which death now claims because of sin. Out of darkness He called natural light; into the darkness of a heart which in its unregenerate state is but a chamber of spiritual death, God sends a light which is no other than Himself. "He shone<sup>2</sup> in our hearts," the apostle says; even that God who is light, and in whom is no darkness at all. It is in these terms that the quickening operation of the Holy Ghost is here described. God Himself shines, and in that light His children see the light of life as it looks on them, in the perfection of both grace and truth, in the face or person<sup>3</sup> of Jesus Christ. God, who is a Spirit and invisible, is made palpable as well as visible to our faith, in the form and substance of the Word made flesh.<sup>4</sup> We may note, before proceeding, the vivid contrast presented in this verse to the descriptive statement of the former ministration.<sup>5</sup> The face of Moses shone with glory, but Moses was not personally glorious. The veil was placed over that which Israel saw, because Israel's true Hope was not yet manifested. The servant said, "Who is Moses?" It is the Son who at His coming says, "I am."

As already intimated,<sup>6</sup> we have in the words now before us a counterpart of the doctrine stated in verse 4, since it is not as the just claimant of all creature homage that Christ is here presented, but as the gracious and ever-blessed expression and com-

<sup>2</sup> ἔλαμψεν.    <sup>3</sup> ἐν προσώπῳ I.X.    <sup>4</sup> 1 John i. 1-3.

<sup>5</sup> Chap. iii. 7, 14-16.    <sup>6</sup> *Ante*, page 101.

municator of God's love to His elect. The answer given by the Lord to Philip, when with longing heart but purblind eye he was seeking vainly for the Father, beyond the unsuspected limit of His presence, comes naturally to our minds when meditating the apostle's words.<sup>7</sup> All that man can ever know of God is presented to him in the person of His incarnate Son. Hence, "that I may know *Him*," is the still unsatisfied desire of the most advanced believer, whose heart, long freed from the burden of an evil conscience, through the knowledge of Christ's finished work upon the cross, runs onward for the prize of his high calling, and, as a saint, counts nothing gained till Christ Himself be won, and His faint but true pursuer is found at last in Him.<sup>8</sup> What speeds the soul upon this race is not religious imagination, but a meditative and yet active *faith*, which never forgets that the end of our salvation is to know our Saviour, and that the magnitude of all that mighty sum of promise which places earth and heaven alike within the lawful range of Christian expectation, is healthfully appreciable only through direct communion with Him, in whose name and by whose merit all His things are made our own. For if we have obtained an inheritance, it is not *with* Him only, but first *in* Him also; and to know Him is not only better than to know His things, but is the essential condition of our holding, with safety to ourselves that title to universal inheritance which is a part of the believer's boast. The Corinthians forgot this, and the consequences are depicted in their history for our warning and instruction. Spiritual

<sup>7</sup> John xiv. 9-11.<sup>8</sup> Phil. iii. 8-14.

elation—the natural effect of unsanctified spiritual knowledge—was succeeded by deep spiritual humiliation. Had their knowledge been of Christ personally, instead of the displayed treasures of His grace, as their minds eyed them in the Spirit's doctrinal inventory of His wealth and theirs, they could not have miscarried as they did. May they be our beacon now, and not our judges in the coming day!

Let us carefully remember that such knowledge as Paul here describes can never be attained by mental effort. It is by companying with the Lord, in the spirit of a worshipping intimacy which finds and tastes the kindness of perfect human friendship in the very presence of Almighty God, that disciples grow into their Master's likeness, and learn the manner of the God with whom they have to do. For it is in the perfection of manhood that the fulness of the Godhead is in Christ revealed to our faith, and according to the form which He who is otherwise invisible has taken for our sakes, is the knowledge of His glory now made known to our *hearts*. Men are the objects and receivers of His mighty love, and it is a Man who both brings God down to be the minister of our need, and, as our effectual Redeemer and Intercessor, lifts us up in righteousness: not to such fellowship as Adam knew with his Creator, who descended to converse with him in Eden, but to that which is proper to a child with the Father who begat him, and such as may be known (and unspeakable as yet be one day worthily expressed) by a full vessel of mercy, in the presence of the God who has both formed and blessed it at His will. It is as the teacher of "Jesus Christ," according to the fulness and glory of His name and

person, that the Spirit both nurses and strengthens the affections and the minds of such as are, by the power of His calling and His quickening word,<sup>9</sup> distinctively “of God.” To enlarge further on what is contained in this brief declaration of the Apostle—to show how God’s glory in Christ reveals its gracious brightness through the ever-changing circumstances of our pilgrim way, familiarizing gradually the souls of His true children with His holiness, His power, His faithfulness and all-considering mercy and compassion, would here be out of place. What God is must be learnt through fellowship with God; and such fellowship, in the enabling power of the Spirit, is the one sure symptom of a growing *faith*. Now the property of faith is to seek for and find in another what is known not to exist within itself. If then we are led of the Spirit, we shall not only, as believers, have the Father in the Son as the supreme object of our faith and hope, but even now be ourselves found also in Christ, as we taste the sweetness of His love which passeth knowledge, after having been lost and irremediably ruined in person, in nature, and in name.<sup>1</sup>

Verse 7. “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels,” &c. Such then is the nature and effect of the ministry with which these messengers of God were charged. Themselves founded in mercy, and enriched in Christ with an experimental knowledge of the more abundant life,<sup>2</sup> they were in the world,

<sup>9</sup> Jas. i. 18.

<sup>1</sup> Irremediably, that is to say, so far as nature and her power are concerned. The change from flesh to spirit is a real supplanting of the old thing by the new. This point, so material to the solid peace of the believer, is more fully treated by the apostle in the following chapter.

<sup>2</sup> John x. 10.

out of which they knew themselves redeemed, as the witness and power of deliverance to others. But though the ministry be glorious, its instruments are base. Of themselves they can say no other than their father said, when searched by the presence of the God who blessed him and with whom he had to do.<sup>3</sup> But in addition to that self-annihilating consciousness which is proper to all who in their mortal bodies taste experimentally the knowledge and presence of the living God, it was necessary that they to whom this ministry was entrusted, and especially one in whom the power of God wrought and displayed itself so mightily as it did in Paul, should undergo a course of training, and be subject to such experiences as should make it not only evident to themselves, but visible also to others, that if by their ministry an excellent power was discovering its effects, that power was indeed of God, and not of man. Power in excess of what He puts forth ordinarily in His servants must be accompanied by corresponding tokens of personal insufficiency in the earthen vessel which contains it. Paul, like his Master, should be despised in his person, as well as rejected in his ministry, by the wise and prudent of this world. The strength which upheld and sustained him, under the otherwise crushing weight of his manifold labours and afflictions, should bear clear testimony to its Source. If he endured without fainting, it was because of Him whose mercy compassed him and held him up; and while this was understood by all who were likeminded, and in their measure walked by the same rule, the recital of his trials which he here

<sup>3</sup> Gen. xviii. 27.

makes to these forgetful children of his toil, is at the same time a melody of praise to God.

Verses 8, 9. "Troubled on every side," &c. The first of these verses seems to relate chiefly to his inward trials, the second to those which came upon him from without. The tribulation which is promised as the common burden of discipleship was in his case multiplied according to the prominency assigned to him as a chosen vessel of the Lord. In *everything*<sup>4</sup> he was straitened; as an ambassador of Christ he was the enemy's especial mark, and all that could be devised by the power of darkness against the ministry of light and life was practised to impede his course. But if the afflictions of the gospel were abundant, and his spirit often groaned beneath its burden, he was never straitened in the Lord. His consolations were ever in excess of his afflictions, even when these last were at their height. For in Christ he had both liberty and peace, and in the growing knowledge of His love, the troubles which opposed him were endured not with patience only but with joy.

"Perplexed," &c. If God be, as He is, a present help in trouble to all who put their trust in Him, so when His servants are involved in doubt and uncertainty as to the shaping of their future course, He is their light and refuge still. That an apostle should be allowed to feel embarrassed or perplexed may seem a stranger fact than his endurance of affliction; but we are taught more convincingly, by these experimental revelations, the nature of true spiritual ministry. An apostle's knowledge never either formed

<sup>4</sup> ἐν παντί.



or cleared his path. He walked by *faith*. Hence, not unfrequently, both doubt and harassing perplexity were suffered to visit this much-tried servant of the Lord. *God's* future, as presented in His counsels, and unveiled to him by the Spirit, was unclouded light; his *own* was darkness often and uncertainty, whether it related to his personal safety or the order and measure of his work. He has confessed his insufficiency to think or plan; and if perplexities were allowed, as they often were, to thicken round his path and to press distressfully upon his spirit amid the general triumph of his course, it was both to remind himself, and by his confession to show openly to others, that safety and continuance are in the ways of God alone. If perplexed, therefore, he was not in despair.<sup>5</sup> If doubts arrested him they threw him back upon his Strength,<sup>6</sup> and turned only to the multiplying of his peace by casting him more absolutely upon the loving care of God. For he warred not at his own charge; he knew in whom he trusted, and had within him an assurance that in nothing he should be ashamed.<sup>7</sup> Thus when Paul stood confounded for a while at the infatuation of the churches in Galatia, his mistrust gave place to confidence when he cast this burden also on the Lord.<sup>8</sup> And if a hesitation of another kind beset him as he lay at Rome in bonds, a willing prisoner of Jesus Christ, it turned only to a stronger assurance, and a more abundant measure of blessing, to himself and to those who in their time of trial share his faith,

<sup>5</sup> Or utterly perplexed—*ἐξαπορούμενοι*.

<sup>6</sup> Ps. xxvii. 11-14.

<sup>7</sup> Phil. i. 20; 2 Tim. i. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Gal. iv. 20, v. 10.

when he left his doubts for their solution to the pleasure of the Master whom he served.<sup>9</sup>

So also with his outward trials. That he should be "persecuted" was a thing of course to one whose life and walk were *Christ*.<sup>1</sup> But if persecuted, he was not forsaken; the trials of the servant must fall short of those which visited his Lord. All forsook the Saviour in the hour of His desolation, but Paul never was left quite alone. If removed from human aid or sympathy, the Lord stood by him, whether in his dungeon or before the judges of unrighteousness. "Cast down," he must be, lest by any means he might be tempted to suppose that he could stand in any power of his own; "destroyed," he could not be, for his soul was in the keeping of his Saviour; nor even to the killing of his body could the enemy prevail, until his course was ended, and the work allotted to him by his Lord was done. If left by the haters of the truth for dead, he is presently a living comforter again among its friends;<sup>2</sup> and how it fared with him in Asia, and with what result, we have already seen.<sup>3</sup>

Verse 10. "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our bodies."<sup>4</sup> It is important to remember that if apostolic experiences are peculiar, they are so in measure rather than in kind; for they suffered, through the more abundant energy of the Spirit which sustained them, in and for the

<sup>9</sup> Phil. i. 13, *sq.*; ii. 23.

<sup>1</sup> John xv. 20; 1 Cor. xi. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xiv. 19, 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ante*, page 11, *sq.*

<sup>4</sup> *Cod. Sin.*, with other MSS. of note, omits the word *κυρίου*, and has *τοῖς σώμασι* in the latter clause.

“common faith.” This is exemplified clearly in the language of this verse and the following. By the words now before us the apostle seems to mean that as Christ once suffered for us in the flesh, so faith—accepting the new standing of a dead and risen man in Christ—puts on the Lord, as a companion of His patience, and expects only what He found in the world which once rejected Him. The believer becomes, therefore, as a *follower of Jesus*, exposed here to a continual death. But quite irrespective of the external afflictions of the gospel, this language has an obvious moral application to the Christian, as a simple holder of the faith. The life and activity of our natural body is to the eye a contradiction of the *cross*, for we are dead with Christ. But we walk by faith and not by sight, and so of all believers it is true that “the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.”<sup>5</sup> Yet, for an experimental verifying of our profession, the Spirit who has His dwelling in God’s saints leads each and all of them through processes of personal trial; and this exercise of faith results in the more or less abundant manifestation of the life also of Jesus in their mortal bodies. They live, but not they; they are crucified, and yet alive; the life which they live in the flesh being lived by the faith of the Son of God.<sup>6</sup> Dwelling in His love, they are proportionately fashioned to His likeness. For the energy of spiritual life is proved by its practical mastery over the will of the flesh—its ability to carry about and use in all its members, to the glory of God, a body under which meanwhile it groans. And this, which in its nature

<sup>5</sup> Rom. viii. 10.<sup>6</sup> Gal. ii. 20.

is common to all in whom Christ really lives, was especially manifested in the apostles, and beyond perhaps all other men in Paul, as appears in what follows.

Verse 11. "For we which *live*," &c. It is by the knowledge of Christ, and the power of His resurrection, that the Spirit leads believers into the fellowship of His sufferings, and renders them conformable unto His death;<sup>7</sup> and such conformity becomes visible in its effects, according to the greater or less measure of fervent devotedness which marks the individual characters of those who partake in common of the grace of God. *Much* love is the offspring of an active and discerning faith.<sup>8</sup> It was for Jesus' sake that Paul and they who like him lived in the enjoyed blessedness of Him and of His love, were always delivered unto death. And again it is written as a common utterance of the Spirit, on behalf of those whose calling is to follow their Redeemer through tribulation into glory: "For Thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."<sup>9</sup> The experimental proof may be exceptional, and apostles might in their generation seem to stand almost alone, as willing sufferers for Christ;<sup>1</sup> but the calling and moral liability is for all who are of God. Nor should they who witness their own death to sin and life to God, by confessing the name of Jesus crucified and glorified, esteem it a strange thing if, in the world which slew the Lord of glory, they should walk, as His followers, in jeopardy of

<sup>7</sup> Phil. iii. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Luke vii. 47; 1 Tim. i. 15, *sq.*

<sup>9</sup> Rom. viii. 36.

<sup>1</sup> See *Notes on First Corinthians*, iv. 9.

life.<sup>2</sup> But if we have the sentence of death in ourselves, it is for the more effectual manifestation of the life of Jesus in our mortal flesh; and as the deadly enmity of man to God was drawn out most decidedly when Jesus most distinctly spoke and acted as the Living One, so the world's hatred fastens ever on the servants, in proportion to the simplicity and constancy with which they glory in His cross.

Verse 12. "So then death worketh in us, but life in you." It is a mistake, I believe, to attach, as some would do, an ironical meaning to these words. Irony is indeed a weapon which Paul wields upon occasion with a masterly effect,<sup>3</sup> but this is not his present mood, nor is there anything in the topic he is handling to call it forth. He is speaking of his ministry; describing not its source only and its character, together with its subjective effect upon himself and his fellow-labourers, but its fruits also, as exemplified in those whom he addressed. He views these Corinthian believers, not now as erring and refractory disciples, but as living trophies of his toil as an apostle of the faith. Death wrought<sup>4</sup> in him; for the more abundant energy of Christ within him made him and his true yoke-fellows a spectacle of weakness for the gospel's sake.<sup>5</sup> But that gospel was, to all who heard it with a willing ear, the power of God unto salvation, and they were witnesses of this as well as he. *Life* wrought in them. By Paul's travail they had been brought effectively to their new and hea-

<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter iv. 12, 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Infra*, chap. xi.

<sup>4</sup> It is immaterial to the moral force of this passage whether *ἐπεργήται* be taken in a middle or a passive sense.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 9, *sq.*

venly birth. If spiritually they were languishing, they were not dead, and the life which was in them was now putting forth more energy than when he wrote his earlier epistle. But the question here is not the measure of their personal devotedness or likemindedness to Christ, but the palpable evidence which as believers, by the grace of God, they afforded of the truth and power of his own apostleship.

Verse 13. "We having the same spirit of faith," &c. What spirit of faith? There is indeed but one, which, given by measure to the prophets, but without measure to the Son, has put forth utterances in His earlier testimonies whose ripe sense is for us and not for them.<sup>6</sup> While faithfully portraying what the inspired writers felt, in whose hearts they were first indited, they are fitted by the same Spirit (with a richer and more perfect significance) to the lips which have been purged for ever by a true confession of the name of Jesus, but belong often, in their highest meaning, to the Sanctifier Himself; and it is in this latter acceptation that we are chiefly to regard the apostle's present reference. For He who is now the manifested object of our faith is also our great Fore-runner in this race. In a pre-eminent and incomparable sense, the Saviour both believed and spake; testifying, as a man on earth, to that which He, and He only, had seen and heard with God. If the words that He spake to men were spirit and were life, He spake still as one who had a charge to speak.<sup>7</sup> It is witnessed of Him that He put His trust in God: the Son of the Blessed honoured the Father, according to the form and nature which in love to us He had

<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter i. 10-12.

<sup>7</sup> John vi. 63, xii. 49, 50.

assumed. The prayers of Jesus were the prayers of faith.<sup>8</sup> And it is as the obedient learner and fulfiller of the will of God, accomplishing His sufferings in the prospect of the joy to which they led,<sup>9</sup> and speaking the words of life eternal while Himself ordained to die, that the Master is here contemplated as His willing servant's pattern. What follows is a confirmation of this view.

Verse 14. "Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus," &c. In the days of His flesh the Lord spoke often to His disciples both of His humiliation and His after glory; but until the Scriptures which foretold of both had been fulfilled, He was the solitary believer as well as speaker of the truth. His flesh rested in the grave in hope, while His disciples neither believed His words, nor understood the Scriptures, that He must rise from the dead. And even as God whom He trusted raised up the Just One from the dead, so will the same God presently reward the faith and crown the hope of those who now by Jesus Christ believe in God.<sup>1</sup> With a heart full of this faith Paul spoke, and contended always for the resurrection of the dead; while those who reasoned only in their minds on such a truth were either silent or spoke falsely of what they only seemed to know.<sup>2</sup> Faith only can speak soundly of what faith only can perceive, and it speaks with both knowledge and assurance. Convinced by irrefragable proof that Jesus lives who once was dead, His true witnesses are not

<sup>8</sup> The teaching of the same apostle in Heb. v. may be compared with what is now before us.

<sup>9</sup> Heb. xii. 2.

<sup>1</sup> Peter i. 21.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xv. *passim*.

less sure that God, who raised and glorified His Son, will by Him also raise up them who now confess His name. By Jesus Christ the glory of God has been manifested in creation; by Him, in His incarnate grace, has the love of God been commended effectually to His elect; and by Him also will God's thoughts and promises, both of grace and glory, be accomplished, when the bodies of His people are by the voice of Jesus summoned from death or mortality to endless life.

It may be noticed that we have in this verse a strict limitation of distinctive *Christian* faith: a risen Christ and a risen Church, and both to the glory of God. The presentation of His first-born<sup>3</sup> to Himself does not indeed exhaust His counsel,—for God had other things in view besides His Church, though all *in Christ*,—but it fulfils His special purpose in this gospel dispensation.<sup>4</sup> As therefore Paul's present topic is his *ministry*, he confines himself naturally within these limits. God's labourers will be presented together with that which they have wrought, in the effectual energy of His grace, with an equal acceptance in that coming day of joy.

Verse 15. "For all things are for your sakes," &c. If Paul magnifies his ministry, it is that he may give to his brethren a worthier and deeper conviction of the nature of the grace wherein they stand, and of the excellency of their calling as partakers with himself of Christ. The grandeur of this and similar apostolic declarations is worthy of the source from which they spring. God's glory, as a Saviour, is "*by us*," the

<sup>3</sup> Heb. xii. 23.

<sup>4</sup> *Notes on Romans*, chap. xi.



vessels of His mercy.<sup>5</sup> All things are therefore for our sakes. God's works are done in love as well as truth and power, and the ministry of the Spirit as the revealer of Jesus and His things is, like the working of the Father and the Son,<sup>6</sup> for the fulfilling of God's thoughts of love to usward who believe. Creation and Redemption fall alike within the lot of their inheritance whose portion is in Christ. If God made the worlds, it was by Jesus Christ. But His assumption of that Name and of the nature to which it is attached, is the visible outshining of His love to us. The life and death and resurrection of the Lord were all for us; and for us also is He gone to sit on high. Moreover, if God now fulfils the mystery of His government, though strange and sense-baffling phenomena, and schools His children in the wilderness, where faith and patience must be fully tried, it still is "for their sakes;" that as they learn Him in His ways their joy may grow with knowledge, until, on their expected change, they stand in His very presence, and in the likeness of the First-born proclaim, in worthy and never-ending adoration, the eternal fulness of His praise.

Verse 16. "For which cause we faint not," &c. Fainting is not for those who joy in such a prospect; the mercy which he had received, and the hope for which he waits, alike forbid it. Yet he had fainted had he not *believed*;<sup>7</sup> for the pressure on his flesh was hard, he died a daily death. But there is in every believer an inward man which daily comes to life. Corruption and renewal mark respectively the

<sup>5</sup> Chap. i. 20; comp. 1 Cor. ii. 7, Rom. ix. 23.

<sup>6</sup> John v. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Ps. xxvii. 13.

old and new in that wonderful and complex being the regenerate man. Nature decays, but grace revives; the undying Christ being evermore within His suffering saints, the hope of glory.<sup>8</sup> And with a change of life there is a change of language also, for faith sits triumphantly above all natural facts and experiences, and contradicts them by the voice of God; as in the following words:—

Verses 17, 18. “For our light affliction,” &c. The second of these verses is the argument of the first; for it is only while looking by faith on things unseen that burdens, in themselves of overwhelming weight, can be accounted light. But as all creatures when compared with their Creator are as nothing, so faith’s anticipations have ever a diminishing effect on the temporary experiences, whether joyous or grievous, of the believer.<sup>9</sup> We have two things to consider in the passage now before us; first the apostle’s doctrine, and secondly the language in which it is expressed. What is here clearly affirmed is the existence of a positive relation between the tribulation which is the common calling of God’s saints while in the flesh, and the glory which they are to have. The latter is declared to be a resulting effect of the former; “the light affliction *worketh* for us an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” The extremes are here brought into comparison, the intermediate effect of tribulation on the exercised heart of the believer being patience.<sup>1</sup>

Such language belongs experimentally to those who by the grace of God, not only trust abidingly in

<sup>8</sup> Rom. vi. 9-11, viii. 10, 11; Col. i. 27.

<sup>9</sup> *Notes on First Corinthians*, vii. 29-31.

<sup>1</sup> Rom. v. 3.

Christ as their eternal Surety, but *walk* also in the truth, and consequently undergo in their appointed measure the afflictions of the gospel for His sake. To such the chequered occurrences of life are not matters of indifference, but have their lasting value and significance. What a right-minded believer *does*, he does as a man in Christ. His works are wrought in God and by faith, in the enabling power of His grace; they are wrought, therefore, for eternity. What he *suffers*, while thus occupying for his Lord, has then of necessity a lasting consequence. This great and obvious moral principle Paul not only felt profoundly, but gloried also in its assertion. Knowing (and aiming that we too should know) that *all* things work together for good to them that love God, he connects habitually the particular trials which affect him here with the rest and joy of that inheritance which is laid up for us in heaven, and to which they practically form his path. They are helping him to glory. In Christ and with Christ he is suffering here, and his sufferings have their answering reward above; a joy more abundant and which fadeth not away.

A sinner's mercy must not be confounded with a saint's reward, though both are alike by grace; and although the abundance of the latter most assuredly depends upon a due appreciation of the former, God's saints have also experiences, both common and distinctive. As Canaan could be reached by Israel only through the great and terrible wilderness, so is it that through much tribulation all who are of God are brought by the Spirit on their way through this world to their rest. But a common experience develops special and widely different qualities in those

who are thus proved. God tries the faith of His elect with varying results. Hence the doctrine of this passage is both general and special; it includes all saints, it contemplates more closely those who in their measure share the single-minded and entire devotedness which so pre-eminently marked the writer of these words. His language is very bold, but in exact conformity with the truth expressed. Afflictions work out glory for the true follower of Christ, and that in an inverse ratio. The afflictions (when estimated by the heart of faith) are light; the glory is above all weight. The connexion of ideas in this memorable contrast is most obvious: what Paul suffers he suffers in the flesh, and with the limited endurance of a man; but he suffers in the name and for the sake of *Jesus*. According to that name, therefore, and to the worthiness of Him who bears it, will be the joyful recompence of the reward. Thus he reckons, with the calm assurance of one who eyes the race he has to run with a secret consciousness of a strength fully equal to the task proposed, on winning, by the grace of God, the prize of that high calling after which he strove. He is Christ's wholly, and Christ is no less absolutely *his*. Because of the first he is acquainted here with grief, while for the latter reason he expects a compensating weight of glory which no other name than Christ's could bear.

## CHAPTER V.

“FOR we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved,” &c. (1.) Proceeding still with the confession of his faith, and declaration of the reason of the hope which is his boast, the apostle now sets before us more precisely the goal of his immediate wish. Death, he has told us, both claimed and held a certain mastery over him while in this body ; he carried, as he went about triumphantly accomplishing the ministry of life, the sentence of death within himself. As a mortal, he is brother to the worm ; and in the recollection and experience of that which caused mortality he groans. For the body, which originally was the proper ornament and strength of its possessor, is become through sin both a burden and a snare, from which a shameful dissolution is, in the order of fallen nature, the alone release. But the same Source from whence the light has come, which shows to the believer the dishonour of his mortal state, has furnished also the bright witness of the more abundant glory which is in reserve for such as do not stumble at the word of God. Paul *knows*, and would have his brethren also know, that there is for the souls which Christ’s redeeming blood has purchased for Himself, another and a

nobler house—a building of *God*, not generated by the will of man, neither earthy in its substance nor perishable in its nature, but eternal and in the heavens.

That by the figurative language here employed the apostle means to designate the spiritual body, which is the appointed vessel of that exceeding great and eternal weight of glory of which he has already spoken, is quite evident. And we may notice first, the peculiar style in which he delivers himself, when speaking on this subject. He does not say “*when* we die,” but, “if this tabernacle be dissolved.” His language is a simple reflexion of the truth of that “mystery” which he had already shown to these Corinthian saints,<sup>1</sup> and by means of which he had taught them that, while bodily *change* is a certainty to the believer, the *dissolution* of his mortal body is a thing by no means sure. All men speak naturally of the peril and uncertainty of life; it is a peculiarity of the Christian only to speak hypothetically of death.

We have next to consider the actual condition of the believer as an expectant heir of grace. He is described in this passage as occupying “the earthly *house* of this *tabernacle* ;” the Spirit doubtless employing this incongruous form of speech to depict the situation more exactly. For this body, which is the natural abode of Adam and his children, has ceased to be the *home* of those whom God has called. Formed originally from the dust by its Creator’s hands,<sup>2</sup> and since then propagated—with the soul

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 51, *sq.*

<sup>2</sup> Gen. ii. 7.

which God breathed into it—through the operation of the human will,<sup>3</sup> it remains in its mortal weakness as a witness of its own departed glory, but as a pledge also to the true believer of another and a better hope.<sup>4</sup> As to its constitution and its end, it is both temporal and wholly of and for the earth. Either dissolution must befall it, or a total change; the former as the fruit of sin, the latter as the completed triumph of redemption. The apostle first contemplates the former as the familiar course of nature in its fallen condition; but he views it doubtfully, as we have seen, because the light by which he now reads all things proceeds from the risen and ascended Christ. While, therefore, he allows its just place to the common, but, as he constantly insists, *uncertain* issue of mortality, he directs his gaze beyond this doubtful mark, and in spirit looks straight up to God, to seek and find the proper end of the believer's earthly life in the revealed brightness of His glory as it now shines in the person of the re-ascended Son of man.<sup>5</sup> In the clear light of faith's heavenly vision he both discovers what he has, and is assured that it is really *his own*; for He who once was dead for our sakes now lives, and is alive for ever, in the very form in which He died.<sup>6</sup> It is in the divinely-imparted knowledge which he had of the predestined conformity of believers to the likeness of God's Son, that he here affirms so boldly, in the name of all

<sup>3</sup> That will being, however, but the instrument by which the Former of all things gives effect to His own good pleasure. And so with reference to temporal no less than spiritual existence, His children's confession is: "It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves."

<sup>4</sup> Rom. viii. 11.

<sup>5</sup> John vi. 62.

<sup>6</sup> John xiv. 19; Rev. i. 18.

who are "of faith," that "we *have* a house *not made with hands*, eternal in the heavens."<sup>7</sup>

The saint's body is here designated as a "tent" or "tabernacle," not only on account of its intrinsic frailty and corruptibility, but much more because it is the temporary lodging only of one who is, by virtue of his heavenly calling, but a stranger and pilgrim on the earth. Fearfully and wonderfully made, it is nevertheless but a work marred upon the wheels,<sup>8</sup> in the estimation of its Former, who now disallows His earlier creation, that He may join His Name and honour, in sure promise to His chosen, with another and more perfect work. It should be noticed that while in his former epistle to the Corinthian saints the Church collectively is called "God's building," the same title is here given to the spiritual body which each believer is severally to receive. And this is according to the habit of the Spirit's teaching; what is true of the general assembly of God's saints applying, in all vital and essential points, with equal precision to the individual believer,<sup>9</sup> since each is alike, and in the same positive sense, the workmanship of God.

<sup>7</sup> Rom. viii. 29. See further on this contrast, *Notes on First Corinthians*, xv. 44, *sq.* And it should be observed also that, as in the latter passage, we have the origin of the first man described as "earthly," ἐκ γῆς, so here in the cognate term, ἐπίγειος, there is clearly defined the limit of his possible habitation. Flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God, nor can an earthly body rise from earth, but must again mix with it by the sentence of its Maker. On the other hand, the heavenly house is distinctively "of God" (ἐκ Θεοῦ) in its origin, and for the place where His honour dwells, and will for ever dwell.

<sup>8</sup> Jer. xviii. 3, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Compare, as an example of this, the doctrine of spiritual marriage, as declared respectively in Rom. vii. and Eph. v.



It is then (or should be) known by every true believer, that there is awaiting him in heaven another and far different house from that perishable body of humiliation, by which his spirit is now fettered and oppressed. Now such a prospect cannot but excite desire in the heart which sincerely contemplates it. The knowledge that at any moment one may change the prison-garments of mortality, and as a chosen companion of the King of kings be found apparelled in the likeness of the Lord of life,<sup>1</sup> must generate a longing for that moment to arrive; and in sympathy with this passionate eagerness of hope, and as himself inflamed by it, he thus proceeds:—

Verse 2. “For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.” Let us note well the form which his desire takes. It is not to go away from earth to heaven, to depart and be with Christ, though that were far better, as he elsewhere tells us,<sup>2</sup> than abiding in the flesh. His earnest longing is for a visitation from on high, to be clothed upon<sup>3</sup> with his house *from heaven*.<sup>4</sup> On the hope thus definitely indicated he enlarges in what follows; the essential point of doctrine in this verse is that it is “out of heaven” that the building is to come, which is of God, and in which Paul, with all others of like precious faith, expects to dwell for ever. For the consummation of this hope he longs with a yet more fervent earnestness than that which affects the whole creation, which groans still in the bondage of corruption while wait-

<sup>1</sup> Heb. iii. 14; Rom. v. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. i. 2,

<sup>3</sup> Or “clothe himself with,” ἐπενδύσασθαι.

<sup>4</sup> ἐξ οὐρανοῦ.

ing for the manifestation of the sons of God.<sup>5</sup> For intensity of desire must be proportioned ever to the knowledge and assurance out of which it springs.

Verse 3. "Seeing that when we have been clothed (or have clothed ourselves) we shall not be found naked."<sup>6</sup> We have now an emphatic statement of the *reason* of this ardent longing for the house from heaven. To understand this verse, it is necessary to call to mind what is written as to the moral condition of "mortality." *Nakedness* is its earliest characteristic description. The first pair were found thus, when self-discovered to their wakened conscience; and from that hour to the present a sense of shameful and defenceless exposure to an all-seeing eye has been the unvarying attendant of true self-consciousness, when God and His holiness come into the remembrance of a child of Adam. The children of the first transgressor are begotten in his likeness, and their natural heritage is according to the fallen condition of their ancestor. Shame is sin's eldest born; and though supplanted often by its later brood,<sup>7</sup> while nature runs on in its course of darkness, returns to its first place whenever light breaks in upon the soul. Hence the first effect of truth, in its regenerative power, is to fill the awakened sinner with a profound sense of his own unfitness for the presence of his Maker. The believer even, who by grace has boldness now to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, and knows by the Spirit's witness

<sup>5</sup> Rom. viii. 19-22. *Notes on Romans, in loc.*

<sup>6</sup> *ἐἰ γὰρ καὶ ἐνδυσάμενοι κ. λ.* The "if so be" of the authorised version not only weakens, but destroys the sense.

<sup>7</sup> Jer. vi. 15.

the ever-blessed certainty of his own acceptance in the Beloved, is not less conscious still of his *personal* unfitness, while in a mortal body, for presentation in the brightness of that Light which is both his origin and end as a new creature in Christ.<sup>8</sup> If visited of God while in their unchanged bodies, His saints are, by their own confession, void alike of comeliness and strength.<sup>9</sup> But "to see God" is His own promise to the pure in heart, and is therefore the fixed goal of the desires of His children;<sup>1</sup> and to see Him as He is we must ourselves be like the presence upon which we gaze. It is when "found in Christ" at the end of their appointed race, and personally bearing His own likeness, that the desire here expressed will be attained by those who till then are content to run with patience for the prize of their high calling.<sup>2</sup> The glorious body which is presently to clothe the spirits of those who, as saved by hope, are waiting still for the adoption,<sup>3</sup> is the form and pattern of that grace which is to be brought to the believer at the revelation of Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup> In the likeness of the First-born they will not be found naked in the Father's eyes.

Verse 4. "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened," &c. The desire of change, in contradistinction to release by dissolution, is here still more explicitly enounced. Though burdened sorely by mortality and its afflictive adjuncts, he is not sighing, as a prisoner merely, for a loosing of his

<sup>8</sup> Eph. v. 7; 1 Thess. v. 5; Col. i. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Dan. x. 8; Rev. i. 17. <sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 8; Ps. xxvii. 4; Rev. xxii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. iii. 9; 1 John iii. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. viii. 23, 24.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter i. 13.

bonds, as if their pressure were not adequately met by the supply of that grace which meets all need in God's afflicted children; he longs rather for the positive realization of the hope laid up for him in heaven. To be unclothed and have his mortal body laid to sleep, while himself departing to be with the Lord, were well, but would not satisfy the wishes of a heart in which Christ dwells already as the hope of glory. "For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith;"<sup>5</sup> and that hope is nothing less than Christ Himself, when revealed in the glory which as His own meritorious reward He has received of the Father, and which in the grace of His affection He has bestowed in promise on His Church.<sup>6</sup> The proper expectation, therefore, of a saint is to be liberated from the body of humiliation, not in the way of nature, but by the triumph of almighty grace.

That his mortal body should be "sown in corruption" cannot be the *wish* of a believer who has a just appreciation of the hope of his calling, but rather that it should be translated into incorruption while alive. He would not have it "sown in dishonour," though with a brighter end in view, but suddenly transfigured into glory. When dying, if death come upon him, he can triumph in the calm and certain hope of resurrection; but the positive desire of his soul, if formed and directed by the Spirit, must be according to the written promise. Now this sets before us as our proper expectation, not a peaceful death, but an abrupt cessation from this earthly image, and an immediate accession to the heavenly, when God's saints are rapt from earth to be for ever

<sup>5</sup> Gal. v. 5.

<sup>6</sup> John xvii. 22.

with the Lord.<sup>7</sup> Groaning and conflict must continue with mortality, because the life which the believer has implanted in him, though it cannot be extinguished by the flesh, is yet unable to assimilate it to itself. The mortal body, which may by grace be yielded as a living sacrifice to God, and will be so while men are walking in the Spirit,<sup>8</sup> is in its nature the believer's prison, not his rest. But God's rest must be the aim of those who are of God. The longing of the Spirit in Christ's fellows is the open revelation of the victory which He has won, and not a mere escape from toil and sorrow,—that they should be arrayed in His brightness, and, with all God's other sons, be manifested with delivering power to the groaning creature; not to sink out of sight and mind into the grave. God's heirs must know, so long as they are unpossessed of their inheritance, both straitness and distress; nor can anything satisfy the longings of a heart in which Christ dwells but a final assertion, in the displayed glory of His Church, of His mighty power as the Lord and giver of life.

"*Mortality*,"<sup>9</sup> or all that they receive from Adam, must in God's saints be swallowed up of life. The proper force of this term should be carefully observed, since we are apt to forget that not our bodies only, but our entire nature and its fruits are mortal.<sup>1</sup> *Our* thoughts perish when we turn to our earth. Natural affections and imaginings attend the heart and brain which gave them birth, and are, with all else that has

<sup>7</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 15, *sq.*

<sup>8</sup> Rom. viii. 13; xii. 1.

<sup>9</sup> τὸ θνητόν—"the mortal." Comp. 1 Cor. xv. 53, 54.

<sup>1</sup> Death, and the judgment which comes after death—the first death and the second—claim the whole of unregenerate man.

its origin below the heavens, intrinsically "vanity."<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the thoughts and feelings which, themselves of God, now operate through our earthly organism are, like their source, imperishable. We are unable, labour as we may, to separate in this sense the precious from the vile in any perfect measure, or even to comprehend the mystery of *being* at all, though we restrict our investigations to its actual condition. Still less is it within the range of our present powers to understand the yet greater mystery of *changed identity*, which is nevertheless so plainly set forth in the Scriptures as a cardinal verity of the gospel. Nor will any wise believer engage in the attempt. But it is important that God's children should have it well in their remembrance that whatever is *natural* is also *temporal*. Flesh has its flower, but it fades, and will in vain be sought for in the Paradise of God. The chastening effect of this solemn though welcome conviction on the mind of the believer, who occupies the natural relationships of life as an expectant heir of glory, will be appreciated in proportion to our faith.

Verse 5. "Now He who wrought us for the self-same thing is God," &c. How strikingly emphatic is this language: God, whose workmanship the believer is in an especial sense,<sup>3</sup> is declared to have wrought us for *this very thing*, for the change, namely, of which he has been speaking as his proper hope. Re-

<sup>2</sup> Pss. cxlvi. 4, lxii. 9. Effects survive their cause; things *done* remain to confound or to commend the doers, whose personal identity is unimpaired by any transformation which they undergo. On this point more will be found in the remarks on verse 10 of this chapter. Comp. *Notes on First Corinthians*, iii. 14, 15, *sq.*

<sup>3</sup> Eph. ii. 10.

generation, which is the work already wrought upon God's saints, has made them meet, by virtue of their faith in Christ crucified, to enter at the time appointed that eternal building which has been prepared for them of God. Now, as we have before seen, that which is thus figuratively described is by its proper designation "a spiritual body,"<sup>4</sup> and it is with reference to this that the latter clause of this verse is added: "Who gave us also the earnest of the Spirit."<sup>5</sup> The indwelling Comforter, who is Himself the power which is to change in God's saints mortality to life, is fitly called the earnest of that hope for which we wait. For our bodies are the Lord's, and the price of our redemption has been paid, but the time has not yet come for the full assumption of His right. Hence the saints, who as joint-heirs with Christ, are by their calling also fellow-sufferers with Him while in the world, are elsewhere represented as still waiting, though in possession of the first-fruits of the Spirit, "for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."<sup>6</sup>

With this doctrine of the earnest of the Spirit both the joys and sorrows of the waiting Church are inseparably connected. The groaning experience of verse 2, and the "confidence and rejoicing in Christ Jesus,"<sup>7</sup> which are among the essential tokens of divine life in the saints, are equally to be referred to

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 44.

<sup>5</sup> In chapter i. the Holy Ghost is also mentioned under the same description, but there only as one of the characteristic endowments of the Church. The distinctive value and meaning of this gift is shown clearly in its relation to the doctrine of the present chapter.

<sup>6</sup> Rom. viii. 23.

<sup>7</sup> Phil. iii. 3; Heb. iii. 6-14.

the abiding presence of the Holy Ghost. And the mind of the Spirit is ever on the end of that which He reveals; if He takes as the Comforter the things of Christ to show them to the Church, He tells not of things present only, but of things to come. Whether as worshippers within the veil, or as pilgrims on our way to rest, we are in the wilderness while in the world, and our expectation of deliverance is *from above*. We wait for the Son of God from heaven; our present communion with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ is but a preparatory foretaste of that which is shortly to be known, when the flesh is as a thing forgotten in the presence of that joy which is to be revealed.<sup>s</sup>

Let those then who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity remember, and under the necessary burden of their tribulation take fresh courage from the fact, that what God has by His gospel wrought His children for is not a peaceful exit from mortality (though that too is assuredly secured to all who, while the Lord still tarries, end their earthly days), but the merging rather of mortality in life. From heaven there has come already both the message and the Messenger of peace. After having made peace by His life and death on earth, and passed again into the heavens in the likeness which He took for our sakes, but in the power and acceptance of an eternal redemption, Christ "came and preached peace" by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; and the effect of this preaching is to gather from the nations of the world a people for His name. But from heaven there is also presently to come the same MAN Jesus who is

<sup>s</sup> Jude 24.



gone up there;<sup>9</sup> and His personal descent from heaven will be the instantaneous fulfilment on the bodies of His chosen of their promised change.

But if this be truth, how jealous should God's children be of any traditional teaching which either opposes or obscures it. Yet that this doctrine is even now in disrepute among the majority of those who name the name of Christ is not to be denied. With reference to such (as indeed to us all) the same apostle's words in Romans xiii. may well be cited: "It is high time to awake out of sleep," &c. For what, it may well be asked, is the bride waiting but the Bridegroom? For what the servant but his Lord? And for what the holders of the promise but the literal fulfilment of God's words? For if we are Abraham's true children, we shall not doubt that what God has promised He both means to the letter, and is able also to perform. But, as we have seen, the constant testimony of the Holy Ghost is, that the Lord *Himself* shall descend from heaven for His Church, and that though He seems to tarry, His own word of warning is, "I come." Until the arrival of that wished-for moment, they whose love for Him is regulated by the sayings of His mouth are taught by the Spirit to sustain one another in their blessed hope, as companions in the affliction and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. God's promises and warnings keep His people in their place. It is through a willing forgetfulness of what is written that the professing body of Christ has fallen into so deep a slumber, and become so hopelessly entangled in the world.

<sup>9</sup> Acts i. 11.

Verses 6–8. “Therefore we are always confident,” &c. These verses reveal in a striking manner to our view the moral condition of a mind that has been formed by the truth which it receives. Staying itself upon the living God, and by faith abiding in the sanctuary of His peace, it abounds in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost.<sup>1</sup> Confidence and joyful contentment are the habitual temperament of the apostle’s spirit, while he fulfils as a hireling the unknown number of his days below.<sup>2</sup> Knowing what God has wrought, and with what end, his heart is fixed, awaiting in quiet expectation the set time for the manifesting of that work in its abiding glory. Meanwhile he occupies with patient and watchful assiduity for the Master whom he knows and loves. Everywhere he is alike confident: in the body he is *for* the Lord; out of it he will be *with* the Lord. Walking now by faith and not by sight, he longs exceedingly for that which is not seen, and would rather, if choice were his, forsake his mortal body for awhile before its change, to be present with the Lord. For duty, though born of love, is weaker than its source. He stays willingly because his course is not yet run, and though groaning will bear joyfully his burden to the end; yet would he be well pleased<sup>3</sup> if released from that wherein he groans. The state of a disembodied soul in Paradise with Christ is better than that of an honoured but toil-worn bearer of His cross on earth. But neither state fulfils the promise of the Lord.

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xv. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Job xiv. 6.

<sup>3</sup> εὐδοκοῦμεν. In verse 2, where he is contemplating the final change, he uses the stronger term ἐπιποθοῦντες.

Verse 9. "Wherefore also we strive earnestly,<sup>4</sup> that, whether present or absent, we may be acceptable<sup>5</sup> unto Him." To-day is the believer's only certain opportunity of service; for to-morrow's light may bring him to his rest, with such a place and honour in God's kingdom as shall answer to the proof made of him here below. To hold faith with a good conscience in this present world, and to be commended of the Master when His presence is revealed, is the one care therefore of all those who serve and follow Him. But it must be constantly remembered, that an absolute trust in God as our *Saviour* is the sole foundation of all acceptable service in His sight. The question of our personal acceptance as forgiven sinners is entirely excluded from the apostle's doctrine in this verse. It is the language of one who had "obtained mercy,"<sup>6</sup> and been "wrought of God"<sup>7</sup> for glory, that we are here considering. In order therefore to extract, as is sometimes attempted, an Arminian sentiment from such a text, it is necessary first to shut one's eyes to the whole drift of the apostle's teaching, and to confound together the widely different ideas of acceptance with a Saviour, and acceptance with a master,—between a believer's standing as an heir of grace, and Christ's commendation of His chosen when their race is done, and their work and service for His name are at an end. The former is the effect of a ruined sinner's faith in Jesus, the latter is the crown of a believer's honour as a steadfast maintainer of the faith. Paul, whose love flowed ardently along the channel of his faith,

<sup>4</sup> φιλοτιμούμεθα.

<sup>6</sup> *Ante*, chap. iv. 1.

<sup>5</sup> ἐνάρεσται.

<sup>7</sup> Verse 5.

looks ever through his labours to the prize beyond. The God of His mercy will in that day also be his righteous Judge.<sup>8</sup> He serves a Master who has bound him to Himself in love; as a *Christian* he has entered on a race which both begins and ends with Christ. The faith which justified him is a growing power also to sustain him in the path of service. The aim on which his heart is fixed is the reward of spiritual ambition, not the uncertain prospect of an ultimate escape from wrath. Knowing the mind and spirit of his Master, that he serves not "an austere man," but the gracious lover of his soul, his only care is to be found unto well-pleasing in His sight.

The pith of the apostle's doctrine in this and the following verses is the great principle, that if redeemed we are redeemed *to God*. But the only possible way of truly knowing and enjoying God is by trusting and obeying Him in love. To His children His commandments are not grievous, while they are evermore a burden of weariness to the flesh. Hence the deep importance of such teaching as destroys effectually all fallacious grounds of confidence, and disallows all Antinomian hopes. We are, if believers, no longer our own. False views of grace lead men to the opposite conclusion, and nourish the pride of nature for the day of recompences by means of a deceitful and purely carnal security. The hypocrite's hope shall perish; and it is against this deadly artifice of the destroyer that the Spirit of truth both here and always earnestly contends.

Verse 10. "For we must all appear" (or be made manifest) "before the judgment-seat of Christ," &c.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 8.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Peter iii. 18.

This declaration evidently contemplates, in its first intention, the responsibility of true believers, and has in this sense an emphatic force. “*We*,” of whom such things are written as have lately been affirmed, “must give account,” &c. But it is conceived in such terms as embrace also the doctrine of judicial retribution, in its wider and general aspect, as appears more evidently in the following verse. The actions of *men*, whether saints or sinners, are weighed by their Eternal Judge.<sup>1</sup> He is the Governor of nations, but of His own house also in an especial sense. But there is a difference in His method of administration, which corresponds exactly with the character of those who are its objects. A saint will never again come into judgment on account of his natural or inherited iniquity, for he is already dead judicially with Christ, and is no longer known or dealt with on the footing of his natural responsibility. As a man he has been weighed and found wanting. He was born under condemnation, to a natural heritage of wrath, and nothing good has been discovered in his flesh;<sup>2</sup> but his guilt has been obliterated by the blood of his Redeemer, and he is freely and justly pardoned for his Saviour’s sake. Because Christ is risen from the dead, he is no longer in his sins. He is *justified* by faith, and is presented in the name and on the merits of the Just One before God; and of this new and ever-blessed title to acceptance the Holy Spirit is the living seal and witness. Into judgment, therefore, on his own account he cannot come, but as a confessor and bearer of the name of Christ, and as a servant of

<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. ii. 3; John v. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. ii. 3; Rom. vii. 18.

Him whom he confesses as his *Lord*, he has to give account. The reputation, good or bad, which has attached to him here below as a believer, must be confirmed or rectified before the bar of Christ: we shall be *manifested* there. Both acts and purposes will then openly reveal themselves in God's own light,<sup>3</sup> and according to their quality will be the final recompence of praise or blame.

Of good deeds it is needless here to speak, remembering only what is taught us both as to their imperfection at the best, and also the extreme erroneousness of the judgment often formed by Christians as to these.<sup>4</sup> But while as a principle it remains unalterably true, that "he that doeth righteousness is righteous,"<sup>5</sup> not only are God's children *personally* sinners still, ~~and~~ so provided for in the appointment of His grace,<sup>6</sup> but bad actions may be, and assuredly are, often done, even by the best of men. Nor are these always judged here, and acknowledged by their authors. A *perfect* self-judgment would leave nothing for the Lord to judge, but not even the apostle ventured to lay claim to this. Now it is certain that what we do intentionally here below, and do not afterwards repent of and confess as *sin*, we must account for to the Master in that day. It is a solemn truth, and intended by the Spirit, who declares it, to act with sobering effect on our minds. We dare not say, with reference to every important action of our lives, "my conscience bears me witness in the Holy

<sup>3</sup> *Notes on First Corinthians*, chap. iv. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. xxvi. 6, *sq.*; Mark xiv. 3, *sq.*

<sup>5</sup> 1 John iii. 7.      <sup>6</sup> 1 John i. 8, ii. 1, 2; Heb. iv. 16.

Ghost;" and yet we often do act very positively, with but little heed either to our own responsibility, or to the effect of our example upon others. Let us think but for a moment of the endless confusion now existing in the church of God, of the strife and cumbrance which is borne in His unwearied grace by the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup> We may and must have our *convictions* here, but never our absolute *conclusions*; except as to the truth and certainty of that which God reveals. Moreover, there are many things which are not wrong *per se*, but which the Lord will not approve; for the heart's motives are both seen and judged by Him, though they escape often the most honest scrutiny on our parts.

The question which, as believers, we should ask our hearts is this: In what manner are we treating our Lord, whom we profess to serve; and to what extent are we anxiously walking in the way of His commandment? Philanthropy ought not to be confounded with devotedness, nor is an unbidden effort to ameliorate the world's condition the same thing as addicting oneself to the service of the saints. Above all, to extol Christ Jesus the Lord, not by a doctrinal confession only, but in a full surrender of our wills to His—keeping the word of His patience, and so abiding in His love—is the sure road to the honour which awaits His true servants in the coming day.<sup>8</sup> Conscience, if kept in its due exercise, will give us faithful aid in these enquiries; nor need our faith dread shipwreck, while an honest regard is had to this monitor on our parts in the sight of God.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Deut. i. 12; Heb. iii. 1. <sup>8</sup> John xii. 26. <sup>9</sup> 1 Tim. i. 19.

Is *obedience* really the rule of our walk? or are we, in the spirit of a false liberty, still seeking our own? Does our heart condemn us, or misgive us? We are happy if it does not;<sup>1</sup> yet in the light of His presence, before whom we are shortly to appear, we may stand amazed at the *then* apparent wrongness of many a thing which gave us satisfaction here below.

It may be remarked further, with reference to the language of this verse, that it agrees exactly with the same apostle's doctrine of the believer's mastery over, and employment of, his members, as a risen man in Christ.<sup>2</sup> He does not here speak of the deeds of the body, or its lusts, which he elsewhere teaches us to mortify;<sup>3</sup> but of what believers do *by means of* their body,<sup>4</sup> which may be good or bad, according to the governing motive and direction of the work. To yield our bodies unto God as a living sacrifice is our reasonable service, as partakers of His grace;<sup>5</sup> and all that they have done for us instrumentally under any other guidance than the spirit of the fear of the Lord, must find rejection—if not earlier detected and confessed on our parts—when finally examined on that day.

Verse 11. Knowing therefore the terror<sup>6</sup> of the

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xiv. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. vi. *passim*, *spec.* v. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. viii. 13; Col. iii. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *τὰ διὰ τοῦ σώματος.*

<sup>5</sup> Rom. xii. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Some would soften this to "fear," and view it as an expression merely of the apostle's individual piety. He walks in the fear of the Lord, and so persuades men of his integrity, &c. Such a reading of the passage is, however, in my judgment, altogether alien from the real drift of his teaching. His words must derive their meaning from the name with which they are associated, but "the judgment-seat of Christ" expresses the full scope of His jurisdiction who is Lord of *all*. For unto Jesus every knee must bow.



Lord, we persuade men," &c. He takes in this verse a wider survey of the topic which he has in hand. The ungodly and the sinner must be also manifested in their turn before the righteous Judge. It is to be noticed that we find in this passage no reference to time; what is here insisted on is the great and inevitable fact of judgment, as the necessary experience of *all*. "After death the judgment" is an appointed lot of man,<sup>7</sup> and the Lord whom we wait for is the Judge of quick as well as dead.<sup>8</sup> Believers have boldness in that solemn day; they will *judge* the world, not be condemned with it. But accounts must be rendered where talents were bestowed; willingly by those who know and therefore love the Lord; reluctantly, yet of necessity, by those who name Him only to deny Him in their works.<sup>9</sup> The awe and terror of that solemn day has moved the hearts of God's true witnesses through all recorded time. Enoch, the seventh from Adam, spoke of it; Moses and the prophets all confess it, and enquire, Who shall stand? The Lord emphatically preached it in the days of His humiliation, and the same truth is chosen by the Spirit as the practical motive by which men are to be stirred to listen to the gospel of God's saving grace.<sup>1</sup> God will judge the *secrets* of men by Jesus Christ; both the maker and his work will be manifested in that day.<sup>2</sup> Paul, who knew well by God's own teaching the character of that ordeal,<sup>3</sup> would persuade men to escape it by a

<sup>7</sup> Heb. ix. 27.<sup>8</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 1.<sup>9</sup> Titus i. 16.<sup>1</sup> Acts xvii. 31.<sup>2</sup> Rom. ii. 16; Is. i. 31, *margin*.<sup>3</sup> *Conf.* Ps. xc. 11. Moses and Paul were alike "men of God," and their estimation of His things was formed, through divine inspiration, according to the truth and holiness of His nature.

timely fleeing to Christ crucified, as the sole door of refuge from the wrath to come. For God's anger is plainly revealed from heaven, in His word, against the ungodliness of men,<sup>4</sup> and there is a day appointed for the executing of His word. Unconfessed sin will then receive its judgment, and self-righteousness be fairly estimated in the presence of a crucified but slighted Christ. There is no exemption from this common lot; with God in the revealed brightness of His glory, we must have to do *as men*. We must know Him, either *now*, willingly and by the faith of the gospel, as His glory now shines upon us from the Saviour's face, or *then*, when the voice of mercy will be silent, and God's righteous judgment against sinners will be too late acknowledged, in its dread reality, by the impenitent victims of His wrath.

In what follows we perceive the secret of Paul's own boldness in the day of judgment, while warning thus earnestly his fellow-men. The preacher of grace is a chief confessor also of sin: "we are made manifest to God." There is a double meaning in these words; they refer, no doubt, in part to his spiritual integrity as a minister of God,<sup>5</sup> but principally to the completeness of his self-surrender, as the chief of sinners, to the God of his salvation. For if a man is really made manifest to God, what is he in that Light? The moral ground of Paul's confident boasting, as a messenger of Christ, is his thorough deliverance from himself as a true disciple of the *cross*. A genuine believer can withhold no secret from the

With them, therefore, and with all who really are "of God," the eternal hostility of holiness to sin is a fundamental principle of thought.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. i. 18.

<sup>5</sup> *Ante*, i. 12; ii. 17.

God who saves him, but is willingly unveiled to the inevitable searchings of His eye.<sup>6</sup> The bright light of that consuming fire, which will scare the unrepentant sinner in the day of wrath, is already the hiding-place and fortress of the saint.<sup>7</sup>

“And I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.” Knowing whom he has trusted, and on whom he has cast in faith the burden of his sins, he is bold also in the hope that they, who at Corinth had owned him as God’s minister, had accepted both himself and his message, in the effectual conviction of the Holy Ghost. He trusts that they have answered in their consciences to the testimony both of sin and grace, which they had heard from him, and that, as obedient doers of the work of God,<sup>8</sup> they have taken hold upon His strength by faith, and are at peace with Him. Nor will he doubt that he is commended also to their consciences, by the personal consistency of his walk as a living witness and follower of Christ; for as a saint as well as sinner he was made manifest to God, and therefore to the consciences of those who themselves were walking in His light.<sup>9</sup> But, as the sequel shows, his chief anxiety is as to their personal establishment in the grace of God. For so long as they continued saying, “I am of Paul, and I of Apollos,” &c., he could not but feel that he had been but imperfectly manifested in their consciences. He thinks, however, and speaks of them now with reference to the effect of his earlier letter, and his hope rises with his altered estimate of their condition. Persuaded that their

<sup>6</sup> Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

<sup>8</sup> John vi. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Ps. xxxii. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Acts xxiv. 16.

hearts are turned again toward himself, notwithstanding the malignant efforts of his adversaries, his earnest desire is that they should have to do with God, and not only with His servant; while his heart is full of the yearnings of the love of Christ toward them for His sake. And so he continues:—

Verse 12. “For we commend not ourselves again unto you,” &c. If his testimony and consistent conversation do not manifest him to their consciences, he has no desire for their approbation upon any lower ground, nor will he call for an obedience on their part to his apostolic authority apart from the sincere conviction of their hearts. Like the Master whom he served, he did not seek the praise of men; but there were others who did so, and, while nominally preaching and serving Christ, had no other glory than their own before their eyes. By their plausible though groundless pretensions, these men had grievously imposed upon that spirit of credulity which hangs like its very shadow upon self-reliance, and which still abounded to their hurt in the Corinthian assembly; and of these deceivers more will be said hereafter. It is to furnish his brethren with a balance, by means of which such claims might at once be practically weighed, that he here and elsewhere so pointedly insists upon his own doctrine and manner of life. With their own more perfect initiation into the way of the Lord, there would grow also, he trusted, a corresponding readiness of discernment in penetrating and rejecting all such spurious pretensions. Meanwhile, for their sakes and for ours, he so writes as to enable those who read his words with understanding to oppose to all specious claims of a false

ecclesiastical authority, the effective contrast of a genuine servant of the church, who served her in the spirit of devotion to her Lord. There were many, he well knew, who had their conversation neither in simplicity nor in godly sincerity, but who were seeking, through fair but vain words, to prey upon the flock of God, and to make merchandize of them for whom Christ died. Recollections of this kind could not but sadden his spirit, and often like an unwelcome tether they drew him down from heaven to earth—from the rapturous enjoyment of Christ and His unmingled blessedness, to the weary and dispiriting experience of Satan's active practisings against the truth; as well as of the weakness and perverseness which too often threw the unwary sheep of Christ as a spoil—for a time at least—into his hands. In what follows, these contrasted feelings are touchingly expressed.

Verse 13. "For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God,"<sup>1</sup> &c. Ecstatic blessedness is the just effect of truth upon the human spirit, when faith is in perfect communion with its Object, and the mind undistracted by the things of time. And so it is declared by another witness—as a normal description of God's chosen—that in Him believing, though now they see Him not, they rejoice with a joy which is unspeakable and full of glory.<sup>2</sup> In the unclouded light of His presence we can think only of His virtues, and if speech is heard at all, it is the celebration of His praise.<sup>3</sup> And if grace be—as at times

<sup>1</sup> There may be an allusion here to what is described more precisely in chapter xii., but the language is too general to admit of its being restricted to that notable example.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter i. 8.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter ii. 9.

it surely is—ecstatic in its effect on all who truly know it, much more might this be looked for in one to whom so rich an abundance of revelations was vouchsafed. Nor are we who read his words without a personal interest in his experiences, since what Paul tasted, both of joy and grief, was indirectly for our sakes. Not only are we thus encouraged in our own search after God, but we are furnished also with a test by which to prove at any time the measure and quality of our faith. For what rapt the apostle's soul in ecstasy was no other than the truth which he declares to us; and if to enable him to write and act as only he did act and write,<sup>4</sup> an especial frequency of such experiences was granted, we are admonished of the fact in order that our own souls may be stirred to a desire of participation in what he thus describes. The things which he now writes may be read also, and acknowledged by us in another place. For his own words are but a responsive verification of the Master's conditional promise to us all.<sup>5</sup> And where spiritual joy abounds its shadow will be also found. For all true service joy is strength, and the strength thus gained must spend itself in sorrowful collision with the vanity below the sun, to be again renewed by looking upward at the unseen things.

To God, then, Paul was as a man astonished when he contemplated in the face of Jesus Christ the manner of that love which God has set upon lost sinners, and beheld, in faith's clear vision, the wealth of that inheritance which is his own in Christ. But if the sight of Canaan was thus ravishing, a recollection of the intervening waste which must be passed,

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 10; Eph. iii. 1-8.

<sup>5</sup> John xiv. 21.

of the dangers which beset him, and the charge which had been laid on him by his Redeemer, as a chosen and trusted minister of grace, soon changed him to another and a sadder mood. He is sober *for their cause*. As an accountable watcher for their souls,<sup>6</sup> his days of service are filled less with delighted anticipations of the rest for which he longs, than with the work assigned him by the Master, and of which he is so soon to render an account.

To fulfil this worthily was all his anxiety, and although charged with glad tidings as an ambassador of Christ, his labours must be watered with his tears.<sup>7</sup> Joy and grief must have alternate sway in the heart of every faithful minister of God—his inward emotions being regulated by the state of those whom, for Jesus' sake, he serves.<sup>8</sup> Self-committed to the care of Him whose love was all his life,<sup>9</sup> he watched in his ward through the long night of patience, as a trusted guardian of the flock, well knowing what manner of adversary was about their path. Sobering indeed had been the effect upon his spirit of the low condition of these saints at Corinth; but if, as had become too evident, there were some there who owed to him their very souls, and yet were slow of heart to discern in him the true signs of an apostle, and to honour the Master by their worthy treatment of His servant, he would not cease from striving by his own example to lead them in a better way.

Verse 14. "For the love of Christ constraineth us," &c. There lay hidden in his heart a motive-

<sup>6</sup> Heb. xiii. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Acts xx. 31.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Thess. ii. 7-19; iii. 8, *sq.*

<sup>9</sup> Gal. ii. 20; 2 Tim. i. 12.

spring of duty, which sustained and still impelled him on the path even of unrequited service with a willing and untiring devotedness. These words disclose to us the source of all his actions as a spiritual man. The love of his Redeemer had succeeded in his soul to the place once held by natural bigotry, and that deceptive form of self-love which finds its fierce expression in unsanctified religious zeal. The gracious self-devotion of the Son of God had generated in the heart of Paul a faint but genuine reflexion of itself. And let us well observe his language when thus uttering the secret of his soul; not impulsive feeling only, but a calm and meditative estimate is here expressed of the moral claims of Christ's redeeming grace upon the heart and conscience of His people. "We thus *judge*," &c. His mind, with all that is within him, turns with a willing thoroughness of acceptance to the truth which God had taught him in the cross of Jesus Christ.

The remaining verses of this chapter are a rich unfolding of that truth and its effects; but what first fills the apostle's mind, and holds the mastery of his affections, is the mighty and ever-blessed fact of sacrificial atonement. "One died for all." He speaks not only as one who has learnt death in the cross objectively, as God's righteous judgment against sin, but his speech is coloured richly by the captivating power of that grace which has abidingly enthralled his heart, as he sets forth in what follows the mystery of the gospel, with the persuasive earnestness of one who understood what he affirmed, when telling of the love which gave *itself* for our sins.



Two things of equal necessity, but of differing value, are present to his mind, as he contemplates the dying of the Lord. The first is the absolute completeness of the work of substitutional atonement, and the second—which both produces and excels the former—is the personal love and worthiness of Him who did thus die—the Just for the unjust. Comprehending, by a perfect<sup>1</sup> spiritual intuition, the nature and meaning of divine propitiation, Paul infers his own death from that of his Redeemer, and thenceforth acknowledges no other life as his but that which he lives by the faith of the Son of God. This truth, which wrought so mightily in him and his apostolic fellow-workers, is here pressed upon us all as a doctrine of the common faith. “All died,”<sup>2</sup> such is his reasoning, when Jesus died as the appointed Lamb. He does not say, *were dead*. *That* we all were by nature, not as a consequence of sacrificial substitution. All sinned in Adam, and all died in him; and hence what should be “life,” with reference to its proper origin, is only “mortality” in its actual state.<sup>3</sup> But from the moment that faith’s eye is turned steadily on Jesus crucified, all this is changed. Mortality has reached its end in death; the natural man has undergone, in the person of the believer’s ever-blessed Substitute, his final sentence as a transgressor, and in the sight of a just God is

<sup>1</sup> Perfect—that is to say, *relatively*, not absolutely, which none can have until the final change is passed.

<sup>2</sup> Ἀπὸ θανάτου. *Cod. Sin.* has ἀπὸ θανάτου, a reading which, if genuine, would show that the Spirit has here—as occasionally elsewhere also—disregarded grammatical propriety in favour of doctrinal exactness. Christ’s single dying is the death of all for whom He died.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. v. 12, *sq.*

supplanted, through faith in Christ risen, by the spiritual man, who holds life in the title and power of a righteousness both human and divine.

The terms in which the doctrine of substitution is here stated are absolute: one died for all, all therefore died. And since advantage has been taken of this, in entire disregard of the context, to make the language of an inspired apostle the foundation of a false theory of universal redemption,<sup>4</sup> a little space must here be devoted to the refutation of this dangerous, and it is to be feared, highly popular delusion.

The work of Christ is to be estimated always, as to its intrinsic value, by the excellency of His *Person*, while its moral aspect towards mankind is plainly indicated by the declarative language of the Spirit when setting forth His name and glory. He is "the Saviour of the world;" "the Lamb of God, which taketh away (or beareth) the sin of the world;" He gives "His flesh for the life of the world," and is "a propitiation for the whole world." Love to the world induced the Father to send forth His only begotten Son, and it is a faithful saying of the Spirit, that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Further, the declared desire of the God of all grace is, that all men should be saved by means of that One

<sup>4</sup> I say a *false* theory of universal redemption, because in another and far different sense the doctrine of universal redemption is the truth of God. In the day when God makes all things new, He will rejoice in a creation not only perfect as His workmanship, but *reconciled* in all its parts. (Col. i. 20.) The work of atonement will perfectly glorify the workman in the rich fulfilment of his plan; but even as silver must be purged from dross before the art of the refiner can receive its praise, so also will the unrepentant wicked be cast forth to their appointed place, and not found in the creation which God owns as His abiding rest.

Mediator, who gave Himself freely as a ransom for all. Such is the preparation of divine mercy for the need of men. The work is finished, and is now openly attested and published in the gospel by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, to every creature under heaven. The aspect of the grace of God to man is *universal*. The redemption also, which the self-sacrificing Lamb of God has obtained, is an *eternal* redemption.

All this, and more to the same purpose, being true, it remains only to consider the same grace of God in its operative effect. To recur first to the Lord's person: we are told expressly that if the name of *Jesus* was given to the incarnate One of God, it was because He should save *His people* from their sins. But while all are His creatures, seeing that without Him there was nothing made, He confesses as *His people* those only who believe upon His name. The gospel is the message of glad tidings to all who have their hearts and ears opened to receive the words of God. But what is its burden? Is it declared by any of His messengers that all men are saved because *Jésus* died and lives? To put such a question in the face of the plain teaching of Scripture would be an act of gratuitous folly, were it not rendered necessary by the unwearied perverseness of those who prefer their own delusions to the words of truth. Is it forgotten that by the natural man, under both his designations, the gospel is rejected—that the preaching of the cross is to the Jew a stumbling-block, and to the Gentile "foolishness"? "Perdition" is the scriptural opposite to "salvation;" and the sole alternative of a justifying faith in *Jesus* is, by the

Lord's own declaration, a punishment as eternal as the redemption thus refused.

These are among God's true sayings. But there are minds, and their number and influence increases daily, which treat divine doctrines as a basis merely for the evolution and display of human thought. To minds of this stamp truth never rises higher than a theory, and consequently never has possession of the *heart*. The peace of which such men speak is not true peace of conscience through the sprinkling of the blood of Christ, but the deceitful calmness which results from a fancied ability on their part to see through all intervening contrarieties into an ultimate certainty of peace and safety. Attempting to tie the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, not to His own words, but to their conclusions, and forgetful of the declared disparity of His thoughts to ours, they make forgiveness a logical necessity rather than an act of special grace. But in thus forsaking scripture in favour of their own imaginings, they are in reality neglecting God's great salvation; and for such as abide in this condition there is no escape. With presumption and highmindedness written plainly on their foreheads they are self-commended, and too often accepted among men, as the patient and untiring votaries of truth. They aim at the spiritual well-being of their fellow-men, they say, by dispelling irrational apprehensions in favour of juster ideas of the grace of God. The Creator in becoming also the Redeemer has, so to speak, committed Himself irrevocably to their ultimate security. Atonement has been made, and *therefore* sinners will not die, but live. Thus they lie for God, by speaking their own

thoughts instead of His. But it will one day be known incontrovertibly to all how much an offer of mercy differs from an acknowledgment of debt, and that elective love, which in their eyes is no better than a partiality inconsistent with a worthy conception of their Maker's character, is the excellent brightness of His glory who is confessed in the Church as the only wise God our Saviour.

Christ died the just for the unjust; but the ungodly are justified by faith in a Person, not by the mental acknowledgment of a fact. And for the unsophisticated heart of faith, no statement can be simpler or more precious in the hour of our need than the doctrine of this verse. The propitiatory death of Christ involves, by a necessary imputation, the death also of those whom the divine Sufferer represented, and for whom He died. Such, therefore, is the unhesitating conclusion of the renewed understanding, and the heart which accepts this decision believes on and loves the gracious One who did thus die, acknowledging henceforth the sweet constraint and mastery of truth in its new and unchanging form of finished love. *Christ's* love has wrought in its dying energy a work which, by freeing the believer from his natural responsibilities, has brought him past the bitterness of death into the joyful and eternal participation of his Saviour's life.<sup>1</sup>

Verse 15. "And that He died for all, that *they which live* should not henceforth live unto them-

<sup>1</sup> The doctrine briefly stated in this verse is treated by the same apostle more at large in Rom. v. and 1 Cor. xv., while in what immediately follows we have an epitome of his fuller teaching in Rom. vi.

selves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again." The effective limitation of the atonement to the predestinated heirs of grace is plainly involved in this statement. It is nowhere said that because Christ died for all, all are alive, though it is a positive declaration of the gospel that as *in Adam* all die, so *in Christ* shall all be made alive; the last Adam has his offspring like the first.<sup>2</sup> But the last Adam is also the Great Shepherd of the sheep, who holds His flock not by the title which belongs to Him as the Creator of mankind, but as the Father's special gift, and in the bond of the everlasting covenant of life<sup>3</sup> and peace which He has sealed with His own blood. Who then are the living that are contemplated in this verse? They only who believe unto life everlasting on their crucified Redeemer,<sup>4</sup> and because they so believe are taught to reckon themselves already dead to sin, and alive to God in Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup> The just lives by his *faith*. The words now before us show the special aim and purpose of the death-seeking love of Jesus. The dying Lord beheld the prospect of His spoil.<sup>6</sup> To be loved by the living He first set His love upon the dead, even to the voluntary taking of their place. Jesus would have the love of His own as His especial joy, and to win it He so wrought and suffered for their sakes, as to tie them in a willing and eternal bondage to Himself.

Both heart and conscience are appealed to in these words of the apostle, in which the just moral effect

<sup>2</sup> *Notes on First Corinthians*, xv. 22.

<sup>3</sup> John x. 26-29; Heb. xiii. 20.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Tim. i. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Rom. vi. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Titus ii. 14; Heb. xii. 2.

of faith is concisely stated, and which furnish consequently, to the right minded believer, both a ready means of self-examination, and a constant incentive of his zeal. And it should be carefully observed, with reference to the close of this verse, that death *and* resurrection are united in the general estimate of Christian motive. The dying of the Lord is the present and everlasting occasion of our love; His resurrection both determines the nature of our standing before God, and gives to true Christian devotedness its character and form. If we have not added to our faith in the person and atoning work of Christ the knowledge that we are *already risen* with Him, as well as eventually interested in the triumphant benefit of His death, the "constraint" of which Paul speaks will be proportionately weakened. For we are not, nor *can* be, effectually weaned from natural things while still reckoning ourselves among the living in a natural sense. The love which makes men live to Christ is the love by which *faith* works; and faith, when in proper exercise, sees life in *Christ only* as its source and substance, and derivatively in the members of His mystic body.<sup>7</sup> To live to ourselves, therefore, or as he elsewhere speaks, "to walk as men,"<sup>8</sup> is to lie against the proper right of our souls as well as to deny Him practically who is alone the Truth; while to live to Him who died for us, and rose again, is to live also in a perfect and triumphant sense to ourselves, since it is He who is indeed our very life as well as our hope and praise.<sup>9</sup> The whole stress of spiritual exhortation is grounded on the

<sup>7</sup> 1 John iv. 15; 1 Cor. xii. 27.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Col. iii. 4.

doctrine of the resurrection, in its present application to the Church.

The sum then of Christian duty is devotedness to Christ, and the moving spring of that devotedness is the heart's true faith in Him who died for us, and rose again. *Legal* obligations are dissolved through the judicial disallowing and destruction of the flesh, to which alone they can attach. Moreover the law is for sinners, not for righteous men; but the believer, though personally a sinner still, is justified by faith, and, as a man in Christ, is no longer in the flesh, but in the Spirit. And this is the very point of the apostle's language here. For no one lives so intensely "to himself" as the man who goes about to establish his own righteousness. To such an one the law is "gain," until he is taught by the Spirit to understand its true character as the minister and strength of sin, and to seek for and find in his divine Redeemer that end of righteousness, which he once vainly looked for in himself.<sup>1</sup>

Verse 16. "So that we from henceforth know no one after the flesh," &c. There will seem no strangeness in this language to one who has rightly estimated what precedes. Men *know* and *judge*, according to the light in which they personally are, and the language of true faith will represent the truth on which faith lives. But that truth is Jesus, as the Spirit now reveals Him to His own. As men already *dead* with Christ, the apostles, who gloried only in His cross, had lost their natural fellowship with flesh; as *risen* with Him, they see natural objects with an altered eye, and return to natural relation-

<sup>1</sup> Rom. x. 4.



ships in a new and different spirit and power, as well as with another aim. But if apostles tell us their experience, it is that we also may have fellowship with them.<sup>2</sup> Mankind are now contemplated by those who are spiritual, according to the new power of discernment which has been conferred on them through the unction which they have received.<sup>3</sup> They are known, therefore, as “of God,” or “of the world,” as “within,” or “without,” as brethren beloved in Christ, or as strangers, if not enemies, to the truth of God; as believers or as unbelievers, as confessors or deniers of the faith of God’s elect; and being thus distinguished, they are owned or disowned, accordingly—the practical decision of the spiritual man being proportioned always to the measure of his faith, while the sole standard of comparison is Christ.

And as with our fellow-creatures, so also with the Lord. This is strongly expressed in the latter part of the verse. “If even,” says the apostle, “we knew Christ after the flesh, yet now know we Him no more.”<sup>4</sup> He is evidently contrasting here, in the first place, a natural knowledge of Messiah—such as a well-trained Israelite might have received by tradition from his fathers, and of which Paul, as a disciple of Gamaliel, had drunk largely—with the true and divinely-given knowledge of Jesus as the Christ, according to the discerning power of the Holy Ghost.<sup>5</sup> But there is a further meaning in his words. They relate also to the changed condition of the risen

<sup>2</sup> 1 John i. 3, 4.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John ii. 20, 27.

<sup>4</sup> Εἰ καὶ ἐγνώκαμεν κατὰ σάρκα Χριστόν κ.λ. δέ is omitted in the best MSS.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 3.

Lord. Paul had not, like the first apostles, known Him in that companionship in which nature had so large a part; when they saw, and heard, and touched the word of life, with but little knowledge of the excellency of that Presence which was all their joy,<sup>6</sup> and which ended by them all forsaking Him. His discipleship did not begin until the marred visage of the Man of sorrows had put on the brightness of that ancient glory which, for a while, He had veiled under a servant's form for our sakes.<sup>7</sup>

There is in the language of this verse a definiteness which we do well to observe. "From henceforth,"<sup>8</sup> and "now," are expressions which invite an inquiry as to the point of time intended, an inquiry which the same apostle has anticipated and met fully in another place.<sup>9</sup> It was from the moment when the person of the Son of God was revealed in him that he saw and knew, not only what an Israelite indeed might see and know<sup>1</sup> of God's Son in the flesh, but the full brightness of that Light in which there is no darkness at all. Christ in His absolute perfection, as the Son of the Father, is a revelation of the truth which places the receiver of it in a new relation both to God and to His creatures, estranging them not less from the right though deferred expectations of the circumcision, than from the darkness of Gentile ignorance.

That salvation is "of the Jews," is the Saviour's positive confirmation of prophetic testimony,<sup>2</sup> and that Christ as concerning the flesh is "of Israel,"

<sup>6</sup> John xvi. 6.

<sup>8</sup> ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν.

<sup>1</sup> John i. 49.

<sup>7</sup> John xvii. 5; Heb. i. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Gal. i. 15, 16.

<sup>2</sup> John iv. 22.

is a fundamental doctrine of the gospel.<sup>3</sup> But the knowledge of Emmanuel, which the Holy Ghost now gives to the partakers of the heavenly calling, is paramount to that which in its appointed season will flood the earth with gladness, when its manifested God assumes His throne.<sup>4</sup> In the Church there is no Jew, and proper Messianic anticipation is willingly, as well as permanently, subordinated to that "better thing" which sovereign mercy has prepared for the confessors of God's crucified and world-rejected Son. The word "now" contains the point of the apostle's teaching in this verse. As the Lord in person used a like form of speech, when witnessing His good confession before Pontius Pilate, to indicate the postponement of His temporal kingdom to the intermediate calling of the Church,<sup>5</sup> so here His chosen vessel, who could justly boast his knowledge of the mystery of God,<sup>6</sup> excludes in this pointed manner, from the present contemplation of his faith, the yet unrepented promise to the fathers.<sup>7</sup> Christ will again drink with His disciples of the fruit of the vine, in the kingdom of His father,<sup>8</sup> but that kingdom is not now.

Verse 17. "Therefore if any man be in Christ," &c. These words, like those we have just been considering, flow as a direct consequence from what has been

<sup>3</sup> Rom. ix. 5; *conf.* Is. ix. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Is. liv. 5; Zech. xiv. 9. As to the millennial reign, see *Notes on the Psalms passim.*

<sup>5</sup> John xviii. 36.

<sup>6</sup> Eph. iii. 3, 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Notes on the Romans*, chap. xi.

<sup>8</sup> That is, the kingdom of His father *David*, which the multitudes imagined to be "come," when the King rode, meek and sitting on an ass, from Bethpage to Jerusalem. His second entrance will be in another sort. (Mark xi. 10; Luke i. 32, 33; Mal. iii. 2-4.)

before laid down in verse 15, and are an extended application of the doctrine expressed personally in verse 16, to the entire family of faith. Themselves new creatures, because joined by faith to the living Lord,<sup>9</sup> all other things are new also in their eyes—"the old things are passed by, behold they are become new."<sup>1</sup> In verse 14 he had declared explicitly the judicial death of all believers: they died representatively in the person of their gracious Substitute; he now affirms of such a new creation, according to the operation of that mighty power which raised Christ from the dead. The return of the Redeemer from the grave is the birth also of the new creation. Always and unchangeably "the same," He receives now a name expressive of that victory which, as the Captain of salvation, He had won by means of death. He is "the beginning, the first-born from the dead;"<sup>2</sup> and as in His cross and passion they for whose sakes he suffered have their place by imputation,<sup>3</sup> so on His reviving He contains within Himself the full number of the "many" in whose stead He died.<sup>4</sup> The old and foolish king is dead, and the second Child now stands up in his place.<sup>5</sup> Manhood and what depends on it are changed in Christ from shame to glory—the image of the earthly being, by anticipative faith, forgotten in the image of the heavenly.<sup>6</sup>

Old things are become new. With a new life

<sup>9</sup> More strictly, "a new creation," *καινή κτίσις*, *conf.* Gal. vi. 15. Perhaps they are right who would translate these words into "creation is new;" but this is doubtful.

<sup>1</sup> *Cod. Sin.*, with all the better MSS., omits *τὰ πάντα*.

<sup>2</sup> Col. i. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Gal. ii. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. ix. 21; 1 Cor. xv. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Eccles. iv. 13-15.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 49.

there is also a new title; the servant is become a son, and both his expectations and his duties are according to his altered state. The new creation here affirmed of the believer is under another description—"the newness of the Spirit," as opposed to "the oldness of the letter;" and constitutes the basis on which all true Christian life and conversation rests.<sup>7</sup> Things which have always been continue, but in a new power and with another end. Men served and worshipped God before Christ came; but how different is true Christian worship from that of those who served in the spirit of bondage!<sup>8</sup> And as with worship—the true crown of life—so also in the various details of duty and observance. To the pure all things are pure, and faith sees and handles all things in the liberty of full redemption. The very important bearing of the liberty of grace upon the *conscience* of the "man in Christ," is solemnly enforced in the concluding verses of the following chapter.

The apostle does not hesitate, when speaking of these things, to use language of an absolute and final significance, because he is not describing the experience of Christians, but enunciating divine doctrine. Hence his words are not only contradictory of our natural consciousness as men, but in part also of what is proper to us as saints. The tribulation through which all must pass who enter into the kingdom of God is here entirely disregarded, as well as the groaning which in an especial manner marks the spiritual man. Viewing the believer solely with reference to his new nature and position as a man in

<sup>7</sup> *Notes on the Romans*, vii. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Rom. viii. 15.

Christ, he sets immediately before his faith the sure results of the great work of redemption as a present and unalterable truth. That which as a *fact* awaits the fulfilment of God's last creative words,<sup>9</sup> is already apprehended by a faith which sees light only in His light, and regards all things, therefore, in their predestined relation to their Head. For He in whom we live is the Beginning of the creation of God.<sup>1</sup> What Adam was in figure, Christ is in the brightness of eternal truth; and the Comforter, a part of whose mission is to tell the Church of things to come, is our witness that He is already in us who will shortly bring these things to pass. What imagination vainly promises to poets, faith does effectually for the spiritual man. He sees in Christ invisible things, and in the fixed assurance of His love sustains his soul upon a hope which maketh not ashamed.

Verse 18. "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ," &c. From the upper springs of spiritual blessing we descend now to the nether, to be reminded of the manner in which the creative and all-changing power of God has had its operation on ourselves. It is to the era of redemption and not that of original creation that Christian title and expectation are to be effectively referred. The love which beheld us in our natural perverseness has wrought on us its own desired change. Naturally enemies, we are if believers *reconciled* to God by the death of His own Son—a declaration the import of which will presently be more fully considered. The God of our worship is

<sup>9</sup> Rev. xxi. 5.

<sup>1</sup> *Ante*, page 102.

the same who rested on the seventh day from the works which He had made; but as worshippers in the Spirit we know Him not as Adam knew Him, but according to the truth of His nature, as by His own eternal Son He now reveals Himself in His new and ever-blessed work of grace. The apostle, while writing on the common faith, and declaring doctrines which find a responsive acknowledgment in every heart that has heard and learnt of the Father,<sup>2</sup> speaks first, as his custom is, of himself and his partners in the ministry of God: "And gave to us the ministry of reconciliation;" referring thus his liberty of speech for Christ to the same sovereign and enabling grace which had quickened him when dead in trespasses and sins. It is interesting to notice also in these words a fresh definition of the gospel. In chapter iii. we have had it designated as the "ministration of the Spirit" and the "ministration of righteousness;" its source and intrinsic quality being thus indicated and described. It is now freshly named, with reference to its aim and its effect; reconciliation being the purpose of that love of God which He commends to His chosen in the death of His own Son. And now, although Paul is addressing those whom he has already claimed as his own children in the faith, he drops for a while the language of a teacher and assumes that of a *preacher*, while enunciating in what follows the terms of this ministry of reconciliation.

Verse 19. "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself," &c. The work of reconciliation is in this passage traced directly to its

<sup>2</sup> John vi. 45.

origin, and viewed in its effective demonstration. The parties estranged were God and the world which God had made. Sin having entered into the world had of order made disorder, and of a living soul a dying worm. The taint of corruption had fastened on the work of God, and He only who had in wisdom suffered this injury to vitiate His first work of creation, had power to redress it to the praise of His own glory. And God was in Christ. It is necessary first of all to mark the one-sidedness of the apostle's doctrine here. He never speaks of God's *being reconciled* to the world, or even to His people, when setting forth the gospel of His grace on this its higher side. Such a notion would be plainly out of harmony with what the scriptures teach us of divine perfection. For while it is true that sin is a perpetual provoking of divine judgment, and that God is angry with the wicked every day, yet it is certain also that the same God, who loved the work of His own hands, has in His essential dispositions undergone no change since first He saw His likeness in His work. In Him is neither variableness nor shadow of turning, and His purpose is eternal like Himself. If therefore it is written that God repented that He had made man upon the earth, when He looked upon the ripened fruits of sin,<sup>3</sup> it is that we may know that our Maker has in His nature susceptibilities of which our own are a reflexion; that He is affected by what He sees of good or evil (seeing that He is the *living* God, and not a mere philosopher's abstraction), not that his original intentions ever change, or that He can be diverted from His pur-

<sup>3</sup> Gen. vi. 5, 6.



posed end. What He *does* proves only what He *is*, and both His actions and His ways are known only as He makes them known.

But it is otherwise with man. Sin is aversion from God. Man's heart, therefore, in which sin now naturally dwells, is constitutionally alienated from his Maker, and because he regards Him through the medium of a darkened understanding so long as he is in an unregenerate state, he thinks falsely of Him *always*. If conscience is *active*, God is supposed to be vindictively against us; if *inactive*, He is either altogether out of mind, or dishonoured by the flattering self-deceptions of those who judge their Creator by themselves.<sup>4</sup>

But the season of ignorance is past.<sup>5</sup> God, who had long spoken to a single family of the nations by the prophets,<sup>6</sup> telling forth from the beginning clearly, if sparingly, His final thoughts of peace, speaks now to all men by His Son. And the truth which in the gospel shows itself above all other verities of revelation is, that God is *for* and not *against* His guilty creature. That sin may be righteously forgiven, propitiation must be made for sin; but the source of that propitiation is the bosom of the Father, who in love to the world sent forth to that very end His only begotten Son. The subject is here treated in the simplest and most comprehensive terms. Reconciliation was both God's purpose and His wish,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ps. i. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Acts xvii. 30, 31.

<sup>6</sup> Amos iii. 2; Heb. i. 1, 2.

<sup>7</sup> The sincerity of God's wishes as a Saviour is attested by the urgent invitations of His grace; the victorious energy of His *purpose* has its everlasting monument in the salvation of His people. He leaves the unrepentant sinner without plea, by preaching

and to effect it He sent forth His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and on account of sin. But the Father and the Son are one: God came to do His own work in the person of His Son. From the moment when the Lamb of God was manifested, the world's transgressions were presumptively transferred to Him.<sup>8</sup> Hence, although the presence of the Holy One drew out more abundantly than ever the evil energy of the sin that is in the world, their trespasses were not imputed to them, because the work of God was reconciliation and not judgment.<sup>9</sup> Their guilt should be imputed to another. And here we may observe the intimate connexion which subsists between reconciliation as a moral effect, and sacrificial atonement as its instrumental means. God loved the world, and was bent upon its reconciliation to Himself; but where guilt is the cause of estrangement between God and man, the only possible way in which the aggrieved party can disarm the enmity of the offender, is by an absolute offer of forgiveness. But again, if justice be a truth and not a fable, sin must be visited by its avenging penalty; destructive as it is of life, it must be counteracted and itself destroyed by vital sacrifice. The cross of Christ is, as we shall see more fully presently, the ever-blessed solution of this great mystery of peace. It is there-

peace through Jesus Christ to every creature under heaven, while He glorifies the sovereignty of His mercy by effectually calling whom He will. Reason is dumb and helpless in the presence of God's testimonies, but these are very sure, and are the confidence and gladness of the heart which bows in truth to Him. (Ps. xix, xciii. 5, cxix. 99, 111.)

<sup>8</sup> "Behold the Lamb of God, which *taketh away* (or beareth) the sin of the world." (John i. 29.)

<sup>9</sup> John iii. 17.

fore because forgiveness of sin can proceed only upon a sacrificial atonement, and because the latter, how perfect soever in itself, avails them only who in faith present it before God, that believers are elsewhere declared to have been reconciled to God when enemies by the death of His own Son.<sup>1</sup>

It is of much importance to remember that the first clause of this verse is retrospective, and describes not what God is *now* doing, but what He did and was doing in the first mission of His blessed Son. Jesus Christ was indeed a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and salvation is therefore distinctively "of the Jews;"<sup>2</sup> but the supreme end of the coming of the Son of God into the world was to do "His Father's business," and He wrought it by the Father who dwelt in Him.<sup>3</sup> Now the will of the Father was, by means of redemption, to reconcile *all things* to Himself.<sup>4</sup> Grace should reign through righteousness in Jesus Christ. Hence the world's condemnation is declared, not at the annunciation of the Saviour, but on His rejection.<sup>5</sup> The Spirit now convicts the world of sin, because it believed not in the Light of God. His own words, when about to go to Him that sent Him, are: "I came not to judge the world, but to save the world."<sup>6</sup>

The aspect of the doctrine stated in this verse is

<sup>1</sup> Rom. v. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. xv. 8; John iv. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Luke ii. 49; John xiv. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Col. i. 20. In Rom xi. 15 the casting away of Israel is said to be the reconciling of the world; but this dispensational contrast is not to be confounded with the broader doctrine of the text. *Notes on Romans in loc.*

<sup>5</sup> John iii. 19; xii. 31.

<sup>6</sup> John xii. 36, 47.

very wide. The subordinate facts relating to the manifestation of Emmanuel, and His rejection by His own, are here overshadowed by the grand central truth of the cross. God had foreordained a Lamb, and prepared a body for His Son. All other things which the gospels witness of the Saviour are passed by in silence, because, although inseparable from the doctrine of atonement in its complete enunciation, they are not its distinctive verity. Death only could effect the reconciliation to God of those whom sin had made His enemies, and whose condition is mortal on account of sin. The *work* of reconciliation therefore was completed, when the suffering Redeemer bowed His sacred head upon the cross and said, "It is finished," in the act of death. The *ministry* of reconciliation began when, in the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, the Lord's originally-called apostles preached first at Jerusalem, and to the actual murderers of Christ, forgiveness and acceptance in His *Name*. And it is to the fellowship of this ministry that Paul, the once persecutor and injurious, here lays claim, for himself and his partners in the work of God, in the closing sentence of this verse: "and placed in us the word of reconciliation."<sup>7</sup>

We read in these words the natural language of one who, as an able minister of the New Testament, referred all his sufficiency to God. The direct operation of the Holy Ghost as the alone efficient minister of gospel grace is clearly intimated in this statement, which merits truly our close attention. For we are living in days when a nominally gospel ministry is

<sup>7</sup> θέμενος ἐν ἡμῖν τ.λ.τ.κ.

often undertaken in a very different sufficiency, and put merely upon a par with the diffusion of "useful knowledge." But to them that know God truly, the preaching of Christ crucified is another sort of work, and of a character exclusively its own. In things natural it is enough that a man has struck out an original idea, or recognized with clearness some important fact, to enable him to spread his knowledge—usefully or hurtfully according to its character—among his fellow-men. In things spiritual it is otherwise. A mere doctrinal evangelist is but a prating fool, corrupting the message which he so officiously delivers (even in the rare instances in which he states its terms correctly) by the debasing contact of his own unchastened mind, though God may, and in the sovereignty of His mercy often does, send through such unsanctified channels a real life-giving Christ to the expectant ear.<sup>8</sup> But a true preacher of the gospel is one in whose heart the Son of God has been revealed, as it was in the heart of the apostle, by the effectual power of the Holy Ghost. The God who moved the ancient prophets, and put a word from time to time into their mouths, now takes lasting possession of the redeemed vessels of His mercy, and constrains their hearts and minds to a consenting sympathy with His own most precious thoughts. And from hearts thus filled the lips flow over with "good matter" as they speak of Jesus. Reconciled thoroughly themselves, they can speak persuasively of that which they both know and understand. Their speech may be rude, but it is real; for they utter only that which God has first put in their hearts; and by the

<sup>8</sup> Phil. i. 18.

word thus preached there is spread abroad a saving knowledge of His reconciling love. That word, we know too well, may be rejected; but he speaks here of the aspect of the gospel towards man, and not of its definitive results.

The specific sin which, as the crown of all other trespasses, is now charged upon the world is the rejection and crucifixion of the Lord. To argue therefore, as some dare to do, that because in the providing of His fore-ordained Lamb God was not then imputing trespasses to men, He does not *now* impute them to the unbeliever, would be to mock His goodness and declare ourselves incapable of mercy. For that "the whole world lieth in the wicked one" is among the latest recorded testimonies of the Spirit, who now witnesses to the ascended glory of the Saviour.<sup>9</sup> Men are judged, in every age and dispensation, according to the particular revelation of Himself which God may make in each. As a broken law was the ruin and condemnation of those who with hearts estranged from God still ignorantly boasted of the law, so a disregarded or perverted gospel is the snare of destruction which in the present age contains the world. God extricates His chosen from it, in the wisdom of His grace, by quickening their souls effectually through the word of reconciliation, and causing thus the blood of Jesus to speak better things to them and for their sakes than that of Abel. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the open condemnation of the world which judged Him; and it was the profound sense that Paul had of this solemn truth which led him, as one immediately and fully taught of God,

<sup>9</sup> 1 John v. 19.

to refuse to know anything among the Gentiles but the cross. Many deceivers are gone forth into the world to flatter men with groundless dreams of peace and safety, but their own false witness will condemn them in the coming day. The world is not yet reconciled to God, though the ground and means of its reconciliation have been discovered and provided, and are now in the gospel openly declared.

Verse 20. "We therefore as ambassadors for Christ," &c. God *was* in Christ, Christ *is* in God, and with Him is the hidden life of all His saints.<sup>1</sup> As messengers and ministers of God, therefore, the inspired apostles, and in a secondary sense all genuine evangelists, are ambassadors also of God's world-rejected Son. God speaks, but speaks for Christ, and in His name. As in the days of His flesh the Son's delight was by His words and deeds to glorify the Father, so now God's witness by His Spirit is entirely of Jesus. His voice speaks through the lips of ambassadors, who like their Master urge no outward claim upon the world's regard, and whose dignity consists solely in the message which they bear.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is Christ also who is personally received, or a second time rejected in the word of His own grace.<sup>3</sup> All therefore who now desire peace with their Creator must take their answer from the lips of the exalted Son of man. They, again, who now desire to see Jesus, must for the present rest contented with the testimony of the gospel. His *Name* is now given under heaven for salvation; we are justified by faith, and not by sight. As to the form and power of this ambassage,

<sup>1</sup> Col. iii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 5.

<sup>3</sup> "And *came* and *preached* peace." (Eph. iii. 17.)

it is men who appear, it is God who really entreats. As in the days of Christ's humiliation, they who saw Him saw the Father also, and all who heard Him listened to the words of God; so now, the ear that hearkens to the gospel is addressed through human lips indeed, but by the Spirit of the living God. None but the Holy Ghost can truly testify of Jesus. Paul and his fellows are ministers, and do their service in communion with the grace which they declare; but the *ministry* is of the Spirit—"as though God did beseech you by us." Truly *He* is for peace who thus makes suit to His rebellious creatures, and entreats them in the name of Him, who by dying for the guilty has removed all cause of strife, to be at peace with Him.

In further considering the terms of this strange overture of grace, we may note the difference of Paul's language in this place from that which he employs when handling at large the doctrine of the gospel in his epistle to the Romans. The main point on which he there insists is the necessary efficacy of faith in justifying the ungodly, while here stress is laid on the sinner's personal reconciliation to God; and this last must be regarded not *judicially* only—as an act of divine mercy in setting forth Christ crucified as a propitiation for our sins, but *morally* also, in its subjective effect on ourselves. It is thus that the Spirit of truth, while publishing in the freest and most absolute terms, the glad tidings of salvation, extinguishes the hope of natural presumption and hypocrisy. The glorious gospel of the blessed God is preached among men for the remission of their sins, and His saving grace is made openly manifest



to all who will listen to His words; but there is neither forgiveness nor salvation for those who, with His message of reconciliation in their ears, in heart and desire are still enemies of God. If the grace of the gospel does not draw the heart to God, it never has been truly tasted or received; for the goodness of God leads those who know Him to *repentance*. Now our old nature, or the will of the flesh, never does repent toward God: repentance, like the faith with which it ever is associated, is God's special gift, and is the first and continuing effect of His regenerative grace. But the instincts of God's new-born babes are both holy and towards Himself. Hence the man who is truly reconciled to God by the death of His Son is, for that very reason, at variance with himself. The Spirit lusts against the flesh. Imprisoned in corruption, and personally vanquished often by indwelling sin,<sup>4</sup> the genuine believer hears the voice of the Deliverer, and by faith in Jesus gains his rest in God.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the unregenerate holder of the truth hears words which, if intelligible at all, convey a false meaning, and with it a false comfort to the heart. For all that nature cares for is to be out of danger at God's hands; and this it dreams of as the natural effect of gospel grace, though its desires be as much as ever toward its own lusts and the world, and therefore contrary to God; for the friendship of the world is enmity with God.<sup>6</sup> Professing to know God, they boast still of a natural liberty of will—the liberty of self-pleasing, instead of that with which the Son of God makes free. Nature would still remain, if

<sup>4</sup> Rom. vii.    <sup>5</sup> 1 Peter i. 21.    <sup>6</sup> Jas. iv. 4. *Ante*, page 156, sq.

possible, *its own*, but under divine protection and encouragement. It seeks the way of Cain. God's saints, when in their right mind, and walking in the Spirit, love to remember that they have ceased to be their own, and are wholly His who bought them with a price.

When faith is not duly nourished by the word of grace, believers cease practically to live upon the Lord, and become in heart estranged from God. To reach them by the Shepherd's voice, and to restore them, in the spirit of their minds, to the place whence they have slipped, is then the labour of a genuine watcher for their souls. When speaking, therefore, in his gospel to a church which was but imperfectly recovered from a state of deep decline, and containing still among its nominal members some even who had not the knowledge of God, the apostle is led to address himself to these Corinthians as if the work of reconciliation—on their side, at least—had yet to be accomplished. It was indeed begun, in all of them who had believed, from the moment that truth spoke distinctly to their hearts; but it needed to be perfected, and should be so, he trusted, by the same power which began it.<sup>8</sup> There is gospel for both saints and sinners; what saves the latter feeds and admonishes the former: and we may learn from this passage a most profitable lesson as to the importance of our listening often to the words which first let life into our souls. Yet it is a most injurious error to suppose, as many seem to do, that Christians need *only* the message of reconciliation. Christ's *fulness*, as the Comforter unfolds that

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. i. 8.

fulness in the Scriptures, is the proper portion of His flock. In a word, it may be safely affirmed that while an indifference on the part of the believer to the word of gracious invitation, as if it were entirely superfluous, would argue a lofty and perilous condition of soul, to seek nothing further would imply a most infirm and sickly faith. For they who know God truly seek not personal salvation only, in the gospel of His Son,<sup>9</sup> but the more abundant knowledge of Himself and of His will.

Verse 21. "For He made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin," &c. We have now, in this closing verse, a bold and emphatic statement of the ever-blessed truth which forms the basis of this marvellous negotiation between the God of all grace and those who consent to sit down at His feet in Jesus, and receive His words.<sup>1</sup> Two things are here contemplated by the Spirit: the positive work of God, and its definitive intent; and in connection with these we have the Lord Jesus and His work presented to us under two entirely opposite aspects, though morally the truth is one. He is represented first as having been made "sin," and secondly as being personally and eternally the "righteousness of God." And first, let us carefully distinguish between being made *sin* and being made *a sinner*.<sup>2</sup> A

<sup>9</sup> Col. i. 9; 1 Peter ii. 2.

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxxiii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> The attempt to bring the doctrine of atonement within the reach of natural intelligence has led even wise and godly men into many varieties of error. Among the most recent, and certainly not the least dangerous, of these is the notion, welcomed eagerly in some quarters as teaching of the highest order, that upon the cross there was imputed to Christ not "sin" or "sins" only, but that, in some unexplained way, our "old man," or sinful nature, was found on Him as the sacrificial victim, though

sacrificial substitute is of necessity distinct from what it represents, and the more strongly marked this difference is, the more exactly is the idea of vicarious expiation realized, which is that innocence suffers in the place of guilt. Under the law a clean beast was the appointed means of showing forth at once, without prejudice to His personal separateness from sin. A false view of the apostle's doctrine in Romans vi. 6, appears to have given rise to this very unscriptural conception. Its truly perilous character will at once be seen on a consideration of some of the expressions employed by its expounders. Instead of those precious and simple declarations of the Spirit which speak of Christ's bearing and making an end of sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and then taking again the life which He had once for all laid down, we are told that sin was by imputation "attached" to the "human life" which Christ "took"—that this life was ended by His death, *and not again renewed*, the Lord having, in resurrection, "left behind the very nature in which He was responsible and suffered for sin," &c. And it is a melancholy proof of the helplessness of the human mind, when abandoned to the free-workings of its own imaginings, that the same writers who make the finishing of sin to consist in the Lord's getting rid of the life to which they say it was attached, affirm elsewhere in the most positive terms that atonement was not really effected by the *death* of Christ, but by His unknown sufferings anterior to death!

A feeble attempt has been made to justify the above and similar expressions by lowering the word "life" in its meaning to "state or condition of existence." But such an explanation, instead of removing the difficulty, serves only to bring on them who have recourse to it the additional and serious blame of changing the natural meaning of God's words; for in the Spirit's language the word translated "life" means also "soul." The futility of such a plea will be best shown by exhibiting two plain texts of Scripture in this altered form. We shall thus have in John x. 17: "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my *state or condition of existence*, that I might take it again," &c. And in Acts ii. 27: "Thou wilt not leave my *state or condition of existence* in Hades," &c. &c. The first of these new versions states with precision an entirely false position; the second is pure nonsense. Thus it fares, and ever must fare, with those who yield to the temptation of theorizing on the vital doctrines of the faith, instead of desiring the sincere milk of the word.

both the principle of vicarious satisfaction, and the insufficiency of anything that man could lay upon God's altar to make an effectual atonement for his soul. For while contrasted in its moral condition, the substituted victim must in nature be identical with what it represents. The language here employed by the apostle receives an ample illustration from the detailed account recorded for us in the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus of the sacrificial ordinances of the annual day of atonement. Because the offered victim had transferred to it on that great day the whole measure and variety of Israel's sins, it was made by that act to be, in the eye of the Avenger, the thing it bore, and from which it had its sacrificial name. So is it also with our divine Redeemer and His passion. For the suffering of death He was made a little lower than the angels, but before the hour of His mortal pains arrived, He had lived, and borne, and wrought, and spoken, in such sort as to prove Himself to be in truth the Holy One of God. From beneath, as well as from above, this witness had been borne to Him whom men alone despised.<sup>3</sup> Jesus was made sin for us, when having accepted at the Father's hands the cup which crowned the measure of His perfect obedience, He, by the Eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God. For upon the Lamb, thus self-devoted, but of old ordained, God laid in His good pleasure the iniquity of us all. Things that He knew not were then laid unresisted to His charge, and in the completeness of His character as our Substitute, He appropriates the burden then imposed, confessing what He knew not

<sup>3</sup> Mark i. 24.

as His own.<sup>4</sup> For *us* God made Him to be sin ; putting on Him who knew no sin the thing which makes us naturally what we are ; and treating His well-beloved Son, for our sakes, as if He were indeed the very thing which then in our stead He bore.

We must be on our guard also against the fallacious idea sometimes grounded on this verse, that Christ was made sin *absolutely* and in a final and determinative sense. If so, sin would, of course, be altogether at an end ; the evil existing in the world must be called by some other name ; and of those at least who call upon His name it would be true that they have no longer any sin—a conclusion expressly contradicted by the Holy Ghost.<sup>5</sup> The precious doctrine which we are considering is the portion and resting-place of *faith* alone, and faith in its very nature seeks in its great Object what it has not in itself. The doctrine of vicarious imputation is a contradiction of all natural experience, because it originates with Him whose thoughts are not as our thoughts. He who knew no sin was made sin for us, who know that in ourselves, that is, in our flesh, there dwelleth no good thing. But our Substitute is not to be confounded with ourselves. And as with sin, so also with its opposite. God, who made the Just One to be sin for us, did so that we might become the righteousness of

<sup>4</sup> How the Just One felt when taking vicariously the place of the unjust, is best learnt from those parts of the prophetic Scriptures to which direct reference has been made in this connexion by God's inspired witnesses in the New Testament. In Psalms xxxviii. 18, 20, and lxix. 5, 7, 9, the contrast between the personal sanctity of the Obedient One, and His thorough assumption, in His sacrificial grace, of the guilt laid on Him as His people's substitute, is pointedly expressed.

<sup>5</sup> 1 John i. 8, 10.

God *in Him*. We shall examine presently with more attention the import of these blessed words. Let us here notice only that God's righteousness is the exactest opposite to human sin, and as an inseparable attribute of God can be manifested only in one who is Himself divine. Now the Father and the Son are one, and God was in the Christ whom men refused. Of the works which the Just One wrought in the days of His humiliation, when as the Son of man He fulfilled for our sakes *all righteousness*, He disclaimed all separate praise. "The Father which dwelleth in me, He doeth the works,"<sup>6</sup> are words which not only express the perfection of His human nature as the obedient glorifier of His Maker—thus separating Him morally from Adam and his seed;<sup>7</sup> but show also that all that the acceptable *Man* did was the work also of *God*. God's righteousness is never out of or apart from Christ; and the faith which unites the pardoned sinner to the Just One, who once suffered in his stead, makes him as truly the righteousness of God in Him, as he was personally dead in trespasses and sins before he knew the power of his Saviour's name. By imputation the Deliverer stood, for the fatal hour of sacrifice, beneath the weight of all His people's sin; by the just award, therefore, of the God to whom that Sacrifice was offered, they are now designated according to the character of Him who is their new and endless life.<sup>8</sup>

An act then is here ascribed to God which fully

<sup>6</sup> John xiv. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Rom. iii. 23.

<sup>8</sup> For a summary to the doctrine of justification, reference must be made to the note at the close of chapter v. of the *Notes on the Romans*.

justifies the bold and striking language of His servant. For in giving Christ to death for us, He treated Him as if sin were to be found and punished only in His sacred Person. The world's trespasses were comprehended in that "sin" which is here placed as a judicial stigma on the Lamb of God.<sup>9</sup> And now let us remark further the true force of the expression "knew no sin." It is not said only that the Lord was sinless, or that none could convince Him of sin, or even that God who had searched and known the Man whom He approved could find only truth and goodness in His ways. All this is true, and precious in its truth; but what is here said expresses more than this, and to be rightly understood it must be balanced against the opposing phrase "*for us*." For as we know righteousness only as something foreign to our nature, as fallen creatures, and have no subjective apprehension of it until justified by faith, so Christ knew sin only as a thing entirely apart from Him, which indeed as the Holy One of God He hated and would judge, but of which He had no subjective knowledge or consciousness whatever until He had offered Himself, in His spotlessness, as our Substitute upon the cross. When numbered with the transgressors He bore the sin of many; confessing, as if they were exclusively His own, things which He had known only by their deadly effects on God's degraded creature, and then personally estimated by the awful weight of that infliction which fell upon Him as the willing Surety for His own. In all its horrible reality He took sin on Him as His burden and His shame, but it was as strange as ever to Himself. Hence the poignancy

<sup>9</sup> 1 John ii. 2. *Ante*, verse 19.



of His expiring appeal, "Why hast Thou forsaken me?" He knew no sin, but Himself bare our sins in His own body on the tree.<sup>1</sup>

Nor is the grace of the Victim more conspicuous than the love of Him who furnished forth the altar of redemption with His fore-ordained Lamb. This is forcibly manifested in the cast of the apostle's language. It is not said that He was made sin merely, but "*He* made Him to be sin," &c. After having weighed the actions of His own beloved Son, approved His thoughts, and let forth all His soul in the delight with which He viewed the path of Jesus,<sup>2</sup> the Father did not spare the Just One from the sacrificial death for which He had been born into the world. God, whom our iniquities had so displeased, made Him, who only pleased Him, to be sin for us. Surely herein is love!<sup>3</sup> And this love wrought out its gracious instincts by the line and measure of pure truth. *Sinners must die*; nor could the dissolution of the mortal body hide the guilty spirit from the searching gaze of Him who judges righteously. To be safe from wrath men must be free from sin. This *could* be only on the principle of sacrificial expiation: it *might* be only by the natural impossibility of God's providing such a Substitute—nay, not providing only but *becoming* such; for God was in Christ. The Father and the Son are one. And if, in the just statement of sacrificial doctrine, Jehovah appears utterly apart from the human victim whom He smites and leaves to death, that Man is His fellow still.<sup>4</sup> It must never be forgotten, that the dying Sufferer is

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter ii. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. xlii. 1.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John iv. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Zech. xiii. 7.

the source also and the giver of eternal life. To say that God the Father suffered for us would be false; to forget that the dying Mediator is also God the Son would be to deny the mystery of godliness, and to spoil the doctrine of the atonement of its central truth and all its vital efficacy. God only can either measure or perform the will of God, and it was to do that will that Jesus came into the world.<sup>5</sup>

But while the Godhead of the Saviour is everywhere attested by the Spirit, and shines brightly and steadily for faith through all the varied manifestations of that "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" which it is the believer's wealth to know,<sup>6</sup> and never more vividly than when hanging on the cross, the point of the apostle's teaching in these words is the exhaustive completeness of God's great work of propitiatory reconciliation through the dying obedience of His Son. In the brevity of the statement its great force consists. When God made Him to be *sin* for us, all that by divine propriety of speech could be thus designated was objectively contemplated by the eye of Him who is the Judge of all, as He looked down upon His dying Christ. It is a positive act, a new and strange work, and which never could be wrought a second time, that the Holy Spirit here attests; and the terms which He employs are evidently chosen with a special reference to the magnitude of that which is described. God *made* the worlds by Jesus Christ, and will create them yet again; He *made* also Him who knew no sin to be sin in our stead.<sup>7</sup> No language can express more forcibly both the absoluteness of His will who did not spare His Son, and the natural and perfect

<sup>5</sup> Heb. x. 7-10.    <sup>6</sup> Chap. viii. 9.    <sup>7</sup> ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν.

spotlessness of Him who came to do it. Had there been in the man Jesus any thought or natural capacity of sinning, God *could* not have *made* Him to be sin. Such speech would then be both superfluous and untrue. He does not make *us* sinners. What we *are* by birth and inheritance He suffers to appear in practice to our own confusion, and then lays upon the holy and blameless One the iniquity of us all. Let the tried half-believer, who with a thoroughly awakened conscience may be toiling in spirit under the weight of his own sins, consider well these gracious words, and learn quickly the first lesson of an acceptable obedience by consenting to the will of God. He has wrought this wondrous thing. Shall we refuse or hesitate to own His hand? He has transferred sin from sinners to the Just One; shall we dispute the fact because of its contrariety to our thoughts? Nay, He has both done it, and done it for our sakes, that by wisely considering His work we may learn to know and love the God with whom we have to do.

Nor has love's great sacrifice been made without a worthy end. If God's beloved was made sin by Him, it was that we might become<sup>s</sup> the righteousness of God in Him. Let us first notice a significant distinction which exists between the words which the apostle is here taught to use when speaking of the Saviour on the one hand, and on the other of the fruit of the travail of His soul—a distinction but imperfectly expressed in our translation. When he demonstrates the imputation of our sin to Christ, the strongest possible term is employed, in order to im-

<sup>s</sup> ἵνα ἡμεῖς γενώμεθα.

press the completeness of the sacrificial transfer of all our burden to the Lord: "He *made* Him to be sin for us." But when the result is in contemplation, there is a change also of expression; it is not said "that we might be *made*," but "that we might *become* the righteousness of God in Him." We are not made, or constituted substantively, any other thing than that we naturally are. Our guilt is indeed transferred to Him, but not in the same sense His worthiness to us. We cease to be guilty in the sight of God, but does He cease to be the Just One? By imputation we are as He is, but in living fact He only is the righteousness of God. We become so by our faith in Him. Sinners are sinners, whether saved or lost. A saint is a sinner saved, since by virtue of the faith which joins him to the Saviour, he is become by imputation what his dead and risen Sponsor personally is. Now in name, in action, and in everlasting truth, the Lamb of God is equally the *righteousness* of God.

We must, in the next place, observe carefully the different nature of the action indicated by these varying terms. The one is positive and past: "He *made* Him to be sin," &c.; the other is potential: that we *might* become," &c. Now the force of this is evident, and is of solemn importance to all who ponder sincerely the apostle's words. God's purpose and intent is sure of its fulfilment; He will bring His many sons to glory through the dying of the Lord; but since nothing but an active faith joins any one to Christ, the predestined result of His atoning work is stated thus conditionally. To state, as is sometimes done, that because Christ died men

are justified, is to substitute a ruinous delusion for a saving truth. The Scripture knows nothing of justification apart from faith. While therefore to the believer Christ is become already "righteousness" of God,<sup>9</sup> it is to the believer *only*. The cross is preached that sinners may believe, and all who do believe will assuredly be found "in Him;" not having their own righteousness, but that which is of God by faith.<sup>1</sup>

Once more regarding with the closeness it deserves this wondrous destiny of God's true children, it is certain that, to understand and profit by the Spirit's language, we must bind our whole attention to the Object of our faith. For it is *in Him* that we become God's righteousness. From the trance of judicial and most real death, the Just One returns in resurrection to Himself<sup>2</sup> and to His people, receiving thus from God the Father a new glory as the First-born from the dead, the parental Origin of the new and spiritual race, the First-born of God's many sons, the manifested Life and Head of those for whom He died. The doctrine of representative identity must be well remembered in considering the apostle's words. The first man was made in the image and likeness of God, and, as the head of a yet unfallen creation, might be said to be the beauty and comeliness of the God who made him; perfect in outward form, and standing in the untried worth of natural uprightness.<sup>3</sup> But all this has been defaced and lost through sin.

<sup>9</sup> *Notes on First Corinthians*, i. 30.

<sup>1</sup> Phil. iii. 9.

<sup>2</sup> I speak of the dying and reviving of the man Christ Jesus. But the temporary spoil of death ceased not to be the Living One, the quickening Spirit; while His broken body lay, for its appointed season, in the grave.

<sup>3</sup> Eccles. vii. 29.

The last Adam is not the manifested glory only, but essentially and distinctively the *righteousness* of God. There are two senses in which the word righteousness may here be taken: first, judicially, since by means of the atonement, God glorifies His righteousness in the justification of believers;<sup>4</sup> but secondly, and chiefly, with reference to the meritorious obedience of Jesus as the Man approved of God,<sup>5</sup> and our own presentation, as new creatures, in the faultless perfection of the Beloved.

God's righteousness is seated in God's will, and is manifested in the doing of that will. Now all that God willed, as a just God and a Saviour, Jesus did, and did it in our likeness and for us.<sup>6</sup> God has made Himself manifest in Christ. But because the Just One took our place in death, we have, if believers, died with Him, and therefore lost, in the sight of God, all part in that first life which came to us from Adam. And if dead with Christ, we are alive, not *with* Him only, but essentially *in* and *of* Him, who is Himself, not a living soul only, but a quickening Spirit also, and by personal description both the Resurrection and the Life.<sup>7</sup> Lost in the first man, we shall be found, with an entire change of nature, in the Second, according to the native truth and virtue of His ever-blessed Person. Because He is Himself our life, His character is ours also by the grace of God. From being sinners, therefore, by our natural descent and on our own account, we are

<sup>4</sup> Rom. iii. 25, 26.

<sup>5</sup> Some further remarks in this important, though much neglected topic, may be found in chap. v. of the 3rd edition of *Notes on the Romans*, pp. 99-103.

<sup>6</sup> John xvii. 4.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 45; John xi. 25.

become, if truly in the faith, in this double sense the righteousness of God *in Him*. What the natural *man* is, in his moral condition, is published openly in his atoning Representative upon the cross. God made Him to be sin *for us*. What *God* is, morally, is revealed in the person of Him whose glory, when it veiled itself in flesh, was still as that of the only begotten of the Father, though He took for our sakes a servant's form; and who now, as the First-born from the dead, is revealed to our faith as the Beginning or Head of the new creation of God.

God's glory is His *righteousness*, for which Eden was no fit sphere of display, but with which, at the appointed season, He will fill both earth and heaven. And, as on a kind of first-fruits of His creatures, that glory rests now by the Spirit on the Church of His election.<sup>8</sup> As therefore, in this present age, grace tarries patiently, and by its messengers still waits beseechingly on sin, until the time of longsuffering be past, so in that new earth which is the Creator's last recorded purpose, and ordained to be the permanent abode of righteousness, the dwelling-place of God will be with *men*.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> James i. 18; 1 Peter iv. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Rev. xxi. 3; 2 Peter iii. 13.

## CHAPTER VI.

“WE then, as fellow-workers,” &c. (1.) Having declared his message in all its divine simplicity and fulness, he proceeds now, as his manner is,<sup>1</sup> to press it on the hearts and consciences of those who read his words, in the language of solemn and fervent exhortation. And this he does as a fellow-worker, not only with his yoke-fellows in Christ, but with God whose minister he is, and who, whether in His own obedient Son, when fulfilling in the days of His flesh the will of Him that sent Him, or in those who now by His Spirit truly occupy for Him, is the doer of the works which He approves.<sup>2</sup> Still speaking in Christ “as of sincerity and as of God,”<sup>3</sup> he seeks to stir up their pure minds by way of remembrance, lest haply any among those who boasted in the name of Christ at Corinth should seem to have received the grace of God in vain; lest the word before preached to them should, through lack of faith, have failed of its effect, and vain jangling and soul-deceiving questionings have supplanted in their hearts that love which is the true end of the commandment.<sup>4</sup> He would have them receive it with an understanding of its value, which should keep them steadfast

<sup>1</sup> Rom xii. 1; Eph. ii. 11; Col. ii. 6, *sq.*    <sup>2</sup> John xiv. 11, 12.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Ante*, chap. ii. 17.    <sup>4</sup> 1 Tim. i. 5, *sq.*; Heb. iv. 1, 2; xii. 15.



in the profession of their hope,<sup>5</sup> and not for vanity and continued ignorance of God.<sup>6</sup> His grace is absolute and freely offered; let our acceptance of it be sincere. It is the grace of *God*; let it lead those who claim its shelter to cease from man, and give themselves in heart and mind to Him.<sup>7</sup>

Verse 2. "For He saith," &c. In these words, which need not be read parenthetically, we have first a quotation from the prophet Isaiah, and then the Spirit's application of the prophecy to the present work of God. It is to Christ, as the despised of the people and abhorred of rulers, that this language is originally addressed. The whole passage is a magnificent prophetic anticipation of the facts which now characterize the existing dispensation. He has been heard in that He feared, and receives the promise of Israel's eventual blessing when the veil shall have been taken from their heart. He shall be given as a covenant to *the people*, &c. Meanwhile, He is heard in an acceptable time, and succoured in a day of salvation.<sup>8</sup> Raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, He becomes the power of salvation to the Gentiles, although Israel be not gathered. He is preached to the Gentiles, and believed on in the world.<sup>9</sup> This is the true force of the emphatic word "now." Israel's spiritual things are now ministered to men at large. Salvation is of the Jews, but their fall is the riches of the world.<sup>1</sup> The intercepted blessings therefore of Jerusalem fall, with additions of which no Jewish prophet was apprised,<sup>2</sup> into the

<sup>5</sup> Matt. xiii. 23; Heb. x. 23.      <sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 34.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Peter iv. 1, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Isa. xlix. 4-8.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 16.

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xi. 12. *Notes on Romans in loc.*

<sup>2</sup> Eph. iii. 5.

lap of the Church, as the intermediate subject of the heavenly calling. *Now*, therefore, for the Gentile is the time of free acceptance, and *now* the day of salvation. But as the same witness has elsewhere<sup>3</sup> warned us, that day, though long, is limited. The grace which still wooes with such patient importunity the dull ear of the world will, if neglected or perverted to licentiousness, become the swift and inexorable judge of the despisers in the coming day.<sup>4</sup>

From this point to the close of verse 10 he resumes his apologetic tone, and while disburdening his heart to these his beloved though ill-requiting children in the faith, has sketched an enduring portrait of true Christian devotedness as a model, and too often a rebuke, for all succeeding time.

Verse 3. "Giving none offence," &c. Of the moral features which belong to a true "minister of God," some are positive, and some negative; their general result is an entire blamelessness of walk, which the apostle here and elsewhere specifies as the ground of his ministerial confidence, both towards God and in the presence of his brethren.<sup>5</sup> His anxieties are all about his ministry, and not about himself. For his personal reputation he had little care; but since as an ambassador of Christ he spoke for God, and in the authority of His great Name, he would endeavour so to behave that no man should find a just occasion to contrast his doctrine with his walk. The Jew, the Gentile, and the Church of God were severally and continually in his thoughts as he fulfilled his course;<sup>6</sup> and to each and all of these he had

<sup>3</sup> Rom. xi.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. ii. 3; Jude 4.

<sup>5</sup> Acts xxiv. 16; 1 Thess. ii. 10, &c. <sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. x. 32, 33.

respect, so acting in all things by the enabling grace of God, that if any were offended it might not be at him, but at the truth which he so fearlessly and constantly proclaimed.<sup>7</sup>

Verses 4, 5. "But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God," &c. If God be truly served, man's will must be suppressed. *Much* patience is the leading virtue on this list of ministerial qualifications; he dares not say *all* patience, God only can lay claim to that. Men bear in proportion to their experimental knowledge of the grace which bears themselves. Moses was meek in his office, through the grace which called him to it, above all earthly men; but Christian patience ought to far exceed the patience of an Israelite. A son should bear better, at his Father's bidding, than a slave. Moses, again, had seen God face to face, and communed with Jehovah as his friend, and this communion bred in him a just humility; but Moses had not seen what Paul and every Christian man has seen—his Maker manifested in his crucified Redeemer. The patience of Moses failed, and so did that of Paul; in both cases, but especially the latter, we are taught the difference between essential perfectness and measured grace. Christ only bore without complaining, because He was Himself the impersonation of a love which beareth *all* things. Yet Paul had, as a principal feature of that abundant grace in which he made his constant boast, a large measure of this chief quality of godly ministry; nor was the care of the Corinthian Church the least among the many things which kept this grace in constant exercise.

<sup>7</sup> Gal. iv. 16.

The afflictions [or tribulations],<sup>2</sup> the necessities, the distresses, &c., of which he next makes mention, are different varieties of that "hardness," which as a good soldier of Christ he had learned so well how to endure, through the sustaining grace of the blessed Master whom He served. Of these we shall hear again when, in a later chapter,<sup>3</sup> the time comes for him to measure himself and his experiences as an apostle of Christ, in the presence of these "wise" Corinthians, against the specious pretensions of those who claimed to be somewhat in their own account.

Verse 6. "In pureness, in knowledge," &c. If circumspection kept him free from human blame, there is another eye, which tries the secrets of men's hearts, and God was his witness to the pureness of his motives and his walk. If it is a standing maxim of the Spirit that every one who has true hope in Christ purifies himself as He is pure,<sup>1</sup> this purity was found more abundantly in him to whom, in an especial sense, to live was Christ. In God's sight he could also boldly say, with reference to his ministerial faithfulness, "I am pure from the blood of all men." Having renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, he lived among men with no other end than a single-eyed fulfilment of his charge. And this integrity was sustained in him by a "knowledge" which—though he passed among the Gentiles for a fool, and among the Jews as an apostate from the doctrine of the fathers—enabled him both to confound the gainsayers, and to shed the light and comfort of divine truth into the souls of all who lived upon God's words, in a measure unsurpassed by any

<sup>2</sup> ὁλίψεως.<sup>3</sup> Chap. xi.<sup>1</sup> 1 John iii. 3.

of His witnesses. Nay, in this quality he may be said to have excelled them all, according to the sovereign distribution of that *manifold* grace of God, which marked them distinctively in their several stewardships, while abounding in them all.<sup>2</sup> Now the knowledge which the Lord originally gave to His apostles is to be desired, as an addition to their faith, by all who, in dependence on the same revealing Spirit, seek their efficiency as ministers of God in a constant meditation of their words.<sup>3</sup>

“In long-suffering.” Here too he might assert for himself a pre-eminence; for it was a part of the reasonable service which, as a chosen vessel of His grace, he owed to God. As the object of all long-suffering in Jesus Christ,<sup>4</sup> he would not allow himself to be surpassed by any in the practical exercise of a grace to which he owed his own salvation. For he *served* God as he *knew* Him. In “kindness,” also, he must needs abound, since what he ministered to others he had first received of God, whose goodness led him to repentance, and kept his heart fresh watered by the grateful dew of its remembrance. It was as one who had received *mercy* that he did not faint, and since he exhorted others, in their kindness towards each other, to be imitators of God,<sup>5</sup> it became him to excel in this most Christ-like grace, as a pattern to his children in the faith.

“In the Holy Ghost.” These words refer, no doubt, in a very important sense to that special inspiration which belonged to him as an apostle of the faith;

<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter iv. 10; 2 Peter iii. 15, 16.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 7, 15; 2 Peter i. 5, iii. 2.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Tim. i. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Eph. iv. 32, v. 1.

but by no means exclusively, or perhaps even chiefly, to this. We must remember that although the example is apostolic, and therefore exceptional, the character described is general. All are not apostles, but each true believer is "a servant of God," and all living service must be in the power of the Holy Ghost. By that Spirit only had Paul been enabled to call believingly upon the Lord whom now he served; and under the same unction he had gained that knowledge of divine things which so remarkably distinguished him. By the same Spirit also had all other signs and tokens of apostleship, in word or deed, been manifested. In God's power we must work His work; to Him, therefore, does the more abundant labourer<sup>6</sup> assign the praise.

"In love unfeigned." This chief fruit of the Spirit follows closely and naturally, in the order of enumeration, the mention of its living source. By means of it, true ministry has ever been distinguished from its counterfeit. As a spiritual man Paul had renounced all private aims, and no longer knowing any after the flesh, he clave to all who were "of God," with the truthful fervency of an affection which beheld the Saviour in the saved. That this virtue was the mainspring of his patient and unwearied service of the saints "for Jesus' sake" is sufficiently attested, both by his writings and his acts. It was a love which was not only his own glory, by the grace of God, but the shame also of some, at least, of those who were its care.

Verse 7. "In the word of truth." There is here (as indeed in all these specifications of genuine minis-

<sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 10.

terial grace) a challenge of comparison with those mealy-mouthed beguilers of unstable souls who, with loveless hearts wrought plausibly, by good words and fair speeches, to the ravening of the flock. There were many then (and their number is far greater now) who corrupted the word of God; but his boast to the close of his race was, that he had "kept the faith;" men's conscience bearing witness to his words.

"In the power of God" was his abiding confidence, and by that energy his works were wrought. For his personal distinction was bodily weakness and rudeness of speech. Others who trusted in themselves might have recourse to methods of deceit in their propagation of divers and strange doctrines, but as a minister of God he had renounced the hidden things of darkness, and with a confessed inability to think any thing as of himself he was mighty, in the Lord who sent him, to the effectual fulfilling of his mission, both by word and deed.<sup>7</sup> Prevailing most when most apparently prevailed against, he was, through a perfect subjection of heart and purpose to the will of the Master whom he served, raised always higher than the adversary, who sought without ceasing to obstruct in the person of this zealous labourer the fulfilment of the work of God.<sup>9</sup>

"By the armour<sup>9</sup> of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." Having yielded himself to God as alive from the dead, his members are His also, to be wielded as instruments of righteousness in the work of His good pleasure.<sup>1</sup> Paul had learnt, as an apt disciple of the grace that saved him, to

<sup>7</sup> Rom. xv. 18, 19.    <sup>8</sup> 1 Thess. ii. 18; Rom. i. 13; Eph. iii. 1-13.

<sup>9</sup> Or "weapons," *διὰ τῶν ὀπλῶν*.

<sup>1</sup> Rom. vi. 13.

walk justly as well as holily in all his ways.<sup>2</sup> Whether assailing error or defending truth, he wrought in righteousness, as one who wrought with God and in His sight. His opponents were of Satan, his defence was of God, who saveth the upright in heart.<sup>3</sup> Many might secretly deride him, or revile him openly, but when brought before kings, he would speak of God's testimonies, and not be ashamed.<sup>4</sup>

Verse 8. "Through honour and dishonour." In the Church, as well as in the world, he experienced these opposite extremes of human estimation. In the former, where both his official dignity and his personal grace entitled him to veneration, he was lightly esteemed by some even of those whom he could claim as his own children in the faith; while in the latter he was sometimes an honoured guest, though much oftener in bonds for Christ. But in either case he proved himself God's minister. They who received him courteously heard truth in its uncompromising plainness from his lips, while his speech was in the earnest persuasiveness of love; nor could any amount of "shameful entreating" deter him from a bold persistence in his course.

"Through evil report and good report," he ran on steadily toward his mark. As one who sought men's souls and not their suffrages, his ear was closed alike to flattery or censure. In his person, as a chosen ambassador of Christ, truth was calumniated by its enemies, and extolled by its obedient disciples. His bonds were "in the gospel," whether he stood charged as a preacher of sedition, or was

<sup>2</sup> 1 Thess. ii. 10; Titus ii. 12.      <sup>3</sup> Ps. vii. 10; 1 John iii. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. cxix. 46; Acts xxvi; 2 Tim. iv. 16, 17.



slandered as a gainsayer of Moses. Nothing moved him from his steadfastness; for as a seeker of the honour which is from God alone, and with a heart and eye kept fixedly upon invisible things, he could afford to be indifferent to human praise or blame.

“As deceivers, and yet true.” It is enough for the servant that he be as his Lord; and since “deceiver”<sup>s</sup> was the stigma placed by the wise and prudent of this world upon the living Truth, His faithful followers may well endure contentedly the same reproach. If Paul was called “babbler” at Athens, and “heretic” and “traitor” at Jerusalem, God was his witness still, by proofs which the blindness only of a willing ignorance could misunderstand, that he spoke the truth in Christ, and did not lie.

Verse 9. “As unknown, and yet well known.” None was more widely known than Paul, for the fame of him and of his doctrine filled the world, yet none was so little understood. For what he said and did was “by the Holy Ghost,” and the natural man perceiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. While, therefore, he was recognised everywhere, through the untiring activity of his zeal, his notoriety in the estimation of the world was that of a fanatical enthusiast. Though he spoke the words of truth and soberness, the Gentile ruler before whom he spoke pronounced him mad. So likewise in the Church, those who were too sluggish or faint-hearted to pursue with a like earnestness the race which he was running found difficulties in his words, which a simpler and more honest walk with God

<sup>s</sup> Matt. xxvii. 63.

would have made plain. There were not many, even among those who claimed companionship in the ministry of God, whom he would acknowledge as "true yoke-fellows." As the world knows not the genuine believer, though obliged to take note of his profession, so when all seek their own, and not the things of Jesus Christ, the man who lives only to the Lord must seem sometimes a stranger to his own.<sup>6</sup>

"As dying, and, behold, we live." With the sentence of death in himself, and going continually in jeopardy of life for Jesus' sake through the active rage of the destroyer, he lived ever in the power of that deathless life, whose source is in the Name which he confessed. Moreover, till his work was done he was, though vulnerable, safe from mortal wrong. If his enemies were once allowed to spend upon him all their wrath, and left him only when they thought him dead, he presently revives, with strength to continue on the morrow his accustomed toil.<sup>7</sup> Whether fighting with beasts, or suffering from men more savage still than they, despair of life was still answered by deliverance until the end. In himself he died daily, and in Christ he daily lived.<sup>8</sup>

"As chastened, and not killed." *God's* hand was on him, too, as well as man's. As a true son of the Father of spirits, he had his part in that of which all partake, whom God acknowledges as His.<sup>9</sup> If others forgot this, he did not, but confessed it openly, to the glory of God and for the comfort of his brethren; being led by the Spirit to use for this

<sup>6</sup> 1 John iii. 1; Phil. ii. 21; 2 Tim. i. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Acts xiv. 19, 20.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 30-32.

<sup>9</sup> Heb. xii. 5-7.

purpose words almost identical with those which are yet to swell the song of Zion's gladness, when the turning day of her captivity is come.<sup>1</sup> Apostle and chosen vessel as he was, Paul needed but the more on that account what his word has declared to be needful to us all; and although it may be hazardous to specify among his many outward trials, those to which this character of chastisement belongs, a careful watcher of his course will meet with incidents in what is written of him, which seem, at least, to illustrate these words.<sup>2</sup> It was not in a day, or by a single lesson, that he acquired that practical completeness as a man of God, which in an epistle of later date he has so strikingly asserted to his Master's praise.<sup>3</sup>

Verse 10. "As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing." There is much deep and tender feeling in these words. Why was He sorrowful? The general answer to this enquiry is, if rightly given, because he followed with so close an imitation in the steps of Him who was "the Man of Sorrows" upon earth. The coming and going of the Son of God have left the world unchanged, and if Christ be in us energetically, we must mourn with Christ. But more especially Paul found, as these Corinthians would not now need to be more pointedly reminded, abundant cause of sorrow in his service to the saints. No outward persecution made him grieve, but tears were often-

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxviii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> *e. g.* His perils and deliverances, arising from the determinate purpose which he formed in his own spirit of going up to Jerusalem, and from which he refused to be dissuaded, even by an express injunction of the Holy Ghost. (Acts xxi. 4.)

<sup>3</sup> Phil. iv. 11-13.

times his meat while, as one on whom the Lord had laid the care of all the churches, he watched with anxious yearning for their souls. The deep and sad knowledge which he had of the fretting leprosy of the flesh, in its manifold and often unsuspected working in the Church of God, and the distinct provision that was given him of the gradual progress of corruption and decay in that which bore outwardly the name of Christ, until, with a form of godliness remaining, its power should be openly denied and Babylon the Great be stablished in the pride of wickedness, must needs acquaint his soul with grief. But if he sorrowed often, he rejoiced continually ; for the very atmosphere of that kingdom of God's dear Son, into which believers are translated, is "joy in the Holy Ghost," and the apostle's measure of that joy was richly proportioned to his faith. While he estimated, therefore, to their full extent, the power of the adversary and its effects, and mourned, as love only mourns, at the prospect of increasing evil in the churches, he could evermore rejoice in Christ. For the day of His deliverance is fixed, and draws ever nearer to His prisoners of hope. To Him pertain the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty ;<sup>4</sup> and although for a season evil be allowed apparently to triumph, for the proving of the faith of His elect, it shall result in their more abundant joy and honour, when the day of recompence is come. Till then, a state of mourning is a state of blessing,<sup>5</sup> and no joy is really of the Lord which is not sometimes shaded also by His grief.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Chron. xxix. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. v. 4.

“As poor, but making many rich.” The poverty, which was a necessary mark of those whom Jesus first sent forth to preach the gospel of the kingdom, distinguished also Paul, and such as were associated with him in his embassy of grace. To labour with his hands was not indeed a necessity; for the labourer is worthy of his hire: yet, for example’s sake, he added this also to his other burdens, and what his hands gained hardly by this voluntary toil, the same hands also lavished freely on the weak.<sup>6</sup> And if poor in worldly goods, he was yet poorer in that poverty which God has blessed.<sup>7</sup> Thoroughly self-judged and self-abased, his heart contained Christ in a fulness which flowed forth continually for the enrichment of the souls of others. What the angel of the church at Laodicea knew not, Paul had learnt perfectly from God.<sup>8</sup> Endued thus with a moral fitness for the ministration of the grace of God, he preached among men the unsearchable riches of Christ, with an unction of true blessing from the Holy One, which made rich indeed as many as heartily attended to his words.<sup>9</sup>

“As having nothing, and possessing all things.” If assessment were ordered of Paul’s earthly substance, some books and parchments, and a cloke, would probably have formed the bulk of his effects; yet the unlimited credit which he had in heaven, as a simple and fervent truster in the living God, emboldened him to make valid promises to an indefinite amount to those with whom he negotiated in his Master’s name.<sup>1</sup> Like Abraham, the common father

<sup>6</sup> Acts xx. 34, 35.

<sup>7</sup> Matt. v. 3.    <sup>8</sup> Rev. iii. 17; 1 Tim. i. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Acts xvi. 14.

<sup>1</sup> Phil. iv. 19; Philemon 18, 19.

of the faithful, he would not call the place he stood upon his own, because the time of lasting occupancy was not come; but because Jesus holds *all things* as the Father's gift, he claimed, and taught others too to claim, the ownership of all things in His name.<sup>2</sup> Faith takes its portion under a devise from the Creator;<sup>3</sup> whether earth or heaven, therefore, be in question, all are his.

Verse 11. "O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged." It is the delight of a love that is unfeigned, to cast off all reserve, and let its heart forth freely in its words. Yet the words which we have lately been considering are not such as would have flowed spontaneously from his pen, had the hearts of those whom he addresses been altogether as his own. The strongly-marked personal tone which characterizes both these epistles is due, as we have seen, to the defective condition of the church at Corinth. As in his letter to the Galatians, who were slipping from Christ's gospel in favour of a specious counterfeit, so here also, to those who, in forgetfulness of their own spiritual parentage, were induced to question his apostleship, he descants at large upon himself and his official devotedness; not for his own sake, but for theirs. His pen—had he written at all—would have found a happier employment on a higher and far different topic, had their own state corresponded with the longings of his heart. But he could not write to them as "spiritual" (although the reproach of being "carnal" now belonged to them in a much less degree than when he first addressed them), so long as

<sup>2</sup> Acts vii. 5; 1 Cor. iii. 21-23.

<sup>3</sup> Heb. ix. 15-17.

they still had need of such warnings as those with which he closes this epistle.<sup>4</sup> The same consideration will account also sufficiently for the egotistic cast even of the rich exposition of the doctrine of Christ, which fills its earlier chapters, so that when declaring afresh the word of reconciliation, he speaks rather as a preacher from without, than as a teacher and remembrancer of what they had already known. It is as if the Lord stood, in the person of His ambassadors, without the door, and was knocking for re-admission to the bosom of His Church.<sup>5</sup> The apostle's heart dilated with the love of Christ towards them, but that heart had been both wounded by their injurious surmisings, and grieved by their deficiency of faith and godliness. In the consciousness, however, of an undiminished love, he seeks to provoke them to an emulative zeal.

Verses 12, 13. "Ye are not straitened in us," &c. These words seem clearly to imply that among the many artifices of the Enemy, he had suggested successfully, to some at least of the Corinthian saints, that the necessity which Paul had felt of rebuking them so forcibly, as he had done in his first letter, had proportionately cooled his love. They thought as men are naturally wont to think when conscience puts them in the wrong. For reproof has an estranging effect upon its subject, if not received immediately from God. Paul knew this, and labours therefore to obliterate so hurtful an impression, by throwing himself afresh into their arms. They were not straitened, though they might imagine it, in him. If, as their

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 1, *sq.*; *conf.* Heb. v. 11, *sq.*

<sup>5</sup> Rev. iii. 20.

hearts told them, they had deserved ill at his hands, he was their father still in Christ, and held toward them an unaltered mind. The tidings which he had received of the effect of his former letter, in arousing them from their spiritual lethargy, had deeply moved his heart toward them, though much still remained to be redressed. But they stood yet in doubt of him; and the cause of their mistrust was the influence of worldly men and maxims, which were rankling still as hurtful weeds amid the husbandry of God. They had yet to recover their true moral standing, as God's sons and daughters, and it is to aid them in this that, before delivering the pointed exhortation which fills the closing verses of this chapter, he so unreservedly assures them of his constant love, and pleads with such earnestness for its requital on their parts. In the Lord he loved them, and in the Lord he would be loved by them. The words which he had written were the Lord's commandments, though they flowed through the channel of his own deep love to them. False ties must first be broken, and their true position taken, as partakers and followers of Christ, before they could share truly with His messengers the joy which was their constant boast.

Verse 14. "Be not unequally yoked together<sup>6</sup> with unbelievers," &c. The law of God's house is

<sup>6</sup> *ἑτεροζυγούμεναι*. This rare word may signify either drawing under the same yoke with another, or accepting another and different yoke from that to which we are accustomed. The latter seems most suited to the context. There are two yokes, the one of Christ, the other of the god of this world. Believers are emancipated from the latter by the grace which makes them Christ's. Let them not, in the spirit of worldly conformity, resume it.



holiness, and the standard of that holiness is Christ. In the opening words of this exhortation, the apostle strikes at the root of all the evils which infest the Church.<sup>7</sup> Evil communications, as he has before reminded us, corrupt good manners; and the faith which joins believers to the Lord should detach them also absolutely, both in heart and practice, from the world which crucified and still rejects Him. It is plain that this injunction of the Spirit is of the broadest scope, as well as the most searching application. It is quoted habitually by Christians, as a prohibition of mixed marriages, and justly so; but to limit its effect to a particular instance would be to deprive it of nearly all its practical force. It contemplates voluntary partnership of *all* kinds, and not of one only, important as that one surely is. God's children are given to each other for companionship by the same grace which forms them for Himself in Christ, and according to the new law of membership which regulates His mystic body. To be aloof from all who advisedly reject the truth, and to cleave to one another in that love which is of God, and is the bond of perfectness, is the first-fruit of spiritual energy in His saints. For in the sight of God, and according to the truth of their confession, they are no longer of the world, having died out of it with Christ, when He gave Himself for our sins;<sup>8</sup> and to enforce on his brethren in the faith their practical observance of this truth, and to save them from the imputation of hypocrisy, he makes, in succession, each of their distinctive

<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 33.

<sup>8</sup> Gal. i. 4; John xvii. 16.

blessings as believers the ground of a separate appeal to their hearts and consciences alike.

“What participation,”<sup>9</sup> he asks, “has righteousness with unrighteousness?” Have they forgotten their new standing as just men in Christ, and by what means they are thus entitled by the Spirit of grace? It is in the power of the resurrection that the believer is emancipated from his sins, and separated from the congregation of the dead.<sup>1</sup> In his former letter he had denounced unsparingly their habit of “going to law before the *unjust*, and not before the *saints*.”<sup>2</sup> He now seeks to regulate more generally the intercourse which must needs subsist in some shape between the just and the unjust, until the final day of decision, by putting this very searching question. There will be an eternal separation of the just from the unjust; they therefore who, by the grace which has called them, are to sit in judgment on the world, should shun participation in its ways.

“And what communion hath light with darkness?” Can any things be more dissimilar, or more naturally incompatible? Now the believer should remember that he was once darkness, but is now light *in the Lord*; and according to this absolute change in his condition, should also be his walk as God’s witness among men.<sup>3</sup> They are children of the

<sup>9</sup> The five distinctive terms employed by the apostle in this and the two following verses, are—μετοχή, κοινωνία, συμφώνησις, μερίς, and συγκατάθεσις; which are, perhaps, best rendered by the following equivalents: “participation,” “community or fellowship,” “agreement or consonancy,” “share,” and “accordance or assent.”

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 17; Rom. v. 1.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Eph. v. 8.

light and of the day; how then should they walk voluntarily in companionship with those who still willingly abide in that great darkness, out of which they have themselves been called? How could they shine reprovably among a nation crooked and perverse, if in their ways and habits they conformed still to the world? Yet such was their calling, by the grace of God.<sup>4</sup> When the Saviour was on earth, He was personally the Light which the darkness comprehended not, and to which men did not come, because their deeds were evil. And shall His followers, who bear His title, and in whom He dwells, be satisfied to walk as other men? Shall they who, as sons of God, are born of that Light in which there is no darkness turn their own glory into shame, and stir up wrath against themselves, by perversely aiming at the friendship of a world which is the enemy of God?

Verse 15. "And what concord hath Christ with Belial?" Both these contrasted names have meaning in them; which will Paul's brethren in the faith accept? The one speaks of that anointing which is truth, and which abides in everlasting honour; the other of that perishable vanity, which, after deceiving its victims for a season, is itself engulfed for ever in the second death. And had these loud-speaking Corinthians no knowledge of this contrariety? or were they halting still between two opinions, like foolish Israel of old? Can they have forgotten whose they are, and by what kind of right? It is meet that they, who by the grace of God are bearers of the name of Christ, should remember that

<sup>4</sup> Phil. ii. 15.

claims attach justly to that name, which disallow all other claims; that He is Lord of *all*, and that whatever does not heartily acknowledge His supremacy is numbered by the Spirit with His adversaries. And did wise believers need to be reminded that the prince and god of this world, though condemned, is not yet bound and banished to his place; and if powerless in conflict against those who hold fast in the spirit of humility the shield of faith, is master still of all who walk in self-reliant carelessness, and are not watching with the Lord?

“Or what part hath a believer with an unbeliever.”<sup>5</sup> Is their portion the same, either in this world or in that to come? Is there any resemblance in their nature or their aims? Regarding the dearest and most momentous interests of man, do these opposite characters think alike, feel alike, hope alike, or fear alike? And should a believer by his actions contradict his faith? Is not the one “of God,” whose special gift of faith has made the doctrine of salvation a living reality to his soul; while the other, who beneath the same sound of the gospel of reconciliation abides still in unbelief, is not “of God,” but rather of His enemy? And is there no difference between the new creature and the old, that both should be found pursuing the same things? Each

<sup>5</sup> *μετὰ ἀπίστων*. It is to be regretted that in this passage, and at 1 Tim. v. 8, our translators have departed unnecessarily from their usual rendering of this word. For “infidel” has, in our day at least, a positive rather than a negative force. It is, however, most important to remember, that the things here contrasted are “faith,” as God’s gift to His elect, and “unbelief,” as the state of the natural man, with no necessary reference to an active hostility against the truth.

has its nature and its end, but how different the heritage assigned to each!<sup>6</sup>

Verse 16. "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple<sup>7</sup> of the living God." The putting of this question proves the incomplete effect of his earlier warnings on their minds.<sup>8</sup> Had they forgotten that the assembly of God's worshippers is His sanctuary, and that His temple is the place also where His honour dwelleth? And were they so regardless of the grace and glory of that presence which abode among them as to tamper with the customs of the heathen, or to manifest a negligent indifference to the subtle encroachments of the corrupter and destroyer of the faith? He had before told them, though they ill remembered it, of the dignity belonging to their holy calling and anointing as God's living building; and he now repeats his words, enforcing them on this occasion by a series of quotations from the earlier oracles of God, the first of which is taken from the law, and the others from the scriptures of the prophets.<sup>9</sup>

"As God hath said, I will  *dwell*  in them, and  *walk*  in them," &c. God's presence with His people is the abiding effect of their having been redeemed and brought to Him in Christ; the practical recognition

<sup>6</sup> Eph. ii. 8-10; Rom ix. 22, 23.

<sup>7</sup> For "ye" *Cod. Sin.* reads "we," and for temple, "temples."

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 16; x. 14, *sq.*

<sup>9</sup> Levit. xxvi. 12; Ezek. xxvii. 26, 27, &c. As in other instances, an expansion is here given to the original words, corresponding to their intermediate fulfilment in the calling of the Church. What Jehovah will do visibly hereafter, as the God of Israel, He does now by His in-dwelling Spirit of adoption in the saints.

on their parts of this wondrous truth is the condition of true joy and peace in them. God, who chose His Church in Christ before He made the worlds, says, "I will dwell in them;" for they are fitted for His habitation as His own true workmanship in Christ. But this promise, which looks for its fulfilment to the tranquil enjoyment of His everlasting rest, is supplemented by another which respects the condition of His chosen while still groaning in their mortal bodies. He will *walk* as well as dwell in those whom He has purchased for Himself at such a cost. Not only when gathered up by Christ's transforming power to their destined place, but while toiling through the wilderness of this world, God is both in and with His saints. If His many sons are to behold His glory, it is He who brings them to that sight. Both as the shield of His people, and in His unwearied mercy the bearer of their cumbrance and their strife, the living God abides, in Christ, among His chosen by His Spirit, till their pilgrimage is ended in His rest. God's place is for ever with His people; for it is in and through them that He will be manifested, in the coming day of glory, to the creation which now groans on in hopeful bondage till that day. He "*walked* in a tent" while Israel was in the wilderness; He *dwelt* also, for a season, in the temple which Solomon, the man of rest, had built according to the pattern given to his father David. But both these were figures of far better things. God builds for Himself the house in which He dwells. God was in Christ, when Jesus walked on earth as the obedient but solitary doer of His will; and now, by the eternal Spirit, both the Father

and the Son make their abode with those who are fashioned as new creatures by His hand; who through grace obey the truth, and by faith live daily on the bread of God.

Verses 17, 18. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate," &c. Isaiah's prophetic warning<sup>1</sup> to the remnant of his people is now adopted, by the same Spirit, as a word of present exhortation to the Church, but with an important and highly characteristic addition. The *Jehovah* of Israel is the *Father* of His Church; "to us there is one God, the Father,"<sup>2</sup> &c. The passage before us is a remarkable example of the blending together of things old and new on the part of this inspired scribe of the kingdom. The common object of worship to Abraham,<sup>3</sup> to Israel,<sup>4</sup> and to Jesus,<sup>5</sup> is thus presented in His finished gospel to our faith. He, upon whom we call as our Father, is essentially Jehovah-Shaddai, and, according to the varied names and glories of His nature, are the blessings also which, through Christ, are pledged to us in Him.

It is the voice of this living and eternal God, who now speaks to us from heaven by His Son, that is here heard charging us, who are by faith His children,<sup>6</sup> to sever ourselves from all voluntary association with an unbelieving world. Having called us into the fellowship of His Son, it is expected that this high calling should produce on our hearts its just effect: that we should love Him perfectly as our Saviour, and obey and follow Him as our Lord. And let us

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah lii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. viii. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. xvii. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Exodus iii. 14, 15; vi. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. xi. 25, 27; John xvii. 25, 26.

<sup>6</sup> Gal. iii. 26.

take notice of the promissory language which the Spirit here employs: "I will receive you," &c. But if we are believers, some will say, He has received us already, and graced us eternally in Christ. Most true; but the blessings which belong to Christ personally, and are secured in Him for His elect, must be drawn forth by our faith, or they remain practically unknown and unenjoyed. Doctrinal knowledge is only verified by faith; and a faith which thus proves God and tastes His blessing in His word, both lives and walks in Christ. God does not come to tarry with us in our natural circumstances and associations, but calls us from the place and habit of our birth to walk with Him.<sup>7</sup> In position and social relation, the believer undergoes no necessary change;<sup>8</sup> it is in habit and manner of life, in aim and confessed motive, that his calling should transform him in the eyes of his once familiar associates.<sup>9</sup> We cannot be God's sons and daughters while the bonds of worldly affinity subsist. God's children, to be owned as such, must be, as Jesus ever was, under the leading of God's Spirit.<sup>1</sup> And it was for this practical sanctification through the word, that Jesus prayed the Father on behalf of His disciples ere He went on high.<sup>2</sup>

The subject before us is of the deepest importance, and demands the earnest attention of all who name the name of Christ; for the spirit of error is a

<sup>7</sup> Heb xi. 8, 9. What Abraham did actually, the believer does morally; faith operating in each case alike, through the calling power of the word.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 20, *sq.* *Notes, &c. in loc.*

<sup>9</sup> 1 Peter iv. 1-4.

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> John xvii. 15-20.



preacher of sanctification in his own perverted way, as well as the Spirit of truth. "Touch not, taste not, handle not," are among the most effective ordinances and commandments of men; while the living God, who calls His children into the gracious liberty of Christ, is here found using very similar language. But between these external similarities there exists an essential and irreconcilable distinction, which it is among the first duties of a true believer to observe. What then is "the unclean thing," which in either case is the object of avoidance? In reply, it must first be remembered that no human ordinances of religion are *original*. Holiness belongs to God only, and the observances and religious inventions of men, which under so many forms have claimed and still are claiming falsely for themselves the sanction of His name, are but imitations, more or less exact, of what God once ordained. The strength of a false gospel is the dead letter of the law. But the peculiar token by which false sanctity of every kind may be distinguished from "the holiness of truth,"<sup>3</sup> and which characterizes, under all its forms, the work of Satan as the deceiver of the world, is that it aims constantly at presenting the natural man as a fit object of divine acceptance. Its very basis is the assumption, tacit or avowed, of intrinsic natural goodness; or (what amounts to the same thing in effect) the ascription of a positive virtue to religious acts, whereby the innate evil of mankind may be effectually neutralized or remedied. *Man* is, in a word, the aim and measure of human sanctity, and to sever his finer from his grosser part

<sup>3</sup> Eph. iv. 24.

the business of a merely religious purification. To commend himself to God is the dream of the natural worshipper, so long as he remains in ignorance of what he really is, as a hopeless defaulter in the presence of his Maker, and until taught by the quickening Spirit of grace and truth to flee for refuge to the hope set before him in the gospel.

On the other hand, true holiness consists not primarily in self-purification, but rather in *self-renunciation*. Found personally in Christ only, it is in Him imputed absolutely to the believing sinner who boasts only in His Name.<sup>4</sup> It is generated in a secondary sense, and for a continuous and indefinite progression, in the hearts of all who truly know the Lord. Its vital spring is the faith which joins us to Christ crucified, and lays thus, by a judicial imputation, our "old man" in His grave. Its active power is the Spirit of adoption, which imparts to us a conscious knowledge of our personal acceptance in the Beloved, and enables us, according to the truth of the ever-blessed name which we confess, to call upon the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as our own very God and Father also; for, that we might thus know and worship the only living God in the sanctifying power of the truth, the Son, who came to make Him manifest, has sanctified Himself and gone on high. To separate, therefore, in spirit and practice, from the world which is not of the Father, is the necessary condition to our being found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless, at His coming.<sup>5</sup> The law of Christian Nazariteship is the example of the Lord Himself, and His true sayings

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. i. 30, 31.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Peter iii. 14.

are its exposition to the hearts and consciences of such as love Him in sincerity. "He that saith he abideth in Him ought Himself also so to walk, even as He walked," and we *know* that we know Him only as we are obedient to His words.<sup>6</sup>

"The unclean thing," then, in the Spirit's eye, is nothing tangible by hands, or discernible by natural sense. To the pure all things are pure, and a washed disciple may touch anything that God has made, and honour its Maker by its use. For the brand which Moses put up for a season, at Jehovah's bidding, upon some of the things which He had made, has been removed by the pierced hands of the Son of God; and, in the light and power of that great redemption, God's creatures are all "good" to those who are themselves "of God."<sup>7</sup> What is contemplated in this single expression of abhorrence is human wilfulness, and whatever it upholds or sanctions in opposition to the claims of Christ. It is, therefore, manifest that both carnal and spiritual wickedness are comprehended in this warning, as is more distinctly stated by the apostle at the beginning of the following chapter. Of the first of these it is unnecessary now to speak at large; "the works of the flesh"<sup>8</sup> are for the most part "manifest," even to the natural conscience, and vice is acknowledged as defilement wherever self-respect is not extinct. Yet, plain and self-evident as these things are, it is a dreadful certainty of revelation that a time is coming, if not come already, when the lust of uncleanness

<sup>6</sup> 1 John ii. 3, 6.

<sup>7</sup> John xiii. 13; Titus i. 15; 1 Tim. iv. 3, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Gal. v. 19, 20; 2 Tim. iii. 1-5.

will be rivalled only by their greediness of gain, in the shameless ways of those who still make their outward boast in God.<sup>9</sup> And many and earnest are the merciful entreaties of the Spirit, addressed through all God's witnesses in turn, and to the ears of all His saints, respecting the close and ever-dangerous vicinity of moral evil to the path of faith, lest, through heedlessness, their garments be defiled. But against spiritual wickedness also, the real believer has an equal or still greater need to keep his watch. It is the more dangerous because less suspected, since it allies itself most readily with those qualities in our common nature which we are disposed to think least evil, if not altogether good. Neither the cravings of intellect, nor the aspirations of a venerative instinct, are had in disrepute with men. But it is by these means that the deceitfulness of sin most effectually works; and we do well to remember the warning words of Him who alone knows perfectly both God and man: "What is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."<sup>1</sup> Now gross immorality is seldom honoured among men, but formalistic pietism and a self-commended zeal for truth and goodness are accustomed to command the reverence of all who are content to accept appearances for facts. Spiritual plausibilities are more mischievous by far than carnal effronteries; and to beware of "the concision" is not less needful, to the true disciple, than to turn from "evil workers" and from "dogs."<sup>2</sup>

If then Paul wrote such words to the Corinthian

<sup>9</sup> 2 Peter ii. 10, *sq.*; Jude *passim*.

<sup>1</sup> Luke xvi. 15.      <sup>2</sup> Phil. iii. 2.

saints, in the earlier hours of the day of grace, we surely, whose lot is fallen upon its close, should not refuse the mirror which the Spirit of truth thus offers to our hearts. To have on us the present dew of blessing, as the "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty," we must add to the faith which has already made us such in Christ, both a knowledge and observance of *His will*. On us it is not less incumbent than it was on our predecessors in the race, to look well to our surroundings and associations. Paul's questions are truly questions for the times, and should be pondered by us wisely, in view of the actual phenomena of our day.

The world, from whose fellowship God is seeking now to separate His saints, is, in our latitudes at least, not a Pagan, but a *Christian* world. For the blessed name of Christ is not only the ornament and safeguard of His true disciples, but is, within the limits of what men call Christendom, a temporary shelter also for all things which defile and work iniquity. Of the mother of harlots I will not speak at length, nor of her half-grown daughter, evangelic "Ritualism," which, in its utter ignorance of spiritual things, makes sense the medium of Christian worship, and palms upon the gross ear of a careless and self-flattering age inventions which God never knew but to condemn,<sup>3</sup> and which set at nought the common declaration of His prophets and apostles; while, with a vehement assertion of devotedness to Christ, they turn His true glory into shame, and practically make his cross of none effect. Nor shall I undertake the easy, but too mournful, task of proving in

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah i. 11, *sq.*; Amos v. 21, *sq.*

detail the faultiness (when poised in the balance of the sanctuary) of each and every other ecclesiastical system which has made itself a name, and lasted long enough to have traditions of its own. Nor yet shall I do more than call renewed attention to that bold innovation of human thought upon the written testimonies of the Spirit, which so remarkably distinguishes this strange and solemn day of what its optimist admirers call "enlightened Christianity." But I would lovingly and earnestly remind each godly reader of these notes of the plain and simple obligation under which he lies, in the first place, to the Lord who has redeemed him, and on whom he calls ; and secondly, towards himself and his fellow-Christians, as members of Christ's one body, and partakers of a common faith and hope.

Two classes of separatists are recognized in Scripture ; they who separate themselves perversely from the congregation of the just,<sup>4</sup> and those whom God sets apart for Himself, by the sanctifying power of the truth ; and it is on the latter of these classes that the triple injunction of our text is here laid, by the Sanctifier Himself. To approve themselves to God, "as obedient children," they must desist from voluntary association or companionship with the ungodly. They must confirm this separation, by entering on a positive career of faith and duty, such as the men of this world neither choose nor understand ; and they must shun contact with that which God has called "unclean." It is evident that a compliance on our part with these injunctions involves both what is demonstrative, and therefore noticeable,

<sup>4</sup> Jude 19.

for praise or blame by others, and what is visible to God alone. Both are necessary for those who seek perfection,<sup>5</sup> but in the first there is a danger to be dreaded, as well as a blessing to be sought. For it is but too possible to separate oneself from false systems and associations in the spirit of a scrupulous external piety, while the heart remains still unchastened and unsanctified to God.

Returning now to our immediate subject, it may be said safely that, *distinctively*, "the unclean thing" is represented by any and every form of false religion. Christ is the truth; and the worship of the Father, in and through the Son, and by the power of the Spirit, is the only acceptable Christian service. And this needs for its fulfilment an entire surrender of both heart and will to God. Hence the apostle's language has a meaning of the widest and most varied kind. What is *unclean* can be learnt thoroughly only by a reference to what is *clean*; and nothing is so in the sight of God, from heaven downwards, that is not purified by the atoning blood of Christ.<sup>6</sup> Now, for a believer, all things natural are clean, because he knows the power of that precious blood, not only in purifying his own heart from an evil conscience, but in annulling the works of the devil absolutely—abolishing both sin and death, and making old things new. To the pure, as we have seen, all things are pure; to the free, all things are free; to the children, all is lawful that the Father has bestowed upon the Son: the world is ours, for we are Christ's. But for this very reason, because Christ is "Lord of all,"

<sup>5</sup> Matt. v. 48; 1 Peter i. 15, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Heb. ix. 23, *sq.*

and because the knowledge of Him and of His things is only by the Holy Ghost, whatever now calls itself by His great Name, but is not really *of the Spirit*, is “unclean,” in a special and pre-eminent sense.

All carnal ordinances, therefore, and traditional observances of a religious kind, which are not sanctioned by plain apostolic teaching, are not superfluous only, but *unclean*. I shall not fill these pages with a multiplied exemplification of this very obvious principle. It must be left to the reader's conscience, in the sight of God, to determine how far obedience to the declared commandment of the Lord is compatible with a continuance, on his own part, of membership or association with the particular ecclesiastical community to which he may at present be attached, and on the principles which usually regulate external Christianity in our days. If, for example, to be a fellow “Churchman” has a meaning not only not identical with being a fellow “saint,” or “Christian,” or “partaker of the heavenly calling,” but which in cases innumerable is attached conventionally to those who, in state and thought and habit, are evidently strangers to God's saving truth, it is time for the honest and sincere believer, who may at present answer to this designation, to ask himself how long he can with safety to his conscience continue to shame God's living truth, by consenting to a name and social position which so grossly wrongs it by misrepresentation. For a “Churchman” is, or should be, a member of *God's Church*, or the assembly of His saints, which is not an institute of man, but the workmanship of God,—not a government establishment, but a spiritual house, a building of living



stones, "the Church of the *living God*, the pillar and ground of the *truth*."<sup>7</sup>

But I am unwilling to pursue this further. My desire is not to change men from "Churchmen" to "Dissenters," but to remind them of the words of God. Where evil is deliberately sanctioned and defended, no obedient Christian will wittingly remain. If any do so, it is at the peril of their *faith*, which is in sympathy with conscience always.<sup>8</sup> "To please *God*" is the aim and motive of that godliness which we are taught to add to our faith, and which has promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.<sup>9</sup> To please and profit *man* would seem to be the master principle of modern Christianity. On all sides it is evident that humanitarian sentiment is contending (often beneath the specious mask of a spiritual phraseology) for the mastery with that true love which is "of God." Laxity of doctrine and a practical contempt of the positive teaching of the Scriptures are its unvarying tokens, and to assert and ennoble the true but secondary principle of our common brotherhood in Adam is its end. Hence on all sides concessions are being mutually made, in the different sections of the professing body, in the spirit of a false amenity, on the assumption that forms of belief are or should be sacred to the holders of them, while the name of Christ is common to us all. In other words, *the faith of God's elect has avowedly ceased to be the recognized basis of modern Christian*

<sup>7</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 15; 1 Peter ii. 5. See further, on the general subject of the Church and its organization, *Notes on First Corinthians*, chaps. xii.-xiv.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Tim. i. 19.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 1; 2 Peter i. 6; 1 Tim. iv. 8.

*society.* And since human objects are naturally sought by human means, it is only consistent with this prevalent and very specious sentiment that the principle of combination or confederacy should be, as it is, so generally relied on as a means of human good.

So widely diffused is this spirit of the age that it infects perceptibly, and to a large extent, the real flock of God. A sort of spiritual utilitarianism is fast supplanting, in the majority of professors, the true spirit of devotedness to God. Forgetting or ignoring the great truth of the oneness of all who are in Christ, and the despotic authority of Christ as the Lord of His own house, we see men accepting new and false principles of union, the moral effect of which is to blend together righteousness and unrighteousness, and to make the temple of God a second time a den of thieves. For such is a true description of very much of the religious activity of the day. Wealth, influence, social position, &c. are honoured and relied on as the pillars of ecclesiastical communities, and the flesh is unblushingly solicited by numberless devices<sup>1</sup> for the furtherance of what

<sup>1</sup> Witness the efforts made, and in so many ways, to satisfy the sensuous cravings of modernized dissent. Of the bazaar system I have elsewhere spoken; \* but in its affectation of external architectural finery, its often badly imitated ecclesiastical mannerism, and above all, in its blind idolatry of intellect, by means of which—to judge by many of its accredited literary organs—it is fast slipping bodily from the faith once delivered to the saints, it verifies but too distinctly the arrival of that evil time when sound doctrine must give place, in the mind of popular Christianity, to the fabulous conceits of men. (2 Tim. iv. 3, 4.) But in thus writing of a large body of professing Christians, I desire earnestly to be

\* *Notes on First Corinthians*, p. 206, note.

is thought to be God's glory, while His expressed desire for the sanctification of His children, and their emphatic separation from the world, is practically set at nought. It would seem to have slipped from the recollection of not a few of those who truly put their trust in God through Jesus Christ, that to be true worshippers of Him we must be in spirit where He is; that believers are "holy brethren, partakers of the *heavenly* calling;" that they have been severed from the dead world by the quickening power of God, who raised them up with Christ; that the unclean thing which God would have them shun is "the flesh" under all its forms—religious, social, æsthetic, or otherwise; and that the aim of true spiritual energy is not the indefinite expansion of a "profession," which the Lord has already disallowed under its last recorded scriptural phase,<sup>2</sup> but a holding fast of the first faith, a seeking to deliver those of Christ's sheep who are entangled in the world, and a patient expectation of the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.<sup>3</sup>

The basis of the apostle's exhortation in this chapter is the doctrinal statement in chapter v. 17. The attempted amalgamation of the new and old creations is the material of which great Babylon is formed, which God will suddenly destroy. The root of all ecclesiastical corruption is a letting slip of the true doctrine of the cross, and of its counterpart the heavenly calling of the Church. A people sealed of

*understood.* There are to be found, among Dissenting ministers and congregations, many of the Lord's most devoted followers. The exceptions are numerous, but the rule is as above described.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. iii. 14, *sq.*

<sup>3</sup> Jude 20–23.

God on earth, and waiting for the voice which is to summon them to meet the Lord in glory, cannot mix heartily with the settled inhabitants of the earth. Out of the nations of their birth they have been called effectually by the gospel, and have received a new name according to their new and divine generation by the word of truth. Their place therefore in the world is that of witnesses for God, and their testimony will be true or false, according to their habitual observance or neglect of His commands. While they walk with God, they confess themselves strangers and pilgrims upon *earth*, and declare plainly that they seek a better country. They glory in the *cross* and its effects upon themselves.<sup>4</sup> But such a doctrine is intolerable to the world, and hence the endeavour which Satan has made but too successfully to cast down God's chosen from their proper excellency, by presenting the cross as a means only of eventual salvation, and thus neutralizing its efficacy as the power of present separation from the world.

The generation of God's children prove their parentage by walking in His ways.<sup>5</sup> But from Abram down to his remotest offspring in the faith, the word is still to go forth from our natural birth-place and associations, and to separate from man to God.

<sup>4</sup> Gal. vi. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Ps. lxxii. 15; Phil. ii. 15.

## CHAPTER VII.

“HAVING therefore these promises,” &c. (1.) This verse would find a more natural place at the end of the preceding chapter, since it forms the close of the apostle’s exhortation, with a change, after his usual manner, from the second person to the first: “Let us cleanse ourselves,”<sup>1</sup> &c. We may first notice how the divine promise in Christ is here used by the Spirit of grace, according to the standing principle laid down in an earlier chapter,<sup>2</sup> as a stimulant to practical godliness in the saints. This marks broadly and decisively the difference between law and grace, as already stated with such fulness in chapter iii.; the former proposing as an object of natural attainment, what the latter declares as an accomplished fact in the person of the Saviour, and confers absolutely, in Him, on the sincere believer. God can *promise* nothing to His children which He has not already secured to them in Christ, on the ground of His merit, who alone is worthy. He will *give* nothing, except in answer to a faith that lives upon His word.

The believer is already clean every whit, as viewed of God in his Redeemer; but for that very reason

<sup>1</sup> καθαρίσωμεν ἑαυτούς.<sup>2</sup> Chapter i. 20.

his calling is to purify *himself*. And of all who have in them the true hope of the gospel, it is written that they do purify themselves, as He is pure;<sup>3</sup> for such hope is in its very nature assimilative; we are changed as we behold.<sup>4</sup> But the self-purification to which we are here exhorted relates rather to the positive regulation of our walk, than to the secret culture of the soul, although these things are in reality morally inseparable. As, under the law, of Moses, the leper who had been already divinely healed must aid in the work of his own cleansing;<sup>5</sup> so the believer, who, as a once-purged worshipper, has access by faith into the holiest, and is in Christ presented acceptably to the Father, is called to pass the uncertain but appointed measure of his sojourn upon earth in giving diligence, that he may be found of Him without blame at His appearing.<sup>6</sup> The Spirit, who is the seal of their adoption, is their guide and teacher in the ways of God; and He who *stablishes* their souls in Christ is their light also, and their strength, for the fulfilling of their course as *followers* of Him. There are duties as well as privileges of true grace, and that "he that saith he abideth in Him ought himself so to walk, even as He walked,"<sup>7</sup> will be accepted by every right-hearted believer as a

<sup>3</sup> ἀγνίζει ἑαυτόν. (1 John iii. 3.) The Lord is personally ἀγνός, and communion with Him works in His true disciples a moral resemblance to the object of their hope. In this sense, every believer has purified his soul through his obedience to the truth. (1 Peter i. 22.) And such self-purification is morally equivalent to "continuing in the faith." καθαρισμός, on the other hand, seems to have respect to *conscience* rather than to faith.

<sup>4</sup> *Ante*, chap. iii. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Levit. xiv.

<sup>6</sup> James iv. 14; 2 Peter iii. 14.

<sup>7</sup> 1 John ii. 6; Col. ii. 6; 1 Peter ii. 21.

just and reasonable estimate of Christian life and conversation.

Legal morality teaches men vainly to *improve upon* themselves. The morality of the gospel exhorts believers to behave *worthy* of themselves, or, rather of the vocation wherewith they are called, and of the Lord in whom they stand. As new men in Christ, they are called on to renounce the evil habits of the old. As alive to God, through faith in their risen Forerunner, they are warned by the Holy Spirit, who has sealed them, to eschew those motives and practisings which flourish only in forgetfulness of God. Holiness and righteousness should mark the ways of those who already are sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.<sup>8</sup> To serve Him thus is the instinctive desire of all who in heart rejoice in Him as their Deliverer.<sup>9</sup> Owned as God's children, we are to learn to walk as such, a lesson for which our old nature is as unprepared as ever, and which can be learnt only through the heart's subjection to the Lord, and by a steadfast opposition to the promptings of our natural wills. The aim here proposed is common to the teacher and the taught; and the apostle, who was steadily pursuing it, labours now as one who would account for his ministry with joy, and not with grief, to cheer his brethren in the common race.

The terms of his injunction are very comprehensive: *all* filthiness is to be removed, and holiness is to be *perfected* in the fear of God. With respect to the two kinds of filthiness here specified, the first comprises all that operates instrumentally through

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Luke i. 74, 75; Heb. ix. 14.

the members, and is equivalent to "the deeds of the body," which we are elsewhere called to mortify. The chief varieties of this defilement are catalogued for our warning and avoidance, in their fitting place.<sup>1</sup> The filthiness of the spirit represents, on the other hand, the license of the natural mind, the whole interior world of thought and will, when unregulated by the truth and fear of God. Every kind of doctrinal aberration, therefore, as well as all "perverse disputings," fall within this latter category, besides the more obviously vicious imaginings of a corrupted mind. And the remedy for both these evils is the same. *Truth* is the only light by which our natural filthiness is disclosed to our consciousness; and faith, which *draws nigh to God*,<sup>2</sup> the only power which cleanses, and keeps clean, the bosom of a saint.

But holiness is to be pursued, as well as evil shunned; and in calling for its perfection the disciple does but repeat the Master's earlier claim.<sup>3</sup> God's children can have no lower standard of conformity proposed to them than God Himself, as we learn Him in the gospel of His Son. To be transformed to this pattern, by the renewing of our minds, is the manner and measure of that "godliness" which should be added to our saving faith.<sup>4</sup> Nor should we lightly regard the last words of this verse; it is *in the fear of God* that holiness is to have its perfect work. That which, as an element of character, is declared to be totally wanting to the natural man, is here mentioned emphatically as a ruling principle of action in the saint. The presence or absence of this

<sup>1</sup> Col. iii. 5; Gal. v. 19, *sq.*

<sup>2</sup> Heb. xi. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. v. 48; Eph. v. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. xii. 2; 2 Peter i. 6.



quality constitutes, in fact, the essential distinction between a true believer and a merely hypocritical or self-deceived professor. A mental conception of grace, unaccompanied by the fear of God, produces antinomianism, and is the last and most deadly form of spiritual corruption.<sup>5</sup> The grace of God is never separable from His fear. His goodness leads those who believingly appreciate it to repentance; while reverence and godly fear distinguish always the behaviour of those whose worship and service He accepts.<sup>6</sup> Those who hate God dread and would flee from Him, when they think of Him at all: His fear is the treasure of His children. *Jesus* feared, and they who have the mind of Christ fear also. This sentiment is not to be confounded with that which is proper to a conscience under legal bondage. That fear has been cast out of the believer's heart, ever since he knew the grace of God in truth, by the power of His perfect love.<sup>7</sup> He will have boldness in the day when unrepentant sinners are afraid. The fear of which Paul here speaks is the one essential form which love to Godward must ever take, in the case of any creature. And the higher the elevation to which grace raises its objects, and the nearer the relationship in which they stand to God, the more perfect and intense must be that venerative sentiment which has its origin in the true knowledge of Him who is its object.<sup>8</sup> When the apostle noticed that there were some at Corinth who, by disputing the doctrine of the resurrection, showed an entire absence of this fear, he taxes them with ignorance

<sup>5</sup> Jude 4.<sup>6</sup> Heb. xii. 28.<sup>7</sup> 1 John iv. 17, 18; Col. i. 6.<sup>8</sup> Ps. lxxxix. 7.

of God. For none who know God underrate His power, or trifle with His words. Among Christians this soul-preserving sentiment will be deep or shallow, according to their measure of self-knowledge and of grace.

Verse 2. "Receive us," &c. There is a startling abruptness in this change of tone, though it harmonizes morally with what goes before. For there prevailed among the saints at Corinth one form of spiritual filthiness which they had little heeded, and under the effects of which the apostle was then personally suffering. Calumnious insinuations, of which he was the object, had been freely circulated there, and, as the sequel shows more clearly, had obtained at least a partial credence in the church, while his continued absence seemed to lend a colour to the malicious inventions of his adversaries. Having, therefore, cited both himself and them into the presence of Him who winnows all men's actions, and is privy to their thoughts,<sup>9</sup> his next aim is to deal immediately with what remains of misunderstanding on the part of those among them whom he regards as right in heart with *God*, though partly alienated by these whisperings from *himself*. Accordingly he utters in this verse a threefold challenge in the sight of God, and both his friends and adversaries. "We have wronged no one," &c. As a doer of truth, he brings his deeds into the light, that it may be seen that they are wrought in God.<sup>1</sup> This is ever the way of those who are walking in the Spirit. Light and publicity are courted by God's true servants, whenever questioned by their

<sup>9</sup> Ps. cxxxix. 1-3. (marg.)

<sup>1</sup> John iii. 21.

adversaries ; while love's voluntary course is private and unostentatious, when the higher interests of truth are not at stake. For love does not seek her own.

It is probable, from the form of this appeal, that an attempt had been made, by some of Paul's detractors, to fasten on him the three things here disavowed. Now his boast in all the churches, and especially to them at Corinth, was that his walk among them and his personal dealings, of whatever kind, had been in simplicity and godly sincerity, and their knowledge of him made them fit judges in this case. If then he had, by his conduct there or elsewhere, justified any of these covert insinuations, let the evidence appear. But surely their own hearts must remind them that his exhortation had been neither of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor of guile. Whence came it then that he had lost, if indeed it were departed from their minds, so much of their esteem ? Was his present attitude in thus addressing them a natural one ? Should their father who begat them be reduced to ask as a stranger a place in their regard, and beg to be received of those whom he had first received from God, as seals of his apostleship in Christ ? Such language on his part was, if they rightly understood it, a reproach and dishonour to themselves ; and because he felt that to deny such imputations was to blame them also, for their evil-minded readiness in entertaining them, he changes presently his manner of address, and passes in the next verse from the indignant boldness of a righteous conscience, to the affectionate persuasiveness of love.

Verse 3. "I speak not this to condemn you," &c. Truth must be spoken, for it is his life and theirs; but his desire under all his forms of speech is their edification. To exalt himself by putting his erring brethren in the wrong were an easy, but to one of his spirit, an ungrateful task. His joy was rather to commend them in their ways, when they were pleasing in the sight of God. Whether he praised or blamed them, it was for the love's sake that he bore them in the bowels of Jesus Christ. He had them in his heart, and could not therefore be indifferent to what they thought of him. Love can only be satisfied with love; and even as the Master desires to be held in remembrance of those for whom He died and lives, so also must each Christ-like minister of God be dependent, for his present joy of life, on the value which is set upon him for his work's sake in the sight of God. But whether remembered or forgotten on their parts, they had a place in Paul's affection which made him theirs alike in life or death.

Verse 4. "Great is my boldness of speech toward you," &c. The love which did not spare to wound them in its faithfulness, when dealing with themselves, was not less bold to praise them in the presence of their brethren in the world. There had been indeed an intermission of this boasting, since his reception of the first evil tidings, which led him to write his former epistle,<sup>2</sup> and while the painful interval of suspense endured which the return of Titus had so happily terminated. For he knew not, and dared not anticipate too confidently, the

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. i. 11; v. 1; xi. 18.

effect which his letter might produce ; the silence of grief and doubt was on his lips till then. But now his misgivings had been all dispelled ; he had the glad assurance that his former glorying was not in vain, and great is his comfort as he thinks upon them in the power of a joy which put his former tribulation out of mind.

Verse 5. "For when we came into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest," &c. In this verse, which connects itself historically with chapter ii. 13, we have a frank and most touching revelation of the secret workings of his heart, and of the corresponding outward trouble and distress which he had borne on their account. From Troas to Macedonia, his progress had been one of toil and heaviness ; dislodged from the first by disquietude of spirit, he found in the latter no rest for his flesh. "Fightings without" were his familiar experience, as one to whom suffering and personal jeopardy were covenanted things,<sup>3</sup> and were powerless to daunt his spirit as he went about his Master's work ; but "fears within" were a dispiriting intrusion on his habitual peace and tranquillity of soul, for which these blameworthy Corinthians were mainly responsible. For it was for their sakes that he feared. As Eli trembled for the ark of God, so Paul was agitated and distressed when he thought of the havoc which the hand of the enemy had already wrought within the fold of Christ, and dared not yet feel assured that his writing would be accepted by his brethren as the words of God.

But if Satan was thus allowed to sift him, and

<sup>3</sup> Acts ix. 16.

to afflict his soul with many a harassing misgiving, the process through which he had been passed should leave, as its effect, a lasting blessing to himself as well as others. To his likeminded successors, in the course of patient service, his recorded experience has been, and will be till the race of faith is done, a standing consolation and encouragement; while, in his own case, the death which wrought so consumingly in him was answered more abundantly by life in God. He who thus led His servant through the valley of Baca turned its drought into a pool, by the sustaining comfort of His presence.<sup>4</sup> We must not forget, when pondering this passage, his former declaration, that if sorrowful, he was always rejoicing; that if persecuted, he was not forsaken; and if cast down, not destroyed.<sup>5</sup> Faith's trial differs from faith's rest, but is not less precious in the sight of God.<sup>6</sup> It may be needful to add, that to apply these words, as in popular theology they sometimes are applied, to the contest of faith with natural unbelief for the prize of personal assurance, is a perversion of God's words from their natural meaning, such as could scarcely suggest itself to a mind established in the grace of God.

Verses 6, 7. "But God, that comforteth them that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus," &c. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.<sup>7</sup> That God's comfort may be worthily enjoyed, His hand must be first acknowledged in our casting down. In all things true faith has to do with God, and not with the immediate circum-

<sup>4</sup> Psalm lxxxiv. 5, 6.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter i. 6, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Chap. vi. 10; iv. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Psalm xxx. 5.

stances only which constitute the furnace in which faith is tried. Natural fortitude of character avails nothing in the time of spiritual conflict; the afflictions of the gospel are endured only in the *power of God*.<sup>8</sup> The arrival of Titus was, to His much-wearied servant, as a visitation from the Lord. Joy came to him in double measure. Paul had mourned alone, but has companionship in consolation. For Titus too was glad, sharing, as a true child of grace, in the grateful and happy feelings which were excited in the bosom of his father in the faith, on finding that what he had written with so many tears had been blessed of God even beyond his hope. To see Titus was a joy to him; but to hear from his lips an account of what had passed at Corinth filled his cup to overflowing; for it convinced him, by a threefold evidence, of the genuine restoration of the majority, at least, of God's assembly there to a sound state of spiritual health. Weighty and powerful indeed<sup>9</sup> had his first letter proved to be by its effects. Instead of their former indifference to what was due to Him whose name they bore, there is now a fervency of dutiful desire; instead of being puffed up, as they had been, in the presence of discreditable facts, there was the mourning which became the contrite confessors of moral and spiritual delinquency; and to the cold suspicions which the whisperers had poured into the minds of some of them, at least, and which had produced already an estrangement on their parts, there had succeeded the opposite and worthier sentiment of zealous love.

Verse 8. "For though I made you sorry with a

<sup>8</sup> 2 Tim. i. 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Infra*, chap. x. 10.

letter, I do not repent, though indeed I was beginning to repent,"<sup>1</sup> &c. The birth of this new gladness had dismissed his former travail from his thoughts. If he keeps it still in his remembrance, it is only to expatiate more fervently upon the contrast which the grace of God had wrought. There is in this verse a sweet and inimitable expression of the holy tenderness and depth of true affection which he felt for these, his wayward children, in the bowels of Jesus Christ. Under the pressure of his "fears within," he had anxiously recalled his words to mind, and was half tempted to repent that he had written as he had; but the tidings brought by Titus had completely reassured him. For although he perceived that he had caused them grief, he saw through that passing cloud of sorrow into a brighter joy beyond. And let none think strangely of this specimen of mutability even in an inspired apostolic mind. His irresolution sprang from no defect of confidence on his part, as to what his hand had written; for he knew that the words were only in a secondary sense his own;<sup>2</sup> but, as a man of like passions with those whom he addressed, he shrank from an anticipation of the possible effect on them of such a letter as he had been led to write. And if even of the Lord Himself it is written, that "it repents Him of the evil," and that His relentings are concurrent with His judgments, in His dealings with His people's frowardness,<sup>3</sup> how should not the like emotions find their occasion in the heart of one who, through the grace bestowed on him, so closely followed Christ?

<sup>1</sup> εἰ καὶ μετμελόμην.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 37.

<sup>3</sup> Joel ii. 13; Jer. xxxi. 20.



Verse 9. "Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry," &c. That his word had been with power, and that submission had succeeded to their former high-mindedness, though it confirmed him in his official confidence, was no cause of joy to Paul. The devils might be subject to the Name in which he spoke, and yet men's hearts be unrestored to God. It was in the *quality* of their sorrow that he found his deep delight. For they had been made sorry after a godly sort, so that their change of disposition towards himself was the fruit and witness of their repenting toward *God*. His misery had been to see them so remote from God, in the spirit of their minds, as to manifest a haughty indifference to sin. His joy is now to find that, by his former exhortation, they had been recovered to a just apprehension of the presence of the Lord among them, and of the behaviour that became that presence on their parts. He had reproved them sharply, but with no injurious effect. His words were as the smiting of the righteous, and brought the balm of healing to the wounds they made.<sup>4</sup> Their momentary grief should also be their endless gain.

Verse 10. "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation," &c. We have here a criterion, by means of which the quality of all real and lasting sorrow may be estimated. For grief may arise, and even reach a passionate extreme, and yet be as unproductive of any alterative effect upon its subject as the summer dew upon a rock. But of such self-allaying sorrow he takes here no account. There is a sorrow which is not only sincere, but which is

<sup>4</sup> Psalm cxli. 5.

“according to God,”<sup>5</sup> both in its producing motive and its aim. There is a sorrow also equally sincere, but “of the world.” The root of the first is faith in God, and its cause the discovery, by whatever instrumental means, of a moral distance from its trust. “Surely when I was turned, I repented; when I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh,”<sup>6</sup> is the language of a heart into which God has freshly shined in the discerning power of His word. Wrong actions, or imaginings, are then judged justly in the light, and repented of sincerely by the soul that views them there. The distinction between sorrow and repentance is thus clearly marked. The first leads to the second. The one is transient; the other is of lasting operation and effect. Godly sorrow indicates a state of *feeling*; repentance is an active *purpose* of the heart, which grows, by its nature, to a habit. The former respects itself; the latter is the fruit of right-mindedness to God. Repentance cannot be repented of,<sup>7</sup> since it is a turning from evil to good, and from oneself to God. It is, therefore, unto life and salvation in its very nature. It is an operative thing,<sup>8</sup> and its effect is *conversion* in a sinner, and *restoration* in a saint. In either case its end is peace.

The opposite of godly sorrow is the sorrow of the world;<sup>9</sup> a sorrow which they feel who know not

<sup>5</sup> κατὰ Θεόν.

<sup>6</sup> Jer. xxxi. 19.

<sup>7</sup> It is a point still disputed among verbal critics, whether ἀμεταμέλητον should be joined in construction with σωτηρίαν or with μετάνοιαν. I prefer the latter.

<sup>8</sup> ἐργάζεται stands in the former clause of this verse according to the best MSS., and the stronger expression, κατεργάζεται, in the second.

<sup>9</sup> ἡ τοῦ κόσμου λύπη.

God, and whose trust is only in themselves, or in some other arm of flesh—who have relied for prosperity upon the world, and whom the world has failed. Its bitter and unfruitful spring is pride or carnal self-respect; its motive occasions are as manifold as the deceitful lusts of men. Disappointed expectations and frustrated plans turn nature's greenness into the drought of angry but unrepentant grief. The fear of man, which brings a snare, holds captive those who have no fear of God before their eyes. Remorse is blind towards heaven, but seeks eagerly and restlessly its grave. Hope is where God is, despair where He is not; and so this sorrow of the world is said to work out death, since that is the appointed and inevitable fruit of the unrepented workings of the human will. Once more, to balance these two contraries, it may be said of the former sorrow, that it is a badge which all God's children wear at times, although their proper garment is not heaviness, but praise. The other afflicts those who, when the dream of natural happiness has been dispelled by crime, by misfortune, or by the long-resisted Spirit of God, feed only on the bitter bread of self-reproach; and unblessed woe too often wilfully accelerates the cure it vainly hopes to find in death. Contrition is the effect of sorrow on a heart that mourns to God: increased hardness is its opposite result on an ungodly mind; and the end of such is death, both now and in the day of God.<sup>1</sup>

Verse 11. "For behold this self-same thing," &c.

<sup>1</sup> Cain, Esau, Saul, and Ahitophel, will occur, with others, to the reader's mind as examples of the latter sorrow; David, Manasseh, Peter, and Paul himself, of the former.

Repentance bears many fruits, and what godly sorrow is becomes apparent by its manifest effects. In a repentant evil-doer it will prove itself by a willing, though contrite, acknowledgment of guilt; and where the complicity of remissness is the occasion of blame, such marks will follow genuine repentance as are noticed in this verse, which is an expansion, in a more diversified detail, of what he had more generally stated in verse 7. The terms here employed need but little explanation. The altered state of these Corinthians is first indicated by his *recognition* of their “carefulness” or “earnestness,”<sup>2</sup> which stands in happy contrast to their earlier remissness. “Clearing of themselves” describes the willing alacrity with which, when stirred by his former letter, they had addressed themselves to the solemn duty of dealing judicially with the offence. “Indignation,” again, expresses fitly the just and natural sentiment awakened in their minds when, with newly-opened eyes, they considered attentively the enormity of the evil which they had so long suffered to remain unjudged. It was a feeling directed not more against the wrong-doer than themselves. The “fear” of which he speaks had reference, first, to the Lord, and, in a secondary sense, to Paul, who, as His apostle, had addressed them in the plenary authority of His Name. The “vehement desire” already mentioned, with a slight variety of translation in verse 7, has likewise a similar diversity of object. They longed to right themselves with God, and therefore with His faithful minister. “Zeal” and “revenge” seem both to relate chiefly to their

<sup>2</sup> σπουδήν.

altered feeling and behaviour with respect to him who, by his wickedness, had caused the scandal which had now been put away; a change so entire, and of a character so vehement, as to call for the moderating words already noted in an earlier chapter.<sup>3</sup> Both by their ready compliance with his injunction as to the treatment of the offender, and by the spirit in which they had fulfilled their solemn charge, they had now freed themselves from all complicity with the offence, and are thus formally absolved from blame.

Verse 12. "Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong," &c. Love rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices with the *truth*;<sup>4</sup> and it was to rescue the Corinthian saints from the utterly false condition into which they had lapsed, and to re-edify them in the truth of God, that Paul had written. For it is not the suppression of a particular form of evil, or the redressing of some special wrong, that constitutes the end of spiritual exhortation; but the bringing, rather, of God's children into such practical communion with Himself, and with each other in His sight, as will neutralize the workings of the flesh in all its forms. Paul inferred the faulty state of the Corinthians from many patent evidences, and especially from the notorious act of immorality, which had opened the mouth of the enemy to blaspheme. But the suppression of this particular mischief by an authoritative act on the apostle's part would have done nothing towards the recovery of the Church. For that flagrant sin was but a plague-spot, which indi-

<sup>3</sup> Chap. ii. 6, *sq.*

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. xiii. 6.

cated, to his divinely-guided eye, the unhealthy condition of the body which would endure the presence of such evil, and not be ashamed. Until, therefore, the self-assertive folly and hardness of heart, which he had arraigned with so just a severity, had been exchanged for a totally opposite sentiment, he could take no comfort in their state. His eye was not so much upon the doer or sufferer of wrong, as upon Satan, the instigator of all evil, and the fraudulent corrupter of the way of truth. The unnoticed occurrence of such an enormity proved convincingly to Paul to what a fearful extent the adversary had prevailed; and it was to rouse them from their fatal lethargy, and to set them once more in array against the spoiler of their glory, that he had written as he did. And now that the feelings which he sought to excite in them had made themselves distinctly manifest, and they were again returning to their right mind as God's children, he is bold in the sight of God to assign this reason for his former words.

Verse 13. "Therefore we are comforted; but in addition to our comfort on your own account, we rejoice more abundantly in the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all."<sup>5</sup> If he is comforted, it is through the same who for a while had made him sad. He has, moreover, a second joy, as a sharer in what Titus felt, who had found such refreshment to his own spirit, in the reception which he had met with as Paul's fellow-labourer and mes-

<sup>5</sup> Διὰ τοῦτο παρακεκλήμεθα ἐπὶ δὲ τῇ παρακλήσει ὑμῶν· περισσώτερος μᾶλλον ἐχάρημεν, κ.λ. Such is the reading of *Cod. Sin.* and the better MSS.

senger to them. Out of the evil which so sorely tried his love, there had come, by the grace of God, a more abundant good. There remained still some disheartening drawbacks to this joy, and these he will notice in their place;<sup>6</sup> but there was enough in what God had manifestly wrought, to create a deep and grateful gladness in his heart. For this was not an ordinary or expected blessing; he had staked much upon this visit of his younger fellow-labourer, as the sequel shows.

Verse 14. "For if I boasted anything to him of you, I am not ashamed," &c. A lovely picture is presented to us here of the deep and constant interest which the apostle felt, both in his labour and its fruits. He loved to speak with Titus, his own son in the common faith, of what the Lord had wrought by his means among the "much people" which he had at Corinth.<sup>7</sup> And this he had done, not in the spirit of vain-glorious boasting, but to stir and cheer the spirit of his younger partner in the ministry of God. It is likely, though not expressly said in Scripture, that he had desired to induce Titus to take a special interest in the work of God at Corinth, even before the sad intelligence had reached him which produced his first epistle. Be this, however, as it may, his glorying was both truthful and for the furtherance of the truth. Nor was it for Titus' sake only that he had thus boasted. In the spirit of that love which rejoices with the truth, it was his delight to magnify at all times, in the presence of others, such tokens of real grace and godliness as he noticed in any of his children in the faith. Thus

<sup>7</sup> Acts xviii. 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Infra*, chap. viii. 23; xii. 17, 18.

he had said much to Titus of these saints at Corinth; but when they of Chloe's household came and brought up such an ill report, he trembled both for them and for his former words. Strengthened of God to write his first epistle, he seems, after an interval of unknown length, to have despatched Titus to Corinth, not as the bearer of his letter, but to note its earlier effects.

And it is easy to perceive his motive in the mission. As Paul's chosen associate, their reception of Titus, and their behaviour in his presence, would evince with sufficient clearness their feeling also and disposition towards himself. He was, besides, willing that the estimate which Titus had formed of their general spiritual progress, from his earlier description, should be subjected to an experimental proof. There was a hazard in it which distressed his spirit, but he incurred it willingly, as one who could work only with the truth.<sup>8</sup> If Titus found them, after all his boasting, in an evil state, he would accept the disappointment as a chastening from the Lord, in whom alone we may boast *absolutely*.<sup>9</sup> If, on the other hand, the hope, which rose still above his fears, was realized, his glorying should yet be louder to the praise of Him in whom he put his trust. And his godly sincerity receives its full reward. In the comforting report which Titus brought of their estate, he had ample assurance that his boast was not in vain.

Verse 15. "And his inward affection is more abundant towards you," &c. Their ready submission to the claims of truth reacts, in more abundant

<sup>8</sup> Chap. xiii. 8.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Cor. i. 31.



blessing, on themselves. For besides the renewing and strengthening of the bond of their first love to the apostle, there is now opened for them a new spring of comfort; since in the heart of Titus also they had now a special place, and a fresh tie of affection had been formed, which should not easily be broken. He had gone to Corinth necessarily with a doubtful mind, as it can hardly be imagined that he was ignorant of the contents of Paul's earlier epistle; but he brought away with him impressions not less beneficial to himself than to them. Arriving among them on a mission of uncertain issue, he had been acknowledged by them in a manner worthy of the Lord, whose messenger he really was. With a fear and trembling which proved the sincerity of their return to God, they had for the most part<sup>1</sup> obeyed unfeignedly the commands delivered to them in His name.

Verse 16. "I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things." All had thus prospered to the longing desire of this much-tried and much-honoured "minister of God." His reward was as his faith. When cast down, and sore distressed on their account, he had reckoned still upon the Lord; and now his seasonable recompence is come. Alarm is at an end, and he has full confidence again in those of whom he stood in doubt. His vexed spirit<sup>2</sup> now has rest in the complete re-assurance which he had received. Much still remained, indeed, to be corrected, ere the church at Corinth would be practically worthy of its honour as the assembly and

<sup>1</sup> The word "all" is omitted in *Cod. Sin.*      <sup>2</sup> Chap. ii. 13.

temple of the living God, and of this he will speak further on. But their ready obedience, in this principal instance, to the Shepherd's voice emboldened him to look for their yet further progress in the way of holiness and peace. A clear proof of his restored confidence is promptly given in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE closing verse of the last chapter marks clearly a dividing point in this epistle. A distinct subject, though standing in a deeply interesting moral relation to what has gone before, is now taken up and continued to the close of chapter ix.

Verse 1. "Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia." Assured now of their fervent mind towards himself, and reckoning therefore on their willing attention to his words, he passes rapidly from praise to exhortation; and in the selection of his topic we may surely trace the operation of that "mind of Christ" which ever recognizes "love" as the true end of the commandment.<sup>1</sup> The general conscience of the church had been aroused and stimulated, and their faith freshly invigorated by the self-searching effect of his former epistle, and for the perfecting of the work of restoration thus happily begun, he seeks now to revive in their hearts that earlier flame of charity, which their past internal dissensions had so hindered and repressed.

For the attainment of this high and holy aim the means which he employs are well worthy of the end. At Corinth a false rivalry and party-spirit had been

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. i. 5.

well-nigh destructive of their testimony as confessors of the common faith, and through a better emulation he endeavours now to counteract the subtle plans of the deceiver. The eulogistic mention which he here makes of the Macedonian churches is intended to provoke his brethren of Achaia to a loving jealousy, while by the terms in which his commendation is conveyed, he indicates the means by which the distinction now conceded to the former may rest with equal honour on themselves. For if they of Macedonia had done well, it was by "the grace of God," who giveth yet "more grace."<sup>2</sup> What had happened there might be repeated even more abundantly at Corinth. Originating at Philippi,<sup>3</sup> this grace had been bestowed both richly and diffusely on the other assemblies<sup>4</sup> in the Macedonian province; and should not the present temper of the saints at Corinth embolden him to hope that the mother city of Achaia might prove a not less prolific source of open-handed kindness for the gospel's sake?

Verse 2. "How that, in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy," &c. Of the particular season of tribulation to which reference is here made, we know nothing beyond this passing notice; but that it involved temporal adversity, as well as personal distress, seems implied in the apostle's words. Dismissing from our thoughts all speculative conjecture on a point in itself of secondary interest, we shall find our profit rather in observing well the manner and circumstance which gave so marked a character to this rich manifestation of the grace of God. Prac-

<sup>2</sup> James iv. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Phil. iv. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δεδομένην ἐν ταῖς ἐκκ. τ. Μ.

tical liberality was the form and outward expression of their love, but its motive-spring was joy. If their kindness for Christ's sake exceeded, it was because their hearts were more richly filled with Christ. Faith works by love, and here we have a sample of its fairest work.<sup>5</sup> Delighting in God as their assured and everlasting portion, and the faithful helper of their need, they disregarded their own poverty, which by the Spirit's witness pressed them in no ordinary manner, in order to fulfil, in act as well as wish, the words of Him who blessed them.<sup>6</sup> They were *very* poor, but richer still to Godward in their faith, and in love to His children for His sake.<sup>7</sup> Experience had wrought in them a hope which neither poverty nor tribulation could depress. In their feebleness they were strong in God to stretch out arms of help to others. Nor did they mete forth their kindness by the maxims of a natural discretion, but in their singleness of heart were willing to cast both mites into the treasury of God.<sup>8</sup>

Verse 3. "For to their power, I bear record, yea, and above their power," &c. When special praise is bestowed by the Spirit, in anticipation of the coming day,<sup>9</sup> it is less for the sake of those who are its objects than for ours, who are allowed in our turn like opportunities of godly emulation. To give out of abundance, is to be charitable only after a natural sort; to give in a just proportion to one's means is, in a Christian, to act with fidelity as a trusted steward of the Lord; but in giving to exceed one's power is an indication that love has, at faith's bidding, taken, for

<sup>5</sup> Gal. v. 6.<sup>6</sup> Acts xx. 35.<sup>7</sup> 1 John v. 1.<sup>8</sup> Mark xii. 41, *sq.*<sup>9</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 5.

a while at least, the supreme direction of the soul, leaving conscience an astonished yet unreprieving witness of its acts. And of such kind was the temper of these open-handed Macedonians, who, with no other prompting than that of their own hearts, were lavishing thus eagerly their sympathizing aid upon their suffering but naturally alien brethren in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Verse 4. "Begging of us with much intreaty this favour, even a participation in the service towards the saints."<sup>2</sup> Feelings which, in others, had to be excited by a more or less direct appeal, were in them the happy and spontaneous growth of love. It was not often that Paul encountered importunities of such a kind; and their effect on his own spirit may be further gathered from his words to the Philippians, to whom belonged the honour of leading in this acceptable path of righteousness.<sup>3</sup> Great was his joy at this practical reflection of the Master's mind in His disciples. The secret of this gracious forwardness of love is opened further in the following verse.

Verse 5. "And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord," &c. Their kindness, though provoked by a knowledge of their brethren's necessities, had a source far deeper than any temporary motive; and although it is evident, from the tenor of this chapter and the next,<sup>4</sup> that the movement of active sympathy which originated at

<sup>1</sup> On the origin of this collection for the Jewish saints, and the causes which rendered it an object of such anxiety to the mind of the apostle, see *Notes on the Romans*, chap. xv. 25, sq.

<sup>2</sup> Such appears to be the real meaning of this verse, the words *δέξασθαι ἡμᾶς* being absent from all the better MSS.

<sup>3</sup> Phil. iv. 1, 15; Rom. xv. 27.

<sup>4</sup> See especially chapter ix. 2.

Philippi had since extended to Achaia, and was reacting with stimulating effect upon the other Macedonian churches, yet their present liberality was not merely a welcome response to the apostle's known desire, but the energetic outburst of that spirit of vital devotedness to Christ which grace had so deeply rooted in their hearts. *God's love* was there—a love which proves itself by deeds according to its opportunities.<sup>5</sup> We may see clearly in their case the broadly marked difference between natural benevolence and the charity which springs from faith. “They gave *themselves* to the *Lord*, confessing thus the everlasting claim of His redeeming love according to the excellency of His name and person, and making this willing self-sacrifice as the only suitable acknowledgment of that great debt which never can be fully paid. And being thus confessedly His own, such power as they had was freely placed, as for the Master's use, in the apostle's hands as an approved steward of His grace. It was not impulsive eagerness that moved them, but deliberate choice. They knew and felt that they were not their own; what they had, therefore, was for God and His afflicted saints.

Verse 6. “Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun,” &c. Grace provokes grace. Titus, who had been already active when among them in this work of love, is desired, as the bearer of this second epistle, to crown his former labour, by setting vividly before the minds of these Corinthians the bright and alluring opportunity which was thus presented to their zeal. Let them dwell no longer on their own dishonour, but hasten to efface its re-

<sup>5</sup> 1 John iii. 14.

membrance by the engrossing activities of love. It is thus that the Spirit of grace and wisdom deals with and manages the hearts and consciences of saints. The word which sifts and judges them, upholds them also. If humbled through the faithful ministry of reproof, they are presently recalled to the highest moral elevation, by an appeal to their love and willing service to the Lord.

Verse 7. "Therefore, as ye abound in everything," &c. To the gifts and graces which he had before acknowledged in them,<sup>6</sup> we have now specifically added "diligence," and a returning love towards himself. Both these have been already noticed under slightly different forms of expression,<sup>7</sup> and both are here repeated in emphatic recognition of their altered and amended state. All these endowments are enumerated, first, to the praise of Him who gave them, and then to stir up in the hearts of those addressed a feeling of godly self-respect, and a desire to excel themselves by abounding yet further in this grace of brotherly kindness. For in the time of their disorder, the best ornament of their profession had been neglected or forgotten, while they put on garments which, for a while, estranged them from themselves and him. What grace began had been for a season interrupted and repressed by sin; but he looked hopefully, for its revival and yet richer increase, to the same unrepentant mercy which had originally called them into the fellowship of Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Verse 8. "I speak not by commandment," &c. The new commandment which the Lord has established

<sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. i. 6.    <sup>7</sup> Chap. vii. 7-11.    <sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. i. 8, 9.



as the law of His own house,<sup>9</sup> though it lays every believer under its abiding obligation, is never positively enforced. As the alternative of perdition, we are commanded to believe the gospel and confess the name of Jesus, but the practical charity of saints must be spontaneous to be acceptable. It may be stimulated by example, or aroused by exhortation, but is fruitful only by its own intrinsic force. The apostle, while disclaiming authoritative injunction, gives two reasons for his present importunity: he would not have them surpassed by their Macedonian brethren in this happy competition, and he would give them a special occasion of proving the sincerity of their love. Its fervency towards himself, he has with joy acknowledged; his desire is, to witness its expansive force in the active ministry of kindness towards those whom they knew only by the reputation of their faith. He longs to see in them an effectual recognition of their calling and mutual relationship, as members of the one body of Christ. He had in his former letter recalled this truth to their remembrance, in the way of doctrinal exposition; he now seeks to draw out, through their charity, its efficient demonstration. This appears more clearly in what follows.

Verse 9. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," &c. He here applies the true touchstone to their hearts. Without this appeal, his exhortation might have seemed to savour too exclusively of that emulative sentiment, which, though distinctly recognised by the Spirit as a principle of action among God's children, is apt, if unsupported

<sup>9</sup> John xiii. 34; 1 John ii. 8.

by a constant reference to the cross, to degenerate into a merely natural rivalry, both profitless and hurtful to the soul. There is, besides, a peculiar force and significance in this touching remembrance, when considered with reference to those immediately addressed. It marks distinctly their spiritual progress, since their reception of his first epistle. To shame them from their low and faulty practice, he had then reminded them of their high calling, and of the behaviour which should characterize them as partakers of it. But now, in recognition of their altering state, from "carnal" to "spiritual," he can invite them to meditate the depths of God. Truth had wrought mightily among them, and wisdom was ejecting folly from their inward parts;<sup>1</sup> he can refer, therefore, to that theme, which was the exhaustless topic of his own glad spirit's search..<sup>2</sup> They had *known*, indeed (for knowledge was one of their distinctive gifts), the precious grace of which he speaks; but how lightly was it estimated by them in their day of pride! They are, however, reigning now as kings no longer but, with contrite heart and willingness of spirit, are lending an obedient ear to the commandments of the Lord. And so these sweet and heart-filling words of remembrance are mingled with his exhortation and advice, for the double purpose of confirming in their hearts the work of godly sorrow, and rendering it yet more fruitful in result.

Rich, indeed, both was and is the Lord, who had called them by His grace; and to what an unmeasured depth of poverty did He abase Himself, that they and we might share the blessings of His

<sup>1</sup> Ps. li. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. iii. 10.

wealth! But to expatiate on this is here impossible. The wealth of the believer is the Lord Himself. His *grace* is apparent in His acts, and we should thence infer His *love*. The one is our salvation, the other, the unending joy and meditation of the saved.<sup>3</sup> The one may and must be known to all who are its objects; the other passes knowledge, though searchable indefinitely by the saints, in the enabling power of the Spirit.<sup>4</sup> And while God's saints are occupied in spirit with that which is unsearchable, and are living daily on the bread of God, the new commandment is no longer a neglected duty, but becomes, as it was to them of Macedonia, an object of intense desire. We may note also here, the appropriate force of the apostle's language: he does not say, "for our sakes," but, "for *yours*;" for he is not setting forth as a preacher the doctrine of salvation, but helping and admonishing those who already have believed through grace. General statements of doctrine are the fulcrum of our faith; especial applications of the same doctrine are the proper aliment of love.<sup>5</sup>

Verses 10, 11. "And herein I give my advice," &c. While a command in such a case was out of season, as a thing alien from the spirit which he desired to evoke, there was opportunity for such counsel as love only can afford. There is a considerate sympathy that always characterizes true spiritual ministry, and which is strikingly manifested in these verses. He speaks as one who had their honour and their real interests alike at heart.

<sup>3</sup> Acts xv. 11; Eph. iii. 18, 19.

<sup>4</sup> Eph. iii. 19; 1 Cor. ii. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Gal. ii. 16-20.

A year ago, they had both felt and begun to obey a right and gracious impulse, doing willingly and earnestly their work of love :<sup>6</sup> but the intermediate occurrences had both diverted their attention, and morally incapacitated them for the prosecution of their earlier wish. Let them now, as men restored to their right minds, and again found in their true place, at the feet of Jesus, take courage, and resume the good work which they had begun. It was expedient that they should do this, not only that fruit might abound to their account, but that tongues, which might otherwise be loosened to speak evil of the church at Corinth, because of her too public scandals, might be constrained rather to magnify the name of God on their behalf, when they saw displayed among them such evident fruits of His restoring grace. Let each, therefore, use his happy opportunity according to his means.

Verse 12. "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted," &c. Truth must be the rule and measure of practical beneficence ; for love is of God, as well as for His sake. He is the general receiver of His children's gifts, and estimates them in every case according to the heart and disposition of the giver. He has of old borne witness, that a man's *desire* is his kindness, and that a poor man is better than a liar.<sup>7</sup> The smallest offering is, in His esteem, an odour of sweet smell, if its motive be the love of

<sup>6</sup> Οὐ μόνον τὸ ποιῆσαι ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ θέλειν. They had begun, "not to do only, but to will also:" an intentional inversion, which marks his own appreciation of the sincerity of that which some, who judged them only by appearances, might feel disposed to question.

<sup>7</sup> Prov. xix. 22.

Christ. But to this general enunciation of motive there is added presently a special rule of charity, which stands in closest connection with the fundamental constitution of the church or assembly of God.

Verses 13-15. "For I mean not that others be eased, and ye burdened: but by an equality," &c. The oneness of the Church, as Christ's mystic body, of which Israel after the flesh was a figure, is the basis of the present exhortation. Because of this vital unity, particular wants and trials should excite a common sympathy among all who are partakers of like precious faith.<sup>8</sup> All alike recognizing their fellowship of grace and pilgrimage, and waiting together for their common hope, the temporal wealth of one should be for the replenishing and comfort of another who had need; and this not individually only, but also socially. Church should help church, as brother aided brother, in the season of distress. Thus the vicissitudes of affluence and poverty, as well as the manifold circumstantial trials and afflictions belonging to their calling, as partakers of Christ, should be turned to lasting account, as occasions of the active ministry of love. Times might change, and with them the order and administration of the offices of love; the giver of to-day may become the grateful receiver of to-morrow—God being glorified in both, and at all seasons, by those who seek to imitate Him in His ways. Riches are uncertain; grace is sure. Lastly, prosperity, like the seasons, comes and goes; love abides in God, and should be manifested in His children, not in word only, but in

<sup>8</sup> See further on this point, *Notes on First Corinthians*, chap. xii.

deed.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, if as believers we are not our own, still less so is our substance. It will be regarded rather, by the wise-hearted disciple, as a stewardship of trust for Christ.

Founded in pure mercy, and animated by the indwelling Spirit of Christ, the several parts of God's one general assembly should be exemplifying continually the truth of their confession by a natural and mutual care. For the love which is *of* God returns also *to* Him; not in direct worship only, but through the mediate channels of His own providing.<sup>1</sup> We have nothing which we did not first receive, and we acknowledge best the God of our own mercy when our hearts and hands are open for His sake. And so His own miraculous ordinance of supply, when of old He fed His people with manna in the desert, is here avouched by the apostle as a fitting parable of instruction on this point of godly well-pleasing. In the instance to which our chapter refers, the need was at Jerusalem, and the abundance with the Gentile churches. Hence the especial interest which Paul takes in this collection for the saints. That the natural children of the covenant should owe their succour from distress to strangers of the uncircumcision, who entreated their acceptance of this aid for Jesus' sake, would be an effectual tightening of that bond of perfectness which holds fast in Christ, under their new and better Name, both Jew and Gentile alike; but which, without such divinely-found occasions, might but too easily become relaxed.

It remains only to notice that verse 15 has in it—

<sup>9</sup> 1 John iii. 14, 17.

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iv. 12.

independently of its connection with the immediate context—a direct spiritual application of the simplest and most precious kind. We cannot, as believers, gather more than Christ, or less than Christ. God has made Him our portion, the source of a perennial supply. We live, if we live at all, by eating Him.<sup>2</sup> But we gather according to our *faith*, and where faith abounds, the more richly-laden saint becomes a channel of supply to those whose knowledge of the Son of God is less than his. Thus spiritual growth proceeds, until the measure of Christ's fulness be attained.<sup>3</sup> If then (to return to our immediate subject) we find ourselves abounding in the goods of this world, let it be our chief care to bestow our surplus upon Him who is to be still met with as both hungry and thirsty, naked and oppressed—a Man of sorrows, in whatever guise, until the time comes for the earth to shine with His returning glory.<sup>4</sup>

Verses 16, 17. "But thanks be to God," &c. Mention has been already made of the charge given formally to Titus. We have now the apostle's grateful testimony to the spirit in which it was accepted on his part. God had put into the heart of Paul's true yoke-fellow a zeal which exceeded his own wish. If, therefore, Titus came to them again, they should regard him less as Paul's messenger than as *God's*. Moreover, their reception of him, as the intended bearer of this second letter, would be according to the nature of its contents; they would meet him, therefore, not only with the reverence belonging

<sup>2</sup> John vi. 57.<sup>3</sup> Eph. iv. 13.<sup>4</sup> Ezek. xliii. 2.

to his office, but with a responsive appreciation also of his love.<sup>5</sup>

Verses 18, 19. "And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel," &c. With Titus there was associated, in this happy service, one who needed not to be commended to their love. The Corinthians had heard of him, for as an evangelist he was known and praised in every church.<sup>6</sup> Nor is he now sent by the apostle only, but rather as his colleague, upon whom the choice of them of Macedonia had fallen, to be the joint bearer with Paul of their collection for the saints. He assents with readiness to the suggestion that he should fulfil this mission unaccompanied by his apostolic associate, the motive of whose continued absence from Corinth he was well able to appreciate. For Paul, too, gloried in being the servant of the churches in this active demonstration of their love; and his message, and the bearers of it, should alike attest to these Corinthians his readiness of mind.<sup>7</sup>

Verses 20, 21. "Avoiding this, that no man should blame us," &c. We have now a further explanation of this divided responsibility, as well as of his wish to make others more prominent than himself in the

<sup>5</sup> *Ante*, chap. vii. 15.

<sup>6</sup> The name of this honoured brother is in the Lamb's book of life, but cannot be certainly known to us until the day of revelation. Luke, Gaius, Aristarchus, and others, have been suggested, on grounds more or less plausible. That any reference is here made to the written Gospel of the first of these is problematical. Was it, perchance, Apollos, once refusing, but now—as one like-minded with the apostle—made more than willing to revisit those he loved so well?—*Notes on First Corinthians*, xvi. 12.

<sup>7</sup> All the better MSS. read *ἡμῶν*, instead of *ἐμῶν*, at the end of verse 19.



administration of this trust. With a perfect knowledge of the enemy's devices, he stands watchfully upon his guard, cutting off diligently all occasion by the avoidance of any course which might lend, in the remotest way, a pretext for mischievous insinuation. In this world suspicion is the attendant shadow of a trust not yet discharged, and the human heart is found capable of hatching the most outrageously improbable imaginations in its busy and ungenerous surmisings. Paul quickly passes, therefore, what he had received as the almoner of the churches into other hands. God was his witness that he used no cloke of covetousness;<sup>8</sup> but, while walking in the full light of His countenance, he had men to think of also. Discretion should preserve him; he would think not only upon what is pure, but also on that which is of good report.<sup>9</sup> He will be wise as well as honest;<sup>1</sup> giving no hostile tongue an opportunity of slandering him or his office, as an apostle of Christ, by his assumption of an exclusive and irresponsible pecuniary trust.

The example here presented to us is of much value and importance at all times. Actions, which in their nature are susceptible of misconstruction, will be shunned anxiously by all who truly seek to edify the church. To be wise as serpents is not less needful than to be harmless as doves. And here we may notice a clear and broad difference between the delivery of oral testimony, and the conduct of any other kind of business on the part of a believer. The former must provoke the anger of the world,

<sup>8</sup> 1 Thess. ii. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Phil. iv. 5.

<sup>1</sup> Verse 21 is founded on Prov. iii. 4.

and tempt the opposer to blaspheme. The latter, being in its nature quite within the range of human observation and judgment, should be so conducted as to present, if possible, no salient point of objection to a captious mind.

Verse 22. "And we have sent with them our brother," &c. Another trusty coadjutor is here indicated, but not named;<sup>2</sup> and if for a moment we are disposed to regret this omission of what could not fail to interest us, let us again remember that what calls for our observation and imitation is not the individual, but the grace and godly zeal which mark his character. Ever willing and diligent in all good things, but now made eager by the confidence which, like the apostle, he<sup>3</sup> now feels in the Corinthian saints, he joyfully attaches himself, at the bidding of the former, to this embassy of grace. The credit of this second messenger, unlike that of his companion,<sup>4</sup> at that time rested solely on Paul's voucher, who, for that reason, pointedly, as well as warmly, commends him to their love upon his personal experience of his worth. They were ready, though, as the sequel shows, with too little discrimination, in their reception of any who approached them professedly as ministers of Christ, and he gives them fresh occasion of honouring Him by a

<sup>2</sup> It is even less possible to identify this brother than the former. Was it Epaphras, or Trophimus, or even Mark? Such questions may be raised and sifted, but the answer will probably be heard only at the day when every faithful servant of the Son of God will receive his open honour from the Father. (John xii. 26; 1 Cor. iv. 5.)

<sup>3</sup> The marginal translation is to be preferred.

<sup>4</sup> *Ante*, ver. 18.

worthy treatment of those who did not vainly bear His Name.

Verse 23. "Whether any do enquire of Titus," &c. Questions would, doubtless, be raised, and a curious as well as solemn interest be excited, by the arrival among them of these associated messengers; but they are not unprovided with credentials. Titus was already known to them as Paul's partner in the gospel, and his fellow-labourer among themselves. Of the others, one had already been preceded by his general good fame; and if the other lacked this commendation, yet both alike were commissioned by God's churches, and stood, therefore, in the light and glory of the Lord.<sup>5</sup> They came, indeed, with no direct authority from Him; yet their mission was not only, in the nature of it, to the glory of His Name, since it was a practical fulfilling of His new commandment, but the personal devotedness of these tried and ready ministers of grace was such as to justify the exceptional boldness of this apostolic commendation.

Verse 24. "Wherefore show ye to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love," &c. An appeal at once to their obedience, to their spiritual self-respect, and to their love. According to their reception of these visitors would be thenceforward their own estimation in the rest of God's assemblies; and, by their treatment of his chosen and much commended delegates, Paul would try the profession of their fervency of mind, both to himself and to the Lord. Let his reasons for writing, instead of coming, be admitted without suspicion or dispute

<sup>5</sup> Matt. x. 40, 41.

by these Corinthian saints,<sup>6</sup> and let them now show openly before all other churches—some of which might have already heard with grief a rumour of their earlier dissensions—that their present state is worthy of their calling, and that in the charity of God they are not behind their brethren in the common faith. By so doing, they will both prove their own fellowship in the Spirit, and justify Paul's glorying on their behalf.

The frequent mention made in this chapter of "the churches" or "assemblies" in their severalty, as distinguished from the general assembly of saints which constitutes the one body of Christ, invites an attempt to state here with precision the true meaning of this term in its scriptural significance; and in a work, the declared aim of which is practical edification, a slight digression with this object will not, it is hoped, be considered out of place.

A church, in the language of the Spirit, means *an assembly of believers in the Son of God*, and differs by this token from all other assemblies or communities which are not in the common faith. Such is its proper and essential description, as distinguished from the attributes which may mark, for praise or blame, one assembly of God's people in comparison with another, as they pass under the Master's eye. The Corinthians were carnal; the Ephesians were spiritual; the Galatians were slipping from the faith; the Philippians were set for the defence of the gospel, &c.; but all were alike

<sup>6</sup> From 1 Cor. xvi. 2, 3, it is evident that he *then* contemplated visiting them, to receive in person their collection for the saints.

assemblies of *God*. As such, they are further designated in the Scriptures under a rich variety of descriptions, as God's building and His husbandry, His flock, His habitation, and His temple. Nor were they thus in name only, but in the positive manifestation also, more or less abundantly, of His power by the Spirit. They stood thus in a visible, as well as real, separation from the world, which then went openly after another god.

The fashions of the world may vary, but God and His truth can know no change. The world, as has been already noticed,<sup>7</sup> has undergone a notable external transmutation wherever the truth of Christ's gospel has been outwardly acknowledged among men; but external recognition is not saving faith, and the difference between the world, and those whom God has redeemed to Himself out of the world, is as real, though less visible, in these last days of formal godliness, as when Cæsar openly denied and persecuted Christ. But our question at present is with *names*. There are churches now as there were churches then. It should concern the true disciple, first, to discover whether this scriptural designation still retains its proper acceptation among men, and, if otherwise, to endeavour to reclaim it from false uses, and restore it, as a thing of God, to God.

God's churches, when His servants wrote epistles to them in His name, were companies of *saints*, elect according to His own foreknowledge, and attesting their election by their faith and love. If unregenerate persons are recognized among them, their presence is charged as a sin upon the church where

<sup>7</sup> *Ante*, page 221.

they are found. They had come in unawares, to the shame of those who should have better known how to distinguish between a living faith in Christ, which is the true right of entrance to God's house, and an empty profession of His name.<sup>8</sup> As respects the form and polity of these assemblies, the Scriptures present us with a varied picture. An epistle is addressed to one of them, at least, whose organization may be considered as complete, since both bishops (or elders)<sup>9</sup> and deacons are expressly included in the Spirit's greeting, though postponed in honour to the assembly, for the sake of which they had been set in their official place.<sup>1</sup> Nor is it likely that, among "the churches of Macedonia," Philippi stood alone in this respect, since we know by his own testimony what Paul's habit and desire was, with reference to the establishing and maintenance of godly order among those who owned him in his apostolic calling and authority.<sup>2</sup> More frequently, however, we find God's saints addressed *generally*, and contemplated under their common obligation of subjection to the Lord and to each other, in the love and fear of God, than with any express reference to the temporal, though not unimportant, official distinctions which were presumably in force among them all. For while it is abundantly evident that such was the divinely-appointed economy in the churches, both of the circumcision and uncircumcision,<sup>3</sup> it is most important to remember that neither

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 34; Jude 4.

<sup>9</sup> Manifestly the same office under different names.

<sup>1</sup> Phil. i. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xiv. 23; Titus i. 5.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter vi. 1; Acts xx. 17.

elders nor deacons are named in the enumeration of the Spirit's gifts,<sup>4</sup> nor found among these lasting and essential ministries on which the calling and vital structure of the church depend,<sup>5</sup> And the absence of all mention of official place or duty in the two epistles to the church at Corinth, which consist, in so large a measure, of the statement and correction of practical disorders, and in which some reference might so naturally be expected to the responsible holders of authority, had any such been there, is an emphatic proof that a church may exist and abound in spiritual gifts, may receive both praise and blame, may suffer declension and be again restored, without the operation of any other authoritative energy than the effectual ministry of the word of grace.

In one respect at least, as has been shown already, all God's assemblies bear a common likeness; they stand equally distinct from the surrounding world. God, who is unknown in the world, is known in the assemblies of His saints. But if from this scriptural reality we turn to view those institutions which now bear the name of "Church," how different is the spectacle presented to our eyes! To those who are likely to read this book, it is unnecessary to demonstrate the utter falsity of that which claims to be the Catholic Church. But is the idea of a "National Church" more scriptural? Not to repeat what has

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 28, *sq.*

<sup>5</sup> Eph. iv. 11-13. Although, as another has justly remarked, there is a strong moral affinity between one at least of these gifts and the office of an elder, God's overseers are appointed not to govern only, but to *feed* His flock. (Acts xx. 28.) Again, is the "giver" of Rom. xii. 6 a diaconal distributor of the Church's bounty, or merely an individual and voluntary almoner of Christ?

already been advanced with reference to this,<sup>6</sup> I would only now remind the Christian reader that the notion of a national church is a confounding together of two antagonistic things; for it is *out of* the nations that God is now gathering His church. A national church should be a nation of God's called and chosen saints; but every one knows that what bears that name in our days is nothing of the kind; nor could it ever be so, from the very nature of the case. Christ's church or churches, where His Spirit has His dwelling as the Comforter of His disciples amid their promised tribulation in the world, is something quite different from Messiah's kingdom, when the reigning time is come. It is to an early letting slip of the true calling of the church, and a consequent misconception, on the part of those who claimed to be her guides, of the principle of the existing dispensation, that the utterly incongruous idea of state or national churches owes its origin.

And among the numerous varieties and denominations of *dissent*, are there any which answer fairly to the scriptural delineation of a church? This question must be answered by another. Do such assemblies consist only (as far as can be known) of genuine believers, and (for these things are joined inseparably in the scriptural idea of God's building) are they walking in avowed and sincere dependence on the living ministry of the Holy Ghost, and in subjection severally to the Lord alone? It is hardly necessary to insist, that neither royal edicts nor parliamentary enactments are the voice of the Spirit of truth; and it is not less certain, that His power does

<sup>6</sup> *Notes on First Corinthians*, p. 302, sq. *Ante*, p. 224.



not reside in committees or boards of trustees. Still less is popular opinion His chosen medium of utterance, though sometimes blasphemously called so.<sup>7</sup> Nor can that Holy One be transmitted officially from hand to hand, as orders and degrees may be. An inspired apostle might confer a gift;<sup>8</sup> their successors are responsible only for a faithful tradition of their words.<sup>9</sup> In brief, a bishop or presbyter may be created, and multitudes have been and are so, in the ordinary course of things beneath the sun, by a simple decision of the human will; sometimes directly asserted, but oftener disguised under superstitious or traditionary forms.<sup>1</sup> But the true energy of the Spirit, though it may be hampered and afflicted by merely human ordinances, is in its nature paramount and independent of them all. *God* makes men prophets and evangelists; from Him also is the wisdom which fits a true bishop for his office; and to acknowledge Him in the varied distribution of His gifts is the duty, and should be the joy also, of all who call upon His name; but to set up and maintain, by human method or authority, an order

<sup>7</sup> "*Vox populi, vox Dei.*" Remotely this is true, as when the voice of the multitude prevailed to the shedding of the blood of God's appointed Lamb. Man's humour is but the servant of his will; but in its nearer and familiar sense this apophthegm is utterly untrue.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Tim. i. 6.

<sup>9</sup> 2 Tim. i. 13; ii. 2; 2 Peter iii. 2.

<sup>1</sup> And often also, we may well believe, such choice is exercised in the spirit of a genuine piety and zeal for God. In such instances the hand of man is visible, not in the intrusion of unfit persons into ecclesiastical offices, but in the *limiting* to the persons chosen the exercise of ministries which in the true order of God's house are at the unfettered discretion of the Holy Ghost.—*Notes on First Corinthians*, chapter xiv.

of ecclesiastical polity, is but to assert for man what is the prerogative of God alone.

Has then, it will be asked, the genuine apostolic church no true successor? To this question the Romanist, the Irvingite, and others of less note, have each after his own fashion endeavoured to furnish a practical reply.<sup>2</sup> The true answer is, that God's church can have no successor, but abides in the unbroken continuity of *life*. *Churches* may historically

<sup>2</sup> Without drawing invidious attention to either of these, it may be said generally that all attempts at representative Catholicity are entirely gratuitous as well as vain. The assumption that ecclesiastical unity is to be realized through a federal union of churches, under some supreme temporal control, is an idea entirely unscriptural, since the day when God put out the light which He had kindled at Jerusalem, and sent His living truth abroad among the nations of the earth.\* The seven churches of Asia were not subject to each other (save in love), but severally to the Lord. Uniformity is not to be confounded in our thoughts with *unity*. The former is a human aspiration, and is attainable by natural means; the latter is a vital and divine reality, which makes itself visible exactly in proportion to the degree in which His people are positively subject to Himself. That particular churches should be independent of each other in their common dependence on the Lord, while bound together in the closest ties of spiritual fellowship, is as necessary to the manifestation of the oneness of Christ's body as the sacredness of individual faith and conscience† is to the exercise of genuine communion in the Spirit. The unity which in its operative effect results in the edification of the body, is the unity of the *faith*, and of *the knowledge of the Son of God*.‡ There is a sovereign Guide, a Ruler of all churches, but it is *the Lord the Spirit*. There is also a supreme standard of appeal, but it is *the written word of God*. True subjection of heart to these on the part of Christian assemblies would produce a visible union in truth and love, which would adorn as well as illustrate the doctrine of the oneness of Christ's body; but except at a sacrifice of truth and love alike, the realization of the ideal of ecclesiastical unity is attainable by no other means.

\* *Notes on First Corinthians*, pp. 189, 196, notes.

† Rom. xiv. 5, sq. *Ante*, chap. ii. 24.

‡ Eph. iv. 13.

live and die, as they severally hold fast or let slip their profession ; but because all true assemblies are parts of the one living household of faith, they depend immediately upon God alone, and hold nothing traditionally but His written word. And let the sincere enquirer, who loves and trembles at God's word, note well what Scripture teaches as to succession in the present dispensation. The apostles departed to make way, not for an increase of true and like-minded overseers, but for grievous wolves, who did not spare the flock ; while even of those whom the Holy Ghost had verily appointed men must arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.<sup>3</sup> Life has not fled from God's true building, which remains through all ages of apostasy, though its living stones may be to the natural eye no better than a ruinous heap ; but the historical successor of the once pure virgin is Babylon, the mother of harlots. The corruption which is thus symbolized in the Apocalypse is, in one word, *earthly-mindedness*, a willing forgetfulness of the distinctive calling of the church having been the occasion of her gradual debasement and subservient intermixture with the world.<sup>4</sup>

Are there then now, it may again be asked, no churches ? As well might it be asked, Are there no longer any Christians ? For wherever there are saints assembled in the faith of Jesus, there are churches. They are veritably "Churches of God" if He is truly owned by their unfeigned subjection to His word, even as they are in the power of a moral manifestation Churches of *Christ*, when His presence with them by

<sup>3</sup> Acts xx. 29, 30.

<sup>4</sup> Phil. iii. 18, 19 ; Rev. xviii.

the Spirit is their sole acknowledged title to unite together in His name.

Of all forms of sectarianism the farthest from the truth is that which claims, relatively to other communities of saints, to represent distinctively THE church or assembly of God. In other sectional pretensions there is usually something of reality, though in its nature fragmentary, and below the just standard of the truth; but in this all is false: truth is excluded by the bare assumption of exclusive truth. For God's church is where God's habitation is, who has His dwelling in His saints. There is one *Spirit*, and there is one *body*; there are also, by the same witness, many churches or assemblies of the saints. While therefore every community of living Christians is, if walking in the fear of God and the comfort of the Holy Ghost, a true church or assembly, in the strict scriptural sense of that term, no assembly or confederation of assemblies which does not include within itself whatever is of God upon the earth can claim truthfully to be, or represent exclusively, "the Church." Very good and very bad men have laboured in a multitude of ways to realize this dream of sublunary Catholicity, but the attempt has hitherto failed utterly, or had a partial and unblessed success, proportioned exactly to the degree of fleshly energy which has been expended in the work. *God's* work as the Creator of His Church is done, and our calling is to own it and maintain it in subjection to Himself.

The Church, as an object of God's purpose, is already safe with Christ in God, and will presently be revealed in glory with its Head. Churches, owned

and regulated by men, abound on earth, containing within them the widely-scattered grains of God's true harvest. Churches, again, in a truer sense—churches of God and of Christ—are found wherever two or three are really met in faith unfeigned, and in bold renunciation of all human method or authority are relying, in simplicity of trust, upon the living and ever-present Lord. The bride, the Lamb's wife, is under the safe conduct of the Heavenly Messenger, who has been sent forth by the Father in the name of His exalted Son. And the remembrance of this should be the comfort of such as, in this sad day of general will-worship and spiritual distractions, look vainly through their tears for any visible expression of that unity which is nevertheless a vital property of God's true Church. They shall see their desire when in a very little while the coming Saviour will redeem His promise. Let them only in the meanwhile be found sticking to His testimonies, keeping the word of His patience, and, if counted worthy, bearing His reproach.

## CHAPTER IX.

RETURNING now to the Corinthians, we find the apostle, in the opening verse of this chapter, again changing his tone, as he passes from his commendatory notice of his fellow-labourers to the original subject of his exhortation. Mingling praise with words of counsel, he takes the surest method of re-kindling the charitable zeal of those to whom he writes, by recalling to their minds its earlier and spontaneous efforts. It is superfluous for him to write to them about ministering to the saints. Why should he? For to teach them that duty was no part of his responsibility; God had already put it in their hearts; he will remind them only of their former selves.

Verse 2. "For I know the forwardness of your mind," &c. In the early and bright morning of their love, they had manifested an alacrity in this good work, which had not only cheered his heart, but provoked also to their present liberality the majority<sup>1</sup> of those who had since so actively engaged in it, and whose fresher zeal is now morally reflecting on them its own light and warmth. A thick and chilling mist had since then gathered over the husbandry

<sup>1</sup> τοὺς πλείονας. With this verse should be compared verse 8 of the preceding chapter.

of God at Corinth, to the threatened blighting of its chiefest fruit, but grace had prevailed to dissipate it. The Lord was returning to His true place in their hearts, and in this confidence he trusted that his earlier boasting of them should not be in vain.

Verses 3, 4. "Yet have I sent the brethren," &c. Let not these leaders, in the way of well-doing, seem to fall below themselves. Next to the touching remembrancer already noticed in the foregoing chapter,<sup>2</sup> a more forcible appeal could not possibly be made to the hearts of these Corinthians than this thorough identification of Paul's credit in the churches with their own. He had committed himself, in making this boastful assertion of their name, and thus placed his truth and honour in their hands. And could they show themselves unworthy of this trust. Besides, his own long-deferred and much-desired visit is now suspended, as it were, conditionally on their prompt redemption of this pledge. Still, as the sending of the brethren might seem to some among them to have something in it of reproof, he gives a further explanation of his reasons in what follows.

Verse 5. "Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren," &c. It is with such soft and apologetic words that love furnishes itself, when seeking not its own, but the benefit of others. He was not less eager for this visit than themselves, but he deferred it till, if possible, all hindrance of their mutual joy should be removed. Delay should bring a lasting as well as more abundant fruit. Their gift, bestowed not hastily, nor on compulsion, but in the deliberate maturity of love, should be more than a

<sup>2</sup> Chap. viii. 9.

gift—a blessing,<sup>3</sup> as from God. They had gained a renown among the churches by their *promises*,<sup>4</sup> and he will spare no pains to keep them from the shame of a delay or deficiency in their fulfilment. But what they gave must be the free-will offering of their hearts, communicated as a blessing, and not as a reluctant dole. For Paul's messengers were not extortioners, but partakers and ministers of the grace of Christ, the helpers, therefore, of their common joy.

Verse 6. "But this I say," &c. These words are not a quotation, but a condensed summary of many older sayings of the same Spirit; one of whose aims has ever been to seek to save men, by his faithful warnings, from the damaging effects of innate selfishness. Sowing and reaping, which stand in the natural relation of cause and effect, are yet bound together by a secret moral tie, for the one is the act of man, the other the *gift* of God. *He* witnesses the sowing, and assigns the measure of return. What is scattered freely by a heart which trusts in God, He renders back with over-flowing increase. What leaves reluctant hands, will disappoint expectant hands: for the Lord is a God of judgment, and by Him actions are weighed.<sup>5</sup>

Verse 7. "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart," &c. If liberality be, when contem-

<sup>3</sup> Margin, *εὐλογία*.

<sup>4</sup> Margin, *προηγγελέμην*.

<sup>5</sup> This maxim, though of constant illustration as a principle of divine administration among men, fails when applied to the higher mysteries of God. When He went forth personally as a sower, His plenteous scatterings produced but a partial return. (Matt. xiii.) When He gave to the dust of death His solitary corn of righteousness, it was to be the parent of "much fruit." (John xii.)



plated on its lower side, sound policy, there is a higher motive which should regulate the duties of God's saints. Let love be without dissimulation,<sup>6</sup> and the act of charity express faithfully the purpose of the heart. Neither sorrow nor constraint must here have any place, for God is the centre and ultimate aim of all true kindness. *As He has given*, let each true child of His bestow. Let giving be regarded by believers not as a necessity, but as a privilege. For giving is God's own delight; we know Him solely by His gift unspeakable, and His heart is toward them always who imitate Him in His ways. In a dispensation of pure grace, none are *obliged* to give, save by the sweet compulsion of His love. There are no task-masters in the house of God. But each child of His has his allotted opportunities of proving, by the use he makes of them, both whose he is, and by what manner of spirit he is led.

Verse 8. "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you," &c. They are not called upon to make an unremunerative sacrifice. He, for whose sake they are giving of their present store, is not unrighteous to forget any work of lovingkindness to His saints,<sup>7</sup> and He is *able* to requite abundantly the blessings rendered in His Name. If, for the love of Christ, they drew out their souls to His afflicted brethren, and satisfied His hungering poor with bread, He knew how to enrich them tenfold, both in this world and the next. His *grace*, which they had tasted, and in which they stood, should be the full supply of all their need. Their good desires should

<sup>6</sup> Rom. xii. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Heb. vi. 10.

enlarge with their good practice, and His gracious provision should surpass their utmost wish.

Verses 9 and 10 are parenthetical, and contain, first, a remarkable quotation in support of the apostle's plea, and then his confident application of it, in its largest sense, to those whom he addresses. It is a striking example of Paul's freedom in the use of earlier scripture, and an illustration of his own expression, "word of Christ," as a proper designation of *all* the Spirit's testimonies, since the special reference here made is to a passage, which, when taken with its context, points evidently to a state of things not yet established, nor to be established till the existing dispensation has been changed.<sup>8</sup> Earthly prosperity, as the natural reward of faithfulness, is the topic of the Psalm; the God-fearing man is prospered in the sight of the wicked, who shrink powerless away before the revelation of Jehovah's arm. But *now*, and until Jesus comes, the calling of the righteous is to tribulation in the world, and a reproach proportioned to their like-mindedness to Him whom the world has disallowed. There is, however, a deep moral truth contained in this quotation, which remains unaltered through all time. Such gifts and offices of kindness as God acknowledges are, when their motive is regarded, thankofferings to Him, and are therefore a part of that comeliness which beautifies the righteous in His eyes. All a man's goods may be given to the poor without one spark of charity, for of such sacrifices pride, or self-seeking unbelief, is capable; but faith works by love, and bears its fruits of

- <sup>8</sup> *Notes on the Psalms*, Ps. cxii.

righteousness to God by Jesus Christ. The apostle, who knew these things experimentally, would have his brethren sharers of his joy; and in anticipation of their readiness of mind, he is bold to promise them the blessing of the Giver of good gifts.<sup>9</sup> As to the force of his language in verse 10, it is general, and comprises (subject to the distinctive law of the dispensation) things temporal, as well as spiritual; for godliness, as he elsewhere tells us, has promise both of this life and of that to come.<sup>1</sup>

Verse 11. "Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness," &c. Resuming now the commendatory benediction begun in verse 8, he makes God's more abundant praise the crown of his desire. The gracious earnestness with which he seeks to elevate his faulty brethren to the higher place, content himself to be the channel only of their bounty, while he accepts, as a personal obligation, the kindness destined for the poor saints in Judea, may well draw our admiring notice.

Verses 12-14. "For the administration of this service," &c. The whole of this passage shines brightly with the moral beauty of the gospel. Natural kindness is as shallow as its source, and looks no farther than its visible object; true love, which is the chief fruit of the Spirit, does its busy office in the light of God, and tends, in its edifying power, to His glory. To supply the wants of others is the beginning, not the proper end, of charity; and the apostle, in contemplating this prospective ministry of love, dwells rather on the later and enduring fruits of

<sup>9</sup> All the best MS. authorities give the verbs in verse 10 in the future.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 8.

their liberality, than on its immediate effect. Jewish believers would no longer doubt the validity of Gentile profession, when it commended itself thus practically to their hearts; and God would be more abundantly glorified by this knitting together of naturally alien souls in the new and common bond of perfectness.<sup>2</sup>

Three causes of thanksgiving and glory to God, are specified in connection with this work of charity: 1st, The subjection of the Corinthian saints to the gospel; 2nd, Their open-handed liberality towards their brethren in the faith, whether Jew or Gentile; and 3rd, The fervent and longing supplications of these foreign saints on their behalf. The first relates to their compliance with that which (although originating apparently in a spontaneous impulse) called now, as an apostolic injunction, for a ready obedience on their parts. The second declares their title to be reckoned among those in whom the Father is now glorified, through their keeping of the new commandment of the Son.<sup>3</sup> The third brings glory to God on the part of the immediate receivers of the blessing, through their hearty recognition of His own abounding grace, as it manifested forth its beauty in these far off brethren of the circumcision, supplanting natural aversion by a longing for them in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

Verse 15. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." The apostle brings this part of his communication to a close, by one of those abrupt outbursts of the deep-seated love of Christ which so entirely possessed him, and which so often meet

<sup>2</sup> Col. iii. 14.

<sup>3</sup> John xv. 8.

us in his writings. Yet his ejaculation has a method in its fervency, and is in strictest keeping with his previous subject. He had been treating of practical charity—of giving and receiving for the sake of Christ. At the outset of his exhortation, he had referred the strong love of the Macedonian churches to the grace of God; and when addressing himself directly to the saints at Corinth, he had thrown upon their hearts the most powerful of all possible appeals.<sup>4</sup> And now that he has set before them the motive, and showed to them the spirit which should mark their participation in this work of well-pleasing, he returns, as to his soul's true rest, to the grateful and adoring remembrance of God's one unspeakable Gift. All blessings are from Him, and other gifts, remotely due to his unerring grace, might have their honourable mention, and receive their fit measure of acknowledgment; but the love of God in Christ is neither known nor uttered yet, according to its worth. Paul's words are a strong climax of comparison. Very abundant was the grace bestowed on the Corinthian saints, and rich should be the fruits resulting; but what was this lesser mercy to the gift which had made their darkness light; which drowned their sin in everlasting righteousness, and made them cease from their natural heritage of wrath, by calling them into the fellowship of God's own Son!

<sup>4</sup> Chap. viii. 1-9

## CHAPTER X.

IN what remains of this epistle we shall find an altered strain. The former chapters have been marked by a generally pervading tone of thankful gratulation, arising from the abundant measure in which his earlier letter had been blessed of God. But although much had been done, and the apostle's feeling as to the assembly at large was one of joyful confidence, so that he hoped steadfastly that they might be yet read more legibly than ever as an epistle of Christ, there remained among them a large amount of still fermenting leaven, which called loudly for both warning and reproof. The most mischievous form in which the power of evil wrought then among them was that of practical insubjection to the voice of God. For while, as a whole, the church at Corinth acknowledged Paul's authority as an apostle of the Lord, there were some who yet judged him after the flesh, and, both in heart and act, despised his claims. Among those more especially who, as teachers, sought to gain the ear of the assembly, men were found who, in a spirit of natural vanity and self-seeking, cloaked by a simulated zeal for God's earlier ordinances, were endeavouring, not altogether unsuccessfully, to supplant him in the affections of the saints, by advancing

fraudulent pretensions to apostolic authority, while themselves ignorant of the true power of the gospel. Having, therefore, comforted and exhorted his brethren by his earlier words, and led them back, as we have seen, to the cross as the true fountain of their joy and strength, he turns now to deal more immediately with that among them which still called for blame.

Verses 1, 2. "Now I Paul beseech you," &c. There is a pungent as well as mournful power in this opening adjuration, "I Paul." Who, then, was this Paul? Let these Corinthians ask themselves once more both *what* and *where* themselves had been, but for this much-depreciated man, who has, as it were, thus formally to throw his name afresh upon their memories, in order to regain among them that acceptance which they were withholding only to their loss. In the form and words of this appeal, he strikes very obviously at the moral qualifications of those who pretended to dispute his claims. Presumption and arrogance were their leading characteristics, which he seeks thus to shame and silence by this mention of the meekness and gentleness of Christ. They to whom he here refers had formed a false estimate of Paul. Judging him by themselves, and being personally strangers to the ruling motive of his conduct, they seem to have mistaken grace for weakness, and patient forbearance for timidity and littleness of mind. They had learnt badly in the school of Christ, and the form of their lesson must be changed. They had found Paul base among them, since neither in his form nor his manner was there anything to awe their imagination or to steal their hearts. He

was with them in weakness and much trembling, and they had despised his temptation in the flesh. As Michal had derided David in his linen ephod, when he danced before the ark of God, so these brain-taught Christians failed entirely to comprehend that state of mind which makes self-abasement a delight to one whose heart is penetrated and filled fully with the love of Christ. But if little in their presence, from a distance he will venture to be bold.

Irony, more or less severe, distinguishes both this chapter and the next. He had borne long and patiently with the manners of his adversaries, but the time was come for bringing to a determinate issue the question of His apostolic calling and authority. As a follower of Him who is meek and lowly in heart, he would have chosen to be base and baser still; but he felt that Christ's name and glory were at hazard when the pretensions of His messenger were disallowed, and that the gospel itself was in peril, so long as erroneous teaching had an honoured welcome in the Church of God. Since, therefore, audacity and self-assertion seemed in their eyes the chief requisites of apostolic character, he would not, indeed, meet them with their own weapons; for he neither walked nor warred after the flesh; yet he would not fail, upon a fit occasion, to make good in their presence also, with boldness and a power not to be mistaken or disputed, the validity of the title under which he now in writing, and from a distance, urged his claims to their regard.

Verse 3. "For though we walk after the flesh, we do not war after the flesh." He accepts here the insinuation (already sufficiently refuted in chapter i.)



which his detractors were never weary of repeating, in order to administer with more effect the strong and searching admonition which succeeds. He will let his adversaries know, that though a follower of peace, he has weapons, and can use them with victorious effect. He was waging a warfare, not after the flesh, but *against* the flesh; as they would find to their early and entire discomfiture who persisted idly or maliciously to question his apostleship and service as a minister of God, or sought enviously to exalt themselves at his expense.

Verse 4. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal," &c. This parenthetic verse is quite after the apostle's manner, who, if he has to wield his powers, will let their source be clearly seen. Before, therefore, describing further the nature and objects of his warfare, he openly reviews his strength. In the flesh he is powerless; for, by his own confession, he is dead with Christ; but in the Spirit he has weapons which are mighty, *through God*, for the subverting of whatever is opposed to God. The very root of his confession as a minister of God is that power is His alone; that efforts, therefore, even with a godly purpose, are fruitless if not made in His sufficiency.<sup>4</sup> Now God is both the fortress of faith and the leveller of pride, and it was in His name, at His charges, and in His might, that Paul warred his warfare as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. In this confidence he can speak loftily, as we perceive.

Verse 5. "Casting down imaginations and *every* high thing," &c. This is in truth the language of a "strong man armed," and, in its breadth and bold-

<sup>1</sup> *Ante*, chap. iii. 5.

ness of expression, may recall to our minds his earlier words.<sup>2</sup> If we compare with this passage what is written in Eph. vi. 12, we shall find that what is there referred to its energizing Source, is here contemplated in its operative form and power. Repression of the natural will, which is the seat and vehicle of Satan's machinations, is the true aim of spiritual warfare. *God's* rights are thus asserted and maintained by faith against the pretended rights of men. And this explains the peculiar cast of the apostle's language here; since independent "reasonings" or "imaginations"<sup>3</sup> are for ever inconsistent with a genuine subjection of heart and mind to God. Where is the disputer of this world? is a question asked at the outset by the Spirit, when declaring in the face of all men the gospel of Christ crucified.<sup>4</sup> God's church is a sanctuary, not of human thought, but of divine truth. And if love be, as it is, the vital distinction of God's children from the world which knows not God, and the open seal of their discipleship,<sup>5</sup> obedience to what is written should also be part of their reproach in the estimation of a self-worshipping and speculative generation. A free-thinking *saint* is a contradiction in terms, for it is by the truth of God that we are sanctified. Of such it is written, that they sit down at His feet and live upon His words.<sup>6</sup>

To think his own thoughts, and utter his own imaginations, instead of hearkening to the voice of God, is the manner of the natural man. Now a believer has not ceased to be a man; and although

<sup>2</sup> *Ante*, chap. i. 4.

<sup>3</sup> λογισμοί.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. i. 20.

<sup>5</sup> John xiii. 35; 1 John iii. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Deut. viii. 3, xxxiii. 3.

called with another calling, and begotten by the grace that saves them to a new and better hope, it is certain that the chief besetment of God's saints, while in the body, is a practical forgetting that they are their own no longer if in Christ. But if obedience be not the habit of a Christian's walk, he becomes in effect an adversary to the truth which he confesses, and the action of the Spirit is *against* him, until he has ceased from his perverseness, and is again learning in submissive silence to know that he is *God's*.<sup>7</sup> And inasmuch as ignorance of God is the root and occasion of all presumptuous sin,<sup>8</sup> the apostle marks here, in general terms, as the objects of his spiritual antagonism, whatever elevates itself against the knowledge of God. Under this comprehensive category may be classed, besides the standing contradictions of Jewish self-righteousness and the philosophic vanities of Gentilism, a host of those "original ideas," "new and suggestive thoughts," &c. of which our own times are so fruitful, and which, when heedlessly accepted and allowed apart from the controlling sanction of the word, so often tickle men's religious fancies, and for a while may even undermine the faith of God's elect.<sup>9</sup> But as there is no true wisdom that does not come down from above, and light finds entrance only by the word of God, so is there no true moral honesty but in an absolute surrender of our thoughts and purposes to Christ. For He is our Life and our *Lord*: both ourselves and our imaginings are alike His own. There can be no safe compromise between subjection and independence in the mind of a believer. The Spirit lusts and wars against the flesh

<sup>7</sup> Ps. xlv. 10.<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 8.<sup>9</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4.

for ever; and mental liberty, we must remember, is not less a part of our natural disobedience than carnal wilfulness.<sup>1</sup> His victory is attested, not by a change in our natural dispositions, but by every thought of ours being captivated and directed by the ruling mind of Christ.

Verse 6. "And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience," &c. All who at Corinth were desiring to walk with God would sympathize, as fellow-soldiers, with the apostle; but there were among them some who, although they could not deny the force of his expressions, were doubtful of his power to make good his words. For as many as continued in this mind he has his remedy at hand. The Lord whom he served, and who had sent him, had armed him with powers which none could persistently resist but to their own destruction. Full of this confidence he ministers both warning and rebuke; but, in the true spirit of his Master, he rebukes with all long-suffering and doctrine.<sup>2</sup> On the church at large he reckons hopefully, and when, as a body, they had proved sufficiently their faithfulness, he will not withhold from the exceptional recusants the judgment which they still provoked.

Verse 7. "Do ye look on things after the outward appearance?" &c. Holding the rod thus in suspense over the heads of these delinquents, he enters in this verse upon the lengthened and truly wonderful apology for himself and his office, which occupies the greater part of what remains to be examined in this epistle. Fully aware of the moral disadvantage of his absence in such a contest, he will, notwith-

<sup>1</sup> Eph. ii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 2.

standing, match himself with his competitors. And first he will speak not of official pretensions, but of vital standing. Does any one of those whom he is contemplating trust that he is Christ's? This question he might justly raise, since if they really belonged to Him by whom Paul had received grace and apostleship,<sup>3</sup> and whose ministry had been so mightily confirmed of God among the Gentiles, they were giving strange proof of it by calling Paul in question. But as love hopes all things, he would hope this still on their behalf. As they, then, so is he also. They stand in this respect upon a common and insuperable level. Let, therefore, every one who, with God's witness in him, felt emboldened to declare himself a Christian, judge not according to appearances, but according to the truth, and consider that the man to whom the church of God at Corinth owed, instrumentally, its origin, is *also* Christ's.

Verse 8. "For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority," &c. By saving grace, all saints are on a par; but diversity, and not sameness, is the order of God's house. To every believer there is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ,<sup>4</sup> but God distributes place and distinctive membership within the body, according to His sovereign good pleasure.<sup>5</sup> All are not apostles, but Paul had his allotted place and calling, which would not suffer, he opined, on a comparison with that assigned to others. For his own part he was minded rather to pursue in peace his own vocation, than to be a questioner of others; preferring to leave every man to find his proper level, as God might seem severally

<sup>3</sup> Rom. i. 5.<sup>4</sup> Eph. iv. 7.<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 18-30.

to own or disown, in effect, as many as professed to take His work in hand. But if any, by a rash and obtrusive vanity, provoked his criticism, he would not spare to speak the truth. If himself questioned, his reply was ready—the Lord had conferred on him an authority of which he might justly make a special boast; and although its end was edification, rather than destruction, it would prove itself effectual also, where such need existed, to the abasing and confounding of the flesh in all its forms. And since, by their too ready acknowledgment of some who were laying a false claim to their regard, they had obliged him to proclaim his own official pre-eminence, he would take care to make it evident that in asserting these large powers, he had kept himself within the truth. As one who in his office waited with a single heart and eye upon his Lord, not seeking man's admiration, but the praise of God, he knew that though his words were bold he would not be ashamed.

Verses 9–11. “That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by my letters,” &c. He makes these explicit declarations, lest any who knew little of him personally should suppose that writing was his only strength. Even his enemies acknowledged that his letters<sup>6</sup> were weighty and powerful, while his presence and personal bearing had in them nothing majestic or commanding to a natural eye. Eschewing, as he did on principle, all “wisdom of words,” his

<sup>6</sup> There is reason to believe that Paul had addressed to the church at Corinth—besides his former divinely-inspired epistle—some earlier letters of counsel rather than command.—*Notes on First Corinthians*, v. 9.

speech seemed paltry and contemptible to those in whose ears "good words and fair speeches" found a surer welcome than the truth of God.<sup>7</sup> But they who thus judged by the appearance only, and so freely spoke their minds about this messenger of Christ, considered not that they were seeing and judging in the same spirit as they who, in the days of His flesh, discerned no beauty in Jehovah's beautiful and glorious Branch. The grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ, were manifested richly in His chosen vessel, but outward attractiveness and self-assertive dignity were wanting, and, therefore, the esteem of those who thought and spoke of him "as men."<sup>8</sup>

The apostle had determined to know nothing among them but Christ crucified; but on sophisticated ears plain speech, though giving utterance to the sublimest truths, falls flat and tedious. They noticed the insignificance of Paul's appearance, and that, unlike the tone of those who would supplant him, he trembled as he spake for God; but they understood not, as he did, and as he sought to teach them also, that for God to be strong man must be weak; that for Him to operate effectively the human will must be a nullity, and that truth, if it prevails, must shape to its own likeness the instruments which it employs. It might have occurred to these cavillers,

<sup>7</sup> Rom. xvi. 18.

<sup>8</sup> It would seem from the structure of these verses (compare "he saith," *marg.*, with "such an one,") that there was one amongst Paul's detractors more prominent and influential than the rest. But evil communications corrupt good manners; and that this unnamed sower of discord had been but too successful in his evil husbandry is evident from the context.

and might be remembered in our own day by their numerous successors, that attractive natural endowments are in themselves ill-suited to the heralds of a doctrine which lays, in its first utterances, the flower of man's strength and beauty in the dust. Let them at least learn now from what he writes, that his letters were dictated by no other power than that which, as the gift of God, resided in himself; that his advent, therefore, if and when he came, should be in practical agreement with his message; that he would be in *fact* no other and no less than they acknowledged him to be in word by his epistle. He was bold to write to them thus confidently, as one who, of himself, had neither "yea" nor "nay" in such a work.<sup>5</sup> As a minister of God he laboured only to be approved of God, and trusted that *His* effective energy should bear him triumphantly through all.

Verse 12. "For we dare not make ourselves of the number," &c. To be bold for and with God, in the presence of His adversaries, our hearts must first be governed by His fear. What others did without scruple or hesitation, Paul ventured not to do, while he walked in familiar confidence, where they who reviled him durst not take a step. He dared not mate himself with those who, without any voucher from the Lord, were not afraid to recommend themselves; because, in their ignorance of God and of their own intrinsic worthlessness, they were content to take themselves as their own measure, and instead of walking in the light of God, made man their standard of comparison. Paul walked in

<sup>5</sup> Chap. i. 17.



another spirit, and by another rule. As Jesus did not witness of Himself, so also did this acceptable follower of Christ recoil from self-commendation, as an utter contradiction of the ministry which was his boast. But there were some at Corinth who did thus unwisely, and the fruit of their folly was already beginning to appear. Making themselves their aim, they were fast forgetting both their origin and end. *Of* God and *for* God, they were halting in the midst *alone*; for God is never with self-seekers in their ways. Forgetting that they had by their own confession been crucified with Christ, by still thinking themselves to be something when they were nothing, they deceived themselves.<sup>5</sup> While thus acting, they proved how little they yet understood the meaning of their name and calling as believers. The apostle shrinks from the spectacle of vainglorious contention among men professing godliness, as from some strange and dangerous form of madness. For he had not so learned Christ.

Verses 13, 14. "But we will not boast ourselves of things beyond our measure," &c. Disclaiming all association or comparison with those whose honour and dignity are of themselves, he will not boast unduly even of a genuine gift. But he *had* a measure which embraced not Corinth only, but "the Gentiles" wherever they were found. As Christ's chosen ambassador, his mission was to all mankind; and in an especial sense he had been sent and accredited to those whom, at Corinth, the Lord acknowledged as His own. Nor should it have been necessary for them to be thus frequently and

<sup>5</sup> Gal. vi. 3.

pointedly reminded, that if they knew God truly, and rejoiced in Jesus Christ, it was because this Paul, whom they compelled to say so much about himself, had travailed for them, and, by God's enabling grace, had brought them by his gospel out of darkness into light. Others had since entered on his labours, who wrought in another spirit and for another end; and in their blameable simplicity, they had allowed their first affection for their spiritual father to be so far stolen out of their hearts, as that, in the eyes of some of them at least, he should seem like an intruder, if he came again among them in his former character. Such men should find their proper level in due time. In the meanwhile, he endeavours to recall his brethren's hearts to *God*, and to a just appreciation of the work which He had wrought among them by Paul's means. He had not stretched himself beyond his measure, when he came to Corinth as a minister of God, and preached to their willing ears the words of life. The validity of his commission was attested, as they should have known, by the enduring consequences of his work.

Verse 15. "Not boasting of things beyond our measure, that is, of other men's labours," &c. They were his witnesses, that what he wrought among them had neither been allotted to him as a task by other men, nor been continued by him as a builder on another man's foundation. But though independent of them all, and conscious of what was rightly his own due at the hands of these Corinthians, in the sight of God, he loved rather to think of them as his fellow-helpers in the gospel; and

now looks hopefully towards them, in view of his prospective labours, for a strengthening of his hands. But there must first be an increase of their *faith*. Their late condition had been such as to prove clearly, both the small measure and the vagueness of their faith; for had they perceived that the Lord was still among them, the disorders which had shamed them could have had no place. Faith cannot grow with sin. But now that a godly sorrow had succeeded to their haughtiness, and self-judgment took the place of carelessness, he again looks for God's increase and its fruits. He trusted to be yet enlarged by them, when the straitness of which he had before complained had yielded to the gracious pressure of the Spirit on their hearts. He expected their willing and zealous co-operation in the furtherance of that which, if in one sense it was a work peculiarly *his own*, because a dispensation of the gospel was committed to him, was yet theirs also; and would by them be so regarded, when they remembered what responsibilities were associated with their blessings, as partakers and defenders of the common faith.

Verse 16. "To preach the gospel in the parts beyond you," &c. His heart was ever yearning earnestly toward the unfulfilled remainder of his course. Rome had long been in his thoughts, and places yet more distant from the well-wrought field of his earlier labours in the gospel, as he meditated the expansive terms of his commission as a preacher of the faith.<sup>2</sup> But we have already seen how much his power and efficiency, as an evangelist, depended

<sup>2</sup> Rom. i. 13; xv. 23.

on his quietness and ease of spirit as to the condition of the churches.<sup>3</sup> When, therefore, he tells the saints at Rome that his purpose respecting them had been continually thwarted, and warns them against Satan's efforts as a perverter of the way of God among themselves,<sup>4</sup> it can hardly be doubted that the evil working, first in the churches of Galatia and then at Corinth, was the form which those hindrances of the adversary took.<sup>5</sup> And now the amendment of their state seemed to open a near door to his desire. *Rest* for him there was none, on this side glory, nor did he seek it; but comfort and encouragement he looked for, among those to whom he had already ministered the gospel of the grace of God. He would have his brethren in the faith, in heart and desire, if not in action, as himself. For while the particular callings and employment of God's children differ widely, the Spirit who dwells in them is the same; and His one aim is to give glory to the name of Jesus, through their obedience to the truth. But if, and wherever, Paul went among the Gentiles, as Christ's messenger of grace, he went in the sufficiency of God, and by the leading of the Spirit; not meddling with the work of other labourers, but running steadily the race allotted to himself.

Verses 17, 18. "But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord," &c. If there must be boasting with God's labourers, let it have at least its proper object. The Lord is the sole boast of the true disciple's heart. Whether as sinners saved by grace, or as anointed ministers of truth, it is in Him they stand, and out

<sup>3</sup> *Ante*, chap. ii. 12, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. xvi. 17-20.

<sup>5</sup> Compare 1 Thess. ii. 18.

of His fulness they are all supplied. By Him they work, and in Him their labours find their end. Self-praise will wither in His presence, and become reproach; self-judgment leads to fruitful diligence, and at His appearing will become a crown.

The closing verses of this chapter should be locked carefully in each believer's heart; for our own day is one of ceaseless emulation and display. Religious rivalries are among the most conspicuous badges of the times. Never, perhaps, was self-commendation and the love of human praise, disguised or undisguised, exemplified more generally than now; its shadow being the almost universal habit of rewarding, by some ostentatious token, the services of those whom men approve. Religion is thus patronized, but truth denied. Thanksgiving to God and loving favour for their work's sake towards those who minister His grace, are things acceptable in His sight; but the blazonry of what men now consider meritorious service, and the giving and receiving of costly testimonials, when the Weigher of actions is ready to appear, is one of the many proofs, which are multiplied on every side, that the days have come in which men who profess the name of Christ, and have a form of godliness, should distinctively be "lovers of themselves."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 2.

## CHAPTER XI.

“WOULD to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly,” &c. (1.) The point of this opening verse will be clearly seen by a reference to verse 12 of the last chapter. He is about to do, after his peculiar fashion, that which he had there pronounced to be unwise, and for this advised and deliberate act of folly he bespeaks their patient indulgence, since glorying in the Lord left properly no room for self-commendation under any form. If, therefore, he seemed now to be contradicting in practice what he had just set before them as a standing rule of walk, let them remember that it is to themselves, and for their sakes, that he makes the exposure of his weakness. They might, indeed, well bear with him; for he was no willing actor, though by their credulous attention to the claims of his detractors they had thus forced him on the stage. Besides, how strange soever the apparent inconsistency might seem, they would find themselves obliged to acknowledge, if they listened patiently to what he had to say, that if to boast at all was senselessness,<sup>1</sup> he erred not in the common way of fools.

Verse 2. “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy,” &c. What, then, had provoked him to this

<sup>1</sup> ἀφροσύνη.

self-display? He was jealous, but not in the spirit of a natural emulation. His zeal was not upon his own account or for his own repute, but theirs. It is as a friend of the Bridegroom that he speaks, and his zeal is the jealousy of *God*. We may notice, before further examining this remarkable language, that here, as in the epistle to the Ephesians, the doctrine of the *bride* is postponed, in the apostle's exposition of God's mysteries, to that of the *body*. The latter, which concerns principally the absoluteness of divine grace and power, as the fulfilment in creative wisdom of the good pleasure of God's will, stands naturally first in the order of exposition; while the former, which touches the elective love of Christ, speaks rather with a hortative bearing and effect to those who, by their calling, are not *in* Christ only, but *of* and *for* Him also. *Position* is our abiding security; *relationship* is both the ground of affection and the source of responsibility.

Paul's language here is wonderfully bold, but entirely consistent with his earlier description of his office. As an ambassador of Christ he represented Christ, and as God's effectual messenger of grace he had betrothed the church at Corinth to the Lord, having gathered from her lips a virgin confession of His saving name; and his desire was to present her, in the first and unchilled love of her espousals, to the true Bridegroom on the coming day. True gospel stewardship presents to Christ what Christ will Himself present in glory to Himself, and by Himself to the Father with exceeding joy. It will be observed that the apostle is not here speaking of individual saints, but of the collective assembly of the saved at

Corinth. They had received God's gospel in the love of it, and Christ crucified had been their glory and their comeliness, until, by a subtle intermingling of his sophistries with truth, the adversary had prevailed for a season to turn that glory into shame. But God's gifts and calling are without repentance, and He had begun in them a work which He would surely end to His own praise. As the Preserver as well as Saviour of His own, he ministers His grace according to their actual necessities. "Warning and teaching" are the Spirit's means of tending and folding round the Shepherd's person those who already have been led to Christ, even as "preaching" is the ordinary mode of adding to the church. It is with the eye and heart of a true pastor that the apostle here regards his children in the faith; while he seeks to arouse them to a just sense of the danger to which they are incessantly exposed, through the snares which the watchful hatred of the adversary spreads, so thickly and enticingly, on each side of the "narrow way."

Verse 3. "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve," &c. The analogy contained in this warning is very striking and complete. Eve was for Adam; the church is for Christ. Adam was not deceived, Eve was;<sup>2</sup> and the cause of her deception was her consenting to listen to another voice, and parley with another mind, than that of Adam. Hers was a double transgression: she broke the rule of her Creator through a disregard of her allegiance to her spouse. Such was the beginning of natural

<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim. ii. 14.



sin, and the order of spiritual apostacy is similar. The prelude to a fall from grace is the insubjection of the heart and mind to Christ. Faith is corrupted through independent reasoning, and the Christ-forgetting wanderer is found no longer as a branch in the true Vine.<sup>3</sup>

Paul's fear for this church was one, but it might be verified by many means. He dreaded the dividing of their hearts, lest, by the machinations of the adversary, they should be corrupted "from the simplicity which is in (or more properly *towards*) Christ."<sup>4</sup> This expression implies, first, such a clear and unimpeded view of gospel truth as convinces both heart and mind of its absolute excellency and perfection; and, secondly, a faith strong and simple enough to set the believer consciously in Christ, and thus to sever Him in heart and spirit from the world. Completeness in Christ is the assured and delighted consciousness of those only who regard Him with a single heart and eye. This is the believer's true excellency, and to cast him down from it is the constant effort of the enemy. Philosophy and false religious teaching are his chief means of seduction, as a corrupter of the faith, and will-worship under its innumerable forms is the fruit of his success. His methods of operation, which vary according to the constitutional tendencies of those whom he assails, are partly enumerated in what follows. But the principle of corruption is unchanging, and has its perpetual example in the sin of Eve. Truth is sacrificed to error, and with truth the purity,<sup>5</sup> which is its ornament, is also lost.

<sup>3</sup> John xv. 6.

<sup>4</sup> εἰς Χριστόν.

<sup>5</sup> All the best MSS. add, after ἀπλ., καὶ τῆς ἀγνότητος.

Verse 4. "For if he that cometh<sup>6</sup> preacheth another Jesus, whom we did not preach," &c. In Eden what God said was contradicted by the tempter, and the same process is repeated in the church. The testimony of the Holy Ghost is controverted, boldly or covertly, by the lying lips of men who have been first themselves deceived.<sup>7</sup> The drift of this difficult passage, which has been variously rendered, may perhaps be soundly stated thus: You have received, and entertained with honour, a class of teachers who are evidently seeking to estrange your hearts from us; and you are listening to their insinuations. But why this change of feeling on your part towards him who first led you to the truth? Have these men revealed to you a new and better gospel? Is the Jesus of whom they speak a different Lord from ours? and are you receiving from the new comer a better Comforter than He who first taught you to cry, *Abba, Father*? You know that it is not so; that to us there is one Lord and one Spirit, and that if they profess truly to believe on the name of the Son of God, they must speak of Him of whom we also speak. Why, then, are you standing now in doubt of us? You had heard and accepted the gospel of the grace of God, you had received the Spirit and confessed the only Lord, through our preaching, long before the advent of these new apostles. Do you not see that these men, if themselves of God, must speak as we, and that wherein they differ from our

<sup>6</sup> ὁ ἐρχόμενος. The use of the singular in this verse seems to point to some more conspicuous leader in this insurrection of darkness against light; but that he was not alone is clear from verses 12, 13. *Ante*, p. 295, *note*.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 13.

doctrine they depart from truth? Yet their coming and their words have loosened, if not destroyed, your confidence in us! But in disowning us you are denying your own faith, since from us it was that you received the truth. Be, then, the pretensions of these teachers what they may, you should yet bear with me. And let it be remembered also, that if acknowledged on your part at all, it must be according to the fulness of our apostolic claim; we cannot take a secondary place without dishonouring both yourselves and us. For you received me as God's witness and messenger, and are yourselves the open seal of my commission from the Lord.

Verses 5, 6. "For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles," &c. Judge then between us. What I was among you is well known to you all. But your new director says my speech is rude. I have confessed it; nay, it is a chief badge and token of that grace of God in which I make my boast, and which thus makes the weakness of the earthen vessel an exponent of the excellency of the power which has filled and used it. You have heard of the original apostles of the Lord, and although they who are wont to extol them among you, at my cost, bestow on them no honest praise, you do well to venerate their names and calling. I have already made open avowal of my personal unworthiness to be numbered of their company;<sup>8</sup> yet in respect of power, of knowledge, or of effective

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 9. Some would translate τῶν ὑπὲρ λίαν ἀποστόλων by "these superlative apostles," supposing the words to refer to the popular false teachers; a view, in my judgment, not at all in harmony with the context.

grace, wherein have they excelled me? What has at any time been said or done, by either, or by all of them, that God has not equalled, not to say exceeded, by the rich abundance of His grace, in my work and labour of love? Nay, if knowledge be a test of true apostleship, from whose lips, if not mine, did you gather what you now so confidently claim to know of God and of His things? If among other churches ye are counted wise in Christ, and are surpassed by none in the abundance of God's manifested gifts,<sup>9</sup> it were well to call once more to your remembrance the means by which those blessings were received. For indeed there was neither secrecy nor artifice in what was wrought by us at Corinth; our ways were open to the view of all men, even as we lived and walked with God, and in His sight. Nor did we shun to declare<sup>1</sup> among you anything that ye were ready to receive.<sup>2</sup> Yet there is one point on which you might fairly take exception to our practice, and I will state it here.

Verse 7. "Did I commit an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted?" &c. I took no money from you, when I brought to you the glad tidings of the gospel, and there are some among you wise enough to see in this a valid argument against the truth of my apostleship. One really worthy of that title, they will say, should have more regard to his official dignity, and should make the honour of his presence felt. Exaction should sustain authority, and the value of sound doctrine should be impressed

<sup>9</sup> 1 Cor. i. 7.

<sup>1</sup> *Cod. Sin.*, with B., reads *φανερωσάντες*, instead of *φανερωθέντες*.

<sup>2</sup> Compare, as to his reserve in teaching, 1 Cor. iii.

upon Christ's heedless sheep, by the pecuniary conditions attaching to their privilege as hearers of true apostolic teaching! They who now hold your ear have doubtless shunned successfully this snare, at least; it cannot be fairly charged on them that they have been backward in their assertion of official claims. Let them continue to boast their superiority in this respect. As for me, I own myself in fault. Coming in the name of Him who did not please Himself, and thinking in my simplicity that love would reproduce itself, and that my self-abasement would dethrone your pride, I reckoned that in my disinterested labour you would have found an example to follow, rather than a cause of blame. If, therefore, I erred in this, I did so with deliberate intent. Nor yet is this the whole of my offence.

Verses 8, 9. "I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service," &c. This strong expression is no exaggeration of the truth. Paul knew the natural temper of those whom he is now addressing, and rather than excite among them feelings which might operate against the free course of the gospel, he had allowed an undue pressure on the grace of other saints. It is a low place which these kingly Corinthians have now to fill. To find themselves pointedly excepted from the honour of contributing to the apostle's maintenance must have been a wholesome bitter to their pride, and was more likely than most other things to convince them of their spiritual poverty and nakedness. If he came to them he came not at their charges, and when among them, though he wanted, he would not divulge to them his wants, but would live rather at

the cost of others, who could better appreciate his grace.

His well-beloved and likeminded Macedonians, had thought of him with far different feelings in his absence. Themselves full of Christ, and self-devoted to His work, they followed Paul in heart as he pursued his labours elsewhere in the vineyard of the Lord, and thought only how they might most effectually share them; not by prayerful intercession only, but in ministering also to his temporal wants. There is a sternness of tone in the resolution expressed at the close of this passage, which may at first seem out of keeping with the fervent language of his love in other parts of the epistle. But there is no real discrepancy; it was needful, for love's very sake, to form and adhere to the decision; for the purity of his hands had been questioned, as well as the validity of his apostolic mission, by the enemies of truth, and Corinthian saints had listened to the slanderous insinuation. While, therefore, this manifest work of Satan, instead of chilling, did but stimulate his energetic zeal on their behalf, it showed him the importance of watchfully cutting off occasion from them that sought occasion. He well knew that the god which these false teachers served, was not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly;<sup>3</sup> he would force, therefore, on the notice of the church at Corinth the living contrast of his own forbearance and their lawless greed.

Verse 10. "As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting," &c. So momentous is this object in his eyes, that he stakes his

<sup>3</sup> Rom. xvi. 18.

faith upon his resolution. Nor would he bound his purpose by the walls of Corinth. If there were other churches in Achaia, they must endure a like exemption for their sakes. His boast should be that they were his debtors only to the end. They should thus be their own judges when others asked them, or they peradventure asked themselves, how they had recompensed the man who first made known to them the glad tidings of the grace of God.

Verse 11. "Wherefore? because I love you not? God knoweth." What he thus purposed he did not purpose after the flesh, and if their hearts were still too dull to estimate his motive, and to justify him in his strange resolve, God, whom he served, was his approving witness. If his action seemed unlovely, they would learn in due time that love only had impelled him so to act. Nor does he leave his conduct unexplained.

Verse 12. "But what I do, that will I do, that I may cut off occasion," &c. He is maintaining in this course his true character as a minister of God, a witness and servant of the truth. To him, to live was Christ, and he would have the walk of these pretenders tried by the same rule. Since they boasted loudly, he would know upon what grounds. Was their boasting like his own, in *heart*, or in lip only? Had they appeared at Corinth as faithful and distinguished ministers of Christ? Nay, were they, with all their vain pretensions, ministers of Christ at all? The Corinthian saints should know, for Paul would so act as to compel his rivals to discover their true character. Meanwhile, as one who himself stood consciously in the light and sanc-

tion of the living God, he passes solemn judgment both on them and on their work.

Verse 13. "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers," &c. His ironical concessions are now superseded by direct and unsparing denunciation. These lofty and too plausible pretenders are no true shepherds, but wolves rather in sheep's clothing. The strength of his language is proportioned to the gravity of the evil which he is opposing. Unreal claims are in their nature lies; and no lie is of the truth, but all have their common parent in the devil. By personal description, the men whom he thus denounces might be included among the "unruly and vain talkers," of whom he elsewhere speaks;<sup>4</sup> men ignorant of the force of what they wished to teach, and convicting themselves of folly in proportion to their zeal. But in all opposition to the truth, there is an agency at work below the surface, which it belongs to the office of the Spirit of truth to discover and unmask. That Spirit glorifies *Jesus*. If other doctrines than those of the gospel are broached, they are, in all their vanity, the fruit of Satanic energy; men's minds and wills being alike led captive by the spirit of error, when not in sincere subjection to the Lord. Hence the bold distinctness of Paul's words.

Verses 14, 15. "And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed<sup>5</sup> into an angel of light," &c. It is possible that some historic reference may be here intended, but if so, it cannot now be determined. More probably the apostle is here stating generally the habit and practice of the deceiver. God is light,

<sup>4</sup> Titus i. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Or "transforms himself."



and Satan is His opposite; his power is the power of darkness, but his craft is the mimicry of light. To corrupt and destroy truth is his unceasing aim, and to effect it he assumes the form of that which he assails. When Paul calls these false apostles "ministers of Satan," he characterizes them according to the eversive nature of their influence in the church.<sup>6</sup> Their work was deceit; their wisdom, to do evil, to destroy, if it were possible, the work of God, by corrupting and seducing His elect. We should note here also the declared affinity of light and righteousness. It is as ministers of righteousness that Satan's ministers transform themselves. This is one of the commonest forms of teaching from beneath. High and ostentatious pretensions to personal holiness are usually alleged by those who, while claiming to guide others in the way of peace, are themselves destitute of a true knowledge of the grace of God. Preaching themselves and not the cross of Christ, they deny God's righteousness while seeking to maintain their own. But there are balances in God's sanctuary for the final estimation of what men have wrought professedly for Him; and the deceiver's end will be according to his work.

Verses 16-18. "I say again, let no one think me a fool," &c. Turning now from the deceivers to their dupes, he here steps forward to throw down his gage in the presence of those who sat as umpires of the strife. He deprecates, indeed, their contemptuous depreciation of him, but if they must think so disparagingly of one who had once held so different a place in their esteem, let them act at least in a man-

<sup>6</sup> *Conf.* Gal. i. 8.

ner worthy of themselves. Let the fool have license to display his folly. They might receive him, if only in the character assigned to him. It is the manner of such to tell out what is in them, and thus to let their foolishness appear; and he too would, for once at least, endeavour to enact that part, and match his senselessness with that of those in whom they were taking such delight. His wont, as they well knew, was to glory in the *Lord*; to preface anything he had to say of himself by a distinct appeal to Him, and ever to divert their thoughts from what concerned himself, personally, to the everlasting verities of grace. But now, since other boasting was in fashion, and had in his absence from Corinth taken generally the place once thought due only to the praise of God, he would also stand among his rivals, and put forth in his turn such claim as he possessed to their applause. Though a new creature in Christ, he will for a season know both them and himself after the flesh. The Lord shall be forgotten for a time, or, if remembered, cited only at the end of the display, to be the final judge as well as witness of this new and strange, yet *lawful* strife for masteries.<sup>7</sup>

Verse 19. "For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise." The irony of this interesting passage culminates in this verse and the next. He will not refer his cause to foolish arbitrators, nor would he be a fool to please his fellows only; but these Corinthians were surely wise. Had they not proved their wisdom notably in many ways? For patience and forbearance are sure marks of wisdom,

<sup>7</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 5.

and to a truly marvellous degree these qualities had been evinced in their relations with their stranger guides. They might well then bear with Paul.

Verse 20. "For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage," &c. Of the five proofs here enumerated of their unpraiseworthy forbearance, the first is also the most shameful. By the grace of the Lord Jesus they had been freed from every yoke but His, and now, like the foolish Galatians, they were again desiring to be in bondage.<sup>8</sup> Forgetting their true standing in the nearness of the Spirit, they had accepted legal teachers as their guides, and were now gathering the fruits of their own choice. Instead of the true liberty of Christ, they were in bondage to the will of men; for man usurps God's place, wherever law is superadded to the gospel. And had these wise Corinthians made wittingly this sad exchange?

The remaining tokens follow in their natural order. Exaction and extortion are the suitable accompaniments of a ministry which founds its claims upon the lying pretensions of self-righteousness. So also is self-exaltation; and when *that* is tolerated, presumptuous arrogancy, and depreciation of others, follow as of course. And these things had been accepted by these much-deluded sheep, as an advantageous contrast in the character of those who now professed to feed them, to the "fear and trembling," the "meekness and gentleness," the "patience," the "pureness and knowledge," which had marked the ways of him whom they should have remembered and venerated as their father in the gospel; but

<sup>8</sup> Gal. iv. 9.

whom they now seem ready to disown as an apostle, in obedience to the voice of the deceiver. Great indeed was the change which, for better or for worse, had come over them. Paul had spared them, both in feeling and in substance, and ungrateful detraction was the reward which he was then receiving at their hands. These self-imposed task-masters, who were both fleecing and oppressing them, are magnified and venerable in their eyes. In his former epistle he had asked, "Are ye not carnal and walk as men?" when it was a question only of preferring one true apostle to another; but now that he has to weigh himself and his office, in their presence, against the ministers of Satan, he uses other language. By an ironical concession, to those whom he addresses, of superior discernment, he exposes and castigates their folly, by simply recalling it to their minds, and passing its effects in clear review before their eyes.

Verse 21. "I speak as concerning reproach,"<sup>9</sup> &c. We were weak, and are so, doubtless. Nay, so little regard had we to the proper assertion of our official dignity, when among you (I speak, remember, as a fool), that we kept ourselves continually in the background. Had we, as these new men have done, presented Christ less and ourselves more, we should still, perhaps, have had you at our feet. It is the

<sup>9</sup> Κατὰ ἀτιμίαν λέγω ὡς ὅτι ἡσθενήκαμεν. *Cod. Sin.* "I am speaking to my own disparagement, seeing that we are weak." Such seems the true drift of this rather difficult clause. De Witte has: "Zu [meinem] Schande gestehe ich das ich [dazu] zu schwach gewesen bin." "I avow to my shame that I am too weak for this;" *i.e.*, the practical lording it over God's heritage which he has just been describing. He is still indulging his ironic vein.

strong who take the spoil. Howbeit, though such losers by our own remissness, we hardly can regret it, since the strength we then forbore to use may serve us in the contest which we now invite. And now, since these are bold, I will no longer be retiring, but (though in foolishness) bold also. I will stand side by side with these great champions of the faith, and ye, wise and discerning Corinthians, shall weigh our opposing claims, and judge betwixt us in the sight of God.

Verse 22. "Are they Hebrews?" The order in which these questions are put clearly indicates the hinge on which this controversy turned. The false apostles grounded their pretensions (in utter ignorance of the power of that gospel which they professed to teach) on the once valid and essential, but now utterly empty, title of the circumcision to pre-eminence in the sight of God. Of the three kindred distinctives noted in this verse, the first respects merely the original superiority of the Hebrew to the Greek—of the nation which had Jehovah for their God, to the Gentiles, who served lying vanities. The second has reference to those specialties of covenant blessing which attach in perpetuity to all who truly are of Israel;<sup>1</sup> and the third to the particular generation of faith. As to each and all of these, the apostle, without now further disputing their claim to a participation in them (though he has declared above the essential futility of all that they advanced, when estimated by their works),<sup>2</sup> contents himself with a simple assertion of his own. In all these respects he was at least their peer. To speak, there-

<sup>1</sup> Rom. ix. 4, 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Infra*, iv. 13, 15.

fore, of him disparagingly, on any of these grounds, was only an audacious effort, on the part of the deceitful workers, to impose upon Gentile ignorance and credulity. But the decisive question remains yet to be asked.

Verse 23. "Are they ministers of Christ?" If this point of comparison be alleged, then must Paul's folly go beyond itself.<sup>3</sup> For if to compare himself at all with others be unwise, much more must he seem senseless in his boasting when he claims the necks of all competitors. And he does no less, when tendering to his judges these memorials of his service. Allowing their claim to be what he had already solemnly disallowed, and presuming that, if ministers of Christ at all, they must have some tokens of their calling to produce, he boldly sets his acts and monuments of service over them *in all respects*. He has scars to show, as a good soldier of Christ, and he will show them. And here we may remark that not *all* Paul did or suffered, as a minister of Christ, is told us in the Scriptures; though enough has been recorded there to present us with a full portrait of a man in Christ, a true servant and follower of the Lord. Of the facts narrated in this and the following verses, some are confirmed by independent testimony, and the rest may well be accepted on his own, since the challenge thus boldly put has remained without refutation at the adversary's hands.

"In labours more abundant." First, then, he had far excelled them in his constant and laborious toil. What rest had he taken since he first set forth

<sup>3</sup> παραφρονῶν λαλῶ.

upon his mission as a messenger of God? What brought him first to Corinth they well knew; and how he lived and wrought, while tarrying among them, they might easily remember. It was in their power, therefore, to judge impartially the relative merits, in this respect, of himself and these new claimants of their homage.

“In stripes more abundant.” Rejoicing, like Christ’s earlier witnesses, to be counted worthy to suffer ignominy for His name,<sup>4</sup> he is ready to produce upon occasion those legible marks of the Lord Jesus which he bore in his much-afflicted body. Could his rivals show the like?

“In prisons above measure.”<sup>5</sup> Bonds and imprisonments had been among the first, as they were destined also to be among the last, of the prospective sufferings which had been shown to him by the Lord from the time of his conversion.<sup>6</sup> At Damascus and Philippi, and most probably in other places not recorded in the word, (for it was not the purpose of the Spirit to present us with a minute and circumstantial narrative of Paul’s life and labours,) he had already worn the bonds of Christ; and it was, I dare believe, with a prophetic consciousness that he was again and again to become the prisoner of the Lord, that he chose the strong expression here employed. But had these false apostles tasted a like captivity? Were they not rather forging fetters for the souls of others than exposing their own persons to the fury

<sup>4</sup> Acts v. 40, 41.

<sup>5</sup> In transposing the adverbs *περισσοτέρως* and *ὑπερβαλλόντως*, I follow what seems the best MS. authority. The change is unimportant.

<sup>6</sup> Acts ix. 16.

of the adversary, by boldly proclaiming the true liberty of Christ?

"In deaths oft." As one who had hazarded his life for the Lord Jesus, he was not without associates;<sup>7</sup> but in the frequency of his exposure to mortal peril he was beyond all his comrades in the fight of faith. Already at Iconium, at Lystra, at Antioch, at Ephesus, he had been marked for death, and through whatever region of the earth he passed upon his Master's business, the lion and the adder were upon his path. But though maimed often, and sometimes as one clean destroyed, he trod upon them in the strength of God, and would prevail till his appointed labours reached their end.

Verses 24, 25. "Of the Jews five times I received," &c. As might be expected, his chief vexations were at the hands of his kindred after the flesh. The virus of that persecutive zeal, which had once found its most energetic instrument in Saul of Tarsus, when, in untiring hatred of the way of truth, he breathed forth threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, was now reacting on himself, and weaving for him (such is the grace of our Lord!) a chaplet of enduring honour, as an approved martyr of the faith which he had once destroyed. "Rods," which were a Gentile punishment, fell likewise liberally to his share. One instance of the three here mentioned, and in which he suffered not alone, is told us at length in its appropriate place, to the praise of the glory of that grace which then shone so marvellously both in Paul and his companion in tribulation, as at midnight in the prison, with feet

<sup>7</sup> Acts xv. 26.



manacled and stripes unwashed, they sang God's praises by His Son.<sup>8</sup>

What his adversaries more than once attempted took effect but once; and of his stoning, which was also due to Jewish malice, though inflicted by the hands of those on whose ignorance they practised, together with its miraculous consequence, we have likewise a descriptive record.<sup>9</sup> And in this instance may again be noticed the peculiar moral relation in which his sufferings as a Christian stand to his former Pharisaic violence. Stephen was stoned, and so was Paul; both for the Lord Jesus, and each as a separate and singular example of His grace. That Paul should have been allowed to taste in kind what he had once incited others to inflict upon his predecessor in the race of faith, was not vindictive retribution, but abounding grace.

Of his shipwrecks one only is elsewhere related, and that took place a little later than the date of the epistle.<sup>1</sup> The mention here of three distinct disasters of this kind, of which we know nothing at all historically, may convince us how imperfect (though sufficient) a record we possess of what this much-enduring vessel underwent as he fulfilled his course. But the day of recompences will reveal it all. It is, of course, uncertain to which of these repeated trials the latter words of this passage are to be referred.

Verse 26. "In journeyings often," &c. The language of this verse is more general, yet such as to impress vividly on our minds the multiplicity as well as magnitude of the afflictions that were accom-

<sup>8</sup> Acts xvi.

<sup>9</sup> Acts xiv. 5, 19, 20.

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxvii.

plished in him, as he wrought and suffered in the sustaining power of Christ for His body's sake, which is the Church.<sup>2</sup> His journeyings were not for his own pleasure; nor when upon his Master's service did he sacrifice time to convenience, nor shrink from the path before him through any fear of personal risk. He would follow with alacrity the leading of the Spirit, though it brought him to his object by dangerous and unfrequented roads. From the floods and the robbers alike the Lord was his sole but effectual defence. So distinct and positive was his walk as a confessor of Christ's name, that, independently of the particular instances of ill-treatment above noticed, he was in constant and nearly equal danger from his own race and the Gentiles. In the city he was eyed on every side by men who, from their dread and hatred of his work, were thirsting continually for his blood; while the natural perils and privations of the desert were enhanced for one who could no longer reckon confidently on the friendliness of men. A pirate's knife might threaten him upon the sea; and even among those who named the name of Christ there were those who bore no love to Paul, because his works were good and theirs were evil, and, like Abel and Joseph, he was enviously hated in proportion to his grace by them that knew not God.

Verse 27. "In weariness and painfulness," &c. To danger there were added hardships, both voluntary and involuntary. Self-discipline was his habitual exercise, while the exigencies of true soldiership to Christ bore with an unceasing hardship on his flesh.

<sup>2</sup> Col. i. 24, 25.

Many, for Christ's sake, were his wakeful nights; and often, when less ardent though true fellow-servants were at ease, he was hungry and consumed with thirst. Spoiled, haply, by robbers of his scanty wardrobe, or too indigent (while making many rich) to buy himself a coat, he came very near his Master<sup>3</sup> in his experience of personal destitution, because by grace so closely waiting on his steps.<sup>4</sup> And could his vainglorious rivals say the like?

Verse 28. "Besides those things that are without," &c. If his outward trials and afflictions were both heavy and abundant, there were others of a still more poignant kind, which yet could not be separately specified, but generalized only under this reference to his daily burden as a good steward of the grace of God. For hard as his outward trials were, they left his mind unruffled, though his flesh might shrink or tremble. Personal danger or bodily affliction could not take away his spirit's rest; he could sing at midnight in his chains, and with his stripes unwashed; but anxiety about his brethren filled him with dismay. And if the state of things in the Corinthian church took so strong a hold upon his heart, as to seem for a while to paralyze his spiritual energies,<sup>5</sup> we may seek in vain to estimate the weight of that great charge which divine grace had imposed on him as the general nursing-father of God's children, and which the same grace enabled him to bear so painfully, yet with such willing mind. "The care of all the churches!" And was he stretching himself be-

<sup>3</sup> Matt. viii. 20.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 1; Phil. iii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ante*, chap. xi. 12, 13.

yond his measure in claiming for himself a diocese so universal? Love knows no limits, while duty faithfully observes its path. The epistle to the Hebrews<sup>6</sup> shows us in how rich a measure his yearning for his brethren of the circumcision, though often thwarted, was yet owned of God; while his commission as the apostle of the Gentiles, gave him an immediate interest in every assembly under heaven, that confessed the name of Jesus Christ.

There are in truth few passages in Scripture, which excel in pregnant force the language of this verse. And who, but one who felt the value and rich meaning of the truth he preached, could have either understood or carried such a burden? A man of trust must also be a man of care. Great indeed was the honour attaching to his office, and in the sustaining strength of Him who fainteth not, and is not weary, he bore it uncomplainingly, not asking to be eased of that which, if his burden, was his glory also. But it lay upon him heavily from day to day, with a weight little dreamt of by these thoughtless and self-satisfied Corinthians.

And had they who devoured them and smote them on the face any share in such a burden? And let us here mark well, in its practical application to ourselves, the difference between true godly care and anxiety about the things of Christ, which have their root in faith, and that false-hearted carelessness, which, on the nominal plea of casting all its burdens on the Lord, flings far away the sense of personal

<sup>6</sup> My reasons for assuming for this apostle the authorship of this epistle are stated in the preface to the second edition of *Notes on the Hebrews*.

responsibility, and would, in its antinomian boasting, make a merit of its shame. The complaint of the apostle, when he weighed anxiously the average of Christian sentiment, was that all sought their own, not the things of Jesus Christ;<sup>7</sup> and because he, and the few who were likeminded, walked by another rule, they walked like men who carried something precious through a dangerous place, and till their task was ended could not be at ease.

Verse 29. "Who is weak, and I am not weak?" &c. Words, in such lips, not of fustian, but of truth and love; a style of speech which might draw a just ridicule upon most other men, but which it became one to use who, in the sight of God, would call upon his spiritual children to imitate him, as he followed Christ. For as the Lord and Head of His body the church is the gracious and unwearied bearer of His people's burdens, so had there been bestowed upon this chosen servant a quickness of sympathy, and a steadfastness of patient love, which made him a fellow-sufferer with all who righteously complained, as well as their effectual comforter. His heart was wholly in the work for which he lived; indifference, therefore, to any ill which touched Christ in His members, was to him impossible. What bore unduly on the weak, or offended any upright conscience, was a shock to Paul's spiritual sensibilities as a man in Christ, which he both felt and resented according to the mind of Christ. And if to ask such questions was, as it surely was, to cover with confusion those who, while claiming to be pastors by superior right, fed themselves only, and were ravening the

<sup>7</sup> Phil. ii. 21.

flock of God, they may serve also to a further use. Words like these have voices for ourselves, and, as we meditate them in these latter days, should be something more to us than a monumental eulogy of one who lived and loved so well, long centuries ago. The heart which tells out so ingenuously this strange confession of its "foolishness," was only giving utterance to the thoughts and feelings of that Spirit, which dwelt not in Paul only, but is given to all who believe. We may grieve and hinder Him by our unbelief or self-seeking, but His sensibilities and yearnings are the same to-day as then.

Verse 30. "If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern my infirmities." Others had been bold, and he also; and by comparing his apostolic tokens, as a persecuted witness for Christ, with those of his opponents, his brethren in the faith might judge to which side truth, and the honour which is due to truth, belonged. He had spoken thus far of things which, if they largely exemplified the malice of the adversary and his instruments, reflected only honour on the sufferer. But he has another kind of boasting to produce. He will speak of things which marked him, indeed, still more emphatically as a chosen vessel of the Master, but which should prove also, in his own person, the nullity of all self-commendation in the sight of God. He will boast of that of which men naturally are ashamed; in a demonstration, namely, of his weakness. In the presence of these self-appointed lords over God's heritage, he will exhibit himself in an attitude and circumstances which indicate, indeed, most convincingly, his true standing in the scale of

value, as an efficient minister of truth (for cities are not garrisoned and watched, by the rulers of this world, for the apprehension of obscure and insignificant opposers of their will), while disclosing, at the same time, the ignominious shifts to which a true minister of God may be reduced, in order to escape his foes.

Verses 31–33. “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” &c. Before recounting his first recorded peril for the gospel’s sake,<sup>7</sup> and thus finishing the lengthened commendation of his ministry, by tracing it and its effects to the beginning, he makes this solemn adjuration, not only to enforce attention to his words, but as if—like one who felt ashamed at the semblance even of mere egotistic boasting—he would hide his “folly” from their eyes, beneath the glorious majesty of that great Name. Let others judge him, he has still this last appeal, and from that Presence he was well assured his sentence should at last triumphantly come forth. Were his competitors prepared to sustain their allegations by a similar appeal? Had their preaching ever placed their lives in jeopardy, or excited anger in the hearts of king Aretas, or any other king? Had any of them dangled in a basket in the midnight air? They professed to be apostles; had they gained or lost, temporally, by their mission? And if exempt from such humiliating trials as Paul gloried in, was it because they held a higher place of honour in the Master’s eyes?

At Damascus Paul had first declared His gospel, by testifying in the synagogues that Jesus is the

<sup>7</sup> Acts ix. 24, 25.

Son of God ; and from that city he had, after many days of faithful but contentious ministry, escaped as a fugitive, in the humiliating fashion here described. From thence to the martyrdom which closed his earthly days, his course lay through constant but varied sufferings and afflictions, cheered, however, by a yet more abundant measure of joy in the Holy Ghost. Let us remember, when contemplating this life-picture of apostolic grace and faithfulness, that the path in which he found both his sorrows and his joys was not prepared for his feet only. He walked in Christ, and thought only of the will of God. His own assurance to us all (in this repeating only what the Master said) is, that in our case, no less than his, a like aim and motive will work out, in their measure, like results.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 12 ; John xv. 18-20.



## CHAPTER XII.

"It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory," &c. (1.) Still bent on boasting in his weakness,<sup>1</sup> he continues his apology, but in an altered tone. In comparing himself with others, he had been meeting his adversaries on their own ground, and answering the fool according to his folly; but he is now consciously approaching a topic which admits of no such treatment. To the various kinds of trial already enumerated, and the honour resulting from them, other men, and possibly some even of the false apostles, might advance a partial claim; but what remains to be told of Paul's experience is peculiar to himself. He does not say, "Let us come to visions," &c., but "I will come." It was inexpedient for him to boast, and be a witness to himself. He will now go boldly into another sphere, and speak of visions and revelations of the Lord. If the magicians could do so with their enchantments, let them follow if they dare.

To have "seen the Lord" was one of the requisites of genuine apostleship,<sup>2</sup> and it was by a heavenly vision that Paul first learnt obedience to the truth.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, these Corinthians were probably aware that he had been the subject of a vision which especially

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xi. 30.    <sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. ix. 1.    <sup>3</sup> Acts xxvi. 19.

concerned themselves.<sup>4</sup> Of his many revelations he had recently communicated one of lasting importance, not to them only, but equally to us.<sup>5</sup> But though he might have multiplied decisive proofs of this description to the silencing of all gainsayers, yet, as his purpose is to glory in his own infirmity, he confines himself to a single and hitherto unknown example, which, if they well considered it, should shield his "weak presence" ever after from depreciation in their eyes.<sup>6</sup>

Verses 2-4. "I know<sup>7</sup> a man in Christ about fourteen years ago,"<sup>8</sup> &c. On the presumption that the things related in this deeply interesting passage had been previously undivulged, we may well marvel at the perfect power of reticence displayed by the apostle. That he could carry such a secret in his bosom for so many years, and amid so many temptations to reveal it, is an impressive evidence of the thoroughness with which he had learnt the lesson of practical self-renunciation. Nor was this habit acquired, as the sequel shows, without a special process of disciplinary initiation.

Looking now more closely at the description of this miraculous rapture, we find the cast of his narrative in simple harmony with its facts. He could not say, "I was caught up;" for, as he explains, his ecstasy was of such a kind as held ordinary consciousness entirely in suspense. His state was new

<sup>4</sup> Acts xviii. 9, 10.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 23, *sq.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ante*, chap. x. 10.

<sup>7</sup> *οἶδα*.

<sup>8</sup> As the date of this epistle is not absolutely fixed, some uncertainty must remain as to the exact time of the event to which he here refers, but it was probably about seven years after his conversion.

and unexampled in the recorded history of men. Moses, when in the mount with God, was Moses still, and both saw and heard things which he was expressly commissioned to deliver and expound to men. So, also, at the Lord's transfiguration, the chosen witnesses retained their consciousness, and opportunity was found there for both human thought and speech. And when John, at a yet later day, was called in vision up to heaven, it was to be an exact and faithful witness to the church of what he there both saw and heard. But Paul was in a state neither intelligible to himself nor explicable to his brethren. Yet he knows well the man, and can attest the visions which he is unable to describe. It was himself, but in a condition equally distinct from nature and from ordinary spiritual experience. He had, while in this state, a faculty of perception independent of both bodily and mental organs. God, who thus rapt him, only knew his state.

We must consider next the sphere of his translation; and here at the outset a difficulty presents itself, the apostle's language being such as to leave it doubtful whether a single rapture or two successive ones were in his mind. Without presuming to determine this point, I would state two considerations which seem to bear strongly in favour of the former supposition. First, his being caught up to the third heaven affirms nothing more than the fact of his elevation. He was caught up thither,<sup>9</sup> and that is all. But he is said also, secondly, to have been rapt into the paradise,<sup>1</sup> and then the results are stated. It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that the rap-

<sup>9</sup> ἕως τρίτου οὐρανοῦ.

<sup>1</sup> εἰς τὸν παράδεισον.

ture is one, and that the second declaration is but explanatory of the first. With respect to the former, as it is a solitary expression in the inspired scriptures,<sup>2</sup> it were vain to pretend to any further knowledge than is conveyed to us by the natural meaning of his words; but of the paradise which it contains, we have a fuller mention in the word. For Paul is not the first revealer of God's paradise, but the dying Saviour on the cross. To be with Him *there*, and on that very day, was His promise to the penitent companion of His shame;<sup>3</sup> and the same paradise is again held forth by Him who walks among the candlesticks, as a special allurements of His grace to the diligent observer of the Spirit's word.<sup>4</sup>

His being rapt, therefore, into Paradise, was his foretaste of the special joys of God's redeemed, and being there, he doubtless saw what the freed spirit of the pardoned malefactor saw and sees—things undiscoverable by mortal eyes, but which open on the view of those who, on the dissolution of this tabernacle, depart to be with Christ. For the vision and the revelations were of things Christian, and were shown to Paul as to “a man in Christ.” Yet it is noticeable that no mention is here made of what he *saw*, his ears only are engaged. Words are his wonder and enjoyment. In Paradise he heard what there indeed was full of ravishing significance, and these words may, for aught we know to the contrary, have conveyed to him a revelation of heavens yet higher than the third; but on returning to him—

<sup>2</sup> Its nearest resemblance is to be found in Psa. cxlviii. 4, but it is of common occurrence in Jewish theology.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xxiii. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Rev. ii. 7.

self, he retained indeed a perfect recollection of his vision, but as of things which he had neither license nor ability to utter among men. For as flesh and blood cannot enter into the kingdom of God, so also is our natural organism incapable of apprehending or transmitting sensations of a purely spiritual kind.<sup>5</sup>

The passage we are now considering is, therefore, besides its interest in other respects, of much practical importance to the believer, inasmuch as it determines for the willing and obedient ear a question, often raised and fruitlessly discussed, as to the nature of the separate state. It forms a welcome, not to say necessary, link in the divine testimony which cheers the souls of God's expectant children with tidings of the hope laid up for them in heaven, while it utterly discourages all imaginative speculation on things which are as yet objects of faith only, and not of intelligent perception. Many a rash pen, which has foolishly attempted to treat things invisible, as things cognizable by our present faculties, would have remained still, or turned its activity to a better purpose, had respect been had to the plain teaching of Scripture. It is too often forgotten, that one very important point of our learning, as disciples of the truth, is to know, and humbly to acquiesce in, our *ignorance* of things not yet revealed.

<sup>5</sup> The things which Paul heard were ἀρρήτα, which may mean "unutterable" either in a moral or a literal sense; and the words immediately following ἀ οὐκ ἔξόν ἀνθρώπῳ λαλῆσαι seem to express this double meaning. They were not of "lawful" utterance, because not given for that purpose; they could not "possibly" be spoken by a man in mortal state, since a spiritual organism alone could either utter or receive them.

With reference to such things it may be truly said, that when intellect awakes, faith sleeps, and fancy sets herself upon the watch. When Paul was in heaven, he was entirely out of the sphere of natural thought and sensation; he was experimentally absent from the body, for he did not know that he was in it. And what he thus experienced he can declare to us as a fact, but is utterly unable to expound to us, although we have so deep an interest in such a scene. But by divine direction, he records for our sakes this memorable incident, and gives us, with something more than the authority of a scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, the positive assurance that to be with Christ, in temporary separation from the body, is far better than to have the comfort of His presence here below. As much might indeed have been inferred from the Lord's words upon the cross, but in further mercy to His church He has qualified a separate witness, by vouchsafing to him this special insight into spiritual and supernatural things. Like his Master, Paul, when witnessing of heavenly things, speaks what he knows, and testifies to that which he has seen.<sup>6</sup>

If, then, the idle enquiry should still be made, why, and with what intent were incommunicable revelations made to Paul? an abundant answer is

<sup>6</sup> John iii. 11; Phil. i. 23. What John saw in heaven was to be shown to Christ's servants upon earth. He is the prophet, as well as seer, of the church. What Paul saw was for heaven alone, and concerns us only as it bears on our hope. In this last respect, John is as silent as his fellow-servant, testifying to the manner of the Father's love, and the certainty of the believer's hope, but unable yet to know or tell what being "as Christ is" really means, until we see Him as He is. (1 John iv. 17; iii. 2.)

at hand. First, as a personal distinction, this privilege was in strict consistency with the manner of that sovereign grace which called him. To make the last first, belongs to Him whose thoughts are not as our thoughts. But secondly and chiefly, as the chosen interpreter of God's hidden mysteries, and the special expounder of the doctrine of the church, it was fitting that he should be so initiated into the realities of heaven, as to become an unfaltering, and, as it were, familiar witness when declaring things unseen; that such a knowledge should be added to his faith, as might sustain him effectually under the extraordinary trials, both from without and from within, which belonged to his vocation; that in filling his appointed measure<sup>7</sup> of the afflictions of Christ in his flesh, for His body's sake, the church, he might, like his Master, have remembrance joined with hope in the contemplation of his coming joy.<sup>8</sup> His rapture was, moreover, in its consequences, to convey to him a lesson of another kind, as he will presently relate.

Verses 5, 6. "Of such an one will I glory," &c. The exaltation of a man in Christ to heaven, was indeed a thing whereof to glory, for while there he was alike beyond comparison and knowledge. The voice of competition must be silent here; while such a singular distinction, if proclaimed at all, can be mentioned only to the praise of Him who had thus rapt His chosen vessel, by anticipation, to the joys

<sup>7</sup> 1 Col. i. 24.

<sup>8</sup> *Cod. Sin.* and other MSS. of note, join the words *καὶ τῇ ὑπερβολῇ τῶν ἀπακαλύψεων* to what precedes; and before *ἵνα* insert *διό*, thus beginning a fresh period, omitting also the repetition of the words *ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι* at the end of verse 7.

to come. But the man Paul will glory only in his own infirmities; for his boasting, in any case, should be in *truth*, and weakness, helped and sustained by grace, is all that a saint can truly boast of in himself.

Yet so richly had this grace abounded in him, that if he were disposed to glory, relatively to God's other messengers, he would not be a fool; much less so when he placed his true tokens of apostleship against the empty claims of those who gloried in appearance only, not in heart. Wide and awful was the difference, both morally and in fact, between one who had seen the Lord, and been personally conversant with the heavenly things of which His gospel spake in promise, and those who were apostles only by their own unauthorized assumption of the name, and whose works might show, to those who judged things rightly, what their end would be. But in the Spirit of his Master, he forbore to set forth truth which tended to self-exaltation, lest any should estimate him rather by the extraneous accompaniments of his office, than by his observed walk and conversation as a man in Christ. Let him be judged by them that knew him; let them not venerate him as an idol, but esteem him in love, according to the measure and value of the work which he wrought among them by the grace of God. His adversaries owed their temporary credit with the saints at Corinth to the unscrupulous boldness of their self-commendation, but Paul would stand only upon plain and acknowledged facts. Nor will he make even the abundance of his revelations a special claim to their regard, for his aim is that not he but Christ, by his



means, should have and keep always the chief place in their hearts. And to this end he tells them, not of his exceptional honours only, but of their resulting effect upon himself.

Verse 7. "Therefore lest I should be exalted above measure," &c. If for their sakes, and to confirm them in a confidence which should never have been shaken, he had broken silence on a topic which, when known, could not but seem to place him, spite of himself, upon a higher elevation than his judges, he will, for their sakes also, account for that infirmity in the flesh, which made him seem so little in the eyes of those who judged others by themselves. His humiliation shall be not less faithfully recorded than his exaltation, and by a simple and ingenuous confession, he will make them understand that he is, with all his apostolic pre-eminence, a man of like passions with themselves. The third heaven was too dizzy a remembrance to be safely borne by one who had to return again into himself, and again to walk on earth and among men, in a body of sin and death. The Lord knew this, and took thought accordingly for the effectual preservation of His servant. Let those then who, at Corinth or elsewhere, sat loftily as kings, on the strength of their small knowledge of the hope of their calling, bethink them of Paul's case. For he also was as they—in his nature proud and foolish as themselves; and if kept blameless, as a pattern "man in Christ," he owed this, not to his own unaided fidelity to the truth he loved, but to the provident and faithful mercy of the Lord, who led him and guided him by the skilfulness of His hand.

Although pride cannot live in heaven, it can thrive, strange and sad to say, upon celestial recollections. To keep the man Paul lowly, he must be exceptionally disciplined. An angel, or messenger, of Satan<sup>9</sup> was especially empowered to afflict his flesh. Like Job, God's best witness in his day upon the earth, Paul also is delivered over to the peculiar malice of God's enemy; and both alike for the more abundant glory of God, and for our profit for whose sakes these things are written. But there is a very marked difference between the two sufferers, and the lesson taught to each. Job was afflicted to be taught *himself*; Paul, to be *kept mindful* of himself. A true and divinely-sent preacher of the cross, a witness, therefore, from the outset of his apostolic course, to the utter vanity of the flesh and the pure sovereignty of grace, he needed, notwithstanding, to be buffeted, to keep him from forgetting who and what he was, in the remembrance of that which he had seen and heard. It is a solemnly instructive lesson. To say, "Who then is Paul?" was but his natural language as a preacher of Christ crucified; while, as respects the government of his body, he had it, as he elsewhere tells us,<sup>1</sup> in effectual subjection. But intelligent and hearty self-renunciation, even when coupled

<sup>9</sup> Some prefer to render "a messenger, Satan;" wrongly, I believe. The immediate personal agency of Satan seems in Scripture to be confined to what is spiritual. He personally tempts, and takes the word of life out of the heart of the negligent hearer of the gospel. But bodily inflictions he sends, as he did the Sabians against Job, the plagues upon his flesh, &c. He has his angels, and they do his evil pleasure during his allotted time, even as they will share his portion in the place prepared. (Matt. xxv. 41.)

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. ix. 27.

with unceasing vigilance and self-control, does not suffice to quench the pride of nature. A special burden must compensate, remedially, the extraordinary privilege which grace assigned to him. And here also we may note the difference between Satan as a tempter to evil, and Satan as an ordained instrument of correction. To stimulate the pride of nature, and spread snares for the feet of God's unwary saints, is his willing occupation and delight. To vex and weary those who, in the spirit of a living faith, are dwelling in God's love, is doubtless his pleasure also; but it is the gratification merely of a hopeless spite, and a necessity rather than a choice, since he knows well that his malice can never pluck God's chosen from the Saviour's hands. As to the nature of the contumelious buffeting, which bore so distressfully on the apostle's flesh, we know no more than that it was something of a pre-eminently trying kind, and therefore not among the things elsewhere spoken of as "common to man."<sup>2</sup>

Verse 8. "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice," &c. How heavily this burden pressed on him we may infer from the importunity of his entreaty for relief.<sup>3</sup> We may learn also from this

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. x. 13. I pass unnoticed the many plausible guesses which have from time to time been hazarded on this really unimportant point. Every man shall bear his *own* burden. The upper and nether experiences of Paul are alike buried with him in his grave, while an inspired record of them both remains, for the comfort and warning of the church.

<sup>3</sup> Thrice the Lord prayed in His agony, and His own answer came to His servant only in the second repetition of his wish. Does not this seem to consecrate this number as the limit beyond which any positive but unanswered desire of a strictly *personal* kind should not be preferred?

verse how real and trying a conflict may sometimes be carried on in the hearts of God's most devoted servants, without any immediate reference to sin. It is, moreover, consistent with the whole tenor of the passage we are now considering, to suppose that the buffeting of the enemy was of a kind which seemed, in the apprehension of the sufferer, to operate as a positive hindrance to his ministerial efficiency. Hence his anxiety, and the bold urgency of his request. But as God's very Son learnt obedience by the things which He suffered, so also, on the behalf of Christ, was it given to His chosen vessel to reach his crown of righteousness through a special process of affliction, which bore due proportion to the excellent measure of his knowledge in the mystery of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

Verse 9. "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for [my] strength is perfected in weakness,"<sup>5</sup> &c. And was Paul ignorant of this? Assuredly not in *doctrine*, but he must be a *doer* also, in the way of patient suffering, of the truth which he confessed. There are measures of grace which are proportioned to genuine self-knowledge. If Paul is to be filled with Christ, he must first be thoroughly self-emptied. The process must needs, indeed, be wearying and sorely afflictive to the flesh, but under such a Teacher, the lesson he was learning was a stream of constant and increasing blessing to his soul. While his ear was being opened to the searching but gracious discipline of love, he learnt

<sup>4</sup> Eph. iii. 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Cod. Sin.*, with other MSS., omits *μου*, and prefers *τελειται* to *τελειοῦται*. It is difficult to determine the exact reading.

the hard task of abandoning *all* self-reliance, and was content to be the passive instrument of God. If the weapons of his warfare were, as he tells us, mighty through God to the bringing of every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,<sup>6</sup> it was in this school of training that he learnt their use. As Jacob got lameness with his blessing, when he wrestled with the Lord,<sup>7</sup> so "the marks of the Lord Jesus"<sup>8</sup> were the salutary tokens of that more abundant grace which rested on this last-called, but singularly-honoured, apostolic labourer.<sup>9</sup>

His afflictions were, in fact, distinctive tokens of approval; and with this conviction he will boast of that which made him so feeble in the sight of men. For it was not the semblance only, but the substance of divine power, that rested on this broken reed, as he went, under the sure guidance of the Spirit, about his Master's work. "Not I, but Christ," was his motto and his boast; and anything that conferred on him a deeper experience of this truth he welcomed as a real addition to his joy. With respect to the latter clause of this verse, it is manifestly not to be confounded, as a point of doctrine, with what belongs to the common faith of Christians. All who are truly such are, by position, "in Christ;" and in all alike Christ dwells, or they are none of His. This resting, or tabernacling,<sup>1</sup> of the power of Christ upon His servant, is a special form of that general but conditional promise which the Lord spake to Judas—not Iscariot—in the days of His flesh.<sup>2</sup> The power of Christ is absolute, and may use at will all instru-

<sup>6</sup> Chap. x. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Gen. xxxii. 24, *sq.*

<sup>8</sup> Gal. vi. 17.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 10,

<sup>1</sup> ἵνα ἐπισκηνώσῃ, &c.

<sup>2</sup> John xiv. 23.

ments; but when it is said to rest upon a man, it implies, in his case, a thoroughness of inward contrition and self-loathing (not necessarily because of particular sins committed, or the consciousness of evil proclivities of an exceptional kind, but by a divinely-taught estimate of the flesh, in its hopeless contrariety to the Spirit) which leaves the whole heart vacant for the Lord, whose habitation ever is with such.<sup>3</sup> All that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with its affections and its lusts;<sup>4</sup> for by their faith they both died and are risen with the Lord, but not every saint is passed *experimentally* through this killing process. Such special dispensations are among the methods of divine husbandry by means of which the branch which beareth fruit brings forth yet more abundantly, to the praise of Him who purges it.<sup>5</sup> In another epistle he tells us, more at large, of the process and ends of this schooling in Christ, with its moral effects upon his own spirit;<sup>6</sup> it is here connected rather with his outward experiences, in service as a minister of God.

Verse 10. "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities," &c. What nature would recoil from, a perfect faith embraces and delights in, for the sake of the ulterior blessing. We have in this verse a general *résumé* of his apology.<sup>7</sup> This thorn in the flesh, whose sharpness went so deep into his nature as to hold self effectually in the cords of death, is now seen to be the secret condition of that "strength," which made him visibly triumphant over every obstacle. As a strong man proves his vigour by the per-

<sup>3</sup> Isa. lvii. 15.<sup>4</sup> Gal. v. 24.<sup>5</sup> John xv.<sup>6</sup> Phil. iv. 11-13.<sup>7</sup> From chap. xi. 18.

formance of feats at which spectators, though of equal stature, stand amazed; so Paul, demonstratively weak and contemptible in presence, yet wrought and endured in a manner which drew on him the attention of the world. Results, such as were achieved by him, obliged men to seek elsewhere than in Paul for the source of the power which wrought so mightily in him. The more he suffered, the more the name of Christ was known;<sup>8</sup> his tribulations were both the glory of the church, as a sharer of his grace, and a convincing witness to the world. His fame was spreading everywhere, with the opposite accompaniments of love and hate. Nowhere could he feel secure but under God's safe keeping, and never was he suffered so to prosper in his ministry, as to make fleshly ease or reputation one of its effects. Killed all day long for Jesus' sake, he lived and conquered by the faith of Him who loved him.<sup>9</sup> Chastened every morning, he yet went in the strength of the Lord God, making mention of Him and of His righteousness alone.<sup>1</sup> He was, as the result of these experiences, at once the saddest and the cheeriest man upon the earth. For by grace he knew, as perhaps none other of his fellows knew, both man and God, both earth and heaven. Weak as a lamb among devouring wolves, he was still undismayed; and often doubtful how or when his course might end,<sup>2</sup> his bow abode in strength until his day was done; for his weakness was *himself*, and his prevailing power was *the Lord*.

Verse 11. "I am become a fool," &c. There is a

<sup>8</sup> *Conf.* Phil. i. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Rom. viii. 36; Gal. ii. 20.

<sup>1</sup> *Pss.* lxxiii. 14; lxxi. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. ii. 23,

true sorrow in these words. He had prefaced his egotistic vindication of his office by a deprecation of that censure, and now that he had finished it, he felt both humbled and distressed, though he had spoken nothing but the truth. The very completeness and success of his apology abashed him, and he felt as if a portion of his former irony recoiled upon himself. But if he was a fool, the charge of his folly lay at their own doors; they had compelled him to do what he would willingly have left undone—to fill his epistle with himself, instead of writing only of the Lord. And though his boasting did indeed redound to the true glory of Christ, yet he felt that he had spoken in anticipation of the coming day.<sup>3</sup> They wronged him, when they forced him thus to praise himself. He should have been their glory, as they were his own. Both on his own account and theirs, he felt aggrieved. Their want of godly discernment vexed him far more than his own reproach; for they should have known, that in all that belonged to true apostolic calling and character, he was excelled by none. The most eminent of those who bore that title, were his fellows only, not his guides;<sup>4</sup> for he had his commission from the Lord no less than they. Measured by themselves, both they and he were nothing; but estimated by their labours, the pre-eminence was rather his than theirs.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Gal. ii. 6.

<sup>5</sup> It is still less plausible to refer the words τοὺς ὑπὲρ λίαν ἀποστόλους to the false apostles, than the corresponding expression in chap. xi. 5. The deceivers have already been unmasked and duly characterized, and other thoughts now occupy his mind, than a further comparison of himself with them. *Ante*, p. 307, note.



Verse 12. "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you," &c. The true signs of an apostle are a reflexion of the spirit and operative powers which belong, in their perfection, to the Lord; and it should be noticed that the three distinctive terms, "signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds," which Paul here uses as a voucher of his office, are employed elsewhere by the Spirit to characterize the ministry of "Jesus of Nazareth, the Man approved of God."<sup>6</sup> And had the Corinthian saints forgotten all these things? and, abounding as they did in spiritual gifts, had the faculty of right discernment so deserted them, that the man, who by the grace of God had made them what they were, should now seem to them no true apostle of the Lord? But if not, what was he? and how came he by these tokens? Were his undoubted powers from above, or from beneath? They ought to perceive that their own claim to be God's church at Corinth, must stand or fall by the very thing which they had been thus unwarily induced to question.

Verse 13. "For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches?" &c. True it was that, with all his abundant apostolic powers, he had not fleeced them, to impress the weight of his official dignity more forcibly upon their minds—a style of pastorate which seemed to have its attractions in their eyes. Nay, he had not suffered them to do what other churches did, which willingly contributed to his support. He had nursed them as babes, and with a true insight into their natural character, and a just appreciation of their spiritual feebleness, as well

<sup>6</sup> Acts ii. 22.

as a perfect knowledge of the methods of the adversary, he had abstained from exercising his undoubted privileges as a labourer worthy of his hire.<sup>7</sup> This he acknowledged was a wrong which they might well resent; and so he asks forgiveness, yet in the spirit of one who, in the act of confession, meditates a repetition of his fault.

Verse 14. "Behold, this<sup>8</sup> third time I am ready to come to you," &c. His contemplated visit was the third in *purpose*, not in fact; his second intention having remained unfulfilled, for the reasons already given.<sup>9</sup> He was ready before, and forbore only for their sakes; now, he was once more ready, and if he came, they should find him still unchanged. He will be at his own charges, and not theirs. They had behaved towards him with little of the love and duty which became them as his spiritual children, but he would not on this account renounce or forget his parental relation to them in the sight of God; and he would act as parents should, labouring for their sakes patiently, and seeking by his unremitting ministry of love, to lay up for them an enduring substance. For he sought not theirs, but them. They were dear to him as when first given to him by the Lord; their very perverseness and their manifold wanderings had, by discovering the extent of their spiritual weakness, drawn out the more abundantly on their behalf the fervent activity of his affection.

Verse 15. "But I will very gladly spend and be

<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. ix.

<sup>8</sup> The best MSS. agree in inserting *τοῦτο* after *τρίτον*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ante*, chap. i. 15-23.

spent for your souls,"<sup>1</sup> &c. He had served them faithfully for Jesus' sake, and was still devotedly their own. As one who must give account, he had both watched and laboured for their souls; not without tears, but with a joy yet more abundant than his grief.<sup>2</sup> There was that, however, in their state which moved his pity not less than his love. The marvellously low tone that prevailed among them (amounting almost to a spiritual fatuity), evinced so strikingly by their abject submission to the false apostles, made him feel deeply how possible it is to labour diligently, and yet seem to toil in vain. But his faith sustains him in the joyful assurance, that in the Lord it should not be in vain. Their weak condition did but remind him how sorely they still needed his assiduous care. The time might come, when, with hearts withdrawn from vanity and turned wholly to the Lord, they would better recompense his love. Meanwhile, in manners as in doctrine, he would show himself their pattern still.<sup>3</sup>

Verses 16-18. "But be it so, I did not burden you," &c. These verses connect themselves more immediately with verse 13; and truly they present a notable example of the moral depths to which the minds of real believers may descend, when not kept by faith in practical communion with the Lord, and thus out of the influence of Satan's wiles. That the mission of Titus and his fellow-labourer should have been so interpreted, and that so grossly absurd as well as malevolent a misrepresentation should have obtained a moment's credence from any of those who

<sup>1</sup> Margin.    <sup>2</sup> Heb. xiii. 17; *Ante*, chap. ii. 4; vii. 4, *sq.*

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. xiii. 4-7.

owed to Paul's ministry their knowledge of the gospel, might well, if not written against them with his own hand and in the sight of God, have seemed incredible. But, strange as it seems, it is nevertheless a trait of character belonging to our kind; to be contemplated therefore on our parts, not as a singular and unlovely peculiarity of these Corinthian saints, but as a corroborative illustration of the Spirit's warning to us all, in view of the coming day of Christ.<sup>4</sup> Through what channel the apostle obtained his knowledge of these evil surmisings we are not informed, though it is probable that some whisperings of this tenor may have visited the ears of Titus or his comrade while among them.

And if to any young believer's mind this strange passage should seem inconsistent with what has been described already,<sup>5</sup> as the effect of this visit on the Corinthian assembly at large, and on Titus also, who found such comfort in their ready and sincere reception of himself and of his message, the apparent incongruity will disappear on an attentive recollection of the facts. For it is evident on the face of this epistle, that, with a very real and general awakening to righteousness on the part of the Corinthian church, especially with reference to the needed observance of vigilance and godly discipline, there remained still unjudged among them a large amount of the "old leaven." This, though driven from the surface by the energetic reaction which followed the apostle's first appeal, was still fermenting in the heart of the assembly, chiefly through the assiduous malice of those emissaries of Satan whom the Spirit of the

<sup>4</sup> James v. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Chap. vii, 6-16.

Lord has so unsparingly rebuked. Besides, the low-thoughted filthiness of the spirit here exposed is but a part of *ourselves*. Let the reader, who feels his astonishment excited by a perusal of this passage, bestow but a little closer attention on the phases of Christian life around him, and his surprise will either cease and change to silent sorrow, or will fasten for expression on some nearer object than the Church of God at Corinth. Is the imputation of wrong motive so very rare a thing in modern Christianity? Would to God it were so! But, alas! an hour's spiritual (?) gossip might easily suffice to justify the picture here so boldly and truthfully coloured of the interior of unsanctified Christian life. Love thinks *no* evil, and while we walk with God, that love, which is of God, will be the tenor of our way. If out of His presence, we are ruled practically, to a greater or less degree, by the instincts of a nature which is *only* evil.

A saint is a many-sided character, and cannot be judged rightly by particular appearances, and it is with churches as with individuals. Regarded from one point of view, the state of the Corinthian saints was in a high degree satisfactory and hopeful; looked at on another side, they present an aspect morally revolting; and these things are set before us for our warning and encouragement. Hence the value and importance of such unattractive passages of scripture as the one before us. It is by laying them to heart that their admonitory power operates on ourselves, and the errors of the fathers are a safeguard to the children, as they fulfil their course in their appointed time. We are not better than they, but by taking

heed to their example we may escape in our day of trial their reproach.

If the existence of such suspicions be, as it needs must be, a matter of surprise, the manner in which they are here met is not less admirable. Christ when reviled reviled not again, and when buffeted unjustly, demanded only witness of the evil;<sup>6</sup> and grace here sustains the servant in his Master's steps. Truth is never declamatory in its own defence. To the preposterous insinuations, so unworthily and injuriously entertained, the apostle applies no other refutation than the most effective one of remanding the accusation to their own consciences in an interrogatory form.

Verse 19, "Again, think ye?"<sup>7</sup> &c. They thought as men always think whose hearts are not kept near to God. They were measuring God's messenger and servant, not by his conformity in life and manners with the truth which he declared, but by themselves. Not being habitually in communion with the Lord, they failed entirely to estimate the moral elevation of Paul's mind and spirit. Darkness comprehends not light, and it is given to the servant to taste, according to the measure of his personal conformity to Christ, a portion of that bitterness of which the Master's cup was full.<sup>8</sup> But he will correct the error of those who thus judged after the flesh. He speaks before God in Christ; and the power of Him, in whose name was both his light and shield, would

<sup>6</sup> John xviii. 22.

<sup>7</sup> *Cod Sin.* has *πάλαι δοκεῖτε κ.λ.* = "Ye have long been thinking that we are excusing ourselves," &c.

<sup>8</sup> Isa. liii. 3; Luke vi. 40.

surely verify his words. But though conscious of the sufficiency of his official authority, his heart yearns against the exercise of any other compulsion, to maintain them in the way of duty, than that of their own love. What he does is for their edifying in the love of God. To know His will and to obey it is the end of their calling into the grace of Christ, as the fellows of His own beloved Son; and to win them to this better way, by words of persuasion and acts of self-abasement, is the welcome though heart-trying service in which this close pursuer of his Master was content to spend his strength. For Jesus' sake he is their slave.<sup>9</sup> Let them believe that, even when from the multitude of words bestowed upon himself he might seem intent only on self-vindication, it is for their sakes that he speaks.

Verses 20, 21. "For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would," &c. He has fears and anxieties, but not upon his own account. Much had he rejoiced at the coming of Titus, and great had been his comfort when he contemplated the effect of his former exhortation, yet he hesitated still to show himself; for he dreaded lest enough unjudged evil might remain among them to rob his visit of its joy. These closing words are full of sad and solemn interest. The church of God on earth is, like the individual child of God, the theatre of an unceasing conflict between flesh and Spirit. What Paul dreaded, with but too solid a foundation for his fears, was the practical ascendancy of the flesh in the assembly of the saints at Corinth. In a tone, therefore, of affectionate earnestness he here gives

<sup>9</sup> Chap. iv. 5.

utterance to his misgivings, knowing well that close walking with God can alone secure His children from habitual sin. Thoroughly aware also that of all that was lacking to the saints at Corinth, no greater deficiency existed among them than that of genuine subjection of heart to the Lord, he first enumerates the forms which human selfishness most usually takes, with a warning of their incompatibility with the true enjoyment of God's peace; and then, with more distinctness, specifies those acts of unrepented iniquity with which some among them were still chargeable, notwithstanding the amended tone of moral feeling in the church at large.

The blending of a firm and uncompromising official decision with the deep and tender fervency of a love which bears and covers all things,<sup>1</sup> is strikingly manifested in this passage. It is required of stewards that a man be found faithful, and Paul had no mind to lose the rich blessing of the Master's praise. They who, while boasting in their Christian standing, were carnal still, and walked as men, should find in him not a model only of a higher walk, but a judicial reprover also of their ways. As God's messenger, he would speak no flattering words. As Christ's apostle, he was ready to apply the power of the Lord to the wilful obstinacies of the flesh. Yet for such a heart as Paul's the necessity of enforcing even necessary discipline was as a humbling affliction from his God. Instead of rejoicing in the opportunity it gave him of openly displaying his authority, the discovery of unrepented sin in God's assembly

<sup>1</sup> *Notes on First Corinthians*, p. 326.



would turn his joy to mourning, and make his presence there a spectacle of grief and shame.<sup>2</sup>

It is unnecessary to dwell on the particular features of the very unlovely picture of degenerate Christian life and manners presented in verse 20. It is a mirror by which modern communities of saints may often profitably turn their eyes upon themselves, lest, through neglect of such admonitions, the shame of their nakedness should appear, and themselves become a scandal rather than a light to men. Where Christ is lovingly enjoyed and honoured, such things are unknown; they revive and flourish, as faith languishes for want of its accustomed food.<sup>3</sup> If the Lord is not constantly before our hearts, we follow other objects than Himself, and our manners then are worthy of our aims.

We should notice, before passing to the following chapter, the decisive refutation which these verses give to the false distinction often taken between sins before and after Christian baptism, the practical effect of which is to qualify the doctrine of remission, and, by superadding law to gospel, to raise obstructions on God's "way of peace." Sins of a heinous kind are here contemplated as having been committed in a Christian assembly; and the offenders, who were "many," are moreover represented as remaining in an unrepentant state. For such there could be, at the hands of the apostle, but one kind of treatment. If we *walk* as publicans and sinners, the holy consistency of truth requires that we should also take their *place*. God's house is not a harbour

<sup>2</sup> Compare, as to the spirit of this passage, his exhortation to the Hebrew saints. (Heb. xiii. 17.)

<sup>3</sup> John vi. 57.

for iniquity, but the abode of light; and with a sad but firm resolution to maintain the purity and honour of that house, by exciseive judgment if his warnings are unheeded, he looks forward with mixed feelings to his visit. It is evident that, although these unnamed offenders had sinned shamefully, his sorrow is less on account of their transgressions than for that hardness of heart which kept them in an unrepentant state. Sin is the same at all times in its nature, but its malignity is in proportion to the light of divine knowledge which the sinner has.

Men sin *against* Christ and *without* Christ, *i.e.*, in their regenerate or unregenerate state. The sin of a believer differs from the same act in an unbeliever, in that, in the latter case, it is a violation of natural conscience only, while in the former it is an offence against the known and tasted grace of God. It is not only a defiling again of the once purged conscience, but a grieving of the Holy Spirit of God. On the moral difference of these things it is not necessary to dilate. Acts of transgression, on the part of a believer, attest the heart's departure from the Lord; for they who abide in Him sin not.<sup>4</sup> And it is against the hardening effect of sin in permanently estranging the heart from the true source of its life and blessedness, that the scriptures here and elsewhere so emphatically warn us. Now in a *living* soul repentance, sooner or later, answers exhortation, though Jacob may long go frowardly in the way of his own heart;<sup>5</sup> and restoration, through a sorrow of God proportioned to the length and depth of our wanderings, is the sure and blessed result. Against

<sup>4</sup> 1 John iii. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Isa. lvii. 17.

the penitent, truth has no arms. God's house retains all those who honestly confess their sins, but casts forth as defilement unrepentant wilfulness. Grace gives no shelter to iniquity; while it heals effectively and unupbraidingly the wounds of those who, in contrite sincerity, renounce their evil way.

A believer's person is accepted in his Saviour. By His redeeming blood he has been justified, and according to his Mediator's merit he is known of God. But the Spirit who thus sheds abroad in our hearts the love of God, is in perpetual conflict with the flesh; and in the course of these epistles we are often called to note to what extremes of moral distance a true saint may wander from the path of holiness. Now a sinner is the moral opposite to a saint. If, therefore, one professing godliness commits iniquity, the soundness or unsoundness of his profession is not determinable by his act, but by its consequences. Persistence in an evil course so falsifies the confession of the name of Christ, as to place the evil doer, while he so continues, outside the pale of safety. Tears may, and will be, shed for such; but if their way is followed to its end, it leads men to destruction.<sup>6</sup> A man may cast off the faith he once professed—it is possible to draw back to perdition. Unbelief is the prime element in every form of sin; while repentance proves the presence and effective energy of faith. Faith comes *to God*, with language suited to the condition of the heart in which it is. Its tones may therefore vary from the deepest self-abasement to the most exalted praise, as its speech relates to sin or grace, to self or Christ, as

<sup>6</sup> Phil. iii. 18, 19.

these opposites are personally realized in the experience of the man of God. The apostle's language shows us plainly that nothing can maintain the believer in the path of light and honour, but a watchful continuance in the grace of God, and an habitual walking in the spirit and power of the same faith that originally joined him to the Lord. If we walk in Him, we walk in holiness as well as peace. If we wander in another way, our peace will flee from us, to return to Him whom we have left. To renew it, we must set ourselves anew to seek His face who repents not of His gifts and calling, and waits still, in His unwearied faithfulness, to be the gracious Restorer of all who remember and turn again to Him.

The only apology which I can offer for the length of these practical remarks, is the conviction that, whether welcomed or rejected, they are needful in these times.

## CHAPTER XIII.

“THIS third time I am coming to you,” &c. (1.) The apparent incongruity of these opening words with the facts in their historical order, has given rise to much fruitless and unnecessary discussion; for there is indeed no real ambiguity in the case. Paul had already, in purpose and intent, though not in fact,<sup>1</sup> twice visited this church; and in the first chapter he has fully shown the reason why, although with them in spirit and desire, his bodily presence had been for a time withheld. Moreover, he might reckon and speak of it as a real visit, since Titus was not his messenger only, but his true and faithful representative, “his partner and fellow-helper concerning them.”<sup>2</sup>

Much indeed had he desired to be with them, but he hated the prospect of coming again to them in heaviness.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as a minister of God, he had his duties, and whether in joy or grief, he would perform them faithfully. The main obstacle to his return among them had already been removed, through the effect of his first letter, and in now preparing to

<sup>1</sup> The conjectural hypothesis of a second unrecorded visit, as suggested by some modern commentators, seems worthy of no serious regard.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. viii. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. ii. 1.

return personally, he keeps prominently in view the tolerated presence among them of those who, by their unrepented sins, still troubled and defiled the house of God. He will surely come, as he has said, and even as the just Lord is among His people,<sup>4</sup> as the Searcher of their ways, so would His apostle and true witness bring practically to their remembrance this long-neglected truth. He will judge what they had failed to judge, and set in order that which was above their charge. And let us note here the aptness of his quotation from the law. Judicial discipline proceeds on well-attested *facts*. God judges all that He discerns; by Him, therefore, thoughts and motives are weighed, as well as actions. But to His children no such power has been delegated: positive and multiplied testimony must establish every accusation made against a saint. As to the principle, it still remains, as a gospel verity, that "the law is for sinners." Grace meets and embraces penitents; law judges sin.<sup>5</sup>

Verse 2. "I told you before, and foretell you,"<sup>6</sup> &c. With a reiterative earnestness he impels them to the task of self-amendment, by a distinct and solemn notice of the sole alternative. Having taught them from the first, the necessity of practical godliness,

<sup>4</sup> Zeph. iii. 5; Rev. ii. 23.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Tim. i. 8, *sq.*, *conf.* 1 John iii. 4, where the same principle is stated in a more abstract form. The believer is no longer under law, as to his conscience; redemption has discharged for him that debt for ever. But if, in practice, he denies the faith, the law is a reprover of his evil way.

<sup>6</sup> The language of this verse has, in our translation, lost some of its clearness, through the improper addition of the words, "I write." Γράφω is no longer found in the text of any critical edition of the New Testament.

and confirmed his doctrine emphatically in his former epistle, he is now, though still personally absent, again witnessing among them by his written words. And these he now addresses, primarily and pointedly, to the delinquents themselves, as a pledge of that more conclusive sentence which he will not fail to utter, if, at his coming, he finds them in their present state. But though his purpose is decided, he remembers that to effect it there must be the immediate operation of a higher sanction. The conditional expression, "if I come," implies this, and may recall to our minds his memorable language at the close of chap. i. For with him was neither yea nor nay.

Verse 3. "Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me," &c. The connection of this with what immediately precedes is evident.<sup>7</sup> If their spiritual dulness and insensibility to what was due to the great Name which they professed were such as to leave them still in doubt as to the validity of the apostle's claim on their obedience, his presence should terminate all controversy on that point. His very adversaries had acknowledged the weight and power of his letters, but this power must be referred to its true source. These letters, though his own, were not the expression of his own mind only. Christ spake in what His servant wrote. He had gloried in his weakness, and would glory: but in setting him aside they were disputing with the Lord,

<sup>7</sup> Some would rather place a period at the close of verse 2, and connect the words before us more immediately with verse 5. This view of the passage is no doubt admissible; but the ordinary construction, besides bringing out quite as distinctly its general sense, seems preferable, because more natural and direct.

who will both ease Him of His adversaries, and correct with judgment the children who neglect His words. Let Paul be forgotten; there is One to be remembered who is mighty, not *toward* them only, but *in* them also, and who makes manifest His power instrumentally, according to the good pleasure of His will. His might toward them was attested, first, by their being in the faith at all; and, secondly, as they should have known, by the effect wrought on them by Paul's former letter. If, as he acknowledged, they abounded in the Spirit's gifts, to whose power was that to be ascribed? And by what energy had the moral change been brought about, which had changed their false exaltation to a godly sorrow, if not by the present power of the Lord? Such spiritual consciousness as they possessed must needs attest the truth of what he says. His words clearly imply these considerations; while in their direct force they convey a repeated warning of the punishment impending over those who might prove refractory when he arrived, by recalling to their minds the still recent proof of the Lord's presence, and judicial energy, as exemplified in the case of the offender whom they had been compelled to deal with, in obedience to His word. Had they duly appreciated their own act, such senseless questionings of Paul's apostolic authority could never have been entertained.

Verse 4. "For truly<sup>8</sup> He was crucified through weakness, but lives by the power of God; for truly [so also] we are weak with Him, but shall live with

<sup>8</sup> *καὶ γάρ*. In this verse the word "εἰ" is omitted in the best MSS., which also, with the English margin, read "with" instead of "in."



Him by the power of God toward you.” We have here a fresh and very striking example of Paul’s<sup>9</sup> divinely-taught habit of turning incidental circumstances to an occasion of reiterating and magnifying the fundamental doctrines of the gospel. The moral connection of this verse with what goes before appears to be this: weakness and folly had been largely exemplified in this richly-gifted, but unstable, church; the various forms of evil, which have been noticed in the course of these epistles, being symptomatic of their spiritual feebleness. But for God’s assembly to be thus was a reflection on the Name by which they were called; for Christ is both the wisdom and the power of God. Their low condition was the effect, therefore, of their not abiding steadfastly in Him. For with Him the time of weakness was past; He was *crucified* in weakness, and that for them—but He lives by the power of God. Raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, He is found to be the self-same living One who once lay down in real death beneath the burden of our sins.

The terms here used by the apostle<sup>1</sup> are correlative, and express the means or occasion of Christ’s death and life respectively. Having emptied Himself, to take upon Him the form of a servant, the Son of God delivered Himself, in the perfection of that “weakness” which belonged to the nature and character which He brought with Him into the world, when found in fashion as a *man*, to the absolute dis-

<sup>9</sup> A habit not surely peculiar to Paul, but distinctly noticeable in all true apostolic teaching; and nowhere more conspicuous than the epistles of the apostle of the circumcision.

<sup>1</sup> ἐξ ἀσθενείας, and ἐκ δυνάμεως Θεοῦ.

posals of the Father's will. And the sum of that will was, firstly, His obedience and death, and, secondly, His manifesting, as the Resurrection and the Life, all power both in heaven and on earth.<sup>2</sup> Because of His "weakness," the Son of man became, at the appointed hour, both the victim of human and Satanic malice, and the offered Lamb of God. He was put to death in the flesh, in fulfilment of the recorded counsels of His grace. But His decease having been accomplished, the Abolisher of death revives and is alive for ever, according to the power of God. In this latter phrase we have both an assertion of the natural divinity of His person, and also of the sameness and endless continuity of His manhood, whether before or after death. Human weakness made Him capable of death, but the mighty God<sup>3</sup> could not be holden of the cords of death. Moreover, as the "Just One," and "approved of God," He received both life and glory, as the fit and necessary recompence of His obedience unto death; and in that sense He lives, and will for ever live, by the power of Him whom He does not cease to call His *God*.<sup>4</sup> The same hand which upheld and guided Jesus, as He walked in meekness on the earth, maintains Him also on the throne of glory in the heavens. And, as we have often had occasion to remark in the progress of these notes, it is the latter aspect of the resurrection and its consequences that we most frequently meet with in the writings of St. Paul.

The death and life of Christ are equally for our sakes. As, therefore, it was, and is, personally with the Master, so also is it, by the faith of Him, with

<sup>2</sup> John vi. 39, 40.

<sup>3</sup> Isa. ix. 6.

<sup>4</sup> John xx. 17.

His honoured and deeply-taught disciple. "For we, too, are weak with Him," &c. Paul's weakness and his strength are alike by the grace of Him who loved him, and gave Himself for him to the death. Arming himself, therefore, with like mind, he apprehends both death and life with Christ.<sup>5</sup> Crucified with Him, we shall also live with Him. Such is his confidence. But the doctrine is enforced here, not so much with reference to its eventual realization in glory, as in its immediate bearing on the situation: "we shall live with him by the power of God *toward you*." He will show himself, as he has before said, to be in truth and power what he is in word. Self-emptying, and kept low, that he might prove experimentally the grace of Christ, he would be to themward, not only according to the truth of their common standing, as alike dead and risen with Christ, but effectively also, in the fulfilment of his ministerial trust, according to the power of God.

Verse 5. "Examine yourselves, if ye are in the faith," &c. Having thus completely answered for himself, and reasserted more emphatically than before his apostolic claims, he now speaks no longer as his own apologist, but calls on his judges to turn for a while their scrutiny upon themselves. They had searched and known him; let them now try and prove themselves, with reference to the faith which is their boast. Let them ask themselves who and what they really are, and how they became possessed of the discerning power which had enabled them to sit in judgment upon him. It was but just that they should do this; and if they did, would it not recall

<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter iv. 1.

to them the solemn but blessed conviction that Jesus Christ was in them, as He was in Paul? Had they lost their spiritual self-consciousness? Unless they had departed from the faith, and so become reprobate in the eye of Him who called them, they could not but be aware both that they were Christ's, and that they had received the knowledge of salvation chiefly through the ministry of Paul. Was it, then, because they had forgotten their own origin as Christians, that they were now at variance with the father that begot them? This home-driven appeal to their hearts and consciences was intended to anticipate and render unnecessary the outward exercise of that authority which he held himself in readiness to wield, if loving reproof still failed of its effect.

Such is the evident drift of the apostle's words, which have, however, too often been perverted by authoritative ignorance to a sense destructive of true Christian peace. What is here ministered by the Spirit as an admonition to believers in a censorious and self-complacent state, is too often placed as a barrier in the path of a newly-born and peace-seeking child of God. But to such, the same Spirit holds a widely different language. His questions and reasonings relate then to the ever-blessed subject of His testimony,<sup>6</sup> which He sets alluringly before them as the immediate object of their faith. To draw the contrite sinner off from self-investigation, and to fix his heart and mind exclusively on Jesus, is His one great aim. To one who had received Christ's gospel from the lips of Paul, and had since been nurtured by his teaching, no doubt of his ac-

<sup>6</sup> Rom viii. 31, *sq.*; v. 6-10.

ceptance and standing in the grace of God would be likely to arise; for all that he taught them centered in the demonstrated certainty of God's free love to usward in His Son. And it is in the remembrance of this that the Corinthian saints are here called on to compare their sentiments and manners with *themselves*. But to attempt to make the duty of self-examination a first condition of evangelic confidence, is to forget that our only true ground of confidence is Christ Himself. Our access with confidence is "by the faith of Him."<sup>7</sup> Most true indeed it is, that sincerity of heart is essential to a genuine possession of this confidence; without this, faith is but an idle and deceitful name. What is so important to be kept in mind is, that the end of all *right* self-knowledge is to cast the soul of the believer more unreservedly upon *the Lord*, as our only righteousness and strength. He that believeth has God's witness in himself; and these saints at Corinth, faulty and blame-worthy as their ways had been, had no need to shrink from the test proposed in the apostle's words.

Verse 6. "But I trust that ye shall know," &c. Be they, however, as they may, he has no second thought but Christ. By Him and for Him he lived, and would live still. And his trust is that they too should acknowledge, that both himself and those in whom he gloried, as his fellow-helpers to the kingdom of God, were truly and indeed what they professed to be. His present writing, if they read it with unclouded eyes, should be his witness in the sight of

<sup>7</sup> Eph. iii. 12.

God.<sup>8</sup> There is in this verse something of the same spirit which finds such strong and decisive utterance at the close of his epistle to the Galatians.<sup>9</sup> Theirs is he in patient love, and in his heart it is to live and die with them, but it must be only in Christ, and according to the truth and power of God. If others had changed, and Christ were held cheaply by some who once professed to glory only in His cross, it should at least be made evident both by word and deed, that what Paul only knew among them at the first he still would only know.<sup>1</sup>

Verse 7. "Now I pray to God that ye do no evil," &c. If in the foregoing verse a tinge of sarcastic severity may be perceived, he is now in another and more genial vein. His heart is enlarged toward them, and gives utterance to its longings to Godward on their behalf, though for their own sakes he had used sharp words towards themselves. His prayer is prompted by his fear and anxiety on their account. And here let us note the pregnant force of this short wish. Negative in its form, it really seems the measure of a saint's perfection as a bearer of the name of Christ. To be blameless and harmless in our obedience to the faith, is to be as sons of God;<sup>2</sup> to resemble Him who did no evil, and was personally holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. To be preserved from temptation and delivered from evil, are among the few things for which the Master taught His disciples especially to pray. Positive and active goodness will assuredly result also from such a frame of soul; but cessation from

<sup>8</sup> Chap. i. 13.

1 Cor. ii. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Gal. vi. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. ii. 15.

sin must ever precede the doing of its opposite. In unlearning evil we learn good, and in the act of denying ourselves, we do what is most pleasing to the Lord.

Two effects would follow from their walking well : they would be as Paul would have them in the sight of God, and their praise among the churches would be an attestation also of the ministry which had begotten and instructed them in Christ. His own honour was bound up with theirs, for they were the seal of his apostleship in the Lord. This, therefore, has the first place in his prayer. He desires not that he may shine, but they. Let them only be found in the way of that honour which proceeds from God, and he was contented to be still defamed of men. A reprobate he was not, in the sight of God, for to him to live was Christ ; but as one who had learnt his own value in the scales of truth, and knew experimentally, as a *disciple* as well as preacher of the cross, what “vanity” and “dust and ashes” mean in the Spirit’s estimate of sinful flesh, he could well afford to bear what name his enemies might feign for him until the day of restitution came.

Verse 8. “For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.” Words not of warning only, but of exceeding comfort also. Truth sits in Christ in its personal majesty, as the umpire of all our acts. It must judge both the teacher and the taught ; they need not therefore fear his words, but weigh them in their consciences. If contrary to what was elsewhere written, they were alike without power or authority. If their hearts told them that

Paul spoke the truth in Christ and did not lie, let them not tarry, but receive truth as a suppliant, rather than abide its advent as a judge. As to the apostle, his sorrow was his consolation also. In the truth he suffered, and by and with it he rejoiced. In Christ, the truth is both his life and end. To know its resistless power in his own experience was his soul's salvation; and to be allowed of God to help it onward, as a witness, is his joy. In it he must labour, for it held a constraining mastery over his whole nature as a child of light. Powerless against it, he was by the grace of God its mighty vindicator and assertor. As to his children in the faith at Corinth, their state had, latterly at least, done little honour to the truth; and this had been his grief. If, as he trusted, they returned with their whole heart to the Lord, his joy in them would again abound. Let the truth only be magnified in them, and he would count it no grievance to be still the offscouring of the world.

As this verse has not seldom been adopted as a motto by men, whose words have nevertheless been stout against the fundamental doctrines of the faith,<sup>2</sup> it is well to examine it a little more closely. He does not say we *may* do nothing, but we *can*, and power must be estimated by its ultimate results. To resist the Spirit and speak evil of the way of truth, are, alas! but too easy and too natural to man; nor is a Christian exempt from incurring the danger of the self-same guilt, if his mind is not kept in due subjection to the written word. From the bold scoffer who, without a blush, unveils his folly to every seeing

<sup>2</sup> Colenso is a late and notable example of this.



eye, to the mere "crotchetty" believer, who strives to mantle his crude ideas in the sacred garb of Christ, there is an ever-varying but consistent opposition of men's thoughts to those of God. And for a while the former seem to win the day. It was for Paul the aged to lament the large success of Alexander's<sup>4</sup> practisings against the truth, while the last days of John were spent in recording the lordly pretensions of unrighteousness within the church of God.<sup>5</sup> But as Christ, by dying, destroyed for His people him that had the power of death, so truth's injuries are the sure though delayed destruction of her adversaries. They record their own condemnation in the wounds which they inflict. And even as the teeming energies of nature soon repair the wrongs inflicted by the hands of man, and war's ravages do but attest the mightier force of peace, so will it appear in that soon-coming day, when, terrible as an army with banners, God's much vexed and dishonoured truth shall beam forth in the brightness of its full accomplishment, and her enemies be in Jehovah's presence as the fat of lambs.<sup>6</sup>

Verse 9. "But we are glad when we are weak," &c. Truly the mind that was in Christ Jesus was also in His servant, as he thus esteems these Corinthians better than himself. To be among them with a rod would be no joy to him, but to hear of their prosperity, and, if God so willed it, to find them, when allowed to see them, full of the vigour both of faith and love, would be his heart's delight. He could gladly in such case be weak, and officially

<sup>4</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 15.

<sup>5</sup> 3 John 10.

<sup>6</sup> Ps. xxxvii. 20; 2 Thess. i. 7, *sq.*

unfelt among them; the latent powers which belonged to his vocation being unremembered, when the necessity which alone could call them forth existed there no longer.

His language has, besides, a further and especial force, when we remember the relation in which he stood towards them, as their spiritual father. It is as if he would say, Childhood is weak and needs correction and reproof. Your state, as I have clearly shown you, has hitherto been such. Glad shall we be when, by a prosperous growth in Christ, ye shall have attained a manhood, which no longer needs our fostering care, but shall rather be a strength and consolation to our age. Meanwhile his wish is their *perfection*,<sup>7</sup> or an adjustment of their conduct to their faith. The single term here used by the apostle stands opposed to the dreary catalogue of mischiefs mentioned in the foregoing chapter.<sup>8</sup> "The perfecting of the saints" is the end of all true spiritual ministry,<sup>9</sup> and the declared purpose for which the grace of the ascended Christ has given gifts to men.

But there is a difference to be observed between the perfection here desired by the apostle, and that other perfection, of which some mention has been made already in the progress of these notes.<sup>1</sup> The latter, which belongs already to every believer, when considered representatively in his risen Head, is in its nature personally unattainable, until the final change presents those who are then "found in Christ" in the completed likeness of His glory. On the other hand, "a finished Christian" ought no more to be

<sup>7</sup> κατάρτισιν.

<sup>8</sup> Chap. xii. 20, 21.

<sup>9</sup> Eph. iv. 12.

<sup>1</sup> τελείωσις. *Notes on First Corinthians*, p. 46, note.

a mere ideal than “a finished gentleman,” or “an accomplished man of letters,” in the world, since the perfection here spoken of is a state resulting as the just effect of true self-culture in the fear of God. Paul tells us how he exercised himself habitually, to have a conscience void of offence, both toward God, and also toward men;<sup>2</sup> and his thorough furnishing as a man of God consisted, mainly, of his absolute subjection to the will of God. The progressive character of the perfection, which he longs for upon their account, may be seen by comparing their condition with that of the Philippian church. Marked deficiencies of spiritual excellence, which are complained of in the former, are supplied and commended in the latter. The apostle does not, when writing to them, desire their perfection in this sense, but rejoices over them because of their consistency of walk; while by his own example he incites them to a still closer conformity to Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Verse 10. “Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness,” &c. This verse repeats substantially, with a natural and impressive reiteration, what he had before said in chap. ii., when stating his reason for writing this second epistle. He had already spoken of some among them who were puffed up in the belief that he did not really mean to visit them, and who had consequently felt themselves secure, notwithstanding the acknowledged power of his letters. To such

<sup>2</sup> Acts xxiv. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Phil. iii. 12, *sq.* *κατάτρισις* expresses what a Christian ought to be, and may be, by the grace of God, if walking humbly in the faith. *Τελείωσις* looks beyond this, and leaves a distance still between Paul's zealous efforts and the goal of his desire.

now, and to all, he once more testifies his still unaltered purpose ; and that he may have joy, and not sorrow, at his coming, he sends this harbinger of faithful love. His power is for edification, not destruction. But that God's building may grow, the flesh which hinders it must be destroyed. If the Corinthians edified themselves, and one another, in the purifying spirit of self-judgment, his authority to rectify disorders would remain in grateful inaction. But if the occasion continued, the powers with which he was invested must have their fitting use, for they were not given of the Lord in vain.

Verse 11. "Finally, my brethren, farewell," &c. In this valedictory address he once more glances at the distinctive evils which had been the occasion of his letters, and in four hortative words describes perfectly both their condition and their need. They are recommended—1. "To set themselves right,"<sup>4</sup> giving proof of their obedience by an honest acceptance of his words. 2. They must not despond, on a review of their shortcomings, but "take comfort" in the changeless grace of God. 3. They should "be unanimous," seeing that they are one by their birth to God, through the word of His grace, and by their calling into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ. They had, therefore, or should have, a common object, both of worship and attainment. 4. They should "live in peace," as became those who were alive to God ; for to that they had been called of Him.<sup>5</sup> Now all these things depend for their achievement on the patient and unceasing exercise of faith and love. The God of love and peace, who knew them

<sup>4</sup> καταρτίζεσθε.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 15.

in His grace, would Himself acknowledge them and cheer them in their ways. He would be *with* them, and they should know the full blessing of that fellowship. Their comfort must, however, hang on their obedience. If they despised the word of God, He would be to them a rebuker of their folly, a corrupter of their blessings, and the judge and avenger of their sin. But hope is stronger in Paul's heart, on their behalf, than fear.

Verses 12, 13. "Greet one another with an holy kiss." This injunction, often but not always appended to his epistles, is added to each of those to the Corinthians. And does not the condition of this church enable us to perceive the fitness of this evidently designed repetition. *Friends* need no prompting to a demonstrative expression of their love. *Brothers*, in nature's order, cling instinctively to one another; and God's children are both brethren and friends, first, through the grace ineffable of the Saviour, who so calls them in His love,<sup>6</sup> and then of one another in His name. Now dissension is the very bane of love, and the apostle knew but too well that it had wrought already to a perilous extent at Corinth. But the Spirit was withstanding and prevailing against the flesh, and to help them to a mutual confirmation of their love he adds these words. The very difficulty of complying with love's forms,<sup>7</sup> where love is a stranger to the heart, is thus laid as a compulsory obligation upon all who name the name of Christ, that the reluctant observer of the

<sup>6</sup> John xv. 15, xx. 17; Heb. ii. 11, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Love varies with time and people in its outward demonstration, but it *has* signs, which are distinctively its own.

rule may make his own aversion his instructor, and be thus led to consider and repent. Meanwhile, if their affections were still suffering the chilling effects of these contentions, *all* who in other places bore that worthy Name saluted *them*.

Verse 14. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ," &c. There is an elaborate precision in this well-known formula of benediction, which claims our earnest attention. In each of its clauses it not only speaks pointedly to the hearts and consciences of the Corinthian saints, but commends itself directly to the church of God, in all its diversified manifestations, to the end of time. *God* is the essence and power of this benediction, in the threefold display of His nature and His love. In each and all of these He had been wronged at Corinth. Grace had been fearfully abused; love had been recompensed by quick-witted indifference, and dissension had supplanted the sweet and blessed fellowship of the Spirit. The cardinal doctrine of the faith had been called in question,<sup>8</sup> while legal sentiment had been going hand in hand with utterly licentious practice. Thus the Father had been defrauded of His honour, the Master of His fear, and the Holy Spirit, which abode in them as the unction of redemption, had been grieved.<sup>9</sup> But truth lives unmoved by contradiction; and though God may change His bearing to His children, He never will deny His name.<sup>1</sup>

As to the *order* of these words of blessing, "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" comes first, because it is the essential means and power of salvation,

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. xv.

<sup>9</sup> Malachi i. 6; Eph. iv. 30.

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iv. 16.

without which neither love nor fellowship could be enjoyed. Next in remembrance, and centred between the other two, "the love of God" finds place as that which both originates the grace thus manifested in His Son, and is the end also for which all counsel and action are ordained. Mention is last made of "the fellowship of the Holy Ghost" as that which pervades the living body of Christ, and is commensurate, in sympathetic efficacy, with the grace and love which are its reason and its strength.

May our hearts be ever open to receive this precious valediction in its full effect !

FINIS.