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NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

ON THE

EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS.

BY

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PREFACE.

THE Epistle to the Philippians is a part of Holy Scripture, of which it may be safely said, that it is more widely admired than discerningly appreciated by ordinary readers of God's word. The very lovely traits of Christian character which it presents, and the moving picture of both life and godliness which it offers to our view, are recognised, and even delighted in, by not a few who yet fail to receive into their own bosoms the main burden of the Spirit's teaching in this inestimable writing.

Rich, almost beyond comparison, in didactic power and expression as a testimony to the personal grace and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, this Epistle is, in its general cast and tenor, a congratulatory exhortation, mixed with tender and solemn warning, rather than a methodical statement of doctrine. It is a manual of salvation addressed to those who, as true partakers of the grace of God, are running well and hopefully the race of life. The Saviour is set before the saved as their example, yet in such terms

as to kill all emulation but that which is rooted in a faith which lives only on Him who gave Himself for our sins.

Salvation, both retrospective and prospective, is the subject of Paul's letter to his dearly-loved brethren in the faith, and the means of its attainment on the part of those who, through grace, believed and had openly confessed the Saviour's name, are set forth, not only in the persuasive and encouraging tones of one who watched for their souls as having an account to give, but with an especial vividness also in the recital which it contains of the Apostle's own steadfast but unfinished efforts to achieve that aim.

How a forgiven sinner, who by virtue of his calling is already a *saint*, may become also, in due time, a Christian, or a final winner of Christ, is shown us with a searching yet alluring distinctness. With equal plainness of speech we are warned of the fatal issue of that groundless but self-flattering hope which rests on the airy foundation of mere doctrinal knowledge, and would make the grace of God in Christ crucified the servant of men's natural wills.

My desire, in endeavouring to put forth a faithful exposition of this Epistle, is to furnish an antidote to the very prevalent will-worship and low-toned but self-complacent evangelical profession of these busy

and difficult times. I would seek to abash self-confidence, and to encourage true contrition, by holding before the view of those who read, as closely and steadily as the grace of God may enable me, a picture of genuine Christianity, in contrast to that which too often assumes with an unblushing thoughtlessness the form, while ignorant of the power, of godliness.

The class of readers chiefly contemplated in the preparation of these Notes is the same as that to which Paul's Epistle was originally addressed. My words are for 'the saints in Christ Jesus;' for those, wherever found, who have through grace obeyed the call which by the commandment of the everlasting God is now sounded by the Gospel in the ears of all who will attend. I have had also ever present to my mind that small but sincere company of true seekers after God, whose search has been mainly baffled hitherto by the spectacle of self-contradiction and spiritual disorder which Christendom on every side presents. No comfortable sectary will read these Notes with pleasure; but my hope is that no weary soul, whose ear is open to the words of God, will fail to find in them some present alleviation of its pain, and, more than this, some lasting spiritual good.

Would that my mental conception of true godli-

ness were matched by a corresponding practical conformity to Christ! If, however, I have written to any purpose, those who read will have something of higher interest to engage their thoughts than inquiries as to who and what he is whose pen is as a voice to call them closer to the Lord.

London,* , 1879.

* The precise date was never filled in by the author, who fell asleep in Jesus, after a brief illness, on the 3d February, 1879, in the sixty-fourth year of his age. As the ripest and richest counsel and testimony which the lamented servant and soldier of Jesus Christ had, through great grace, prepared for the instruction of the Church, this work is now sent forth by his friends in the confident hope that the Holy Ghost may use it largely to the glory of God and the edification of His blood-bought flock.

December, 1879.

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS
ON THE
EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS.

CHAPTER I.

VERSE 1. 'Paul and Timotheus,' &c. This Epistle, like all others of the same inspired authorship, is addressed to a distinct class of persons, who, while reckoned outwardly among the inhabitants of the place in which they lived, are, in name and calling, regarded by the Spirit of truth as no longer forming a part of the generation out of which they had been called, and as separate, by virtue of their new birth to God through the power of His word, from their natural habits and associations as children of Adam and inhabitants of earth. The inspired men who address them glory in the title of 'slaves of Jesus Christ,' who in His name and for His sake make their communications to them as to 'the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi.'

This distinctive title of saintship, which is common to all true believers, marks off emphatically its possessors from the world in which they are. For a 'saint' is a holy person, separate to God. But the

world is not holy, nor are men naturally separate to God, but rather separate, alas, from God, so that by a new birth only can they either see or enter into the kingdom of God. Nor are any by their natural birth or choice 'in Jesus Christ,' since that description belongs to those only who have believed through grace, and learnt, as confessors of Christ crucified, to lay themselves and their expectations, as heirs of the first Adam, in the dust of death; naming now the name of Christ as the sole reason of their hope to Godward, and rejoicing in Him as the tasted fountain of the inward peace which they enjoy. A saint is, in a word, a man not raised by his personal qualities above his fellows, but one who, humbly confessing in the sight of God, and affirming boldly before men, the nullity of *every* natural claim to either life or honour, boasts only in Christ Jesus, and cares only to know *Him*.

Now Christ Jesus, the sanctifying object of His people's faith, is no longer upon earth, but is passed into the heavens as the Forerunner of those who are thus greeted by the Spirit as 'in Him.' Their calling, therefore, and their interests are no longer of the earth, on which they remain only as God's witnesses, to testify of Him who for their sakes has returned from earth to heaven,¹ and are as pilgrims and strangers—without place or name among the nations—in the constant and unwearied hope of their promised bodily translation to be 'ever with the Lord.'²

¹ John xiv. 2, 3; xvi. 7.

² 1 Thess. i. 10; iv. 16, 17.

It is necessary to draw attention to these facts, because, like other truths of Scripture not less plain and obvious to all who read God's sayings in His light, they are for the most part overlooked entirely in modern estimates of things Christian. Divine teaching in its clear and solemn distinctness has possession only of the ears of God's elect, nor even in their case is it always unalloyed by the vanity of human thought; while the world, no longer repudiating the *name* of Jesus, though in heart still the enemy of God, gives more or less attention to the teachers of its own providing,³ in whose lips the sound words of true knowledge are not found, and whose gospel is not that which pleases God.⁴

God's Gospel is to the true believer His *power* unto salvation, separating to Himself, and thus *sanctifying* those whose hearts respond to the quickening revelation of His truth.⁵ 'The Christian religion,' as men speak, is, on the other hand, a discretionary acknowledgment of the name of Christ, presenting to our contemplation a wide and much diversified moral area, in which truth and falsehood, faith and unbelief, sincerity and guile, lie side by side. It is a thing both social and political; of mighty moral influence among men, but by no necessity *divine*. It is of and for men as denizens of earth, and concerns itself with heaven (which is the home and centre of the true believer's every

³ 1 John iv. 5; 2 Cor. ii. 17.

⁴ 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4; Gal. i. 10.

⁵ Jas. i. 18.

thought and wish, because his *life* is there) remotely only, and as a vague though necessary hope. It is pleased with itself, and foolishly expects God to be pleased with it. For it sports with its own deceivings, while its words are stout against the Lord as it utters thoughts and practises observances which prove that earth has clean supplanted heaven in its heart. For it is a lover of itself, a lover of money, a lover of pleasures more than of God, yet an outward honourer of God, and namer of the name of Christ.⁶ Its activities and interests are the fruit mainly of humanitarian sentiment and utilitarian foresight rather than of a true zeal of God. The real Church of God's elect and Christ's redeemed exists, indeed, in Christendom, but cannot be identified with it, except through an utter falsifying of God's words.

The name of Jesus—mighty once to sever those who uttered it in faith alike from Jewish blindness and from Gentile ignorance and scorn, and to hold together in the bond of perfectness the naturally heterogeneous aggregate of those who knew the grace of God in truth—has lost none of its vital power in the hearts of God's elect, but has long ceased to separate visibly the living from the dead. Hence the mingled emotions of joy and sorrow which fill the heart of every genuine disciple, as his mind opens to a right understanding of the Scriptures, and a just apprehension of his own calling as a child of God: a joy not to be told in words at his percep-

tion of the grace and glory of the Lord in whom he trusts, but shaded, while the day of evil lasts, by a grief no less intense at the spectacle of confusion and evil-working of all kinds which meets the eye and affects the heart of any who seek in modern Christianity a living witness of God, and a distinctly legible epistle of Christ.

What sanctifies God's people is His *truth*, and that truth has its perfect utterance only in His *word*. Now unchangeableness is a standing property of the word of God, since it reveals Him and His purposes, with whom is neither variableness nor shadow of turning, while in its simplicity and directness of meaning it abides, for the opened eye of the believer, as a clear shining light, amidst the delusive and ever-shifting haze of merely human thought. There is not a particle of ambiguity in the language of the Lord, or His Apostles, when speaking of the Church in its relation to the world; and the relation thus determined must remain (for a mind subject to divine teaching) *unaltered*, so long as the Church itself remains on earth. For Christ's disciples are not, nor ever will be, 'of the world;' nor is there, as some dream, any vital power of assimilation within the Church itself, whereby in due time the world is to become identified with that which once it hated and oppressed. The kingdoms of this world are indeed to become at the appointed time the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ,⁷ but that change

⁷ Rev. xi. 15.

will be effected by other means than those which are operating in the present age. To let that abide in us which we have heard from the beginning is the moral condition of our own abiding in the Son and in the Father. To keep God's faithful and true sayings, and until Christ comes to hold fast what we have received, is the mark of true discipleship to the end of our measured days on earth.⁸

It is in vain, therefore, that attempts are made to bring Scripture into harmony with 'modern thought.' For men's thoughts are not the thoughts of God, although it is a common and highly popular thesis of one class of the many modern corrupters of God's word that natural science—which, if referred to its origin, is seen to be the permitted growth of the original sin⁹—is identical in its source and character with the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. But if God be true, these men assuredly are liars; and if their error be of the heart as well as brain, they cannot have a place where truth alone is crowned.¹

⁸ 1 John ii. 24; Rev. ii. 25.

⁹ Men who glory in intellectual power and independent religious aspiration forget that our moral consciousness, which is the parent of all mental activity, is itself a judicial effect of sin. 'They knew that they were naked,' &c. It is for this reason that the mind and thoughts of fallen nature are so sternly disallowed in Scripture by the Spirit of truth. Intellectual *pleasures* rank in His category with carnal sins. Intellectual *force* is derided, as found incapable of grasping, or even perceiving, divine truth. It is to babes that the Father is revealed.

¹ One of the sweetest consolations of Christ to the perplexed and saddened spirits of those who ponder with an understanding heart the religious phenomena of the last times is a conviction, such as Holy Scripture sanctions, of the compatibility of wide—

Discursive reflections of this kind cannot be palatable to a hasty or indifferent skimmer of religious books. They will, on the other hand, I venture to think, be endured patiently, if not at first cordially welcomed, by the only class of readers that I care to please; by those, namely, whose hearts are honestly desiring the true knowledge of God as He reveals Himself in the sure testimonies of His Spirit. Let us now return to the Apostle's words:

‘With the bishops and deacons.’ Although this is the only instance in which these, or any other official persons, are expressly included in an apostolic greeting to a Church or assembly of God, it is abundantly evident that both one and the other were from the first regarded as natural, not to say indispensable, adjuncts to such assemblies. And here, again, as we fall upon two scriptural designations, it is incumbent on us to ascertain, if ascertainable, the proper force of each, and to take care that this meaning, once discovered, be persistently retained in our minds, to the absolute rejection of all later but unwarranted usage of the same terms in an altered sense.

almost the very widest—mental aberrations from sound doctrine upon other points with a believing discernment and true love of the person of the Son of God. So that often we may regard hopefully, as really alive to God, persons whom we dare not own as *Christians*, by reason of their contradiction of the Lord. It is a latter-day warning that ‘the Lord knoweth them that are His.’ Meanwhile, to hold fast what we have received from Him is the true honour of all who hearken to His Spirit's voice; and for such there will be due reward when God's kingdom and glory are revealed.

Now a 'bishop'² is an *overseer*, and a 'deacon'³ is a minister who *serves*. No question can be justly raised as to either of these meanings, both of which are exemplified originally and supremely in the living Truth Himself. For the Lord is the Bishop also, or Overseer, of the flock which, as the true Shepherd, He has purchased for Himself, and which He both guards and guides through the effectual ministry of the Spirit in the constancy and patient grace of His unalterable love. In a secondary sense, all *elders* in God's Church or assembly in any locality are also *ipso facto* overseers or bishops;⁴ the first description indicating their needful maturity of age, the latter declaring their official charge. But we may not infer from this that all aged disciples are 'elders' also. For the latter name is a *title* as well as a description, and is attached by the Spirit to those Christian men of age only in whom a fitness for oversight is also found.

As respects the official initiation of God's bishops or elders, they may have sought with a godly zeal for Christ and His Church this place of solemn and arduous, yet for His sake welcome, trust; or, themselves reluctant, may have had the charge imposed upon them absolutely by the Holy Ghost.⁵ Of the nature and specific duties of this calling a sufficiently

² ἐπίσκοπος.

³ διάκονος.

⁴ A comparison of Acts xx. 17 with ver. 28 of the same chapter is sufficient to establish this identity. Men have, alas, sundered what God views as one; but His ordinances have a lasting validity for those whose ears are open to His words.

⁵ 1 Tim. iii. 1; Acts xx. 28.

clear conception may be formed by an attentive student of Scripture, but they can only receive a general notice here. With or without an accompanying gift to teach truth publicly,⁶ their calling was to 'feed the flock of God,' or care for it as a shepherd tends his sheep. Episcopacy was, and is, if truly owned of God, a ministry of *love*,⁷ but its burden might be borne by men unfaithful to their trust. Account therefore must be given of this charge, and it will fare ill with the negligent or self-seeking elder in that day, while a crown of imperishable glory is ready in the hands of the Chief Shepherd for the heads of such as have in their day of opportunity shown forth His mind and met the wishes of His heart by their patient imitation of His ways.⁸

It remains only to remark that God's bishops *never stood alone*. The charge is one, but exercised in all known scriptural instances by a plurality of persons. There were bishops watching over the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi; and elders, who, as we have seen, are the same persons under another name, were appointed by apostolic direction 'in every city' in which a Church or assembly of God was found.⁹

With bishops there are always found associated in a lesser grade God's 'deacons,' or official servants of His Church. Of these it may be said generally, that while the office was inferior in dignity to that

⁶ 1 Tim. v. 17.

⁷ John xxi. 15-17.

⁸ 1 Pet. v. 1-4.

⁹ Acts xiv. 23; Tit. i. 5.

of bishop or elder, and in its origin related to temporal rather than eternal things, its efficient discharge demanded moral qualities of the highest order, and afforded wide scope for the manifestation, in those who used the office of a deacon well, of the true features of the mind of Christ. To estimate it duly we must call to mind the express declarations of the Lord, first with respect to His own self-chosen place among His saints;¹ and secondly, when pointing out to His followers the true path of honour in this world.² None can be a true deacon or servant of the Church, which is Christ's body, who has not first given himself wholly to the Lord.

It would occupy too large a space to treat historically, even within the limits of Scripture, the subject of official service in the Church of God; to speak of Stephen and his associates; to weigh with care the words of Paul to Timothy and Titus with reference to both these divinely-appointed institutions.³ What is of more importance is to notice that beyond these

¹ Lev. xii. 27: 'I am among you as *he that serveth*'—ὡς ὁ διακονῶν.

² John xii. 26: 'If any man *serve Me*,' &c.—ἐάν ἐμοὶ διακονῇ τις κ.λ.

³ Compare with the apostolic declarations on this subject the voice of the Christian liberalism of to-day, as expressed in a very recent article, 'On Church and State,' in a leading quarterly review. After stating that 'the municipal organisations of the Italian community had, in the apostolic age, not been formed,' the writer continues: 'The Episcopate was not yet born. The Presbyterate was a mere provisional arrangement borrowed from the Jewish synagogue. The Diaconate was a temporary expedient to fill a special material need' (*Ed. Rev.*, July 1877). Thus foolishly and presumptuously does the natural mind proclaim its ignorance of those things of God with which it rashly undertakes to deal.

local and, as we have seen, *plural*, official charges, 'ecclesiastical polity' is to the Spirit of God *a thing unknown*. The idea of an aggregation of Churches, owning a common subjection to a supreme temporal head, finds no countenance from anything written in the word of God. Nor can anything resembling a 'National Church' be discovered either in the descriptive or prophetic testimonies of the Spirit which relate to the existing dispensation. *Establishment*, in an ecclesiastical sense, is not only a thing without a name in Scripture, but the idea which it expresses is altogether foreign to the true mind of the Spirit. For God's Church or assembly is composed of those who have no other place on earth than that of witnesses to things unseen, whose interests and hopes are solely from above, and whose attitude while sojourning on earth is that of expectant heirs of a salvation ready to be revealed. It has indeed a unity and completeness of its own, which depends for its continuance on no methodical organisation of human policy, but on the immediate operation of God's living Spirit, while its constituent local branches are subordinated to no other head than Christ Himself. Each several Church, or assembly of God's saints, by walking in the truth and observing the apostolical traditions,⁴ attested, so long as divine government remained undisturbed in such assemblies by the opposing will of man, the common unity of all. Each 'saint in Christ Jesus' was, whether present or absent, a member of

⁴ 1 Cor. xi. 2; 2 Thess. ii. 15.

each and every true assembly of God, because all were equally members of Christ's mystic body. While, therefore, their immediate associates claimed naturally, and received, their closest practical sympathy, their hearts' affections could be bounded only by the limits of electing grace.⁵

With respect also to office and its forms, that both bishops and deacons are regarded in Scripture as inseparable adjuncts to every Christian Church or assembly is abundantly evident. And God, who willed the creation of these orders, and by His Apostles and their delegates first set them in their place, departs not from His own institutions. There will be found, therefore, in any company of true believers who seek, as fugitives from Babylon, the light and shelter of His presence, divine provision both for nurture in sound doctrine and for godly order. But inasmuch as no such assembly really constitutes 'the Church of God' in any place (most of Christ's living members being scattered among a multitude of discrepant ecclesiastical organisations of a purely human institution), the shepherd who feeds them will be known among these poor of the flock in undiminished love and faithfulness indeed,

⁵ The non-dependence on central establishment or local organisation of the work of true ecclesiastical edification is strikingly exemplified in the first Epistle of Peter. 'Strangers of the dispersion' is the name given to those who by grace were, in the various regions named, coming severally to the Lord, as living stones, to be built up a spiritual house and an holy priesthood. Yet, whenever these were found united in any number, there were found among them elders or bishops, who are officially addressed (1 Pet. i. 1; ii. 4, 5; v. 12).

but without external signs.⁶ For names and official titles have long been separated in the nominal Church, or Babylon, from the grace and power of which they were once the genuine external form, and even when borne by persons duly qualified of God they are commonly dishonoured still by their association with some distinctive or sectarian badge.

Both bishops, then, and deacons are, as regards their *service*, coeval with the Church itself; and since all true service has the Lord for its supreme object, and His people only for His sake,⁷ there will not cease to be some, until the Chief Shepherd shall Himself appear, who for the love of Him will care still for His flock however scattered,⁸ nor will the same love fail to prove itself also in a true diaconal ministration. But they who thus act for God will be themselves discerned and honoured in their place and function by as many as are spiritual.⁹

I shall not pause here to contrast the mechanism of modern ecclesiastical polity in its multiform variety with the original ordinance of God, remarking only that what men have invented and established, and which obtains a measure of honourable recog-

⁶ Compare Zech. xi. 11.

⁷ 2 Cor. iv. 5.

⁸ 1 Pet. v. 1-4; John xxi. 15, 17.

⁹ In thus writing I give utterance, as one who has received mercy, to my personal convictions before God. Difference of judgment will probably exist always among godly men as to the continued validity of 'orders' in a broken and divided Church. All that I assert is the sufficiency of God's original provision, and its essential continuance, in His own grace and power, to the end (Matt. xxviii. 20; Haggai ii. 4, 5).

nition in the world, is of light esteem in His sight whose eyes are as a flame. The living stones of God's building are, indeed, hidden under one or other of the almost numberless 'denominations' of the time; but among all these there exists not one to which would properly, and therefore *exclusively*, belong a like address to that which heads this Epistle to them at Philippi, whom God owned, in the unity of their common faith, as *His*.

What steps should be taken by any whose eyes are opened to compare the precious with the vile, to distinguish divine realities from false and carnal assumptions, and to pass from plausible appearances to vital and undying truth, can be learnt effectually from Him only who is the gracious refuge of such as own Him in His holiness as the searcher of assemblies and the judge of His own house. *Truth* is in all cases the one thing to be sought after and obeyed. Systems and institutions, which are not themselves of God, must not receive a false honour for the sake of those in them who are really His; nor, on the other hand, are godly persons to be rashly judged for upholding what *to them* may seem to have the sanction of His name.

Whoever walks with God in such a day as this will be fully conscious that it is a day of difficulty and abounding spiritual danger. All who desire to walk godly in Christ Jesus will have such sorrow of spirit as the prophets had, with a yet more abundant measure of their joy. They must be

content to bear reproach and obloquy, not only from their natural adversaries, but from many also whom they know to be the Lord's, and love therefore for His sake. While success may seem to wait upon the organised efforts of those who make, not the doing of the will of God, but 'the regeneration of society,' their object, they will be still conscious of working no deliverance in the earth. Yet if it can be said of such in the soon-coming day of reckoning that they have held fast what they once received from God, they will not be without a crown.

And now having cleared our way by an honest comparison of earlier and later things, and remembering well that what God approved and blessed at the beginning He will approve and bless also at the end; remembering also that all deviations from plain apostolic teaching—however charmingly misrepresented they may be as the expansive and alterative energy of the Spirit of Christ in the Church—are in reality *departures from the faith once delivered to the saints*, and proceed therefore not from the Spirit of truth, but from the spirit of error,—let us note carefully in what manner God's inspired scribe addresses those whom he perceives to be in a true and acceptable position before God. For it is to such only that he writes.

Verse 2. 'Grace unto you and peace,' &c. Such is the common greeting of the Spirit to all who stand in like relation to the Father and the Son; to all, in other words, to whom it has been given to respond

by a genuine confession of Christ's name to the call, which in the Gospel of the grace of God is addressed unreservedly to all mankind.

Verses 3, 4. 'I thank my God,' &c. There is a heartiness in the Apostle's language throughout this deeply interesting letter, which is felt from the outset by the attentive Christian reader. For Paul's remembrance of the saints at Philippi wore still unfadingly the bright colouring of that first love which so manifestly proved itself at the beginning of the Lord's work in that city, and his personal reminiscences had been confirmed by favourable mention made to him from time to time by others of their spiritual well-being. As often therefore as he thought of them, and bare them and their known condition, in the spirit of loving intercession, to the throne of grace, his first and ruling impulse was that of pure thanksgiving for what God had wrought. He prayed also, and that earnestly; for incessant prayer to God is the chief moral condition of all true spiritual progress; but the requests which he addressed to God, reflecting as these did what he felt to be the genuine desires of those on whose behalf he prayed, were such as to cause not anxiety, but joy only, to his soul. For that his spirit was in full accord with theirs at the time of his inditing this Epistle he felt thoroughly assured. The special cause, however, of this joy is declared more explicitly in what follows.

Verse 5. 'For your fellowship in the Gospel from

the first day until now.' The feeling here expressed is in perfect contrast to that under the pressure of which he had a few years earlier addressed 'the Churches of Galatia.'¹ The sorrowing wonder with which he viewed the incipient apostasy of the latter from the grace of Christ, and the anxious travail with which he laboured for their restoration, are richly compensated by the evident tokens of a continuous growth in grace on the part of these single-eyed believers in the living God. They had received the word with understanding and were fruitful;² and with a firm and steadfast love they clave, in the fellowship of the Spirit, to him who had begotten them in Christ by the Gospel. And it was towards that Gospel³ that their new-born sympathies as believers were distinctly turned. Unlike the 'foolish Galatians,' who, after having tasted the good word of God, were opening their ears to other and strange doctrines, they gave their whole souls to that which they had proved to be God's power unto salvation in their own case, and were acting as men who felt that in receiving Christ's Gospel they had had set before them a hope which shamed all other wishes and ambitions, and that in the holding fast of that Gospel, and its communication both by word and by example to their fellow-men, lay from thenceforth the main business of their lives.

Verse 6. 'Being confident of this very thing,' &c.

¹ *Notes on the Epistle to the Galatians*, chap. i.

² Matt. xiii. 23.

³ κοινωνία εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον.

The race of faith and patience which is set before God's saints has a common beginning, but a various end. By the grace of their calling they enter upon equal terms the way of life, and life eternal is the assured hope of all who are in Christ by faith. 'For God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.'⁴ But according to their use of the opportunity which grace bestows will be the awarded place of the living in the coming day. Steadfast running, lawful striving, and uncomplaining patience will abide in lasting and honoured contrast to their contraries, as these opposite moral qualities have been manifested in the personal history of those who name the name of Christ. Wide indeed is the difference which even here below may be discovered among those who are partakers of like precious faith; but it is only at the judgment-seat of Christ that the counsels of the heart will be fully known, and the final estimate of character pronounced.

The Philippian saints and their brethren in Galatia ran equally well at the outset of their course,⁵ but steadfast continuance was found only in the former. In the latter case, we see how natural impetuosity and fickleness of character gave opportunity to the adversary to impede the work of God. But was it to a superior cast of natural disposition that Paul ascribed the admirable constancy of these Philippian saints? They were, it is true, as oppo-

⁴ 1 Thess. v. 9.

⁵ Gal. v. 7.

site in temperament to those of Galatia as the Saxon and the Celt are still in our times; but what the Spirit calls 'a good work' owes nothing for its goodness to what is natural. Its *form* is natural, its *quality* divine. In marked and measured words therefore the Apostle here ascribes to *God* the healthful condition of these saints of His. A good work was begun in them, which the Workman would not leave, and would know how to finish in due time. It was begun while as yet there was in them no subjective agency available for such a work, while they lay, as others, spiritually *dead* in trespasses and sins. In the following chapter we shall see by what manner of internal and conscious agency the divine beginner of the work conducts it to its close.⁶ At present he records only his glad confidence on their behalf in the unchangeable character of God, and reminds them of the day of Jesus Christ as the distinct goal of their desire. If God wrought in them by His Gospel it was unto salvation, and that salvation would be attained unto *perfection*, for them and for all other saints, only in the day of Jesus Christ.⁷

Verse 7. 'Even as it is meet,' &c. It is evident from the tenor of this verse, and indeed of the whole Epistle, that cheering communications had been received by the Apostle from the Philippian saints, and that probably through more than one channel, though it is to the arrival of Epaphroditus, and to the living testimony of his lips in answer to

⁶ *Infra*, chap. ii. 12, 13.

⁷ Heb. xi. 40.

Paul's questionings, that the happy assurance to which he here gives utterance is mainly due. The conviction that they had him in their heart^s in a thoroughly sympathetic fellowship, both in his bonds and in that which had occasioned them, made an increase of love on his part but a just return. With longing interest they were awaiting at Philippi such intelligence as is conveyed to them in this Epistle; and because he knew this, and referred both his own endurance and their cordial sympathy to the self-same grace of God, his happy confidence in their steadfastness is associated with an unreserved outflowing of the strongest personal affection.

Verse 8. 'For God is my record how greatly I long after you all,' &c. Love in the Spirit may well blend with pure natural affection, since that also is of God; but it shines brightest, and puts forth its strongest energy, when unsupported by the latter. To Paul, as a man in the flesh, these Philippians were nothing, or, as uncircumcised Gentiles, were objects rather of aversion than of love. But 'in the bowels of Jesus Christ' they are become his dearest joy, and God, who knows men's hearts, and is Himself the true source of these tender and holy emotions, is here cited by His servant in solemn attestation of the sincerity of his words.

Verse 9. 'And this I pray,' &c. Of his habitual

^s Unanimity as to the true construction of this verse is, perhaps, hardly to be hoped for. My own judgment is in favour of the marginal reading.

supplication on their behalf he has already spoken ;⁹ we have specified, in the verse now before us, some of the objects of his prayer. That the true love of God was in them was already his joyful assurance, but his earnest desire was its continued increase and development. For love, which is the very life of God in all His saints, is, as he has elsewhere taught us so impressively,¹ a force of multiform operation and effect. Moreover it needs, for the manifestation of its intrinsic energy, both nurture and culture ; and in this Epistle more distinctly, perhaps, than in any other we are called to witness love under its appropriate training and its varied expression in the family of God. And if we weigh attentively Paul's words, we can hardly fail to notice that in shaping his petitions on behalf of his Philippian brethren he had a wise regard not only to their state of spiritual growth, but also to their natural temperament and character. For nature is the mould by which the grace of God is practically shaped, and it is characteristic of the Spirit's teaching to recognise and deal with the distinctive natural features of those whom He is forming to the true Image of God. Thus intellectual quickness in a Corinthian believer has both its acknowledgment and its warning in the Apostle's words addressed to God's people in that city ; and as the impulsive fickleness of Gallo-Grecian character is met, as we have seen, by its appropriate rebuke, so these honest but slow-minded saints at Philippi are

⁹ Ante, ver. 4.

¹ 1 Cor. xiii.

incited to add knowledge to their faith, and to cultivate and keep in wakeful exercise that perceptive faculty which is meant to be a safeguard to the child of God amid the snares and illusions of an evil day.

Of the two terms here used by the Apostle, the first, 'knowledge,'² has the larger sense—embracing, as it does, the whole range of spiritual discovery and acknowledgment: being that unto which, according to the same witness, the new man which all true believers have put on is renewed.³ The other,⁴ because it operates in various directions, is accompanied by the comprehensive adjunct 'all' or 'every.' It signifies that faculty of sensitive perception by a just exercise of which the true knowledge which God's children are exhorted to pursue may be attained, and the fraudulent counterfeits of the father of lies effectually shunned. It is a versatile faculty, which, in a state of healthy exercise, turns instinctively against all forms of error, and resents all deviations from the truth. It answers, in fact, in the spiritual man, to that consummate 'taste' which in a highly cultivated natural man is at once a principal ornament and a defence.

To be quick of understanding in the fear of the Lord is a leading feature of the true 'mind of Christ,'⁵

² ἐπίγνωσις. ³ ἀνακαινούμενον εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν (Col. iii. 10).

⁴ αἰσθησις. This word occurs here only in the New Testament. In Heb. vi. 14 we have also a single example of the kindred term αἰσθητήριον, there rendered 'sense;' and once only is the verb αἰσθάνομαι employed—in Luke ix. 45. Perceptive power or discernment is the central idea in each case.

⁵ Isa. xi. 3. 'Quick-scented' (marg.).

and it is for the attainment of this on the part of his much-beloved brethren in the Lord that Paul here gives himself to prayer on their behalf.

Verse 10. 'That ye may approve things that are excellent,' &c.⁶ The love which is of God is neither blind nor indolent. It proves itself by an active power of discrimination, discerning and eschewing what is evil, and rejoicing only in the truth. The world through which God's children are being led toward their rest is full of false allurements and deceptive sights and sounds. The seducer and destroyer walk on every side, but without power to harm them that walk by faith and not by sight. For even babes in Christ have an unction from the Holy One which qualifies them to distinguish good from evil.⁷ The true sheep hear the Shepherd's voice, and cannot perish because kept of Him; but vigilance is needed, lest through heedlessness or sloth the sleight of the deceiver should make spoil of those who walk safely only in the light of truth. The believer is exhorted, therefore, to an habitual proof of what he sees and hears, and the effect of this godly exercise will be the formation of a character in harmony with the true hope of his calling. He will be 'sincere'⁸ and with-

⁶ It matters little which version we adopt of *εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τὰ διαφέροντα*, as they are virtually the same; since, if we note differences wisely, it is with a view always to a better choice.

⁷ 1 John ii. 20, 27.

⁸ *εἰλικρινεῖς*. I do not know that any single English word is preferable to the one chosen by our authorised translators, though the word carries in it the additional notion of spotlessness searched approvingly by sunlight.

out offence unto the day of Christ.' His eye being single, his body will be full of light. Himself given unreservedly to God, his guileless spirit will desire to hide nothing from the light that searches him. For his sun is his shield also, and while walking in that love which ever finds its object close at hand there will be none occasion found of stumbling in him.⁹ To attain and to preserve this state of conscience was, the Apostle lets us know, his own unceasing aim.¹

Verse 11. 'Being filled with the fruit² of righteousness,' &c. The true tree of righteousness is Christ, the living Vine, and fruit is borne only on those branches which abide in Him.³ The Apostle's words here deserve our close attention. Let us first observe that *righteousness* must not be confounded with its *fruits*. The believer is righteous by his faith; Christ being personally his righteousness, who is of God made both righteousness and holiness to every true confessor of His name. But a vital state or condition of the human soul will prove itself with more or less distinctness visibly. What is of God, by sovereign grace, returns to Him in obedient devotedness, as to its natural end. But this true way of the Spirit in the new man is hindered more or less effectually by the flesh, which in every believer lusts against the Spirit. Hence it is by a steadfast continuance in the faith; and keeping of the word of

⁹ Ps. lxxxiv. 11; 1 John ii. 10.

¹ Acts xxiv. 16.

² καρπὸν is generally preferred to καρπῶν.

³ John xv.

Christ's patience, by diligence and an unceasing exercise of heart and conscience in His sight, that fruit is borne to God by such as taste His love in His commandments.⁴ But it is not in themselves that fruit is found, nor by themselves that it is borne; they are powerless for good apart from Him. It is by the power of God *through faith* that His elect are kept. From the Lord their fruit is found, and through abiding in Him it is borne by them; and if any be full of such fruit it is because their self-emptying souls are filled out of His fulness, and have their conversation solely by His grace.⁵

The expression 'fruit of righteousness' occurs but seldom in the Scripture, and describes always, where it does occur, the declared effect of experimental godliness. It is the peaceful and happy result of divine chastening on a soul duly exercised thereby.⁶ It is *sown* for an after-harvest of rejoicing by such as seek the blessing of the peacemakers.⁷ In like manner we are here taught that it is by walking in the light and having their hearts exercised unto godliness that they who are justified by grace attest the genuineness of their confession of the name of Christ. As in the father of the faithful, so also in his spiritual seed, faith proves itself by works.⁸ There are for the true believer steps prepared of God, in which His children who are led of His own Spirit walk.⁹ Christ formed within them, and dwelling in their heart by

⁴ 1 John v. 3.

⁵ Hosea xiv. 8; 1 Pet. i. 5; 2 Cor. i. 12.

⁶ Heb. xii. 11.

⁷ Jas. iii. 18.

⁸ Jas. ii. 22, 23.

⁹ Rom. iv. 12; Eph. ii. 10.

faith, works in them after His own manner; and God is glorified in His true children through Jesus Christ by their practical conformity to *Him*, as they remember and obey His words.¹

Verse 12. 'But I would ye should understand,' &c. Having first given utterance to his own fervent wish on their behalf, he hastens now to gratify the known desire of their hearts by telling out to them some of his personal experiences as Christ's prisoner at Rome. It is to be inferred, from what we read in this Epistle, that the comparative freedom which for two years Paul enjoyed at Rome, while living in his own hired house, though under military custody,² had been exchanged in the mean while for a strict incarceration.³ The Philippian saints had no doubt heard of this, and we have already listened to his feeling acknowledgment of their sympathy. His task is now to comfort them in turn by a recital of the gracious dealings of the Lord. At Rome, as at Philippi, the pride and craft of the adversary had overreached itself, and his malicious practisings had prospered only to his own confusion. What had happened by divine permission was found to be in furtherance also of divine purpose; and God's Gospel was mightily advanced by the very act which might seem at first sight to threaten its extinction.

¹ John xv. 7, 8.

² Acts xxviii. 16.

³ The cause usually, and with much probability, assigned for this change is the death in this interval of the upright and fair-dealing Burrhus, the Pretorian prefect at the time of Paul's arrival at Rome, and the succession to his office of the infamous Tigellinus.

Verse 13. 'So that my bonds in Christ,' &c. It is most interesting to note the analogy of this verse to the inspired narrative of the beginning of the Gospel at Philippi.⁴ At both places the adversary's object was to discredit God's Gospel by fastening false charges on its preachers; and in both instances not only was this malicious aim defeated, but the interests of truth were sensibly advanced. At Rome Paul had been talked of from the first; but the lapse of two whole years, during which he remained a prisoner at large, while favourable to the silent progress of the Gospel, may well have chilled the general interest in one whose arrival as a government prisoner, against whom no intelligible charge was laid, had at first drawn to him some measure of popular attention. The recent order for his close detention had no doubt revived this interest, and provoked a more careful inquiry into the nature of his alleged offence; and thus it was become generally known in Rome that his bonds were *in Christ*, a fact which led naturally to further investigation as to the origin and meaning of that Name, and the reason of the evident hostility with which it was regarded by the imperial power. Beginning with the prætorium, to which those guards belonged who had Paul in their especial charge, this rumour of Christ diffused itself easily through Roman society at large. And of those who heard it there were not a few who did not cease from anxious inquiry until, through God's abundant grace, they had

⁴ Acts xvi.

found rest for their souls in a believing knowledge of the Lord.

Verse 14. 'And the majority⁵ of the brethren in the Lord,' &c. Some were intimidated by these more stringent measures of repression, but the most part drew fresh encouragement from the example of Paul's constancy.⁶ Of these 'brethren in the Lord' we know no more than that they formed a part of that company of saints to whom, but a short time previously to his own arrival, Paul had addressed his invaluable Epistle,⁷ and from whom he received so glad a welcome when his long-cherished wish to visit them was realised, though not in the way that he had hoped.⁸ Thus the closing of one mouth was the opening of many others; and even as the violence of Jewish hatred had been the instrumental means of more rapidly diffusing the knowledge of the truth throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria,⁹ so now, at the imperial seat of Gentile power, the wrath of man strove vainly against the righteousness of God. And thus has it ever been since Pharaoh laid oppressive hands on Israel, and sought vainly to destroy what God had ordained for increase and dominion in his day.¹

Verse 15. 'Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife,' &c. Of the many who ventured on

⁵ τοὺς πλείονας.

⁶ The construction is a little doubtful here, some preferring to render ἐν Κυρίῳ πεποιθότας, 'trusting in the Lord.' To me the Authorised Version appears the more natural and forcible.

⁷ Rom. i. 7.

⁸ Acts xxviii. 15; Rom. i. 13; xv. 23, 24.

⁹ Acts viii. 1-4.

¹ Exod. i. 12.

the path of danger for the name of Christ, it is evident that not all were led into that path by the *Spirit* of Christ. Most painful it is to read the Apostle's words, but needful, if we would form a sound estimate of the nature and manner of God's present work on earth, to ponder them attentively. For it is certain that merely natural elements do continually mix themselves with the true work of the Spirit. Grace has not always the practical mastery in those whom it has saved, and may, alas, be too easily abused to the purposes of our natural wills! Human motives, and these often of a very base description, are continually striving to assert themselves in the ways and works of men who do not call falsely on the name of Christ. The flesh lusts against the Spirit, even in the best. The persons to whom Paul here refers were no doubt known to him, as to their views and dispositions, before they assumed their new character as preachers of Christ, and had been saved by him hitherto from injuriously pushing themselves, through natural restlessness and love of notoriety, into a false place of prominence. This may, I think, be fairly inferred from what immediately follows:²

Verse 16. 'The one preach Christ out of party-spirit,'³ &c. In this verse and the following we are shown how wide a moral difference may exist be-

² I take this entire passage as it stands in the English Bible, though in most modern recensions of the text verses 16 and 17 change places.

³ ἐξ ἐπιθελας.

tween those who are nevertheless to be equally acknowledged as 'brethren in the Lord;' and in considering the Apostle's words, we should remember how very differently things are judged and designated by one writing under the immediate inspiration of God, from the view which may be taken of the same acts by an ordinary Christian observer. The factious temper of these insincere hawkers of the name of Christ invites a presumption that they were mostly of the circumcision. For intrusive and undesired ministry of this kind might emanate easily from such a source. To unlearn is harder always than to learn; and men nursed in Jewish legalism, and naturally of zealous temperament, and but imperfectly possessed for the most part of the true knowledge of God, though outwardly obedient to the faith, would be likely to oppose themselves with earnestness to the unqualified doctrine of free grace as it was set forth by the Apostle. To such men the news of Paul's closer imprisonment might seem to offer a welcome opportunity of supplying what was lacking, as they imagined, in his teaching, and restoring the Gospel, as they understood it, to its proper form. They knew, indeed, that their unfettered liberty of speech would vex the spirit of God's prisoner, yet, like other zealots, they thought lightly of his feelings if only their own tenets were confirmed. It was an impure work that they were doing, and had nothing in it of the wisdom from above; yet they fearlessly pursued it

in the heat of that evil 'emulation' which is among the deadliest works of the flesh.

And who shall say to what extent the same evil spirit is operating in the vast area of nominal 'Evangelicalism' at the present day! Two things may at least be noted, and should be carefully observed. First, these preachers, though active and zealous, were not *sent of God*. Such call as they laid claim to was at once disclaimed by God's inspired servant. They were self-impelled, but constrained neither by a true zeal for God nor a sincere love towards their fellow-men. Other things than Christ and His saving grace were in their hearts while they freely traded in His name. They planned and calculated, looking with evil eye for other effects than the true glory of God and the profiting of men. And secondly, whenever men now run unsent, and, in the consciousness of a ready fluency of thought and speech, take up the work of an evangelist in the spirit of self-will, with rhetorical persuasion on their lips, while their hearts are still unemptied of their native self-esteem; or again, when some special point of doctrine dominates their minds, so that they preach Christ, not absolutely and in accordance with the record that God hath given of His Son, but partially, and in the interest of some ruling theory, not speaking therefore with fear and trembling as God's oracles, but with carnal self-complacency as masters and possessors of the things which they allege, propounding their own conceptions instead of

delivering God's uncorrupted words—they fall under the same spiritual censure as these undesired utterers of Christ at Rome.

Verse 17. 'But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the Gospel.' Wherever the true Gospel of God is preached in this world it is sure to be both openly and covertly assailed, since both traditional religion and the vain pretensions of philosophy are equally its foes. And it is by insidious corruption rather than open opposition that the adversary's practisings against the truth are usually most successful. It was because Paul knew well his devices, and was set watchfully for the defence of the Gospel committed to his trust against the manifold methods of the devil, that he joyed so heartily when he found in others a like appreciation both of the incomparable excellency of the truth itself and of the dangers to which it was exposed.

In the present case the love of these right-minded brethren took the form of a common discernment, both on their part and his, of the infinite value of God's words. As distinguished from the many who were ready everywhere to sacrifice truth to popularity, Paul's habit was to speak in Christ 'as of sincerity and as of God,' with the profoundest sense of the weight of the burden which lay on him as a 'minister of God.'⁴ With a kindred zeal, also, these Gentile lovers of the truth felt more for the Gospel than for him who had so mightily proclaimed

⁴ 2 Cor. ii. 16, 17.

it among them, and found a fresh outlet for their sympathy with Paul the prisoner of the Lord in a yet more energetic assertion of the truth, for which he was in bonds. Such is a sure result always of the effectual working of the word of God in any soul.⁵ God's truth assumes a paramount place in the heart which has received it, and life takes in a genuine believer the new form of obedience in love.⁶ For the Gospel is, to such as have received it of the Lord through the effectual teaching of the Spirit, the beginning and the end of all their hope; since it is to them not only the truth of God, but His power of salvation also to their souls. By means of it Christ is Himself formed in them, and has His dwelling in their hearts by faith. It is thus their life, their only but abounding consolation. To tamper with it, therefore, in any wise is to them a thing intolerable, while their glory is to suffer for it even unto blood. To have personally 'kept the faith,' and by his writings to have set forth the mystery of the Gospel in its fulness, and warned faithfully against the latter-day corruptions of sound doctrine, was the supreme consolation of this true minister of God in the immediate view of his own death.⁷

Verse 18. 'What then? Notwithstanding every way,' &c. That Christ was preached was a fact in which Paul could rejoice without reference to the moving causes of that testimony; and even if accompanied by the damaging perversions of human ignor-

⁵ 1 Thess. ii. 13. ⁶ 1 John v. 3, 4. ⁷ 2 Tim iv. 7, 8.

ance and wrong-headedness, there was something in the simple publication of that Name which made glad the heart of this willing prisoner of the Lord. For he trusted that the word of God should not return without effect to Him who had sent it forth among the nations, though the seed scattered might sometimes be sown by unskilful, or even by unfaithful and unholy, hands. For the preaching of that Name to all under heaven, for the obedience of faith, is the great commandment of Him who is not the God of Jews only, but of Gentiles also ; a commandment not to be revoked until He come in answer to the longing cry of those who call in truth upon His name, discovering Himself both to the ready and the unready, at the times appointed by the Father.

But how great is the difference between the preaching of Christ in the Apostle's days and now ! *Then*, the name itself was new as well as the Blessed Person unknown to whom that name pertains. *Now*, on the other hand, it is the name which, whether honoured or dishonoured, is at least the name most widely known throughout the civilised earth. For the name of Christ is known to all men as the common ensign of the mightiest nations of the world, since there is not a power on the earth of any commanding political weight that is not nominally Christian. And Christendom loves ever to enlarge its borders and increase its strength ; for there is that in the Gospel, even in its most corrupted form, which largely benefits mankind, albeit its true saving power

be but little known. And thus it has at last come to pass that the Name which was to draw men from the world unto the Father has become, through the craft of its prince, the chief means of embellishing and strengthening the world. Men glory still in their *natural* liberty, which is insubjection to the will of God,⁸ while naming boastfully the name of Christ. But though the Ethiopian may seem to have changed his skin, the world is still as far as ever from the Father. And hence it is found that when Christ is now really preached in the power of the Holy Ghost, God's doctrine sounds as strangely in the dull ear of a secularised Christianity as it did when first declared to the blunted heart of Israel, or to the idolatrous mockers of the Gentiles. Yet, God be thanked, Christ still *is* preached, and ears will continue to be here and there unstopped to welcome the glad tidings of the Gospel until the appointed 'fulness of the Gentiles be come in.'⁹ And herein is still matter of rejoicing to all who, with Paul and those like-minded, joy in God through Jesus Christ.

Verse 19. 'For I know that *this* shall turn to my salvation,'¹ &c. To them that love God all things work together for good, and the Apostle is here personally exemplifying this cardinal maxim of the faith. His captivity and its results, both gratifying and distressing, are summed together in the single demon-

⁸ Rom. viii. 7.

⁹ Rom. xi. 25.

¹ Some would render *σωτηρία* here by 'deliverance,' and refer the verse to the actual condition only of Paul as a prisoner; but the context is plainly repugnant to this view.

strative pronoun here employed. The things which happened to Paul as a confessor and preacher of the Lord Jesus Christ were, in all their wide variety, 'things which accompany salvation.'² For we are saved by hope, a hope that truly maketh not ashamed, but which falls short in its very nature, while the time of trial lasts, of the end at which it aims. Hence salvation, in its ultimate and complete sense, is continually spoken of as the final goal to which all really Christian life is tending. We receive now, indeed, if true believers, 'the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls,' when we receive the Lord by a sincere acceptance of His Gospel;³ but, on the other hand, the *attainment* of salvation depends on our continuing in the faith grounded and settled, and not being moved away from the hope of the Gospel.⁴ We are accordingly exhorted to hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, and shown clearly that 'drawing back unto perdition' is the alternative of 'believing to the saving of the soul.'⁵ Whatever, therefore, exercises faith is conducive to salvation, and it is in this sense that the Apostle is here speaking. We shall find also, as we proceed, that this habit of connecting actual experience with the realisation of covenanted promise is a prominent feature of this Epistle, as indeed it is of all divinely inspired teaching.

Very noticeable, also, is the connection so dis-

² Heb. vi. 9.

³ Col. i. 23.

³ 1 Pet. i. 8, 9; John i. 12.

⁵ Heb. iii. 6-14; x. 39.

tinctly recognised in the latter part of this verse as subsisting between the activities of Christian sympathy and the spiritual well-being of the objects of that sympathy. The support and nurture of Paul's sure hope in God was 'the supply of the spirit of Christ;' the instrumental means of that supply was the prayer of his brethren on his behalf. Doubtless the Lord would faithfully uphold His suffering servant, though no friendly voices interceded from this earth on his behalf; for He forsaketh not His saints, and knoweth them that trust in Him. But we are taught here very distinctly that the natural channel of supply to an afflicted member of the body of Christ is through the sympathetic agency of those who suffer with it in the unity of their common faith and hope.⁶

Verse 20. 'According to my earnest expectation and my hope,' &c. It is a remarkable word⁷ that Paul here chooses to express his state of hopeful suspense. Once only is it elsewhere used, and by the same writer, to set forth the earnest longing of the now groaning creation for its blissful release at the manifestation of the sons of God.⁸ And fitly does he here appropriate it as a just expression of his soul's desire. For he, too, was in affliction, and intensely longing for release, though mightily sustained in spirit by a hope that would assuredly bring glory as its crown. His whole soul is in his words as he reviews thus

⁶ Eph. iv. 16.

⁷ ἀποκαρδοκία.

⁸ *Notes on the Epistle to the Romans*, viii. 19.

boldly his course from the beginning as a minister of God, and anticipates the day when the body which then wore joyfully yet painfully Christ's bonds should be transmuted to the likeness and revealed in the manifested glory of the Lord. For such would be the 'salvation' of which he speaks in the preceding verse. In the mean time he has one anxiety, and only one, upon his own account: that as he hitherto had had his conversation 'by the grace of God,'⁹ and had in his manifold afflictions suffered only as a *Christian*—so that in all things Christ was magnified in what had befallen His chosen vessel—this might continue to the end. But though warily alive to the dangers and difficulties which beset his course, and far removed in the spirit of his mind from carnal confidence of any kind, he is full of assurance, as one who knew well the dangers, and had weighed well the cost, of his venture as a namer of the name of Christ, and, like Joshua and Caleb in their day of trial,¹ claimed as his refuge a victorious strength which lay elsewhere than in himself. This comes out clearly in the verse which follows.

Verse 21: 'For to me to live is Christ,' &c. In these few words we have not only a declaration of Paul's own motive of action and manner of life as a chosen Apostle of God, but a normal expression also of *all* true Christian life. It is too often a habit of modern Christians to gaze mentally on Paul as on an exceptional person, whose course and habits we

⁹ Conf. 2 Cor. i. 12.

¹ Numb. xiv. 6-9.

should observe with an admiring interest and approval, but whose path we need not think of emulating. Now, with reference to this, it is only necessary to remark that while with Paul's apostolate we can have nothing to do, except to bless God for his calling and for the grace bestowed upon him, and to yield obedience to his words, the Spirit which animated him and the principle that governed his whole life as a believer are identical with what should be found in all who are partakers of like precious faith. For if Christ be, as He is in truth, the life of every believer, what other aim or object can such an one rightly or truly have but Christ? Dead with Him from the rudiments of the world, and quickened with Him, and in Him only now alive to God, his true place and calling here below is to manifest in his ways the reality of the mighty change through which he has passed as one truly called of God—the change from death to life, or, in other words, from self to Christ. Yet he, who is the subject of this change, is in all other respects unchanged. His relations towards his fellow-men are undisturbed, only those relations are now to be fulfilled on his part in another spirit, and on a new and altogether different principle. He once acted from himself and for himself, with perhaps some ulterior reference to his Creator. He could, therefore, while in his natural state, call nothing properly his own but that which was inherent in him naturally, which he had gained by his own effort, or received from other men. If he spoke or thought of righteousness,

of wisdom, of hope or expectation in this life, or of the unknown future, the centre of all his thoughts and the basis of all his anticipations was himself alone. With his ear closed against the words of God, he had yet his religious ideas and convictions—but these all were still his own, and stood upon the common level of things human. In other words, religious or irreligious, he was ignorant of *God*, and within the dark vail of that ignorance he was, as he imagined, master of himself, while really driven at the will of him who rules the darkness of this world.

But now, as a believer, he has ceased to be his own by the very change which has put him in possession of all other things.² He is *Christ's*, not only as a part of the purchased possession of his Redeemer, but—wonder of all wonders—as an acknowledged fellow, or partaker, and joint-heir with Christ. All things are therefore *his* by a right both paramount and indefeasible. For he receives his boundless heritage not in the way of natural title and ownership, but by virtue of his having been himself appropriated and possessed of *God*. They are his *in Christ*, who is his life. What, then, has such an one to do with any other life, or hope, or aim, than Christ? He is, if walking in the truth, already far removed in spirit from things visible, for his calling is heavenly, and his life is hid with Christ in God. Yet he has to bear for a while the burden of mortality, and to live

² 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22.

among other men upon this earth. But shall he live *as* other men? In their case, if Paul's words can be applied at all, they must be taken in an inverted order. For if an estimate of nominally Christian society be fairly taken, it will be found that among ordinary namers of the name of Christ '*to live*' means pleasure, lucre, earthly politics, science, literature, or art; while '*to die*' is usually, at least in purpose, *Christ*—that blessed name being too commonly regarded rather as a viaticum for a reluctant passer to another world than confessed and enjoyed as the reason and motive and power of this present life. Now in all instances it holds most surely true that we *live* for what we *love*.

But the love we bear to our Lord must be tempered with true spiritual sense, or we shall weary Him by undesired services instead of pleasing Him by a faithful keeping of His sayings. How many a man—taught votary of Christ, regarding complacently the Apostle's words, but having a heart hardened by the deceitfulness of sin—has with a passionate zeal enforced for Christ's sake, and to do God service as he thinks, both doctrines of devils and evil inventions of men! But they only know Christ truly who are taught of Him.³ On Paul's lips, therefore, such language has another meaning. It is Christ *personally*, and not Christ *traditionally*, that engrosses his whole soul. If he lives, he lives by the faith of the Son of God, who loved him and

³ Eph. iv. 21.

gave Himself for him. And where Christ's person, as the Comforter reveals Him, is the object of the soul's believing love, Christ's *words* will be the limit of that soul's discretion as a servant and worshipper of God. For such an one all other voices, whether of persuasion or authority, will speak in vain. The true Church is dumb in the presence of her Lord, by whom she is herself addressed. The sheep hearken only to the Shepherd's voice, and it is in the ways of obedience that genuine companionship is found by His disciples.⁴ Happy they who, amid the existing Babel of religious tongues, have still an ear for Christ's living and unchanging words, and faith to echo truly such a confession as Paul here gives us of the vital reason of his hope.⁵

'To die is gain.' That which takes finally away the gains of nature brings also the true man in Christ securely to his hope. For to a life of faith and patience death must surely be a gainful end. If in the groaning body of mortality to live be Christ, to be released from it will be Christ still, but in a fuller and a richer sense. And, in truth, dying is, for a saint, both an easy and a welcome thing, as has been often said; the difficulty is *to live*. Moreover, as Paul wrote, and in his actual circumstances, there was that in the probable manner of his death which would have made it more emphatically a gain. For honour in a special sense belongs to those who are counted worthy to be slain for Christ. And he wrote

⁴ John x. 27; Cant. viii. 13; 1 John i. 7.

⁵ 1 Pet. iii. 15.

these calm and hopeful words in full view of the lion's jaws.⁶

Verse 22. 'But if I live in the flesh this is the fruit of my labour,' &c. Much difficulty has been felt by all who have sought to declare the precise meaning of this verse. It stands evidently in closest connexion with what goes before, and may, I think, be fairly paraphrased as follows: 'I have said that to me to die is gain. But if to live still be my appointed lot, this also has its fruit. And what I shall choose I know not, and therefore cannot say.'⁷ To live on as Paul had lived, was to be still gathering fruit unto life eternal. He was ready then, were such his Master's pleasure, to live and suffer for a further while, though to die would surely be to his wayworn and much-tried spirit the far preferable part. Which, then, shall he choose? which means, as I understand it, for which shall he ask God? For, as he elsewhere says, with *himself* was neither yea nor nay.⁸

Verse 23. 'For I am in a strait betwixt two,' &c. His suspense, as we shall see presently, lasts only so long as his mind is on himself and his personal interests as a believer. There was in his heart a longing desire to go straight to Christ, to lose himself and his changeful experiences here below in the eternal joy and blessing of that presence. For

⁶ 2 Tim. iv. 17.

⁷ This seems to be the true force of οὐ γνῶμιζω.

⁸ 2 Cor. i. 9.

though to be *for* Him, as a suffering witness in the world, and in the midst of the infirmities and temptations of the flesh to prove the strengthening and sustaining sufficiency of His grace, was *well*; to be *with* Him, and to walk with Him in white, unworried by Satan, and no longer needing flesh-distressing discipline on his own account, was assuredly *far better*. But the thought of this devoted 'slave of Jesus Christ' could not long dwell upon himself and his own wishes; for Christ with whom he so ardently desired to be was already *in* him, and had yearnings of another sort, which find their expression in what follows.

Verse 24. 'Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.' That other longing which he has already mentioned, and of which God was witness,⁹ now finds voice. On *their* account he felt assured it was more needful that Paul should still live in the flesh, and now he hesitated no longer. For the fulfilment of his personal desire he is content to await the hour when the appointed measure of his service should be reached. His words are full of deepest interest, and illustrate very strikingly the difference between apostolic and prophetic inspiration. The holy men of old wrote as they were moved to write by the dictating Spirit of God. If in their inspired writings personal utterances are occasionally heard, they are either the writings of a poignant grief, or the expostulations of ignorant

⁹ Ante, ver. 8.

perplexity, or else the ebullitions of a joyful astonishment as some bright glimpse of the sure end of the Lord disclosed itself to their expectant souls. But Apostles write, first, as themselves in the confidence of Him who sends them; and secondly as men to men upon the common footing of the grace wherein they stand alike, and with a natural outflow of personal interest and sentiment, *according to the nature and occasion of their communications*. The former prophets spake not by the Spirit of communion but of testimony only. For He who moved them was not in them, yet as the abiding seal of their redemption. They had not yet received 'the mind of Christ,' and could not therefore either feel or speak as Christ's Apostles did.

Verse 25. 'And having this confidence, I know,' &c. It is a bold expression that is here given to the perfect spiritual self-possession which now fills the Apostle's heart. He knew that his interest in these Gentile believers had nothing in it of merely natural partiality or sympathy; that if he loved them it was 'in the bowels of Jesus Christ;' and, in a full assurance that the fountain of all gracious sympathy is in the Lord Himself, he reckons on such a decision of the actual crisis as would give practical effect to his desires on their behalf. He speaks not only of Christ, but also *in* Christ, and as one who has a knowledge of his Master's mind. Yet though assurance is strong within him, it does not tempt him from the waiting place. Time would soon show if

his expectation were well founded, and he gives, in the mean while, free utterance to what is in his heart.¹ If he did revisit them he knew that it would be for their furtherance in the faith, and for an increase therefore of their joy.²

Verse 26. 'That your rejoicing³ may be more abundant in Christ Jesus,' &c. The close connection of this verse with what precedes is evident. Paul trusted that his presence once again at Philippi would be so fully in the power of the Gospel as to confer on them some positive addition to their faith and knowledge. Joy would increase proportionately, and with joy would come an increase also of that glorying in the Lord which is a proper characteristic of all true worshippers of God.⁴ His words seem to have reference both to their ability to glory in the Lord as the faithful succourer of His people in their times of trouble, and also to the effect upon their souls of a maturer knowledge of the unsearchable riches of Christ as the result of further apostolic teaching.

Verse 27. 'Only let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ,' &c. He had said

¹ With respect to the historical sequel of this declaration of Paul's confidence, it is, perhaps, impossible to speak with certainty. In Philem. 22—an Epistle bearing the same date—we find a similar anticipation, which in Heb. xiii. 23 is changed to a positive expression of purpose; his reluctance to leave Rome unaccompanied by Timothy being the sole apparent reason of his longer stay. There is, therefore, at least a high probability that his wish to revisit Philippi was fulfilled.

² εἰς τὴν ὑμῶν προκοπὴν καὶ χαρὰν τῆς πίστεως.

³ Or rather your 'cause of boasting, or exultation'—καύχημα.

⁴ Infra, chap. iii. 3.

enough of his own position, his anxieties, and his hopes. Addressing himself now more directly to the main object of his Epistle, which is the confirmation of his brethren's faith, and their further edification in Christ, he makes their actual state, as already acknowledged, the basis of his remaining exhortation. They had proved their sincere love of the truth by their fellowship with Paul in the defence of the Gospel; his sole anxiety on their account is lest there should be by any means a cooling of that love, and a corresponding slackening of their zeal. He would have them, therefore, in the first place, realise thoroughly their true position in this world as confessors of the name of Christ. So his word is: 'only,' or 'chiefly, do you regulate your conduct in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.'⁵ Whether present and delighting his eyes by the spectacle of their godly order, or cheered at a distance by their good report, he cared only that there should be found among them, in a ready and steadfast exercise, oneness of spirit, oneness of soul,⁶ and an equally energetic and constant readiness to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.

But in stating thus briefly his threefold wish, he well knew the formidable nature and number of the obstacles which stood in the way of its attainment. For how should oneness of spirit or disposition be

⁵ πολιτευέσθε. The Authorised Version is excellent, but its force at the present day somewhat diminished, as the natural effect of time and change on current speech.

⁶ ψυχή.

maintained among men whose natural individuality craved continually free space for its development? Each man in Christ has his *own* spirit—too often to mislead and wrongly prompt him—as well as the indwelling spirit of Christ. It was, therefore, only by a continued and watchful subjection of their native wills to the obedience of Christ that this much-desired unity could be attained. What is contemplated by the Apostle is the united life and action of the Church at Philippi; but this must itself be the result of a prosperous individual growth of the constituent members of that assembly in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. A double-minded or a two-souled man⁷ is unstable in all his ways, as we are elsewhere told; and it is a spirit subject to the Father of spirits, and a heart united in the fear of God, that alone maintains in His sight a steadfast and acceptable walk.⁸ As natural self-pleasing and the adverse influence of earthly things are the chief hindrance to oneness of spirit in the Church of God, so oneness of soul, or whole-hearted devotion, in the communion of the Spirit, can be experienced by those only who live individually, in the daily habit of their faith, upon the Lord, eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of Man. Faith grows by that on which it lives, and without such nourishment it dies.

Let us here note also distinctly that a true believer must, if in a healthy state of soul, be in this

⁷ διψυχος ἀνὴρ (Jas. i. 8).

⁸ Ps. lxxxvi. 11.

world a man of contention, though a son of peace. For the Gospel of God can never be really popular in a world which lieth in the wicked one;⁹ and to maintain it in its integrity, to keep the faith, and in any thorough sense to hold that fast which we have received, involves a continual strife against the rulers of the darkness of this age. Paul himself became, from the moment of his conversion, a man of strife, like his prophetic predecessors.¹ To dispute with the Grecians, to expose the distinctive heresies of false Christian teachers, and to hold erect the banner of pure Gospel truth—while the many who professed to teach the same things were adulterating the word of God with a view to their own popularity²—was a large part of his occupation as a follower of Christ to the end of his career. To seek peace and ensue it is indeed the natural tenor of a true disciple's way, but peace is found only in the truth of God. *His* enemies must, therefore, be the adversaries also of His friends. The proper attitude of God's Church in the world is to be in united testimony to the truth and united opposition to all forms of error. But what if truth's defenders are at variance among themselves? It is the utter fault of modern Christianity that it seems to overlook, in its manifold displays of zealous energy, the rudimental principle, that to commend truth to others we must ourselves be subject to the truth we would commend. What

⁹ 1 John v. 19.

¹ Jer. xv. 10.

² Acts x. 29; 2 Cor. ii. 17.

is Christ's in this world is known by its resemblance to Christ. Unless, therefore, the Church be a living echo of His words, its power of united testimony to the truth is gone.

Now a divided Church stands openly before the world as a witness against itself. For men know what is written in the Scriptures, though they too often have no care to taste and see what meaning for themselves there may be in God's words. But the world's natural intelligence is quite competent to discern the contrariety of sectarian division to a divinely wrought and divinely sustained union of God's worshippers. Let none think, therefore, that an 'Evangelical Alliance' is a perfect or even an efficient witness for the *truth*. It has its value as a proof of the existence of sufficient spiritual vitality in the professing body to enable men to disregard upon occasion the pressure of sectarian bonds. But its radical condemnation is the fact that it rests still remotely on a sectarian basis, and honours the sectarian principle even in the act of professing and, as is supposed, asserting the oneness of Christ's body. It is, moreover, in its nature, a voluntary association merely, regulated by human management and ordinance, while true Church unity is the result of a common obedience to the faith and mutual subjection in the fear of God ; no room being found in His house for the honouring of any lesser name as a distinctive badge than that of Jesus Christ.

None will, I trust, imagine that these remarks

are made in an unfriendly spirit. With the desire that animated the original projectors of this movement I have the heartiest sympathy. What I anxiously plead is the paramount claim of truth itself to *the obedience of faith*; or, in other words, that believers who know that there is no second name by which Christ's people can be rightly called should refuse to recognise any sectarian or denominational title or relation whatever among such. God's house is one, and indivisible; so also is Christ's flock, and the Church which is His body. All particular assemblies of saints are on a par by virtue of the common grace of their calling. And God has given them no more than this. Their only *establishment* is their immediate dependence on Himself. Without local or political status in the world, and with no continuing city upon earth, the corporate unity of God's elect is maintained by their severally holding the Head which is in heaven. Far different, however, is the spectacle presented by that which now passes among men for the Church. I repeat it, individual saints may, and do, and will continue to the last to contend manfully for the faith of the Gospel; but a united striving for this object presupposes a united Church — a spectacle once shown for a very little while to men and angels, but to be no more seen, it must be feared, beneath the sun, till Jesus comes. Still, words once addressed by the Spirit to God's saints are seasonable to the last for all who have an ear to hear.

Verse 28. 'And in nothing terrified by your adversaries,' &c. The fear of man is overawed in a spiritual mind by a higher and a holier fear, while it is at the same time derided by a faith which has its high place of defence within the munitions of rocks.³ If plainly on the Lord's side, His people must have adversaries who, by their declared opposition to the truth, are unconsciously setting themselves as a mark for the arrow of divine judgment in the coming day. They will know in due time against whom they were arraying themselves when persecuting them that loved the name of Christ. Meanwhile, the calm and undaunted demeanour of the objects of their hatred—schooled as these are of God to count such trial no strange thing—was, did these opposers only note it well, a manifest token of their own destruction when the just Judge of the whole earth should arise at last to ease Him of His adversaries. But for the sufferers such trial was a mighty corroboration of their faith. Their danger was their safety also, in anticipation of the day of recompenses, and a strengthening of their hope to Godward as they waited for that day. For they were experimentally verifying their own calling as the Master's words were thus receiving a fulfilment in their case.⁴

Verse 29. 'For to you it was granted,'⁵ &c. This verse is of the deepest importance, inasmuch as

³ Is xxxiii. 16; liv. 17.

⁴ John xv. 20.

⁵ ἐχαρίσθη.

it describes in very precise language the real nature and meaning of saintship in Christ Jesus—as a thing acknowledged by the Holy Ghost—for all who can receive the unadulterated word of God. Saints are believers, and believers are saints. The Apostle, therefore, who is here seeking to establish and strengthen the hearts of his brethren in view of the afflictions of the Gospel, reminds them in these words of the source and origin of that faith which makes them what they are. They believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; but if so, whence came this saving difference betwixt them and their gainsaying adversaries, to whom the same word of reconciliation was addressed? To believe in Christ was, he distinctly assures them, a special grace bestowed upon them by the God of their salvation. The grace thus given went, he continues, beyond the point of their own acceptance of the saving truth of the Gospel. There was conferred on them, in addition, the distinctive honour of suffering for the Lord.

We are living in a day when every point of positive Christian doctrine is being rudely sifted by the confident yet impotent⁶ intellect of man; and the working of this spirit of the age may be distinctly traced also in the Church of God. As one effect of this, and not the least dangerous in its ulterior consequences, we find not unfrequently that persons zealous for the Gospel, and ardent in their desire to win souls to Christ, have laboured and are labouring

⁶ Impotent, that is, to handle rightly any spiritual truth.

still to persuade men that the faith which justifies a sinner is no special gift of God, but a simple and natural credence directed only to its proper object by the preacher's words. But this is only another way of affirming that there exists in fallen humanity a natural sufficiency to reattach itself to God. True it is that this error is but a very intelligible reaction against the injurious habit of preaching election and predestination to unconverted men, instead of declaring to them the free Gospel of the grace of God; but it is not the less injurious on that account, but rather otherwise. For error gains the readier acceptance if only it can side apparently with truth. The subject is of sufficient importance to justify the addition of a few more words.

That 'faith in God' and 'belief of the truth' are things commonly united is true, but they are by no means identical, as some suppose. The latter may exist without the former, and does so in numberless examples. The devils believe the truth, but have no faith in God. They knew and confessed the Son of God, and could distinguish between a true and false confession of His name in others;⁷ but they have no faith in Him. So likewise King Agrippa believed the prophets, but his faith stopped short of God and His salvation. And it is a matter of everyday experience that credence may be given to the declarations of the Gospel, and that men often readily indoctrinate their minds with grace, while

⁷ Luke iv. 41; Acts xix. 15.

their hearts remain unaffected by the faith of God. When therefore an Apostle speaks of 'belief, or faith, of the truth,'⁸ he puts it immediately after sanctification of the Spirit, and refers both one and the other to the original election of God.

And this, to a divinely-opened eye, will be found to be the constant and unswerving testimony of Scripture. That a true believer's faith is the gift of God is repeated by the same witness in another place;⁹ while here his language, when thus accounting for the spiritual standing and relationship of these Philippians, and their experience as confessors of the name of Christ, may recall to our minds the words addressed by our Lord to the Father in His commendatory prayer.¹ For it was 'on Christ's behalf,' and that He might be glorified, that the Father had led these Gentile sheep to the true Shepherd of their souls.² The name of the Lord Jesus would be glorified in them by their steadfast continuance in the faith. And all this would redound to the excellent glory of the Father, whose sovereign will had found expression in the effectual grace of their calling. With their hearts they had believed unto righteousness, and had wrought the work of God, receiving the words of His messengers,

⁸ πίστις ἀληθείας (2 Thess. ii. 13). Compare, as to the order of God's saving work in His elect, 1 Pet. i. 2.

⁹ Eph. ii. 8. For an exposition of this verse I may refer the inquiring reader to my *Notes on the Ephesians*, in loc.

¹ John xvii. 6: 'Thine they were, and Thou hast given them unto Me.'

² John vi. 44.

and believing on Him whom God had sent. And heartily also were they set for the defence of that Gospel whose power and priceless value they had felt and understood. But as in Paul's own case he boasted, when recounting his most abundant labours in the Gospel, solely of the grace bestowed on him,³ so here, while he cheers and commends his younger comrades in the faith, he impressively reminds them of the source whence their honour comes.

Verse 30. 'Having the same conflict,' &c. No higher praise could be conferred by man on men than is here freely bestowed by God's Apostle upon these single-minded receivers of the grace of God and true followers of Jesus Christ. Standing himself, by special grace, in the nearest relation to his Lord as a partaker of His reproach, and a diligent imitator of His ways, he can honour none more highly than to recognise them as his fellows in the work and sufferings of Christ.⁴

³ 1 Cor. xv. 10.

⁴ Conf. Col. i. 24; 2 Cor. i. 6, 7.

CHAPTER II.

VERSE 1. 'If there be therefore,' &c. High as is the praise bestowed in the foregoing chapter on the Philippian saints, they yet fell far short, in Paul's estimation, of that 'perfection' which he also was pursuing still.¹ They were indeed zealous for the Gospel, which proved both the soundness of their spiritual understanding and the courageous steadfastness of their faith, and won for them the Apostle's heartiest commendation. But spiritual self-culture is a far more difficult attainment than demonstrative piety of *any* kind; and it is to the furtherance of this all-important object that the Epistle now before us is principally directed. The moral connection of the verses we are now about to consider with what precedes may be easily observed. For it is in the nature of energetic activity, in any cause, both to draw out individuality of character and to generate a spirit of rivalry in those who are devoted to the work. But such tendencies are manifestly adverse to that oneness of heart and mutual dependence in love among God's children which are the most effective means of winning honour among men for the name of Christ. To *Him*, therefore, he

¹ *Infra*, chap. iii. 12.

now seeks to draw their hearts, appealing in his words to the inward affections of their souls.

Four things are here specified as experimental facts, established in the consciousness of those whom he addressed, and which availed, therefore, as the basis of his appeal; each of these being recalled to their minds by that expressive particle of speech which is of equal power to suggest doubt or to confirm assurance, according to the nature of the subject and the intention of the writer. 'If,' says the Apostle, 'there be any consolation in Christ.' But he is writing to God's saints, who, if they knew anything, knew assuredly that they had fled at the instigation of the grace which quickened them, and in obedience to the voice that called them, from their native darkness and the misery of hopeless ignorance of God, to find eternal consolation in their Saviour;² and how rich and strong that consolation is which God has willed His children to receive they were learning daily in an increasing measure, as the Comforter unfolded Jesus and His things more fully to their souls.

'If any comfort³ of love.' Of this, too, they all had tasted, since their ears were opened to God's

² 2 Thess. ii. 16; Heb. vi. 18.

³ παραμύθιον. The difference between this word and the παράκλησις, or 'consolation,' just spoken of, is that the latter has a far wider range of meaning than the former. Consolation may be found in a person (Luke ii. 45), in circumstances (Luke vi. 24), or by the inward operation of the Comforter, who often sheds silently abroad the love of God in our hearts. But the 'comfort' here mentioned is always the effect of loving *speech*.

words of love in the ever-blessed Gospel of His grace, and they had learned, as partakers in common of that grace, to eye one another in the Lord, and through purged lips to utter from the heart the sweet reciprocations of that love which the Spirit shed abroad in all their hearts. They had drunk such comfort largely from Paul's lips while still among them, and his heart held fast a grateful recollection of their affectionate desire towards himself, and that this intercourse of mutual blessing might continue was his ardent wish. They knew then, by a happy experience, that such a thing as 'comfort of love' both existed and was theirs.

'If any fellowship of the Spirit.'⁴ How should we take these words, which imply, like the rest, their conscious possession of the thing described? The language is ambiguous, and intended, it appears to me, to carry a double meaning. For it may well express, first, that oneness of spirit among fellow-servants of the same Master to which he had so feelingly referred in the former chapter, and which he elsewhere also speaks of as a happy experience of his own;⁵ but secondly, and chiefly, it is 'the communion of the Holy Ghost' that seems intended, which last, as the greater, includes and is the efficient cause of the former. Among true yoke-fellows there was surely fellowship of spirit,

⁴ *ἐν τῇ κοινωνίᾳ πνεύματος*. The Authorised Version is right in my opinion, notwithstanding the absence of the article, though there was certainly room for a marginal variation.

⁵ 2 Cor. xii. 18.

as both he and they well knew, and should yet more fully know. But his appeal here is not partial but general, as in the other points. They who knew that consolation was in Christ knew also their own participation of that Spirit which is God's common seal of His purchased possession. Their zeal for the Gospel, already noticed, was one effect of this fellowship of the Spirit, and he reckons on a continuance and experimental increase of the same fellowship for yet further fruit.

'*If* any bowels and mercies.' That there are such, and in a multitudinous abundance, is the familiar knowledge of every true child of God. Well they know that the native place of all true kindness is the bosom of the 'Father of mercies,' and that these latest mentioned of the series form the remote fountain of all the other specified blessings which constitute the strength of Paul's appeal. For it was by the Father's bowels of mercy that the Light of life came forth from the thick darkness of His earlier dwelling, and salvation became a living fact in the personal advent of His Christ.⁶ Compassion moved the joint work of the Father and the Son—the Sender and the Sent. And it is in the knowledge of this ever-blessed truth, as the Spirit ministers it to their souls, that God's elect are now exhorted to be imitators of Him whose grace has made them sharers of His name.⁷

Verse 2. 'Fulfil ye my joy,' &c. The fervency

⁶ Luke i. 78 (margin).

⁷ Is. xliii. 1; Col. iii. 12.

of Paul's entreaty gives the force of an adjuration to his words. But if he wished strongly it was not to attain a natural joy. His thoughts towards his brethren were in 'the bowels of Jesus Christ,' and the end of his desire was that Christ should be glorified in them through a presentation on their part of the truth of the Gospel, not by word of mouth only or chiefly, but through the confessed subjection of his brethren to the Lord as they walked in oneness of love, of purpose, and of thought. And we may note with interest the near resemblance of the words as well as wishes of this close 'follower of Christ' to those addressed by his Divine Leader to the eleven.⁸ The joy of the Master was that, through keeping His commandments and abiding in His love, His disciples should be fruitful to the glory of His Father; and the joy of the true servant is attained when the Lord is commended to the hearts and consciences of others by an exhibition of His moral likeness in those who call upon His name.

Verse 3. 'Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory,' &c. The ordinary play of motive and power in the world is to be reversed among those who, if in the world, are in it only as God's witnesses. *Christ* having been solemnly acknowledged as the supplanter of *self*, through a true appreciation of the death and resurrection of the Lord, party-spirit and vainglory cease naturally, and can have no place so long as faith is working effectually by love. Yet

⁸ John xv. 11.

how easily these old and hateful forms of evil might reassert themselves, and both seek and find cover under the fairest pretensions of zeal, was even then before the Apostle's eyes at Rome, and had been already pointed out to his brethren at Philippi.⁹ He warns them, therefore, the more earnestly to shun the evil and pursue the good—to think lowly of themselves, remembering their deep and common abasement as lost sinners, and in love regarding one another in the Lord; none eyeing his neighbour grudgingly, with a desire to spy out his inconsistencies—that dear delight of our carnal minds—but rather noting with honour, each in the other, any trait of Christ that showed itself to love's quick eye, and in all cases remembering to estimate His people according to their value in *His* sight.

Verse 4. 'Not looking¹ every man on his own things,' &c. Each man in Christ has also 'his own things,' and in another sense he is to give close attention to those things.² But whoever has deliberately said, with an intelligent sincerity, 'not *I*, but *Christ*,' has no longer any private ends to gain or interests to serve. His own things are, as his own burden, to be wrought and borne in the sufficiency of Christ, while his active sympathies will find their fitting exercise in seeking out and ministering, for His sake, to the wants of others, and especially of such as love His name. Such is the 'law of Christ,'

⁹ Ante, p. 30.

¹ σκοποῦντες is preferred to σκοπεῖτε by all modern editors.

² Gal. vi. 4, 5 (*Notes on Galatians*, in loc.).

as he elsewhere teaches those on whose necks he was endeavouring to place again the yoke of that service which alone is perfect liberty, after breaking, with passionate and indignant earnestness, the false legal trammels in which they were already in part entangled, and which, in their ignorance, they were preparing to assume as a special ornament of grace.³ He would have them then remember that they were disciples of One who, in divine compassion, had come forth from the secret of His own eternal glory to look upon the burdens of those whom He is not ashamed to call His brethren. Themselves by sovereign grace ‘in Christ,’ they should think and act as He thought and acted whose manner while on earth was to do good and to suffer wrong. And so he proceeds :

Verse 5. ‘Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.’ What that mind was is set forth with impressive distinctness in the verses immediately following, wherein the great mystery of godliness is enunciated with more fulness and precision perhaps than in any other part of the record which God has given of His Son. He has been exhorting them to humility and self-renunciation, and he now sets before both them and us the pattern, but not the measure, of that which we are called to emulate. The *pattern* ; for as children of the Father we are to aim at nothing short of His perfection,⁴ and as partakers of the Spirit of Christ His ways should be also ours. Not the *measure* ; for the very first step of His hu-

³ Gal. vi. 2.

⁴ Matt. v. 48.

mility was one which none but His natural equal, if such there were, could possibly have taken. This presently appears.

Verse 6. ‘Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.’ It is ‘the man that is Jehovah’s fellow’⁵ who is here described. In considering these words we have first to notice carefully that He of whom these things are written is *Jesus Christ*, or, in other words, that the *Person* whom Paul knew and preached under that name and title existed before either name or title, or the nature and form to which these visibly attach, had any being. Of the Man Christ Jesus, then, it is affirmed that He was originally and essentially ‘in the form of God.’⁶ If we search the Scriptures for a further elucidation of this statement, we shall find nothing to help us to an intellectual conception of its meaning. That the Word was with God in the beginning we are told, and also that the Word *was* God.⁷ Distinctness of relation in unity of nature is thus clearly predicated; but *form*, in a superhuman and purely divine sense, is mentioned only here. God’s Wisdom was ever with Him, possessed by Jehovah in the beginning of His way and before His earliest work. Brought forth before the depths, that Wisdom was as one brought up with Him, and had been from everlasting His delight.⁸ But what was Wisdom’s *form*? What eyes beheld it until, veiled in glory, it shone

⁵ Zech. xiii. 7.

⁷ John i. 1, 2.

⁶ ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ ὑπάρχων.

⁸ Prov. viii.

forth upon the principalities and powers in the heavens which were created before man? The glory which Christ had with the Father was undoubtedly beheld in heaven before earth was made, but is the King eternal, immortal, invisible—the only God—discernible *essentially* by any creature? Do angels, *in this sense*, know the form of God?

These questions must be left without reply. The other Apostolic testimonies which declare the Son of God to be ‘the image of the invisible God,’⁹ ‘the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person,’¹ though strikingly assertive of the Lord’s divinity, are by no means identical in force with the language of the verse now before us. For they respect rather what is manifested than what is essential, though the latter is plainly involved in the former. But Paul here uses an expression of a different kind. With him essential Godhead has a *form*. No merely theological definition of deity exists of a perfectly satisfactory kind. Nor is this surprising, as the very attempt at such definition on any of our parts is but a spiritual impertinence, since what is neither visible nor mentally comprehensible cannot be defined. All such endeavours are in their nature not ‘of faith,’ and are therefore self-condemned. To listen to God’s words, and record faithfully in our hearts what is by Him revealed on such a subject, is our safety and our

⁹ ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου. Col. i. 15.

¹ ὡς ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ. Heb. i. 3.

praise. Accepting the unauthorised assumption that God is 'without body, parts, or passions,' very many who read Paul's words take 'form' loosely in the sense of 'nature.' But precision as well as truth belongs to all inspired words, and 'form' is surely not the same as 'nature.' And that the Father has a form or shape² may be inferred from the Lord's own declaration to the Jews.

The Father's face is seen now in heaven by His children's angels, and will be seen by themselves hereafter;³ but this outshining or revelation of His name and glory is not the same thing as the discovery of His essential *form*. Invisible and unapproachable to man, God *is*; and, on the authority of this passage, has a form peculiar to Himself. And Jesus from eternity was in that form. This, as a point of revealed truth, is a part of the 'common faith' of Christians; *intelligible* it can never be, at least to any in this mortal flesh.

Being then by nature in that form, He 'thought it not robbery to be equal with God.'⁴ The Apostle's words are expressive of such a natural equality as corresponds to the identity of form. For self-assertion is superfluous to any being conscious of an undisputed native right. Now none but a Divine Being could originally bear the form of God,

² εἶδος. John v. 37.

³ Matt. xviii. 10; Rev. xxii. 4.

⁴ Or, 'regarded not equality with God as a thing to be aimed at as above His native right'—οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ. He could entertain no thought of grasping or specially asserting that which was essentially His own.

and one truly in that form could think no lofty thoughts. For above Him is no height. Ambition has its springs below; but one in the form of God could eye no object higher than Himself, and the thoughts and purposes of such an one must either be self-contemplative or take a downward course. To be equal with God therefore, or, in other words, to act as God only and always, was to the Son who dwelt in equal glory with the Father from eternity no lawless or aggressive thought, but simply a continuance uninterrupted of the ineffable communion of Godhead with itself.

Verse 7. 'But emptied Himself,'⁵ &c. The motive that prompted this amazing act was, as we are elsewhere told, consenting filial obedience. 'The Father sent the Son.'⁶ What we are here especially concerned with is the mind that was in Him who once wore the form of God. From the high and lofty place of His nativity the Son of God, by whom the Father made the worlds, viewed, in communion with the Father and the Eternal Spirit, the effects of sin upon mankind. He beheld the condition of the sons of Adam with a perfect knowledge of its cause, and His heart was affected by His eye. God is supremely and essentially Love, and because love in the Father yearned in a boundless mercy towards those whom necessary justice made the prey of death, the same love and mercy in the Son responded to itself and accepted its own promptings as its law.

⁵ ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσε.

⁶ 1 John iv. 14.

Nor was that love less ready and entire in the eternal and ever-blessed Spirit, who is the searcher and the efficacious energiser of all Divine thoughts. The Father willing, the Son consenting, and the Spirit animating and enabling, effected, when the proper time arrived, the marvel of the incarnation of God's living Word.⁷

It is of the Son alone, however, and His individual action that Paul here speaks: 'He emptied Himself.' The plain force of these words is that the Eternal Son of God, in order to assume humanity, put off the form and laid aside the proper honour and functions which belonged to Him originally and of native right. But His nature and relationship remain with His personal identity. Essentially God, He so remains, under what form soever He may hide Himself. But in undertaking to exchange dominion for subjection—the form of God for that of man, and the majesty of heaven for bond-service upon earth—He may be truly said to have vacated what was properly His own, and thus to have 'emptied Himself,' in order to assume a new and untried state of being. For in truth and in the highest sense this ever-blessed One looked not upon His own things, but the things of others.⁸

This, then, was Love's first and mightiest step

⁷ And thus had Immanuel, whose goings forth have been from everlasting, expressed Himself through the pen of His inspired seer: 'From the time that it was there *am I*; and now the Lord God and His Spirit hath *sent me*.' Is. xlviii. 16.

⁸ Verse 4.

towards the deliverance of its objects, when Jesus Christ, the Captain of our salvation, thus proceeded forth and came from God. All the rest flowed as it were naturally from this strange and wonderful beginning. Its immediate sequel was, that He 'took on Him the form of a servant.' The reader will here notice that there is an inversion of the natural order of description, with the evident intention of placing in closer contrast the extremes of dignity and humiliation which meet in the great mystery of godliness. If the only begotten of the Father ceased to rule as God, He would begin as man to *serve*; not entering the world to claim resistlessly as well as lawfully its universal homage, but while bearing in the truth of His sacred person the just title to all sovereignty, both under heaven and above it, He would from the beginning of His sojourn upon earth learn obedience by the things which He suffered. From the manger at Bethlehem He would advance in silent meekness towards the place which He had chosen for Himself as the true glorifier of God upon the earth.⁹ And in thus perfecting all righteousness in obedience He was consulting also the gracious interests of His love to usward for whose sakes He came. For the wife and children whom the Father gave Him, He would serve as a slave for ever with digged ears,¹ never vacating the servile form which He had once assumed, but under it in due time reëntering the

⁹ Matt. xii. 19; John xii. 27-32.

¹ Exod. xxi. 4-6; Ps. xl. 6, marg.

glory which was His from everlasting. And according to the form which He had chosen should be His estimation also among men. The price of a slave² should be the reward of His betrayer at the hands of the circumcision, and a slave's ignominious punishment should be the manner of His death by the unrighteous sentence of His Gentile judge. For He was despised and rejected of *men*.

'And was made in the likeness of men.' His mother was a woman, and He is verily 'the Son of Man.' He bore therefore externally a common likeness to His kind. This is the first and essential description of the incarnate Son of God, a description which unites Him irrevocably to humanity.³ What morally *separates* Him from His kind is shown us in the verse which follows. But in this Man, the self-emptying Son of God, there dwelt nevertheless

² Exod. xxi. 32; Zech. xi. 12.

³ I would have this statement clearly understood. The Lord verily became man; but 'humanity,' as dating from the first Adam, was unaffected by this marvellous act, and remains in its unaltered state of repudiation on account of sin. By means of death Christ took from His people's necks the yoke of fatal bondage; but He died and rose again that in *Himself*, as the last Adam, He might make of Jew and Gentile one *new* man. To speak, therefore, of humanity as having been dignified and ennobled by the Incarnation is to speak ambiguously, and, in the sense commonly attached to such expressions, *falsely* also. Christ left the world at His departure as He had found it at His advent, with the awful difference only of the special guilt of His rejection. He came forth from God, not to join Himself to *our* humanity and give to *that* a lasting honour, but took flesh that His elect might participate in *His*: 'flesh of *His* flesh and bone of *His* bones' is the description of His mystic spouse. The false notion of a redeemed and ennobled humanity lies at the root of most of the spurious and earthly-minded Christianity of these latter days.

the fulness of the Godhead in a bodily form.⁴ It was He who alone can say '*I am*,' and had by that name declared Himself to Moses, who had thus marvellously changed His form and state, but neither His nature nor His own essential name.⁵ But He was verily a Man among men; observed, loved, and hated; spoken of approvingly or otherwise; eating and drinking, where men would have Him as their guest, with Pharisees or publicans indifferently; and revealing by His presence and His ways the thoughts of many hearts. Men were His object, and He accompanied with men; for it was among such that as the true Shepherd of the sheep He sought His own.

Verse 8. '*And being found in fashion as a man*,' &c. There is deep meaning in this form of speech. The Man among men, whose words and ways were filling all tongues in Immanuel's land with speculative rumour as to His true origin and character, was discerned in the truth of His person by those only whom the Father led to that discovery. God, who in prophetic vision had found His servant David, and anointed him,⁶ had searched and inquired vainly for 'a Man' by His messengers of old; but there was none to answer to His call till Jesus came.⁷ On Him the heavens opened, and the living Seal of God descended, while the Father's voice declared the true lineage of that stranger in the earth whom no man knew.⁸ Found thus of God, and greeted in His proper

⁴ Col. ii. 9.⁵ John viii. 58.⁶ Ps. lxxxix. 19, 20.⁷ Isa. lix. 16; Jer. v. 1; Ezek. xxii. 30.⁸ Matt. iii. 16, 17.

name, He next, and immediately, becomes the mark of Satan's hostile practisings. Receiving from heaven the loftiest of titles, He chose for Himself the very lowest place on earth. Driven by the Spirit into the wilderness, He first patiently endures the contradiction of the father of lies, repelling his temptations and effecting his discomfiture solely by the exercise of such obedience as glorified the form in which the Son of God was found. The woman's seed began thus His course of victorious obedience precisely at the point at which His father after the flesh had through disobedience forfeited his place and honour as the image of his Maker. I pass by here the Lord's antecedent life of subjection to His reputed parents at Nazareth, and dwell only on His obedience as the Son of God, found and declared from heaven to be such, in human form.

And herein is established the definitive moral contrast between the first man and the last. Human history commences with an act of disobedience, and maintains that evil character unaltered to its end. The record which God has given of His Son begins with His self-emptying and change of form as the obedient Messenger of the covenant of promise, and portrays His ceaseless self-devotion, as the true Image of His Maker, to the end. Let us weigh now the remaining words which lead us to that end.

When in the form of God, He *emptied* Himself ; but when found in fashion as a man, His praise is that ' He *humbled Himself*.' His personal worthi-

ness entitled Him to claim under that form the very loftiest place, but to *prove* that worthiness He took the road to honour through humility. Self-assertion had ruined the first man Adam and his race. Self-denial, in the assertion of the Father's claims, was the path of glory and virtue, which led Jesus to the crown. He had indeed a distinct and positive will of His own, but it was surrendered wholly to Him in whose name He had come into the world. In His blessed person were combined, in an equal perfection, both filial piety and the duty of man to his Creator. Because He loved the *Father*, *His* business was the earliest care of Jesus; while to do the will of *God* was the declared reason of the coming of the Just One into the world. The resulting effects of this obedience on those who now put their trust in Him are not here in the Apostle's mind, but solely the grace of Him who, though rich, became poor for our sakes, and who, though born King of kings and Lord of lords, chose service rather than dominion to please and honour Him from whom He had come forth.

‘And became obedient unto death,’ &c.⁹ What is presented to us here is less the sacrificial aspect of the cross and the self-devoting grace to usward of the Lamb, than the absolute perfection of the Man who alone could say to the Father who had sent Him at the close of His allotted course, ‘I

⁹ More strictly, ‘having become obedient unto death’—*γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου*. His humiliation reached its measure in the dust of death. In like manner our natural bodies are called bodies of humiliation, because due to death. *Infra*, chap. iii.

have glorified Thee on the earth.' Perfect and unreserved obedience in thought and word and act belongs to the creature as the workmanship of God. Christ took this place in an entire harmony with His essential filial relation, and glorified His Maker while He wrought His Father's works. All through His life here below His natural (and perfect) will opposed itself to His fulfilment of the Scriptures as the despised and rejected One. For love does not willingly meet hatred, nor goodness evil. All the natural instincts of the Man who was so unlike other men inclined Him to seek favour with both God and man. But of Him it is written that He did not please Himself. From first to last He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself. The intensity of this natural opposition came fully into view in the hour of His agony in the garden, where we should note that no utterance is given to the soul-sustaining anticipation of the joy which lay beyond, nor to the animating consciousness of His own deep and ineradicable love to His elect, for whose sake He had taken flesh. In the near prospect of death, and such a death! all the pent-up repugnance of His sinless nature which had groaned under the strange burden of a mortal's¹ weakness, as He wrought in patience His self-chosen work of unwearied and compassionate grace, rose up in instinctive protest against so unnatural and horrible a close of such a life.

¹ 'Mortal,' not as we are, who because of sin are naturally due to death, but because divinely foreordained to die—to suffer in the flesh, and by the grace of God to taste of death for all.

‘Take *this* cup from Me,’² spoke out the secret of those prospective terrors, which from His youth up had ‘distracted’ the pure and holy mind of Jesus.³ For He knew that He was born to die ; although mortality was not His natural state when found in fashion as a man, because in Him there was no sin. But the will which He came into the world to do could be effected only in a body capable of death, and from His virgin-mother Jesus had received that body, which conception, by the overshadowing power of the Highest, had prepared.⁴ And when at last the dreaded moment came when self-renunciation must confront its mightiest task, the will of the obedient Man shone out with a distinctness of confession which enhanced unspeakably the moral value of the sacrifice then made in its final and absolute surrender to the will of God.

It was ‘unto death’ that the Son of God was borne by His obedience ; fulfilling to the utmost tittle what was written, and expiring when His work of dying was complete—committing to the Father the Spirit which He had received at birth ; laying His life down in fulfilment of the commandment which had been imposed upon Him, to resume it at the appointed moment by the same sanction under which it was laid down.⁵ Dying or reviving, the Man Christ Jesus, who is God’s incarnate Word, is the passive subject of the Father’s will.

² Mark xiv. 36.

³ Ps. lxxxviii. 15 ; Luke xii. 50, marg.

⁴ Luke i. 35.

⁵ John x. 18.

Verse 9. 'Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him,' &c. The aspect both of the death and resurrection of Christ, which is presented to us in this chapter, is limited to the human side of the mystery of godliness. It tells us the truth about Him who was 'found in fashion as a *man*,' being prefaced, however, as we have seen, by an emphatic declaration of the Lord's proper and essential Deity. It is to other parts of Scripture that we must turn for the counterpart of this teaching, in which the Divine sufficiency and action of the Son of God are only made the more conspicuous by the form under which Almighty power hid itself to work its gracious will.⁶

Confining ourselves now to what is immediately before us, it may be noticed, first, that the quickening of the dead Christ and His resurrection by the glory of the Father are involved, without special mention, in the Apostle's testimony to His *exaltation*. The contrast drawn is that of the true Man's voluntary and obedient humiliation, and His awarded honour at the compensating hand of God. He is the passive recipient of glory, even as He had submitted in obedience to the curse.⁷ The emphatic word here chosen by the Spirit to express the exaltation of the Lord⁸ has an implied reference, we may reasonably infer, to the original lure of the serpent. To be '*as gods*, knowing good and evil,' without

⁶ John ii. 19; Heb. i. 3; Eph. iv. 8-10.

⁷ Gal. iii. 13.

⁸ *ὑπερύψωσε* = 'supremely exalted.'

quitting the paradise in which they had been placed, was the limit of his lying promise to the disobedient. But now, in the ever-blessed person of the obedient One, humanity is joined to *God*, and sits, raised far above comparison, upon the Father's throne. Let us note also the relation in which the name bestowed is here made to stand, not to the Lord's birth in the flesh, but to His exaltation. That name was His; and to chosen ears its rich significance had been declared before His birth at Bethlehem;⁹ but it was without meaning or value in the general estimation of mankind until the mighty work of death was done, and He whose righteous claim had been in the days of His flesh a derisive stigma of reproach was declared to be indeed the Son of God, with power according to the Spirit of holiness by means of the resurrection from the dead. And now all other names give place to that.

Verses 10, 11. 'That in the name of Jesus¹ every knee should bow,' &c. 'Jesus' is a human name, which, since Joshua the son of Nun, that lively type of Him that was to come, departed to his rest, had been borne by many ere its sole rightful owner came into the world. For it is a name of Divine power and significance, whose true possessor should in human form and nature both work salvation for His chosen in His own sufficiency, and occupy of native right the throne of universal lordship and dominion. With respect to the true scope of this

⁹ Matt. i. 21.

¹ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ.

verse, it seems to contemplate the ultimate results of redemption, when the universal homage of creation will be rendered to the name of Jesus, and every tongue shall glorify the Father, from whom every family in heaven or on earth is named, by a unanimous confession that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Looking now at these verses in their more immediate application, it is evident that as yet *faith* only views as in a glass the glory of the Lord, and that of the three classes of worshippers here mentioned the first is alone complete. In heaven already all knees bow, angels and principalities and powers being made subject to Him to whom God has given glory.² By 'things in earth' a partial worship only is at present rendered to Him, who is hereafter to be known and honoured universally as 'the God of the whole earth,' and of these bowing knees and confessing tongues there is a yet more limited companionship of believing and adoring hearts. In the mention made of 'things under the earth'³ there is a reference, first, to the dead as distinguished from the living, and that in the most comprehensive sense;⁴ and secondly, to the angels now in Tartarus.⁵ The Apostle's words are intended to remind us that the Man Christ Jesus is the ruler of all depths as well as of all heights;

² 1 Pet. iii. 22.

³ The word *καταχθόνιος* occurs only in this passage. In Rev. v. 13, where universal creature-worship is rendered to God and to the Lamb, we have a different, though closely-related, expression—*ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς*. But the former is the wider of these kindred terms, embracing things *infernal* as well as simply *subterranean*.

⁴ Rom. xiv. 9.

⁵ 2 Pet. ii. 4 (Gr.).

of the place of penal banishment as well as of the abodes of beatific rest. The devils, as we know, already tremble through their hostile faith, believing a certainty that brings no joy to them.⁶

And this inceptive and partial fulfilment of the Apostle's words must continue until the time arrives for the kingdoms of this world to become the kingdom of Jehovah and His Christ. Earth shall then be filled as full as heaven with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, and universal earthly worship, partly sincere and partly false, will be rendered to Him whose right it is ; for whom the nations wait, and whose advent with His saints is the sole hope of a creation which is groaning still, and travailling in pain. Penal subjection also, in all its joyless reality, will be acknowledged to the same supreme title of dominion by the occupiers of the pit, who will then confess that He whose name was preached to them in true and unupbraiding grace, but from whose outstretched arms they turned persistently away throughout the long day of salvation, is the Lord also to whom vengeance belongs. At present none can truly say 'Lord Jesus' but by the Holy Ghost, and to confess Him thus in faith is our salvation ; but that He is Lord must be one day owned by every creature of His hand, when His mighty and resistless power finally asserts itself. In His name every knee must bow. Yet will He still and for ever be Himself subject to the Father, reigning in

⁶ Jas. ii. 19.

righteousness, and exercising judgment as the Son of Man; ruling over men in the fear of Jehovah while His appointed kingdom lasts;⁷ and at its close, when man's long controversy with his Maker shall have ceased—having been stilled in final judgment on the impenitent—and be thus a thing unknown within the limits of that creation of which Christ, and not Adam, is the true beginning, it will still be through the willing subjection of the Son that God the Father shall be glorified as all in all.⁸

Such, then, is the reward decreed of the Most High to goodness found in Man, and acting, self-humbled in love, for men's sakes toward God; to the lover of righteousness and the hater of iniquity; to the Man whose supreme pleasure was to serve His Maker, and whom God delights to honour in His truth. And such, also, is the pattern set for imitation before them that now make confession of the name of Christ. If called by His name, let them seek to be like-minded to Him whose name they bear. And even as humility has perfectly attained its righteous crown in Jesus, so likewise will they who learn of Him and follow in His steps be honoured also of the Father. Exaltation will in their case follow self-abasement, which constitutes the moral preparation in God's saints for their entrance into the eternal kingdom and glory unto which they have been called. Made companions of their Lord by pure and sovereign grace, they are left

⁷ 2 Sam. xxiii. 3.

⁸ 1 Cor. xv. 28.

in this world for an appointed season to learn His ways, to taste in their measure His experiences, and to follow in His steps; to love with His love and hate with His hate; to choose the good and to eschew the evil; above all, to forget and deny themselves to the laying down of life itself, in their grateful and satisfied remembrance of Him.⁹

Verse 12. 'Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed,' &c. The connection is obvious of these words with what immediately precedes. *Wherefore*—because of what has just been said; because salvation is God's purpose and the mode in which He wills to make His highest glory known; and because also the confession of Him in the name of His anointed Son is not only the effective means of salvation to the saved, but the necessity imposed on every creature of His hand—do you now, who have learnt to know Him in the truth of His electing love, go forth to meet Him in His ways.

To train his brethren in the ways of God, that as obedient children they might be fruitful in righteousness through Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of the Father, is the main desire of this earnest watcher for their souls. Having therefore set freshly before them the living picture of perfection in the person of the Lord, he urges it upon their hearts and consciences as the master-motive of their walk. For what lay once before God's fellow, and drew the gracious longings of His love, lies open also in

⁹ 1 John iii. 16.

another sense, as the path of safety and of honour before those who are by grace *in* Christ. For they also are, in a new and triumphant sense, ‘found in fashion as *men*.’ No longer a grief to their Maker, which we all are in our natural state as born of the first Adam,¹ but new-created in Christ Jesus, and accepted already in heavenly places in the person of their Forerunner, they are left for a while on earth to think and speak of heaven, and to know no other boast among men than the cross of Jesus Christ. Of them, as sealed now with the Spirit of His Christ, and in due time to be presented faultless in His likeness, God is not ashamed. They start on their career as Christians from their new and higher birth. Born, not of the will of man, nor of corruptible seed, but of the will of God and by the power of His word,² they are no longer *of* the world, nor *for* the world, but *to* the world; sent into it to witness both of present grace and coming judgment in the name of its Saviour and appointed judge.

But it is personal conduct rather than external testimony that is here occupying the Apostle’s mind, and hence the force of the appeal: ‘Wherefore,’ because these things are true of Him who is your Saviour, do you work out your own salvation by cleaving still to Him, and closely imitating Him. For salvation is not only *of* but also *in* the Lord. To abide in Him is therefore to be safe. But it is

¹ Gen. vi. 6; Rom. iii. 10 seq.

² John i. 13; 1 Pet. i. 23; Jas. i. 18.

by the habitual exercise of a faith which knows its ever-blessed Object in obedient love, and by no other means, that we do or can abide in Him. Such is the evident meaning of this much pondered but often much misapprehended verse. The Lord had in His great humility obeyed, and their life to God as believers is a part of the fruit of that obedience. By means of it they had been placed, through elective grace, in a filial relation to God; and as God's living workmanship they had made a good beginning of their course. They had obeyed heartily and from the first the form of doctrine to which they were delivered,³ and Paul's absence from them had but multiplied the proofs of their obedience. While with them at Philippi he had rejoiced in their aptitude and diligence as hearers of his words and observers of his ways in Christ.⁴ But when, like weaned babes, they fell at his departure into the immediate hands of the Good Shepherd, and drew from Him alone the nurture of their souls, their works abounded through the increase of their faith. Paul's disciples had become his rivals in their zeal for the Gospel;⁵ and now his sole anxiety is, that what they did rightly as to its object should be done wisely also in its spirit; and that they should keep well in mind both the nature of their calling and the manner of the grace wherein they stood.

For it is evident that the danger to which they

³ Rom. vi. 17, marg.

⁴ Conf. chap. iv. 9.

⁵ Ante, chap. i. 7.

lay chiefly exposed was the unsuspected growth among them of a self-reliant and mutually independent spirit. Respect also is had in the Apostle's words to the natural temperament and disposition of those to whom he writes. Each nation has its characteristic traits, and the same Spirit who takes corrective notice of Gallo-Grecian impulsiveness and fickleness has words of caution also for Macedonian self-assertion.⁶ The sole effectual corrective of will-workings of any kind in the children of light is, as Paul well knew, the maintenance in their souls of a due sense of the grace in which they stand, and of the manner of the God with whom they have to do. Now the promised end of his brethren's faith, as of his own, was *Salvation*, and he here reminds them that this end had yet to be attained; and that if, as it surely is, salvation be of sovereign grace, it is also by means of a faith which in a just knowledge of the Saviour-God, and of the unspeakable value of His gift in Christ, and in a corresponding spirit of self-judgment, trembles while it trusts, and proves its own vitality by seeking still to do His will. In what manner Paul connected habitually his own experiences with his hope as a suffering follower of the Lord is evident throughout his writings, and has already found expression in an earlier part of this Epistle.⁷ And on this all-important point he would have his brethren like-minded with himself.

⁶ And, it may be added, for Roman pride and litigiousness; for Philippi was a *colony*.

⁷ Ante, chap. i. 19.

The righteous man, we are told by another and a very competent witness, is with difficulty saved;⁸ for it is against all natural and Satanic oppositions that the power of God prevails in His elect, through faith, unto that end. It is by a patient continuance in well-doing that the good fight of faith is fought successfully; and the crown of righteousness is in reserve for those who, like Paul, bear constantly in mind the native contradiction of the flesh to the Spirit, and find strength for conflict only in the habitual replenishing of their self-emptied souls out of the fulness that is in Christ. For such His grace suffices, and in the hearts of such there will be found in their sweet and inseparable companionship both the fear of God and the comfort of the Holy Ghost. He would save his brethren from the danger of becoming hearers only, and not doers, of the word. A wily and relentless adversary was about their steps, who could be foiled only by a vigilant and steadfast faith. It became them, therefore, by giving diligence to certify their calling and election to themselves;⁹ to *live* and not to theorise, and with fear and trembling to work out their own salvation; laying firm hold on that eternal life to which they had been called in Christ, and remembering that it is mainly by *endurance* that this work is wrought. Afflictions for the truth's sake were therefore to be regarded as tokens of salvation, and as among the means

⁸ 1 Pet. iv. 18: ὁ δίκαιος μόλις σώζεται.

⁹ Jas. i. 22; 1 Pet. v. 8, 9; 2 Pet. i. 10.

appointed for the attainment of that end.¹ By what manner of strength the work thus enjoined on the believer is to be effected, he explicitly declares in what immediately follows.

Verse 13. 'For it is God that worketh in you,' &c. The great example of 'God willing and doing' in man is the revelation of the Father in the Son, and the *power* of Divine action in any form is the Holy Ghost. 'My Father which dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works,' is the glad confession of Him who cast out devils by the finger of God. The *order* of Christian obedience is according to the filial relation which grace has established for us through the Gospel; its *principle* is that of unreserved subjection to the Lord.² The Christ in whom all true believers stand is *God's*. And even as the Father did the works while dwelling in the Man whom He approved, so will He also, by His indwelling Spirit, work in them that are truly Christ's; and if His, then their own no longer. To yield themselves therefore unto God, and their members as instruments of righteousness unto God, that the good pleasure of His own goodness may be wrought in them according to Christ Jesus, is for God's saints to work out in effect their own salvation. For, that salvation can result only from obedience is the perpetual testimony of the Spirit.

The people whom Jehovah once led forth from

¹ Ante, chap. i. 28; 2 Cor. i. 6.

² 2 Cor. x. 4, 5; Heb. v. 9.

Egypt by the hand of Moses fell in the wilderness, and failed to enter into the land of promise. Salvation was their song when the Red Sea was behind them ; but they failed to work their own salvation out through a willing ignorance of their Saviour and His ways. That Jehovah was among them was apparent to their eyes, which daily saw the tokens of His presence ; yet they erred from that presence in their hearts ; and thus through the disobedience of unbelief, instead of salvation, they incurred destruction at His hands. Yet not all fell ; for there were some who understood His wonders, and clave still in heart to Him. And as it was with Israel after the flesh, so is it now with them that call outwardly upon the Name of Jesus Christ. He who walked in a tent with the children of Israel now dwells by His Spirit in the hearts of His elect ; while they who know the truth by ear only, and not in heart ; who note and mentally admire the prodigy of Divine redemption, but are not drawn in love to the Redeemer ; who bear the name of Christ therefore, but being without true faith are unsealed by the Spirit of Christ—are none of His. To the ears of such the charge to ‘work out their own salvation with fear and trembling’ seems a discord in the burden of ‘free grace.’ In still thinking their own thoughts, and estimating the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ by themselves, they find a false and delusive pleasure, like an earlier generation of unbelieving namers of His Name, in listening, with mind and conscience

equally defiled and unawakened, to the words of God.³ They fall, as unbelieving Israel fell, into the fatal error of imagining that *they*, and not Christ only, are natural objects of Divine favour; and, receiving willingly the proclamation of free grace as made through Christ unto themselves, they turn that grace—the grace of *God*—to lasciviousness, by continuing in Christ's name to follow their own ways. Instead, therefore, of reverence and godly fear, there is found in these a merely carnal confidence and false security; and while the righteous tremble in their joy, these unaltered sinners utter the vain boastings of a deceived and self-elated heart; partakers by profession of the heavenly calling, yet living wantonly in pleasure on the earth.⁴ Not seeking *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness, they will in the end find that, alas, and only that, which they in heart *have* sought. If Mammon be preferred in heart to God, the choice will be ratified irrevocably in the coming day. Self-seekers who neglect God's great salvation will at the last find nothing but themselves; and what salvation is in them?

It is well for us all to ponder carefully the Apostle's language in this passage; for we are living in the full course of the predicted days of peril, when tongues are loud, and self-direction, or else some other form of merely human guidance, is the common manner and habit of nominal Christianity. In God's true

³ Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32; Tit. i. 15, 16.

⁴ Jas. v. 5; 1 Tim. v. 6; Jude *passim*.

children His own indwelling Spirit governs (not without much resistance from the flesh) both their acts and wills. And it is by a diligent cultivation of the habit of subjection to the will of God that they become co-workers with Himself to the effecting of their own salvation. A true faith does not content itself with generalities ; it deals with *God*, and learns to walk *with* Him in secret and *before* Him in the sight of men. And there will be found believers of this stamp when their long-promised salvation is at last revealed. When peace and safety have by the many been long dissociated from the cross of Christ, and expectation has ceased entirely to regard the heavens, and fixed its gaze solely on the earth, and the comer in his own name is ready to receive the idolatrous homage of the nations which once outwardly acknowledged Jesus Christ as Lord, then such as have stuck to God's testimonies and kept themselves in His love with a heart united in His fear, rejoicing and working righteousness as they build themselves upon their most holy faith, will not be disappointed of their hope.⁵

Verse 14. 'Do all things without murmurings and disputings,' &c. Believers are themselves distinctively 'of God,' and if led of the Spirit their works will be wrought in Him, and after His own manner. But God neither murmurs nor disputes. His longsuffering is salvation, and His words are peace to such as His goodness is now leading to

⁵ Ps. lxxxvi. 11 ; Is. lxiv. 5 ; Jude 20, 21.

repentance; while His judgment will need no argument to prove itself to be according to truth, in the day when He confounds His adversaries. If men, therefore, do such things, it is because of their natural ignorance and forgetfulness of God. A grudging spirit will be far from one who remembers how freely he has himself received; while ‘reasonings’⁶ or ‘debatings’ belong rather to them that walk on in darkness, through their willing ignorance of God, than to children of the light and of the day.⁷

Verse 15. ‘That ye may be blameless and harmless children of God, without rebuke,’ &c. Although the filial relation of a believer to the living God is purely of grace and in Christ, and exists, therefore, antecedently to any manifestation of character on his part, his claim to call upon the Father is in the eyes of men a disputable one so long as he lies open to any kind of moral blame. For as the tempter challenged the true title of the woman’s Seed, though first declared from heaven, until driven back to shameful silence by the truth and meekness of his Victor, so the assertion of Divine relationship on our part is met by incredulous scorn, or else by secret fear, on the part of an unbelieving world, according as we are walking ‘as men,’ or as He walked whose example is before our eyes. Nothing so mightily convinces men of the reality of a godly profession as the manifest freedom of those who make it from the ordinary ties of worldly conformity, their superiority

⁶ διαλογισμοί.

⁷ Ps. lxxxii. 5; 1 Thess. v. 5.

of motive and habit to the customary ways of men, their cheerful abstinence from worldly pleasures in the power of a richer joy and brighter hope, and their willing bondage to the law of Christ.

Profession unsustained by demonstrated grace is entitled to no credence on the part of others. As Jesus, when asserting the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son, appealed to His works as a confirmation of His words,⁸ so also is the witness of *behaviour* established as the true ground of the recognition of His people in the world. To the Jews, who claimed falsely to be Abraham's children, His resistless refutation was: 'If ye were Abraham's children ye would do the works of Abraham.' The same law still rules, and cannot be revoked. They who believe truly in the Lord Jesus Christ are known not because they say so, but because they do in measure work the works of Christ.⁹ A loveless 'saint' is no true child of God. He is not yet a living soul; for nature and origin declare themselves in act.¹ Men are what they habitually *do*.

Of the two terms here used to specify the moral features of God's true children, the first points to their negative virtue as unexposed in the ordinary tenor of their lives to outward censure—affording to the enemy no cause of evil speech, as Daniel proved invulnerable to any charge save only in the matter of his God. The second is descriptive rather of the inward disposition of the soul. That His

⁸ John xiv. 11.

⁹ John xiv. 12.

¹ 1 John iii. 14.

disciples should be 'harmless as doves' was the Lord's injunction in the days of His flesh ; and the same word² is here used by the Spirit in Paul's exhortation, and repeated in a like sense to the saints at Rome.³

By thus walking as their Master walked they would let their light shine before men, and constrain them to give glory to God in their day of visitations. Instead of rebuke they would have praise from all who preferred peace to lawlessness.⁴ The generation among whom they sojourned had their characteristic moral features, and so too should they. But they are of the light while the world lies in darkness. The way of the natural man is froward and strange,⁵ but their calling as new creatures in Christ Jesus was to keep the way of *God*. Instead of crookedness there should be found in them simplicity, and instead of the perverseness of self-will conformity to Him who pleased not Himself, and was reproachable by those only who reproached God.⁶ Let them shine therefore⁷ by keeping steadfastly the path of obedience, having their conversation honest among the Gentiles, and by well-doing silencing the ignorance of foolish men.⁸ If darkness still refused to comprehend the

² ἀκέραιος.

³ 'Simple concerning evil' (Rom. xvi. 19). With the passage now before us we may compare 2 Cor. vi. 14-18. But there is a difference: in the latter it is a Divine recognition of their filial relation—'I will receive,' &c.; while here it is the reluctant acknowledgment of men.

⁴ Rom. xiii. 3.

⁵ Prov. xxi. 8.

⁶ Rom. xv. 3.

⁷ φαίνασθε is ambiguous. I prefer, however, the marginal translation.

⁸ 1 Pet. ii. 12, 15.

light, and their close following of Christ had no other present effect than to make them partakers of His cup of suffering, they would be abundant gainers still.⁹

Verse 16. ‘Holding forth (or fast)¹ the word of life,’ &c. The word here used by the Apostle carries many meanings, and I am not sure that the one chosen by our authorised translators is the best. For it is evident that oral preaching, in which sense the word is taken most commonly by readers of the English Bible, is by no means prominently in Paul’s thoughts. If it had been he would have used, I am persuaded, a different and less ambiguous expression. It is the *life*-preaching of God’s saints that he evidently has here most at heart. His desire is their firm adhesion to the faith of God’s elect, and their exercise of practical godliness through the effectual working in them of the word of God, which produces in result that moral testimony to the truth of the Gospel which is far more powerful than unsupported words. This conclusion is, I think, fully sanctioned by a reference to the latter part of the verse. For Paul’s glory and joy in the day of Christ would be rather in the fruit of his own preaching than of theirs, and it would be only through the apostasy of those to whom he had been personally sent as God’s messenger of grace that he could be truly said to have run or laboured in vain.

If, then, they held fast the word of life, keeping it

⁹ 1 Pet. iv. 14.

¹ ἐπέχοντες—‘continentes.’ Hieron.

with understanding in their souls, and not letting slip the things now spoken to us of God by His Son, their light should both shine clearly before men in their day of patience; and he who now joyed over them for their well-running thus far in the race of life would have them as his boast and praise when, as part of the interest of his Apostolic talent, they were given over by him on that day to the Master's hands. And how near that day was in the constant anticipation of his spirit we have already seen, and are continually reminded as we meditate his words.

Verse 17. 'Yea, and if I be offered,' &c. To all of them the day of Christ was near, but to himself a martyr's death seemed yet more imminent. Nor was such an ending of his course in his eyes a strange or unexpected thing. From the first Paul had been, as it were, in training for that end. At Philippi he had been shamefully entreated for the truth's sake, as they knew; and if at Rome he was to seal his testimony with his blood, it would be a fitting close to a career which had throughout been marked by persecutions and afflictions for the Gospel's sake. There was nothing in Paul's nature to make death less terrible to him than to any other man; yet, though no stoic, either by personal temperament or educational habit, he can welcome a bloody death for Christ's sake not only with serenity, but with thankfulness and joy. For his blood, if shed in such a cause, would be as a drink-offering to God. The faith of these Philippian saints had made themselves

and their service an acceptable sacrifice to God through Jesus Christ;² and if He so willed it that the instrument of their conversion should be the first to enter on their common hope, and his freed and longing spirit should ascend without delay to God, the joy of that release was not his only, but theirs also. For whether present or absent he was bound to them, and they to him, in the indissoluble communion of the Holy Ghost.

Verse 18. 'For the same cause also do ye joy,' &c. And if these were his own feelings and anticipations in the prospect of such a death, he would have his brethren be also of like mind. Instead of fainting at his loss, they should be glad for his sake who had been thus honoured,³ and for their own also, as his companions in tribulation and partakers of his hope.

Verse 19. 'But I trust in the Lord Jesus,' &c. His death by violence seemed immediately impending, and he had no special revelation to the contrary; yet, as we have already seen, his inward persuasion was that the Lord had further need of him, and that for their very sakes to whom he writes.⁴ But while suspense continued he would keep his trusty yoke-fellow beside him, that when his lot for life or death was definitively settled they at Philippi might have the earliest and most trustworthy intelligence of the event. And if, as he anticipated, he was still to

² Rom. xii. 1.

³ Conf. John xiv. 28.

⁴ Ante, chap. i. 25.

live, he would receive by the same messenger on his return authentic tidings of their state. And that these tidings would be of a cheering character he would allow himself to entertain no doubt.

Verse 20. 'For I have no man like-minded,'⁵ &c. Epaphroditus was indeed like-minded, as the sequel amply shows, but he was rather *theirs* than *his*. Besides, he would be with them when they read his words. It is of Roman Christians generally that he utters the depreciatory estimate contained in this verse and the following. Yet there were not a few at Rome who loved truly both the Lord and His suffering bondmen, and who themselves preached Christ of good-will and in love.⁶ But there are measures and degrees of Christian devotedness. A love which can make men care for strangers as for their own and for themselves dwells in them only whose souls are on a par, with respect to practical grace, with that of this self-renouncing and Christ-filled servant of His Church. For to him, indeed, to live was Christ. To give therefore his whole heart in loving service to all or any who are Christ's was to him not an effort, but an instinct rather. 'Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is offended and I burn not?'⁷ are words which could not be repeated without hazard by ordinary Christian mouths. And yet such love as filled Paul's heart, and in which Timotheus was by grace

⁵ ἰσόψυχος—'of equal soul or spirit'—a rare word, and descriptive of a too rare condition of soul.

⁶ Ante, chap. i, 15, 17.

⁷ 2 Cor. xi. 29.

a partner, is but the normal tone of true spiritual-mindedness. To fall short of it is to confess our failure as disciples;⁸ and a due consciousness of this would be a wholesome check on the self-complacency which is so apt to settle like a blighting rust on right-thinking but inert and unstirred Christian minds.⁹

Verse 21. 'For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.' The spirit of self-sacrifice which had early begun to work among the saints at Philippi had not yet shown itself in those at Rome. Their *faith* indeed was widely known,¹ and that hope abounded also, according to the Apostle's earlier desire,² we may well believe; but faith's best addition, 'charity,' which seeketh not her own, was lacking still. The Roman believers were as most of us moderns are who trust in the same Lord, *saints*, but not *Christians*. For how can that name of loftiest grace and honour (though now, alas, in current speech so prostituted and debased) be justly called on any who seek not, as the only things worth seeking for their own sake, 'the things of Jesus Christ'? While any other things have the first place in our thoughts and our affections, we call Him 'Lord' to little purpose; for if He be truly Lord He owns us *absolutely*. His rights, therefore, and His claims are both our duty, and, if we think wisely, our interests also.

⁸ John xiii. 34, 35.

¹ Rom. i. 8.

⁹ 2 Pet. iii. 1.

² Rom. xv. 13.

And here I feel it right to call attention to a common but often unsuspected form of self-seeking which abounds especially in seasons of general religious activity. I mean that spirit of will-worship which leads Christian people to devote themselves to philanthropic services of various kinds in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, while apparently indifferent to the woful disparity existing between the known wishes of the Lord and the actual condition of the Church here below. Few seem to covet now the place of Mary at the Master's feet, while the sea and land are traversed eagerly to multiply the number of His professing people. 'Good works' are now estimated rather by a reference to their presumed effect on human society than by their accordance with the will of God. Hence, while saving truth is (God be thanked) copiously ministered, and the seed of life broadly scattered on all sides, the true calling of God's children—their oneness in Christ, with its practical evidence in their undivided fellowship and common subjection to the statutes of God's house; their relation first to each other, and then to the world in which, as heaven-sent messengers, they publish the name and assert the claims of Him whom the world refused—those things, in a word, which are emphatically 'the things of Jesus Christ,' are comparatively little thought of. The benefits of His passion are widely and, it is to be feared, too often lightly and vainly claimed, while subjection to Himself whom we call our only *Lord*, as well as our Saviour, and a

doing of His words rather than a fulfilling of our own ideas, are found only in exceptional instances, and for the most part abandoned in a false assertion of the liberty of grace.

It is, in truth, a mournful declaration that the Apostle has here made, and it may remind us of his words of even earlier date to the saints at Corinth, who, though sanctified and much enriched in Christ, were walking still 'as men,' and so misconstruing both wisdom and folly in their ways as to make him think that the Apostles who began the testimony of Christ crucified were set forth also as the last examples of its full transforming effect.³ Such was and is the dismal average of practical godliness even among those who are acknowledged by the Spirit to be Christ's. But bright exceptions there were then, and will be, by the grace of God, until the end. Paul's intended messenger was one of these, as he proceeds to show.

Verse 22. 'But ye know the proof of him,' &c. Timotheus was no stranger at Philippi,⁴ and they to whom Paul wrote could estimate the truth of this appeal. His words are well worth noting. The service of Timotheus was, he says, as that of a son towards a father; for Paul had both begotten him in

³ 1 Cor. iv. 8-16.

⁴ It is, I think, evident, on a comparison of Acts xvii. 14 with the narrative contained in the preceding chapter, that Timotheus was included in the unnamed 'we' and 'us' who were with Paul and Silas at the beginning of God's work at Philippi. We know also from Acts xix. 22 that he visited the Macedonian churches at a later day, with Erastus, as Paul's chosen deputy.

Christ and trained him to the work. But, again, that service had for its object not man but *God*; so it was *with* his spiritual father that this naturally timid and sensitive, but sound-hearted and thoroughly devoted, lover of his Lord had wrought, and was still working in the bonds of the Gospel. Little more is known of the personal history of Timotheus, but this verse alone suffices to give to his name and memory a welcome fragrance in the soul of every sincere lover of the truth.

Verses 23, 24. ‘Him therefore I hope to send,’ &c. He founds his expectation on his circumstances, while he rests his trust in God. His fate could not remain, he thought, long undecided, and when he knew the worst or best he would despatch his trusty and beloved messenger. With Paul, indeed, there could be neither yea nor nay; yet in the Lord he felt a confident assurance that he should revisit them in person, and that shortly. They who were for the truth’s sake his uncompromising enemies were strong, and seemed to have his life at their disposal;⁵ but the Lord in whom he trusted was mightier than they. It is probable, though not absolutely certain, that his fervent wish was granted. But our interest here is rather in the desire and its motive than in its result.

Verse 25. ‘Yet I supposed it necessary to send

⁵ If, as is usually supposed, Poppæa, who patronised the Jews, and was probably a proselyte, was then Nero’s consort, and Tigellinus his chief minister, religious malice would be found in active combination against Christ with natural wickedness and imperial jealousy.

to you Epaphroditus,' &c. Epaphroditus had been sent by the Church at Philippi on an errand both of sympathetic inquiry and of practical relief⁶ to their much-loved father in the Gospel, and it might well have been in the Apostle's heart to keep him longer by his side, as one whose value both as a companion in labour and a fellow-soldier in the good warfare of the faith he so fully appreciated, as well as his assiduous and affectionate personal ministry of love. But, true to his own doctrine as a monitor of others, he considers not himself but them.

Verse 26. 'For he was longing for you all,' &c. He notes and hastens to relieve his brother's heaviness of spirit, due as this was to a feeling which in a heart like St. Paul's could not fail to meet a sympathetic recognition. It is in truth a sweet and touching trait of the sensibility of a pure and Christ-fed love that is here offered to our notice in this brief record of Epaphroditus, whom we know only through the mention made of him in this Epistle. Conscious of an unfeigned and perfect affection for his brethren in Christ at Philippi, he reckoned implicitly upon an equal reciprocation on their part. As the bearer also of their messages and gifts to Paul, he had a special cause of uneasiness, as they might imagine that through his illness there had been a frustration of the objects of his mission. His

⁶ Epaphroditus was their ἀπόστολος as well as λειτουργός τῆς χρείας to the Apostle; both these terms being expressive of public and responsible, as distinguished from private or voluntary, ministry of any kind.

thoughts, therefore, upon his sick-bed and after his recovery were occupied less with his own case than with theirs. His personal burden he endured with willing patience in the strength of God, but it pained him to know that tidings of his illness had already reached their ears.⁷ To reassure them, therefore, by his presence was now his nearest wish.

Verse 27. 'For indeed he was sick,' &c. Does there seem a contradiction in the language of this verse to Paul's earlier description of his own feelings when under the shadow of impending death? Would not Epaphroditus have preferred, like his Apostolic fellow-soldier, the far better part, and gone with gladness to be with the Lord? No doubt he would. Yet his recovery from what seemed a mortal sickness is recorded as a mercy. And such in a double sense it was, as he insists. That it was so to Paul we can have no difficulty in believing, for the sufficient reason given. But it was not less so to Epaphroditus. For Paul was now far advanced in years, and Epaphroditus was by comparison still young, and had before him a fair hope of yet more abundant and successful labour for his Lord and for his brethren's sake. For to every true soul such opportunity of service as this life only can afford is precious, while yet the heart may be divided between its instinctive desire to be ever with the Lord, and the promptings of a godly ambition which would be

⁷ Paul knew this doubtless through some later, but unmentioned, communication from Philippi.

still craving for itself a larger scope. Besides, a stroke of mortal sickness has *primâ facie* an aspect of judgment on the sufferer, or at least on those who would most poignantly lament his loss. Lastly, we may see also in this episode of the illness of Epaphroditus an example of the practical schooling in the ways of God which His Apostles underwent as they ran and laboured in their calling as the willing instruments of His good pleasure. How gladly would Paul have applied to his sick friend the miraculous healing power with which we know him to have been so plentifully endowed ! But with him there was no 'yea.' Divine power can never be at the discretion of a creature. And though he might have naturally wished that this sickness had fallen, rather for their good, on some of those self-sent preachers who wrought the work of God impurely than on so true and devoted a labourer, his hands were tied, and prayer for his fellow-servant's recovery was his only but effectual resource. Viewed thus on all sides, the restoration of Epaphroditus was a mercy, to be acknowledged to the praise and glory of God.

Verse 28. 'I sent him therefore the more carefully,' &c. By what slender links are often the weightiest consequences joined in the mysterious chain of God's all-wise dealings with His children ! This inestimable Epistle would perhaps never have been written but for the sickness of Epaphroditus, and the kindly sympathies resulting. It was for us, who in later generations have pondered to our souls'

profit and delight this inimitable writing, that both the stroke and the mercy came upon Epaphroditus ; that God's Church might have kept before it to the end a living picture and example, both of what His grace is, and of what, when received with understanding into the hearts of men, it practically works. To part from Epaphroditus was no joy to Paul ; but in thinking of the glad effect of his return to them he found a medicine for his grief.

Verse 29. 'Receive him therefore in the Lord,' &c. I infer from this, as it might seem, superfluous injunction, that Epaphroditus stood less highly in their general esteem at Philippi than was meet in the Apostle's eyes. There were there in God's assembly both bishops and deacons, as we know ; but it is likely that Epaphroditus was a previously untried man, who came forward for the first time into public notice as a volunteer to bear the intended aid of the Philippian saints to Paul. Self-addicted, like the household of Stephanas,⁸ to the ministry of the saints, he finds a ready appreciation on the part of the Apostle, who would have his value better known by those who naturally were his own. To give him therefore his true place among them he adds to his words of natural congratulation the weight of an Apostolic exhortation—commending him first personally to their cordial esteem, and then calling their attention to the moral claim on their regard of all

⁸ 1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16.

who thus gave themselves willingly for Christ's sake to the work and labour of love.

Verse 30. 'Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death,' &c. Communication in those days was not as now. A messenger on such an errand as that committed to Epaphroditus ran many risks which modern facilities of transit have removed. He started, it is likely, in weak health upon his perilous errand. But he regarded not his life, if only he might spend it in the direct service of his Lord. And to minister to His Apostle in his bonds was, he felt assured, to minister to Christ Himself. It is evident that there was something in the illness of Epaphroditus which connected it immediately with his Roman visit and his personal service to the Apostle. It was a sickness, that is, to which he would not have been equally exposed had he remained at home. And his act was *theirs* also, since in their name and stead he came, supplying thus, as their most willing deputy, their necessary lack of service to himself. As they would have therefore their own kindness taken, on Paul's part, so let them welcome joyfully their messenger who bore to them his thanks.

CHAPTER III.

WE reach here a dividing, yet connecting, line in this Epistle. He has hitherto been congratulating, encouraging, teaching, and affectionately exhorting his brethren, and he has yet much more to say, especially in the last-mentioned tone. But it is, as he has elsewhere said, by *warning* as well as teaching that perfection is attained in Christ;¹ and he proceeds now to exercise this needful part of his ministry in terms suited both to the reality of the dangers to which his brethren were exposed, and the importance of the truth which they are called on to maintain. But he prefaces his admonition by a highly characteristic injunction.

Verse 1. ‘Finally,² my brethren, rejoice in the Lord,’ &c. They are charged according to the truth of their standing, as new creatures, in the grace of God. For joy is the native element of righteousness, and is an essential feature of the kingdom of God,³ into which they had been brought. Under the sun, grief follows gladness as night follows day, and from such alternations God’s children are not exempt while in their unchanged bodies; but to be glad even

¹ Col. i. 28.

² Or, ‘For the rest—’τὸ λοιπόν.

³ Romans xiv. 17.

in the midst of sorrow is the duty as well as privilege of such.⁴ For the Lord, who is the portion of His saints, is subject to no change. In Him therefore let them ever seek their joy. We may trace easily a connection between these opening words and the close of the preceding chapter. He had bidden them receive *Epaphroditus* with all gladness 'in the Lord.' But such pleasures, though most real, are transitory only, and he would have his brethren always glad. Let them rejoice, then, in the *Lord Himself*, for in that constant joy shall be found also their strength for every good work.

And now in a full consciousness that what he is about to write will not be 'news from Rome,' but a repetition of things which they had often heard from him before, he utters his apology. What he is going to say was a familiar topic of his ministry not to them only, but to others also.⁵ But repetition of the truth is never tedious to them that *love* the truth. The grace of God cannot weary, but cheers rather and sustains both its ministers and those to whom they minister, while their words bear nothing but an insipid sameness to the natural ear and mind. But *salvation* means abiding in God's truth. It is therefore, to every growing saint, a thing both safe and welcome to be oft reminded of what he has already known in part. Nor even is such ministry super-

⁴ 2 Cor. vi. 10.

⁵ The words *τὰ αὐτὰ γράφειν ὑμῖν* may either mean 'to write to you as I have written to others,' or 'to write to you as I have taught you earlier by word of mouth.'

fluous to those who are ripe in knowledge and established in the present truth.⁶

Verse 2. 'Beware of dogs,' &c. The three terms here used to designate the objects of special avoidance to the true believer contain a summary of 'the flesh' in its workings both irreligious and religious. The 'dogs' point clearly, yet indiscriminately, to natural ungodliness and profanity in its varied manifestations of evil inclination—the filthiness of the flesh.⁷ His warning therefore as to these is equivalent to that addressed by the same Apostle to the saints at Ephesus.⁸ This application of the word is further sanctioned by the Lord's first answer to the Syrophenician mother.⁹ 'Dogs' are, in a word, 'sinners of the Gentiles,' whose ways are according to their ignorance of God—men who follow merely their own instincts, whether moral or immoral, and obey no higher law than that of their own will.

The 'evil workers' are less easy to define, since the term covers not a few of those who are ostensibly 'within' the Church as well as those 'without.' Evil workers of the latter kind are, in fact, included in the earlier term. It is therefore within the limits of evangelical profession that we have to seek its meaning here. Now that evil may be wrought by Christ's very preachers he has already let us know; and that the mystery of iniquity, which has its cradle in the professing body of Christ, began too soon its deadly

⁶ 2 Pet. i. 12.

⁸ Eph. iv. 17-19.

⁷ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

⁹ Matt. xv. 26.

work, we learn from almost the earliest of Paul's writings.¹ An 'evil worker,' in this sense, is a person who, while saying 'Lord,' and trading in the Master's name, is seeking still his own; conceiving that godliness is gain, and seeking to gratify natural ambition or worldly lusts by spiritual means.² 'Filthiness of the spirit' is the name given generically by the same Apostle to all such work.³ Within this description there will fall, therefore, false teachers of every kind, whose errors are either doctrinal or moral; corrupters of all sorts and raveners of God's flock, whether habited and graced externally as ministers of righteousness,⁴ or uttering more boldly and with swelling words false promises of liberty to willingly deluded ears.⁵ The end of such will surely be according to their works; but they are meanwhile to be had in cautious and watchful observation by all who would be kept firm in their own steadfastness, and found without spot and blameless of Him whose wished-for coming is the morning of the day of God.⁶

'The concision' hung as a ready snare near every community of Gentile believers, and with what damaging effect on the unwary we are taught impressively in the Epistle to the Galatians. That the word itself is a contemptuous repudiation on the part of the Spirit of Christ of the claims of the outward few is evident from the contrast stated in the following

¹ 2 Thess. ii. 7.² Acts xx. 29, 30.³ 2 Cor. vii. 1.⁴ 2 Cor. xi. 15.⁵ Jude 16.⁶ 2 Pet. iii. 14-17; 2 Sam. xxiii. 4.

verse. Their unbelief had turned the once solid and distinctive ordinance of God into an empty and delusive form. Going about to establish their own righteousness, and refusing submission to the righteousness of God, their once distinctive outward honour is become their shame; for their knives are no longer sharpened by the Lord's command, and the cuttings in their flesh are no better in Jehovah's eyes than those of the idolatrous worshippers of Baal. Yet, with a zeal which seemed to grow with their still thickening darkness, they were labouring incessantly to pervert the right ways of the Lord, and bring again under the yoke of bondage the children whom the Son of God had freed. And it is elsewhere also not less distinctly recorded that, wherever Christ was preached and taught, the opposers and corrupters of the faith were 'chiefly they of the circumcision,' a fact carefully impressed by Paul upon his Gentile son in the common faith.⁷

Such were the chief objects of Christian avoidance in Apostolic days, and it remains only to observe that the like dangers beset still the true believer not less closely. Of the first class it is needless to say more; but of modern 'evil workers,' who can tell the number and variety? And their popularity increases daily. Of the multitude of those who concern themselves habitually with things Christian, how few are found who utter God's words purely, unweakened and unperverted by merely human thought! And even among God's real children how easily and often does

⁷ Tit. i. 4, 10; conf. 2 Cor. xi.

the spirit of theorising work an evil and soul-spoiling work! 'The concision' are also in especial force wherever ordinances not of God and legal teachings are sought to be imposed on men by those who falsely style themselves the Church's priests. Paul's warning, first addressed to the Philippians, instead of losing force, has gained it by the lapse of time. For the nascent evils of his day are now arriving at their culminating point. Sound doctrine is for the most part already voted flat and tedious. Heaven has receded from the view of most of those whose profession is that they are called to heaven, while earth, like some ornate modern cemetery, spreads alluringly those fair shows which are rooted in corruption, and invites all eyes but those which through special grace see light and beauty only in God's living truth.

Verse 3. 'For we are the circumcision,' &c. We have in these words first a supplanting of the old by the new—the kingdom being taken from its natural heirs and transferred to a nation bringing forth its fruits—'we are the circumcision.' Then, in the threefold description of Christian character which follows, we have the main features of the true and living grace of God presented in contrast to those bad lineaments of the old nature against which we have so recently been warned. Instead of Gentile profanity there is the true worship of God. Instead of the evil work of self-seeking there is boasting in Christ Jesus; and for the concision which rests only in the flesh there is an utter disallowing of the flesh.

But these particulars demand a fuller notice, and shall now be considered in their order.

‘We are the circumcision,’ the Apostle says, and what follows in the verse is but an ampler definition of that term in its ultimate and perfect sense. If, therefore, we would know our place and standing as believers, we must note well what circumcision indicates in the mind of the Spirit of God. Now, if we look back to its original institution, we shall at once perceive that ‘separation to God’ was its distinctive meaning. God’s covenant was in His people’s flesh. But the just only are acceptably known of God, and it was by *faith* that Abraham was justified. To him therefore, and to his two children, that is, to all who should share by special grace his faith, circumcision was but the seal and outward token of that sanctification or separation to God which faith alone effects. But it was the will of God, who called forth Abram from his kindred, to put flesh upon a further trial, and under new conditions, while preparing through the same means for the fulfilment, in due time, and through Abraham’s chosen lineage, of the promised advent of Him who is the quickening Spirit. Thus, God took for His people a family from among the families of the earth, and circumcision was the outward proof that they were His. And when afterwards, at Sinai, the law of ordinances dropped its thick veil upon the covenant of promise to the natural eye, the rite of circumcision, although not of Moses, but of the fathers, soon came to be regarded

as the proper badge of a legal or servile relationship to God—of a bondage, that is to say, which, while felt to the full by God's elect, who longed hopefully for their redemption through the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise, was by its infatuated victims gloried in as liberty.⁸ In this sense it is used by the same Apostle when, as a minister of God's righteousness, he apostrophises the carnal Jew: 'for,' says he, 'circumcision verily profiteth if thou keep the law.'⁹ But because that condition is one of impossible fulfilment to the natural man, 'circumcision,' after first becoming 'uncircumcision,' to the outward Jew's confusion, fades lastly into 'nothing,' with the flesh to which it was attached, before the manifested light and righteousness of God in Jesus Christ.¹

From thenceforth 'circumcision,' having clean died out of its secondary or legal meaning, revives in a new and altogether higher sense as a witness and memento of the true and effectual separation of the genuine believer from the body of the flesh in the power of Christ's resurrection from the dead. Such is 'the circumcision of Christ,' or 'Christian circumcision,' a rite not done by hands, but by the power of God, which only works through faith.² Believers therefore may, as the accepted people of God, be called of strictest right 'the circumcision.' We have next to consider the character and habits of the people so described; and first it is said that they

⁸ John viii. 33; Rom. ii. 17.

¹ 1 Cor. vii. 19; John vi. 63.

⁹ Rom. ii. 25.

² Col. ii. 11.

‘Worship God in the Spirit,’ or ‘worship by the Spirit of God.’³ They constitute, in other words, ‘the true worshippers’ whom the Father seeks; finding them first, and by a natural preëminence, in His beloved Son, and in them also who by the grace of their calling are accepted as ‘in Him.’ Such worship can be rendered by those only who are, through their second birth, distinctively ‘of God,’ and are sealed in Christ by the Holy Spirit of promise—who love therefore and seek to please Him only of whom that Spirit speaks. Of such He is not ashamed, and their names are ever on His lips in effectual and saving intercession. To them therefore, and to them only among men, is free access open to the Father by the One Spirit in His name.⁴ The principle of this true worship is *obedience*—that obedience of faith which is the wisdom of the just. It is ‘by the will of God’ that they whom He accepts both live and serve. All other worship, in whatever name addressed to God, is natural will-worship only, and without acceptance in His sight.

But if this be so, what kind of estimate is to be formed of the ordinary religious services of Christendom, whether liturgical or otherwise? For the common basis upon which such services for the most part rest is the entirely false assumption of man’s

³ There seems to be nearly equal ms. authority for the varied readings Θεοῦ and Θεῷ in this clause. Jerome followed the latter, Augustine the former, of these readings. Augustine’s version, however—‘qui Spiritui Dei servimus’—may be fairly questioned.

⁴ Rom. viii. 9; 2 Cor. i. 21, 22; Eph. ii. 18.

natural capacity to offer acceptable worship to his Maker. But this is, in the language of Scripture, to go in the way of Cain and to echo the gainsaying of Core, whose sin was to assert for nature claims and functions which are conferred by sovereign grace alone. To us who believe there is one God the *Father*, who receives the worship of His *children*. The living God is served only by the *living*. The Just God can admit to His presence no sinner *in his sins*. They who call with acceptance on His name must first have their hearts purged from an evil conscience through the sprinkling of the blood of Christ. His true worshippers offer to God the sacrifices of *righteousness*, as they render to Him the fruit of their lips, making confession of the name of Jesus.⁵ The *power* of godliness is the Holy Ghost; its form, in the absence of the power, is among the last manifestations of human wilfulness. But ‘in vain they worship Me,’ is God’s anticipative answer to all forms or habits of religious demonstration that are not ‘of faith,’ but originate with man and are regulated by his will.⁶ ‘The circumcision’ worship God in the Spirit. But they also—

‘Boast, or glory,⁷ in Christ Jesus.’ Again and again God’s saints are called on in this Epistle to be glad and rejoice in the Lord; but the word here used, though it carries in it the additional sense of joyful exaltation, is both different in form and of a

⁵ Ps. v. 4; Heb. xiii. 15.

⁶ Matt. xv. 9.

⁷ καυχώμενοι ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

weightier force, expressing rather the full utterance of victorious confidence than merely emotional gladness of heart. Such boasting as is here ascribed to the circumcision is a solemn declaration of the reason of their hope who worship God in the Spirit. They occupy a standing and assert a title which lies quite outside the realm of nature. The name which they lift up as a standard belongs to Him in whom indeed there dwells the fulness of the Godhead bodily, but who was and is 'despised and rejected of men.' They glory in the *cross* of Jesus Christ their *Lord*.⁸ Knowing by the grace of their election, through the revealing power of the Spirit, the truth of Christ's person and the unsearchable treasure of His love, they brave willingly the contempt of the Jewish and Gentile families alike, and in the conscious possession, in Christ, of the righteousness of God, can make their boast unfeignedly in Him who has redeemed them from the earth. Let it then be well remembered that 'rejoicing in Christ Jesus' means, in Paul's sense of the words, something vastly different from delighting in popular Christian melodies and sensational religious services—that it implies death to the world and life to God; that to boast in what the world derides is possible only to a faith which lives *above* the world, and sees Him who is to sense invisible; and that to such the things of the Spirit are the chosen and natural objects of desire and pursuit, and not the things of the flesh. It is the *circumcision*

⁸ Gal. vi. 14.

who rejoice or make their boast in Christ Jesus, and they are, as we have seen, a people separate to God. Lastly, they—

‘Have no confidence in the flesh.’ Carnal confidence, in the sense of natural self-reliance, is, as a moral trait, inseparable from the ‘flesh,’ against which every believer has to watch and fight. Its corrective in a child of God is self-judgment. It is the snare into which Simon, son of Jonas, fell, to be delivered through self-knowledge by the grace of Him whose warnings he despised. But it is not exactly this that the Apostle is here disclaiming on behalf of ‘the circumcision,’ but rather, as the sequel shows, a false religious trust. Paul’s language can be truth in the lips of no child of Adam who has not first found by faith both death and burial for his ‘old man’ in the Gospel. For such words belong to those only who are themselves no longer in the flesh, but in the Spirit, because indwelt by the Spirit of Christ.⁹ Another confidence is theirs—that boldness which articulates the boast in Christ which we have just been hearing;¹ a confidence which has its rest in God, whose manifested love in Christ is both believed and known by those whom, by His effectual calling, He has separated to Himself. He who was once their natural dread is now become their hiding-place.² The joy of a true believer is that he has found in Christ deliverance from *himself*, as well as an escape from his just judgment as a sinner. His

⁹ Rom. viii. 9.

¹ Heb. iii. 6, 14.

² Ps. xxxii.

sorrow is the still continuing evil vitality of that which, though judicially dead, strives still within him, so long as he is in this fleshly tabernacle, against the Spirit of its Divine supplanter. Instead, therefore, of confidence in the flesh there is, for God's children, *groaning* in this body until the day of its redemption come. There is a constant jealousy of the contagion of the flesh in every divinely enlightened conscience, while God's children find no fear in that 'love' which is the origin of their election, and the eternal portion of their hope.³

Verse 4. 'Though I might also have confidence in the flesh,' &c. We have now presented to us, in this and the two following verses, a summary of the legitimate grounds of that 'confidence in the flesh' which has been discarded deliberately by 'the circumcision' as a worthless and deceptive thing. With a just egotism, Paul steps forward as a witness of God to illustrate in his own person the sound doctrine of the Lord. For as a chosen vessel unto Him, a part of his fitness for the Master's special use was the thoroughness of his character, and experience as a consistent follower after righteousness in the way of works. To speak slightly of the 'concision' would have been scarcely becoming in any Gentile teacher's lips, but of the value of legal righteousness and of traditional and man-taught religion Saul of Tarsus was at least competent to speak, his own kindred and countrymen being witness. If any then

³ 1 John iv. 18.

still thought himself secure upon a legal basis, and saw as yet no safer stand nor higher object of attainment than to be a blameless follower of Moses, let him hear the confession of one who could guide him as a master through all paths of natural merit, and yet show to him a better way.

Verse 5. 'Circumcised the eighth day,' &c. He begins with what is hereditary, and therefore independent of his own choice or will. Paul was no proselyte, but a Jew both born and bred; of faultless lineage as an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin, and brought lawfully within the fleshly covenant of circumcision, he was entitled unimpeachably to that relative 'advantage' which is the birthright of Israel after the flesh.⁴ He then passes to his proper and responsible self: 'touching the law,'⁵ a Pharisee.' To that party in its strictest form he had adhered when come to years, receiving and retaining, as in a kindly soil, the teachings of Gamaliel.⁶ And here we should remark that, of the contending sects of Sadducees and Pharisees, religious excellency could be found only in the latter. For they at least did outward honour to all God's words, though too often annulling them by their traditions, while the Sadducees selected at their will. Obedience was the principle of the one; of the other, mere rationalistic self-assertion. A Pharisee might be, and often was, a godly man, which a Sad-

⁴ Rom. iii. 1, 2.

⁵ Or perhaps *κατὰ νόμον* may mean rather 'by regular training,' as we have a more direct reference to the law in the following verse.

⁶ Acts xxii. 3.

ducee could scarcely be. Paul 'served God' while in darkness, and was truly conscientious in his sins.⁷

Verse 6. 'Concerning zeal, persecuting the Church,' &c. This really formed the very crown and ornament of his carnal confidence. For his conduct as a persecutor was an example of duty persisted in to blood, an estrangement, for what he thought to be the glory of God, from his very flesh. As he had once openly avowed before his judges, he 'thought that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.' It was that sincere zeal of God, but not according to knowledge, which he continued, as Christ's Apostle, to impute to his unbelieving brethren after the flesh,⁸ carried at all personal cost to its ultimate extreme. Carnal confidence had in Saul's teachers rejected Christ in person. 'We know,' they said, 'that He is a sinner.' Inflamed to envious zeal, it clamoured for His death. The high-priest rent his clothes and shouted 'Blasphemy!' against the living Truth; and the same zeal, though in a purer form, made Saul also a persecutor and injurious. In their case a blinded bigotry became the instrument of a politic selfishness, which shrank from no baseness to effect its end. But Paul's bigotry was self-sacrificing rather than self-seeking, and nothing stands higher in the scale of natural excellence than a single-minded and clean-handed zeal.

His last claim to fleshly confidence is undoubt-

⁷ 2 Tim. i. 3; Acts xxvi. 9.

⁸ Rom. x. 2, 3.

edly the boldest also : ‘touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.’ His words must be pondered on our parts in the atmosphere in which he is here supposed to stand ; that, namely, of natural religious knowledge, which is also and always that of spiritual ignorance. While in that atmosphere he thought the law carnal, a thing of positive and limited ordinance, and peradventure deemed himself and his legal teachers spiritual in their zealous seeking after righteousness in the paths of traditional observance. As an unawakened Jew he *boasted* of the law, keeping its literal ordinances scrupulously, and wearing lightly a yoke, the true weight of which his darkened mind and conscience could not feel. His altered estimate both of the law and of himself, when he had passed from natural darkness into the light of God, he has recorded in another place.⁹ As a self-satisfied legalist, he was ‘alive without the law.’ For the commandment ‘came’ only when his light was turned to darkness and his righteousness to sin, when, like Job before him, he perceived that of which he had heard only with his ears before.¹ For to every divinely enlightened mind ‘by the law is the knowledge of *sin*.’² It is therefore quite evident that Paul means here such righteousness only as men may naturally find in the law, and which they can appreciate when seen in one another. A literal obedience to its injunctions was no insuperable task to one who took words only in their out-

⁹ Rom. vii.¹ Job xlii. 5, 6.² Rom. iii. 20.

ward sense. So the young ruler thought who, having lived lawfully from his childhood, came so eagerly to Christ for more to do, that he might win eternal life as his reward. And Israel so thinks still, and still must think, until the vail be taken from their heart.³

Verse 7. 'But what things were gain, these I counted loss for Christ.' It is a dead man's voice that declares this estimate of its effects—the voice of one dead with Christ, but also risen from the dead in Him. And what is the summary of all that flesh at its best could call its own? A name and title, both of which must cease in death; the reputation of a pious persecutor, and a righteousness which, approved and commended by his fellow-men, cannot justify its possessor in the sight of God! Such is the vanity of natural aspirations, and such the emptiness of human gains. Before men, Saul the Pharisee was rich indeed; before God, there was nothing in his hand. Life, then, at its best is here solemnly pronounced by one who knew it well, and stood at its highest moral and religious elevation, to be, apart from Christ, an utter loss. As it had been earlier

³ There are two kindred, yet different, forms of speech employed by the Spirit with reference to legal righteousness. In the verse now before us He speaks of 'righteousness *in law*'—δικαιοσύνην ἐν νόμῳ, or such as man finds in it. In Romans x. 5 He makes Moses describe the righteousness which is 'of the law'—τὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ τοῦ νόμου, or such as should justly result from it. The former was attainable by Paul and others; the latter belongs solely to Him who alone naturally either understood or kept the law unto perfection, and who is now become to every believer 'the end of the law for righteousness.'

testified, 'men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree a lie.'⁴ Paul was a man of highest degree and fairest show in the flesh, but his claims and pretensions are found in the presence of God's truth to be but vanity and falsehood. God showed him Christ, and all his gains were loss. He had *dreamed* only of righteousness until his eyes beheld the Just One. Before that hour he had in his folly measured himself by others, to the destructive elation of his soul; but pride is now hidden from his eyes, and they are opened on the true and living glory of God. That, and that only, now fills all his thoughts, and 'not I, but Christ' becomes the instinctive language of his lips.

And now, before passing to the fuller statement of Paul's manner of life and habit as a Christian, I would add some words of encouragement to such readers of this book as may find in these personal reminiscences of God's Apostle no true reflection of themselves. For he speaks only of things excellent; of righteousness, of duty, of a devoted zeal of God, while they may too probably have to speak of *sin* only in reference to themselves, and would desire to hide rather than expose the tenor of their natural lives. To such an one I would say, be not alarmed at the comparison. If, as a man, you are justly pained at your measureless inferiority to Saul of Tarsus, and feel disposed repiningly to say, 'Such words as his may suit readers of like mind, who

⁴ Ps. lxii. 9.

have passed from a state of moral and religious respectability, by an easy and natural transition, to a higher and diviner platform. But I have nothing in common with Paul. True, he avows himself the chief of sinners; but his sins were sins of ignorance, acts meritorious in themselves, when referred to their motives, and wrong only in their aims. But I can utter no such plea. I have no gains to lose, nor sacrifice to make. I hate and despise myself cordially even in the light of natural self-knowledge, and in secret own myself unworthy of comparison with any of my kind. I am at the zero of ordinary morality, and see nothing human baser, nor so base as I. If known of others as I know myself, I must and should be utterly abhorred,'—if, I say, such are your reflections on meditating Paul's words, I shall make no attempt to soften the portrait you now offer to my view, but accept it in sober and sympathising sadness as unexaggerated truth. And now what I would invite you to do is, first, to thank God heartily for enabling you to take a true and not a false estimate of yourself, and then to turn for a while from the contemplation of an object so repulsive, and look steadfastly at Him on whom God's Spirit seeks to fix your gaze, and whose sympathies, little as you may think it, are altogether with the wretched and the self-abased. The root of *all* error and all misery is *sin*; and sin, we should well remember, is but sin, whether in its heights or depths. Natural estimates are commonly reversed

with God. Publicans and harlots take precedence of Pharisees in entering the kingdom of God, and babes are before the wise and prudent in their capacity for a saving knowledge of the mysteries of grace. Truth is, believe me, but a sorry thing when reporting only what it finds in fallen man. It is lovely only when it speaks of God, and shows to our astonished souls His true image and glory in the face of Jesus Christ. The light which casts the self-reliant sinner into blindness and confusion shines into the already dark chamber of the heart of a self-sick and God-dreading yet God-desiring penitent, to give through the power of that Name the light of life and peace. From self to Christ is the passage from perdition to salvation, without any reference to the natural or mental features of the lost. Paul, the blameless Pharisee, was by nature ‘a child of wrath *just as the rest.*’⁵ Christ came into the world, he tells us, to *save sinners*, and that He might do so effectually, submitted to be Himself ‘made sin’ for them. If He chose His most zealous persecutor to be a vessel of conspicuous mercy and a preacher of the faith which he had once destroyed, it was that in his case *all* long-suffering might be shown forth for the encouragement of any who should afterwards believe.⁶ And if Saul of Tarsus, when his eyes were opened, forsook his righteousness for Christ, you may fearlessly and joyfully make over all your sins to Him who gave Himself *for them.*⁷ He knows

⁵ ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποί, Eph. ii. 3.

⁶ 1 Tim. i. 16.

⁷ Gal. i. 4.

what constitutes the burden of your spirit, and this is His meaning when to the weary and heavy-laden He says, 'Come to Me.'

Verses 8, 9. 'Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord,' &c. Returning now to the Apostle, we find him in this verse enlarging his previous repudiation of his personal gains to a general renunciation of all that could in any wise be held or regarded as a possible object of comparison. From the past he now changes to the present. From the time of his conversion he had dropped his own righteousness to lay hold on Christ. And what he then counted loss he counts loss still, only with more intensity of appreciation ; his judgment growing with his ripening knowledge of his new and better portion. There is a hyperbolic boldness in his style of expression well suited to the vehement earnestness of his feeling and the deliberate sincerity of his choice. He had of course only his own things to renounce ; but had he the whole world at command besides, it would be to him mere loss to be its absolute possessor in comparison with the blessedness of calling such an one as Jesus Christ his *Lord* : to be owned of *Him* was the end of all his hope.

And that his words had truth as well as meaning in them he goes on to prove. For that Name he had already suffered loss, as was well known both to friends and foes. He refers here to the advantageous accompaniments of his former 'confidence in the

flesh.' He had lost the esteem of his countrymen and the favour of his friends. Consideration and honour are things naturally dear to men, and Paul had a keen relish for them both; yet to be as the filth of the world and the offscouring of all things, as a vilified and persecuted namer of the name of Christ, was far preferable in his eyes to the credit and influence which he had once enjoyed. Instead of deference to incur contempt, and to exchange ease and opulence for a vagrant life and a precarious subsistence, and when he might have dwelt in safety to go in a continual jeopardy of life, were indeed things from which flesh and blood must always shrink. But both these, and the infirmities induced by such a course of life, as well as the special buffetings of Satan which were laid upon him for his good,⁸ were in his estimation 'light afflictions,' which he bore joyfully in view of the rich gain to come.⁹ For he played willingly a losing game on earth to secure for himself an endless gain in heaven. 'To win *Christ*' was his venture, and 'to be found in Him,' who had first sought and found him in his sins and claimed him for His own, was the ruling desire of this persistent runner of the race of life.

In considering such language we do well to remember both Paul's earlier exhortations to the Philippian saints, and those also of the Lord Himself, with reference to gain and loss.¹ What 'working out salvation' means, and also its fatal alternative of

⁸ 2 Cor. xii. 7.⁹ 2 Cor. iv. 17.¹ Luke ix. 23-26.

drawing back unto perdition, is exemplified in the remaining verses of this chapter. We are, if true believers, saved already; but *by hope* only, and *in Christ*. Continuance in the faith, which makes the Lord Himself our righteousness and our hope, will in due time bring us to our wished-for end. In the mean while that faith, through which alone God's saving power acts, must have its proof in patience. There is a race to run, a fight to fight, and above all an object to attain. That object is *Christ*, and to keep Him steadily before the soul, in the spirit of a desiring obedience, is to work out surely our own salvation and to gain our hope. Words, we must remember, go for nothing in the Spirit's estimate of character; it is in the hearts of His true people that Christ always has His place, and to gain His presence and be fashioned in His likeness is now all their care. Our behaviour in this world is a faithful reflection of the quality of our hope. A high profession is justified only by a humble and unworldly walk. If the Lord is the hope of our hearts we shall be satisfied with nothing less than a moral conformity to Him.² They who are found *of* Him in peace, without spot and blameless, at His appearing, will be found also assuredly *in* Him at that day.³

True spiritual teaching searches the inward thoughts, and wounds often that it may more effectually heal. What we are now pondering in these verses is intended first to discover whether we are

² 1 John iii. 3.

³ 2 Pet. iii. 14.

really alive to God at all, and then, if we are, to quicken and animate us in the *race* of life. To hope for heaven, and expect to win it, is not the same thing as to know and follow Christ, and give up all for *Him*. Thousands, it may be feared, expect salvation through the words of God, whose hearts care little for the Lord who saves. Self-examination on this all-important topic is an essential condition of true spiritual confidence. ‘If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.’⁴ If, on a faithful inquiry, they do condemn us, then absolution is at hand for such as turn in truth to Him. Paul, if asked by any what he cared for, wished for, thought of, and lived for, would have answered, without any hesitation, ‘*Christ*.’ And we do well to put often to ourselves in secret the same questions. What do we hear with pleasure, the voice of the world or the voice of the Beloved? On what do we muse preferentially when alone? Our thoughts are mostly busy, but with what? We give naturally our minds to that which we value, and which interests us most. All have some ruling passion; what is ours? We cannot win what we do not seek, and we follow by a natural instinct what we covet and think really worth attaining. Paul, speaking in the Holy Ghost, finds nothing in the world worth seeking or winning but Christ, for in Him he knows are hidden all treasures of all worthy joys.

Lost in himself, his sure hope is to be found in

⁴ 1 John iii. 21.

Christ, 'not having his own righteousness, which is of law, but that which is through faith of Christ, the righteousness which is from God to faith.'⁵ He makes no mention here of sin, and what cleanses from it, but of righteousness only, contrasting what is true and everlasting with what is false and visionary. These words are of much importance, since they define with precision the source and nature of a true believer's righteousness. He *has* it; yet as a personal attribute it is not his own, but His in whom the justified sinner already stands by faith before God, and in whom he looks, therefore, to be hereafter 'found.' His own righteousness, which Paul now repudiates, was legal. What he has from God is apart from law. Law cannot condemn and justify the same person on his own account. If, therefore, by the law is the knowledge of *sin*, the knowledge of *righteousness* must come to its possessors in some other way. But the law, when truly known, turns *all* merely human righteousness to sin. If, then, righteousness is to be had at all, it must come to us from a superhuman source. It does so, for it is 'from God;' yet it is in form and substance human still, being the proved perfection of Him who, though originally in the form of God, was for our sakes found in fashion as a man. Christ proceeded forth and came from God, and is, of God, made righteousness to all them that believe.⁶

⁵ μὴ ἔχων ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου, ἀλλὰ τὴν διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, τὴν ἐκ Θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἣν ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει.

⁶ Stress is here laid upon *righteousness*, because he is contrasting definitively law and grace. In 1 Cor. i. 30 we find righteous-

That Jehovah is His people's righteousness was a prime article of prophetic Jewish faith;⁷ yet when He brought near His righteousness and His salvation, by coming to His own in human form, they knew not the day of their visitation, but stumbled at that stumbling stone.⁸ But to the believer that righteousness is given in the living object of his faith. And so it is here said to be '*upon*⁹ the faith' of God's elect, who thus themselves 'become the righteousness of God in Him.'¹ Whatever is in Christ is *Christ's* alone by personal right; if *ours*, it is because we have Him for our own as God's free and unspeakable gift. Now the Son is in the bosom of the Father, and the life of the believer is hid with Christ in God. When He appears He will be manifested in His saints. Till then the race is to be run, and the fight of faith continued, in the power of Him who gives strength for that conflict by revealing things unseen. And so he continues.

Verse 10. 'That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection,' &c. What we have been last considering, from the words, 'for whom I have suffered,' &c., is digressive. We resume here the interrupted line of thought. Paul counted all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord: of knowing Him and the power of

ness described as a part only of that fulness out of which believers all receive. For 'wisdom' is a larger term than 'righteousness.'
Notes on 1 Cor. in loc.

⁷ Jer. xxiii. 6.

⁸ Jer. xxxiii. 16; Isa. xlv. 13; Rom. ix. 32, 33.

⁹ ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει.

¹ 2 Cor. v. 21.

His resurrection, &c.² Possession is deferred, but an assured knowledge of our promised hope is the believer's present portion; the Spirit which is of God having been bestowed on us, that we may know the things that are freely given us of God.³ Now to know Christ we must study Him as He is set before us in the record which the Father has given of His Son, remembering faithfully His sayings and looking on Jesus as He walked. Of this knowledge of the Son of God, which is the common portion of the Church,⁴ Paul possessed already more than most; and for the joy of that knowledge all things else were but as refuse in his eyes. But he knew in part only, and desired to know more, and that with his growing acquaintance with Jesus and His ways he might know also even now 'the power of His resurrection.' Now, bearing in mind Paul's earlier words to the Galatians, as well as the whole tenor of his conversation as 'a man in Christ,' there is something solemnly instructive in his recorded aspirations here. Mere spiritual sciolists, as we modern namers of the name of Christ for the most part are, it may profit us to take a close view of a man who here sets himself before us as an example of practical Christianity. Conformity to Christ is his first and only care. In other words, being already, by the grace of his calling, a saint and an Apostle, he would also be a *Christian*. To be *that*, in its full sense, is to be as Christ was when He walked this earth. And the first essen-

² τοῦ γυνῶναι αὐτόν κ.λ.³ 1 Cor. ii. 12.⁴ Eph. iv. 13.

tial to this is that he should know in himself the transforming power of Christ's resurrection.

And here, because of much false teaching now abroad upon this subject, I feel it necessary to affirm that this power wrought no change in Christ Himself. The Lord is the same before and after death. There is in Him no first and second, no natural and spiritual. He is 'Jesus Christ *the same*.'⁵ But we believers are changed; being no longer reckoned with as men in our natural state, but seen and known of God in Him who rose, as well as died, *for us*. And seeing that if Christ was raised from the dead it was for our justification, the first effect of the *power* of His resurrection on the soul of a believer is to give him a complete assurance of personal justification before God. But Paul had both known and preached this long before. It is, therefore, evident that his words here mean far more than this; that they imply a flesh-subduing power of practical sanctification through the truth, according to the pattern of that victory over sin and death of which Christ's resurrection is the witness. To know the power of His resurrection is, in effect, to be consciously transformed into His own moral likeness. Now the world has never seen the risen Christ; and when it saw Him as He companied with men, and sat at meat with publicans and sinners, it knew Him not. And the like ignorance continues with regard to His elect.⁶ Yet that their light may shine before men

⁵ Heb. xiii. 8.

⁶ 1 John iii. 1.

is the very purpose of their sojourn upon earth.⁷ For their home is not here, but in heaven; and if left in the world, it is that they may be manifestly, in their words and ways, no longer of the world, but sanctified by the truth and separate to God. What Paul longed for, then, and sought to gain, was such an habitual consciousness of his own true standing in Christ as should make him as separate morally from the course of this world, as Christ was while personally shining in it as the Light of life. Let us also well remember that the power of Christ's resurrection is moreover the true 'power of godliness,' the presence or absence of which determines the real place before God of the outward professor in the last and difficult times.

'And the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death.' We die to live as sinners; as saints, we live to die. 'I protest by your rejoicing in Christ Jesus I die daily,'⁸ is Paul's declaration to the Corinthians, not only of his constant exposure to mortal perils, as a faithful preacher of the truth, but of his inward experience also, as one who always bore about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be manifested in his mortal flesh.⁹ 'I am crucified with Christ,' he again says; and in the same Epistle states as a moral consequence that he 'is crucified to the world, and the world also to him.'¹ And

⁷ Matt. v. 16; ante, chap. ii. 15.

⁸ 1 Cor. xv. 31.

⁹ 2 Cor. iv. 10, 11.

¹ Gal. ii. 20; vi. 14.

such is the natural language of all who, by the grace of their calling, are no longer in the flesh, but in the Spirit.² For, in this world *we are as He was*, not only in the blessed consciousness of filial acceptance with the Father, but also in the essential contrariety of the new nature to the old, and its resulting effects.³ According to the measure of our faith, we are partners in His sorrows and His joys. Now a faith which has true communion with Christ's sufferings cannot share also in the world's delights, nor live at ease in Babylon. The animating principle which governs the Apostle, and impels him on his course, is the constraining love of Christ; and whenever this is operating in any force there is a corresponding distaste for what the prince of this world has to offer. God had shined in Paul's heart to give *there* the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Death, then, and not life, was his choice as to all natural things—*Christ's* death, even the death of the *cross*, to which the High and Lofty One had submitted in a slave's form for his and our sakes. So long as he remained, then, in this body upon earth, his place should be in spirit with his suffering Redeemer outside the camp.⁴

Verse 11. 'If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from among the dead.'⁵ These

² Rom. viii. 9

³ 1 John iv. 17.

⁴ Heb. xiii. 13.

⁵ εἰς τὴν ἐξανάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν. This is, I believe, the generally accepted reading. The compound ἐξανάστασις is found here only, and is evidently chosen by the Apostle to add more emphatic point to this expression of his hope.

words have a double force. To have part in the first resurrection—the resurrection of the just—is the common hope of all believers, and this, therefore, is the goal also of all Paul's labour in the Lord. But secondly—and this seems to be the main drift of his language here—his aim is to attain, while waiting for that crisis, to such a degree of practical separation from the world and conformity to Christ, both in spirit and in manner of life, of one who claimed a meritorious precedence personally among men, as should mark him as one worthy of that change. He had counted it among his former gains to be 'as touching the law a *Pharisee*;' he seeks now, as a man in Christ and partaker of the common faith of God's elect, to be, in this new and better sense, a Pharisee or Nazarite to *God*.⁶ In so doing he is working out his own salvation in the fuller and higher meaning of the words. If, then, he speaks thus it is but to enforce, by a living example, his earlier exhortation to us all.⁷

Verse 12. 'Not as though I had already attained,' &c. It is as if he should say, 'I am, it is true, your teacher, and of many of you a father also in Christ; yet think not of me as a *master* of the doctrine which I teach. That doctrine is the doctrine of *God*, and in His school we all are learners to the end. If, then, by special grace, I am before you in present knowledge, call me not Rabbi, but think of me only as of one whose progress thus far you may safely emulate,

⁶ Conf. Numb. vi.

⁷ Ante, chap. ii. 12.

still following where I lead. For I too am yet running, and not resting, since our common hope allures me still.' He had not apprehended, or he would have ceased to strive. He was not perfected, or he would be no longer in this groaning body. But he knew for what he had been apprehended of the Lord, and by grace his inward desire is according to his calling. And should it be otherwise with any of us who call in these latter days, and therefore with a still nearer hope, upon that Name?

And now let us note carefully his pointed disclaimer of a present perfection. In another sense, 'perfection' is the common state of all who are professedly in Christ by faith. But faith thus professed must be put to its appointed proof, and if it be not that which God's electing grace bestows, it will not live, but die and turn to unbelief. A living soul *continues* in the faith, and follows Him whom it has learnt to love through a true knowledge and experience of His grace. But, alas, departure from the faith is but too possible a thing, as he shows to us a little further on, when speaking of many who, after beginning with Christ crucified, and setting their faces heavenward for a while, had so fallen from their first state that he has to describe them as the enemies of His cross. Apostasy, or drawing back from Christ, is contemplated always as a possibility in true spiritual teaching. Eternal life is given us; but that life is *in God's Son*. If Christ, therefore, be neglected through the love of other things, our path

tends no longer to salvation, and will, if finally persisted in, conduct us to perdition.⁸

Faith's course is according to its origin. If it begins with an 'I will follow Thee'⁹ on our part, its probable end is shipwreck. 'Deciding for Christ' is an unfortunate and too popular expression in the present day. If, on the other hand, its origin is the Master's 'Follow Me,' it is the faith of obedience, and will stand. The sheep of the Good Shepherd hear His voice and follow Him: He has found them and apprehended them in the depth of their ignorance and distress, and the helplessness of their natural condition as lost sinners, and they are constrained by the strong cords of His redeeming love. A false zeal may place them in jeopardy of Peter's sin; but the same voice which recalled him from his shame and sorrow to behold with joy his risen Lord restores still, when its own self-reliant will is first effectually broken, the contrite and self-judging soul. The whole moral purpose of such teaching as we have now before us is to sift and prove—to help us in the needful work of self-examination and self-judgment. For we are habitually either flatterers or judges of ourselves. If our faith is in a languid state, we shall hurtfully remain in the dangerous indifference of spiritual self-complacency, or drift into the darkness of despondency. If healthy, it will bind us more and more to Christ, with a constant increase of our confidence and joy. But a sense of imperfection, and a

⁸ Heb. ii. 3; x. 29.

⁹ Matt. viii. 19, 20.

thirsting to attain—to be in fact what we are in promise, and what by the instinct of our new nature we must wish to be, as the bearers of His worthy name—will be the unceasing companion of every true disciple's way, as it was also of Paul's.

Verses 13, 14. 'Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended,' &c. He does not beguile his soul by flattering illusions, but passes on. One object engrosses him, and one thing he does. Nor is he singular in this; but is in fact exemplifying a rooted principle of our nature. All men, good or bad, who are really in earnest, keep one thing supremely in their view. The thing desired may be worthy or unworthy, and the race end in life or death; but men who live at all must set their hearts on something. With a common faith, whose supreme object is the Living God, His saints have always had and lived for one special and heart-absorbing hope. 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after,' if the recorded utterance of one only of God's inspired scribes,¹ expresses faithfully the sentiment of all who know Him in His truth. Unity of object, of desire, of pursuit, has been the mark of God's elect from the beginning. The promise, the birthright, the recompense of rewards—in one word, the *Lord*—has been the aim and expectation of all upon whose eyes the light of life has shined. Paul's labours were various, but his end was one. To attain it there was need, he tells us, on his part, both of a

¹ Ps. xxvii. 4.

resolute forgetfulness and a wakeful zeal. The things behind him he forgot, not always easily, but willingly, and with a lastingly-averted mind. For his flesh looked ever backward, while his mind was on the things before. To these his hands were stretched out as he ran, distancing at each step that in which he once had sought his rest, and nearing daily the salvation which should end his faith. Nature and natural things were all behind. The law also, and its righteousness, as Moses taught it, were forgotten in the glad remembrance of Him who is for righteousness the end of that law to every believer. He forgets his own righteousness, but not his sins; these are before him ever, but only as forgiven. He cannot forget them as he contemplates his Saviour's wounds; but they are no terror to him, and their burden is completely gone. His soul is only weighted now by the sweet and heart-constraining pressure of the mercy and loving-kindness of the Lord. He forgets, moreover, his past course as a believer (though able, upon just occasion, to remember and appeal to it, to the glory of Him whose grace wrought so effectually in His servant) in his earnest consideration of what still remains between him and his hope. Looking off from other things to Jesus as the author and finisher of faith, he runs with a patient eagerness the race set before him, and thinks nothing gained till He is gained who is at once the Judge of the contest and the prize.

With feelings such as these Paul ran and strove,

seeking by patient continuance in well-doing for glory, honour, and immortality ; watching well himself and ruling jealously his own body for the Lord, and dismissing every weight that might retard him as he ran. For what ruled and held him was the heavenly vision which, once smiting him with blindness as an astonished and convicted sinner, now lures his opened eye of faith to God. Christ calling by the Gospel is to Paul no light or ordinary thing. Called to the fellowship of God's own Son, he appreciates the unmeasured dignity and glory of his hope. His calling is heavenward and from heaven ; but to obey it he has to occupy a while on earth. Serving God always from his forefathers, first in ignorance and now with divinely imparted knowledge, he follows where his Master leads, that where He is Paul may also be. Hating his life in this world, and caring only to have it unto life eternal, he seeks that honour which the Father has to give to such as faithfully obey the Son.²

Verse 15. ' Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded,' &c. But how can Paul, a minister of truth, thus say and unsay ? For we have heard him but a little while ago disclaim perfection on his own behalf ; yet now he claims it as a common attribute of all who are like-minded with himself. Such an objection might easily suggest itself to one who weighed his statements only in a natural scale ; but as a warner of his brethren his

² John xii. 25, 26.

trumpet utters no uncertain sound, and we shall see that there is no real contradiction in his words. For, as respects attainments, he and they were equally imperfect, since perfection cannot belong to an unfinished work. All are alike defective in knowledge till they know as they are known. But all who believe through grace are perfected for ever by the one offering of Christ; and this latter meaning is always inferred wherever the word ‘perfect’³ is applied to a true child of God. We are ‘complete in Him’ who is our life and our hope.⁴ But it is not in this sense that it is here employed; but rather as expressing maturity of age and understanding, in contradistinction to the weakness and fickleness of infancy.⁵ He is willing to assume for these Philippians what he asks in special prayer for the Ephesian saints, namely, a knowledge of the hope of God’s calling,⁶ and he exhorts them accordingly. Yet he cannot thus regard them all; but he is full of confidence that if any of them were otherwise minded—their thoughts still running more on their own things than the things of Christ—God would Himself reveal to them this better way. For he believed in their sincerity of heart, and it is to seekers of that kind that God gives the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Himself.

Verse 16. ‘Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk,’ &c. Unanimity is the natural

³ τέλειος.

⁵ 1 Cor. xiv. 20; Heb. v. 14.

⁴ Col. ii. 10.

⁶ Eph. i. 17, 18.

effect of the leading of the One Spirit, but diversity of mind and judgment is common among men, even when called by the same name and pursuing mainly the same things. And God's saints are men, and too often use as men the very gifts and endowments of the Holy Ghost. The Church of God at Corinth was a house of strife and dissension, and the Philippian saints were not without danger, as we have seen, from the same forms of evil. Placing himself, therefore, in the spirit, in the midst of their assembly, he calls for their companionship in keeping that one great commandment of the Lord⁷—which is the canon of God's new creation—that they might both taste the sweetness and manifest the comeliness of that unity of heart and mind which results from a true walking in the love of God.⁸ By grace thus to vanquish nature, by presenting, in their naturally heterogeneous society, the spectacle of full individual liberty, with a general accord and oneness of interest and natural care, would be to glorify the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 17. 'Brethren, be followers together of me,' &c. There is in these words a peremptory earnestness of tone which the sequel fully justifies. For the time was already come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and within the professing body of Christ the spiritual and the carnal, the heavenly-minded and the earthly-minded, the true and false,

⁷ Gal. vi. 15, 16; John xv. 12.

⁸ Ps. cxxxiii. 1.

must more and more discover themselves in their respective ways and works. As one, therefore, who through the grace given to him had walked as a child of light from the beginning, and whose words of passionate devotion to his Lord were visibly sustained by his known manner of life, he makes this pointed appeal. Did his ways seem strange to any? It was because their hearts were unaffected by his ruling motive. Were they in any wise out of harmony with the doctrine which he taught? Their consciences must at once give to this question a negative reply. To stand in their view as a solitary specimen of Christian character was far from Paul's desire; yet he would remind them always of his ways in Christ, because they *were* 'in Christ,' and not to be confounded therefore with Paul's personal idiosyncrasies. But he is never willingly alone in such descriptions. 'Be together,' he says, 'followers or imitators⁹ of *me*, and observe *those* who walk as ye have *us* for an example.' He has already spoken of Timothy 'as a son with the father,' and there were others doubtless besides those expressed by name¹ who walked in the like spirit with himself. But oneness of heart and mind was no longer a general characteristic of them that named the name of Christ, and Paul seems already to accept here, as a needful part of his Apostolic service, the strengthening of what remained.²

Verse 18. 'For many walk, of whom I have told you often,' &c. It is most sorrowfully evident, from

⁹ συμμιμηταί.

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 18.

² Rev. iii. 2.

this and other passages in the Epistles, that the godly had fallen to a minority in the professing body even while Apostles lived. The root of godliness is truth, and godliness itself is obedience to truth. Now the truth of the Gospel is Christ crucified, and practical godliness begins by an acceptance on our parts of this ever-blessed truth in the power of the Holy Ghost. But that truth, when thus attested, means death to the world and life only to God. It can be obeyed, therefore, by those only whose ears and hearts are open to the calling of God. And God now speaks to us, not only *from* heaven, but *of* heaven also, by His Son. The immediate calling of His children by the Gospel is the *heavenly* calling. With earth, as their natural abode, they have done, for they are acknowledged as God's children only in the power of the *resurrection*. Rest, honour, and blessing belong to their new standing in Christ before God; but a walk unto well-pleasing in His sight upon earth can result only from the effectual working in them of the word of God, by which the grace and glory of their calling are declared. Both conscience and affection are concerned in a believer's course; and, while neither of these can healthfully abide alone, it is the latter that gives decisively its acceptable character to a walk that pleases God. For men's ways must, on the whole, be according to their hearts, if they are not systematic hypocrites. Now, a believer, if he knows his real standing before God, is crucified with Christ. His relation, therefore, to this world is not, and *can-*

not be, without denial of the faith, what it was before he believed. It is in truth entirely reversed. For, naturally, man seeks honour in the world; but Paul glories only in a place of utter shame; and instead of eyeing wistfully the avenues to earthly dignity and credit, he goes forth without the camp to Jesus, bearing His reproach—accepting joyfully the outcast place in a grateful and adoring recognition of the grace of Him who suffered shame for our sakes.

Now, all confessors of Christ's name, who receive into their minds the pure truth of the Gospel, accept the cross as the means of their redemption, and periodically recur to it as the ground of their religious trust, for the brightening and rectifying of their theological ideas. But in what manner does it affect the hearts and lives of the vast majority? In his own day, when to confess Christ openly cost much more than in ours, Paul had to weep sorely at the wide-spread contradiction of practice to profession among them that named that Name. *Many*, whose ways he had opportunity of observing, were so walking that he could only speak of them, with tears, 'as the enemies of the cross of Christ.' We have here an expression widely differing in its intensity from his earlier complaint.³ To seek one's own habitually, so that any act of love for Christ's sake should take an exceptional rather than an ordinary place in our daily experience, is, alas, too common with us all. But he is here noting, not a neglect of

³ Ante, chap. ii. 21.

known duty or privilege, but a systematic deviation from the way of God; and to justify his strong denunciation, he hastens to sustain it by a description of the broad features of this alleged hostility to the cross. For he does not call them enemies of *Christ*—they professed, on the contrary, to be His friends and followers—but of His *cross*. The way of such was a spectacle of sorrowing distress to the Apostle, since nothing moves the heart of God or living man more powerfully than the infatuate perversity of religious self-deception. God's prophets have been always men of tears, and Jesus wept His solemn farewell to Jerusalem. And now this minister of His, to whose prophetic eye the mystery of iniquity was not less familiar than the mystery of elective grace, weeps also, as he contemplates the first shootings of that 'vine of the earth,' whose ripened clusters soon must fill the wine-press of the wrath of God.⁴

Verse 19. 'Whose end is destruction,' &c. If his charge be true, there can be but one end for those who are its objects, since to be 'an enemy of the cross of Christ' is to be an adversary of the Lord, and for such everlasting destruction from His presence is ordained. But we have now to see what constitutes this enmity, and under what forms it is discovered, and we shall find that while it is in its ordinary character negative, it is itself the result of an active preference for other things. Of these

⁴ Rev. xiv. 17-20.

enemies of the cross of Christ three distinctive attributes are affirmed. They serve not God, but their own belly; they glory in their shame; and their minds are set on earthly things.

As to the first of these, the Apostle's words are a brief description of the unchanged natural habit of self-seeking, which marks those who, while professing the faith of Abel, are 'gone in the way of Cain.' The 'belly-service' here mentioned represents other things besides the literal gratification of appetite, though surfeiting and drunkenness are among the evil things against which the Lord has warned all His disciples. It expresses self-pleasing *under all its forms*, both carnal and spiritual; being placed, both here and elsewhere, in contrast to the service of God and of Christ.⁵ Instead of working out their own salvation with fear and trembling, these enemies of the cross are reposing in a false and fatal security. Mistaking names for things, and forms for realities, they assume boldly for themselves a personal interest in God's great salvation, while their hearts are altogether strangers to His love. Professing to know Him, in their works they deny Him, and are found as to every good work reprobate.⁶ For no work is good in His sight which is not wrought by faith in love. Their wisdom is not the wisdom of the just, and which cometh from above, but that which is from beneath. They are carnal, and mind the things of the flesh. Loving them-

⁵ Rom. xvi. 18.

⁶ Tit. i. 16.

selves, loving money, and loving pleasures more than God, their life-study is to practise lawlessness in an outwardly religious way. While Christ's true redeemed are zealous of good works, these practical deniers of the Lord that bought them are only 'studying comfort.' With no eye for the poverty of Jesus for their sakes, they are, in the last days of Divine long-suffering, intent only upon worldly gains. And, thus occupied with heart and hand,

'Their glory is in their shame.' The *glory* of a true believer is to be reproached for the name of Christ, to be confessedly a stranger upon earth, to have his conversation in the world by the grace of God, and, as a joint-heir through grace, to suffer here with Christ. His *shame* is to be living in pleasure on the earth, to be seeking honour in the world, and to be walking, with the name of Christ on his lips, as other Gentiles walk. But already these conditions were reversed in the case of 'many,' and more, he too well knew, would follow the same evil way. The denunciations of Scripture, we should remember, are always according to the relations in which its objects stand professedly to God. Israel's idolatries were shameless adulteries in the eyes of Jehovah, whose covenant they brake; and for a Church to be, in its own eyes, rich and plenteous is to be a loathing to the mind of Him who walks among the candlesticks.⁷ But Paul's words here depict clearly a state of things which, already begun,

⁷ Rev. iii. 16, 17.

would result in a general cessation of the power of godliness in the professing body of Christ, an abandonment of their distinctive hope as partakers of the heavenly calling, and a contented settlement on earth—the substitution, in fact, of a self-satisfied ‘Christendom’ for the Church or assembly of the living God.⁸

‘Who mind earthly things.’ This last particular gives its character to the whole description, and sets in its clearest light the point of the Spirit’s accusation. For to set our minds on *heaven* and *heavenly things*, because Christ, our life, is hidden there, is the especial calling of God’s saints. The Church is meanwhile the *wife* of the Lamb in title, His *bride* in expectation, and in her waiting experience a *widow*, till He come to take His people to Himself. For such, therefore, as name His name to live in pleasure on the earth, is to be alive in profession only, while really dead to God. What is in fact described in this mournful passage is ‘the Christian world’ as it now exists and meets our eyes on every side, and which finds such ample representation in the popular literature of the day. But it may be asked, What, in the Apostle’s intention, are ‘earthly things’? The answer is obvious. They are the things regarded as objects of interest or desire by man in his natural state and as a dweller upon

⁸ Externally, that is, and as a manifested dispensation; for I need hardly insist that God’s true Church lives indestructibly amid all changes, being kept by the power of God through faith unto the salvation which is ready to be revealed.

earth. They are therefore, under another name, things *carnal*, as opposed to things spiritual, or our *own* things in contrast to the things of Jesus Christ. All things, therefore, of whatever kind, that root themselves in the earth, and to which ideas of local permanency attach, are 'earthly things.' All things, moreover, which are regulated or controlled in any way by the human will fall under this generic category. To enumerate these at present is impossible. I begin and end also with the highest.

Christianity, as men ordinarily regard it, is an 'earthly thing.' For if we listen to the voices of statesmen and publicists on the one hand, or of private society and its leaders on the other, we shall find that 'the Christian religion' is regarded with honour among men in general, mainly because of its value as an efficient factor in the great work of civilisation and secular advancement. True it is that the common eye looks, in addition to its social benefits, for its 'consolations' also at the closing scene; and, Balaam-like, men wedded heartily to earth still wish to die the death of the righteous, and to find, when their mortal life is at an end, a heaven to their wish. But chiefly and immediately the place held by nominal Christianity in the esteem of men is determined by its proved usefulness to man as a dweller upon earth. And that this is its all-pervading spirit is evidenced by the mutual recriminations which sectarian writers cast at one another when advocating their respective claims as the guides and instructors

of the popular mind. And here, without attempting to examine separately the multitudinous varieties of sectarian language and pretension, it must be on all sides admitted that, broadly speaking, and confining ourselves to western and southern Europe, as a sufficient sample of Christendom at large, Popery and Protestantism divide the so-called Christian world. And in what do these great antagonists essentially and practically differ? Each claims to be of God; but what is asserted by the former is dominion over men's faith and conscience, and a general supremacy over the kingdoms and nations of earth through a false use of the Lord's name and words. On the part of the latter it is urged, not without reason, that both nations and individuals have thriven better as Protestant than as Catholic. Trade and the march of mind, political liberty and moral elevation generally, are found rather on the side of Protestantism, which bears also as its supreme distinctive badge an assertion of the sole final authority of the Scriptures.

But when we take a closer view of Protestantism as 'the religion of the Bible,' do we find that holy Book a witness for or against its claims? First we must ask, Are national Churches, with their various man-devised ordinances and appointments, things of scriptural origin or authority? Again, Is sectarian division, with its dissonant and barbarous nomenclature, a thing of God? I do not stop to ask what countenance the Scriptures give to the manifold varieties of creed or view which now prevail, and to

which men commit themselves as readily as if they really thought that truth, instead of being one, is many, and that the 'narrow way' to life eternal, of which the Saviour speaks, and in which His first disciples walked, had brought their modern successors past the strict limits of all positive and authoritative doctrine into the boundless field of speculative choice—in one word, to compare Protestant theology generally with the declared counsel of God. I will confine myself to that which is known distinctively by the somewhat insidious term 'Evangelical.' Now what place has *heaven* mostly in the daily thoughts of those who boast outwardly of the gospel of free grace? A perfect reply to this inquiry belongs only to the Searcher of hearts; but if things visible and audible afford authentic evidence in such a case, the answer surely must be that what is present and immediate to the mind of the Spirit is contemplated remotely only by a large majority of the avowed partakers of 'the heavenly calling.' In what relation, again, do the bulk of modern Evangelicals stand to the course of this world and its politics? Is it one of dissociation or association? Do they combine with other men for merely temporal objects, or do they shun all fellowship with that which is not of the Father? Is the sanctifying power of that Name plainly visible in their ordinary habits and associations?⁹ Are they, as a class, distinguished by their disregard of the usual objects of natural interest or

⁹ John xvii. 11; 2 Cor. vi. 14-18.

ambition? Are they so 'joying in God,' and looking at the things unseen, as to be weaned effectually from the visible and tangible allurements of Babylon? Is their standard of morality higher than that of the children of this world? Do they, as a rule, suffer patiently when wronged, not caring even for the spoiling of their goods, because of their sure hold upon their better heritage in heaven?¹ Or are they, on the other hand, sharp and self-assertive, litigious and commercially enterprising, eager in the pursuit of worldly wealth, and studious to discover lawful means of personal gratification and aggrandisement; lovers still of pleasure, only hampered somewhat in its pursuit by a conscience ill at ease? Are honour and scrupulous fidelity in the ordinary intercourse of life their undisputed praise? Such questions, and they might be multiplied, need here no elaborate reply.

Insubjection to the declared will of God, as revealed to us in the Apostolic writings, and a disregard of the sure warnings of prophecy, are but too often found in company with an even ostentatious assertion of an evangelic doctrine. Instead of expectations founded on the express declarations of the Spirit of truth, men's minds are inflated by the fallacious hope of an indefinite Christian progress here below, and anticipate in their imagination a millennium of evangelic ease and temporal prosperity. With minds averted from the true hope of their calling, and a lustful eye towards the heritage of Jacob,² they are

¹ Heb. x. 34.

² Isa. lviii. 14.

systematically ‘minding earthly things.’ The kingdoms of the world are to be brought, they would fondly persuade themselves, gradually but surely, under the sceptre of Christ, through an increasing conviction in men’s minds of the manifold practical blessings of Christianity, and its adaptation to the best interests of the race. But appeals to an enlightened self-interest are not to be confounded with the effectual calling of God’s elect, who never can be other than suffering strangers upon earth. For they have been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. And well they know that His kingdom is not now from hence. But popular Evangelism has for its immediate aim not God, but the people. Its promises of liberty address themselves to the old man rather than the new. The real or imaginary benefits which are to follow the adoption of Evangelical principles are alluringly displayed, and men follow where their interests seem to lead. They are willing, like the eaters of the loaves, to take Christ by force, and have Him for their king.³ Alas, they perceive not that the true Lord has withdrawn Himself from earth and earthly things, until the time come for His return in judicial power to reclaim His right, and that this dream of a universal Christendom will end only in the world’s going unanimously after the beast.⁴ For if grace does not root us firmly in the faith of God’s elect, and lead us in the path of the just, its doc-

³ John vi. 15-28.

⁴ Rev. xiii. 3-8.

trines only foster, and will gradually ripen to its full measure, the evil growth of natural wilfulness. And thus it is that, in these solemn warnings addressed to the saints by all Christ's Apostolic witnesses, there is everywhere presented, under various forms and descriptions, the same appalling picture of religious perversion, culminating at last in open renunciation of the living God, or rather in an actual transfer of men's homage from truth to falsehood, from a Christ long dishonoured by an insincere and earthly-minded worship to that 'man of the earth' who will be welcomed as their true king by all whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life. As Christ is Himself the true vine, whose living branches yield fruit acceptable to the Father, so the *vine of the earth* is the prophetic name and symbol of that which falsely bears His name.⁵ A lifeless form of godliness must end in Antichrist, and the critical result of earthly-minded Christianity is Armageddon, where the collected strength of human wilfulness meets truth in its victorious judicial energy. The name of the Victor on that great day of decision is *the Word of God*, and the hosts of His vanquished enemies will perish through their systematic opposition to that Word. It was well, therefore, that Paul, while addressing approvingly a Church which had thus far run well and obtained a just renown as a zealous defender of the Gospel, should warn his brethren against the insidious beginnings of that spiritual wicked-

⁵ Rev. xiv. 18, 19.

ness which must end in the destruction of that day.

Verse 20. 'For our conversation is in heaven,' &c. This verse connects itself naturally with the close of verse 17, the awful warning which we have just been considering being introduced parenthetically in the intervening verses. The words now before us are a declaration of the positive doctrine, the denial of which practically, with its fatal effects, has so lately been described. To mind earthly things is, he says, a mark of reprobation in a namer of Christ's name, because, if we are really His, our citizenship is essentially and properly in heaven.⁶ Nothing can possibly be more emphatic than this language, which claims for God's saints an original and, as it were, a *natural* place and standing in heaven. As the second Man is from heaven, so also are they who are seen now by the Spirit's eye 'in Christ.' As is the heavenly, so also are they that are heavenly.⁷ This is the essential verity of the new creation in Christ, and to maintain it while yet in these bodies of humiliation is the true power of godliness. What we have to notice especially is

⁶ ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει. It is difficult to render these words exactly, since we have nothing in English to match them word for word. 'Citizenship' is properly πολιτεία, while πολίτευμα, which has as its natural meaning the 'government or administration of a State,' seems to carry in this passage both these significations—'our status, and what belongs to it, as citizens of the heavenly city.' Again, ὑπάρχει is not identical with ἐστι, but much stronger—'belongs to,' or 'is essentially' in, heaven. Conf. ante, chap. ii. 6.

⁷ 1 Cor. xv. 47, 48.

that *now*, and not hereafter only, are our place and name in heaven. Our registry is there with our Life.⁸

But if this be so, I ask, once more, is *national* Christianity a thing compatible with such a truth? Is 'social science' a genuine Christian pursuit? For it is not for earth, but heaven, that believers were redeemed, and thither are they called. Nor is it to leaven society with what are called 'Christian principles' that the Holy Ghost descended from above. For what, we must again ask, are 'Christian principles'? The first, and ruler of all the rest, is the assertion of Christ as the true Image and Glory of God, and the consequent repudiation of the natural man. Christ is of the Father, His own very and eternal Son. The world is *not* of the Father. They, then, whom Christ owns and prays for are not of the world, which He does not acknowledge, and for which He does not pray. The Church is God's witness in and to the world so long (and no longer) as it maintains, as Paul personally did, its separateness from the world in the truth of the heavenly calling, and according to the power of Christ's resurrection. But the Church, as a dispensation, has not maintained either its own proper unity or its practical separation from the world. On the contrary, the world has adopted Christianity in its debased and altered

⁸ Heb. xii. 23. In my lately published *Essay on the Church* I have endeavoured to show the true meaning of the expression, 'Church of the first-born,' pp. 106-109.

form, and now calls itself complacently 'the Christian world.'⁹

But wherever God's elect are found their instincts lead them heavenward and away from earth, even when, as too often is the case, they are imperfectly taught the true nature and hope of their calling. And every artifice of Satan, who is the prince and god of this world, is taxed to intercept the full in-shining of the light of God into their souls, that they may be spoiled of their true honour, and lost as to any distinct testimony for God. For they are God's royal priesthood and His holy nation; but their true function is utterly abandoned when they intermingle busily with the world's affairs, and, instead of looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, devote their energies to the base and futile object of material and social progress. And such is the general tone and drift of popular Christianity. But has not the Lord said that the prince of this world is already judged, and that the day of manifested judgment is at hand? The progress of civilisation is little other than the growth of evil and a ripening of the world for the moment when sentence, long recorded, will be executed. But such is not the expectation of men's hearts. Humanities are, in this day, more precious and abundant than they were. Manners

⁹ To one who gives words their true meaning, no more offensive juxtaposition of natural contraries could well be presented to a spiritual mind than is found in this now familiar phrase. John wondered with great admiration when he beheld in vision a symbolic portraiture of what it represents. Rev. xvii.

seem softening on the whole. The standard of practical morality is higher, and in many other respects the age wears now a more attractive guise than at the beginning of the Gospel dispensation. True, nothing is as yet firmly settled, and all nations are in harness for some apprehended strife, while ever and anon the evil which lies restlessly beneath the fair show of external form and order asserts itself with a startling and volcanic force. For there has been a long and earnest sowing of the wind, and the harvest of the whirlwind is at hand. Yet in men's hearts both peace and safety are the things imagined and anticipated, and they look for their attainment to a gradual expansion and improvement, religiously and otherwise, of men's natural faculties and dispositions. Christendom is already fast running 'in the way of Cain,'¹ and as it was at the presentation of Cain's offering that the discovery of his rejection came, so will it be again. Only there is a difference. Cain sinned without special warning: the sin of Christendom is against emphatic and reiterated warning. But even as the sword of Jerusalem devoured her own prophets, so has it been and will it be with all who forsake the broad way for the narrow, and desire to walk godly in Christ Jesus. Persecution, and the contempt and hatred of a cross-denying generation, belong to the end to all whom God accepts. The conversation of God's children, and the heirs of His salvation, is not here, but *in heaven*.

¹ Jude 11.

‘From whence also,’ he continues, ‘we expect a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.’ Until that expectation be fulfilled, the true attitude and occupation of believers is to be working out in patience of hope their own salvation ; to be as men who own an absent Lord, for whom they wait. What we have now to note is the perfect distinctness with which the personal return of the Lord from heaven is, not here only, but everywhere, affirmed by the Apostles. And this blessed hope is but in simple and natural harmony with the heavenly calling and standing of the believer. Belonging to heaven, not to earth (for dead men have ceased from earth, and they are dead with Christ), the natural direction of their eye and heart is of course homeward, and away from that through which their pilgrim journey lies. But how is that wished-for home to be attained ? For though by the Holy Ghost they now cry ‘Abba’ to the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Father also of their spirits, their bodies are both earthy and mortal still. Yet in these same bodies they must enter on their heavenly inheritance. And it is by *man* that this mighty promise is to be fulfilled—that Man who is personally their sure and embodied hope of salvation and eternal life. By the first man, Adam, they lost earth for ever as a place of rest ; and by Christ, the second and true Man, they have gained heaven, and will possess it in due time. Already by faith translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, they await now both redemption and salva-

tion in their final sense. For not their souls only, or their spirits, are the purchase of Christ's blood; but their mortal bodies also. And He whose they are, and who is gone on high for their sakes to prepare for His people their appointed place, is pledged by His express promise to return in person and take them to Himself.² In this hope the fathers also lived and died; only to them it was no immediate promise, but a hope that shone upon them from afar. But to them as well as us, and to them also *with* us, and not *apart* from us, salvation is a perfected reality only when the Saviour, in His manifested power, claims His own.³

Verse 21. 'Who shall change our vile body,' &c. It will be noticed by the careful reader, first, that Resurrection is not mentioned in this verse; and secondly, that it is clearly implied in its closing words. But the evident intention of the Apostle is to place the return of the Lord, and the effect of that return upon His saints, as an immediate object of expectation before his brethren. Yet his words are so chosen for him by God's guiding Spirit as to apply without straining to an indefinite prolongation of the time of patience. For the promise, though precise and explicit in its terms, is without any reference to *time*. The Saviour whom His people look for shall most surely come, and change at His coming 'the body of our humiliation.'⁴ Now we have here a de-

² John xiv. 3.

³ Heb. xi. 40.

⁴ τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν.

scriptive phrase applied to our mortal body which serves with equal truth for the living and the dead. Mortality (which men commonly call 'life') is our born state of humiliation because of sin, and corruption is its consummation. The transforming power of the Saviour as the Lord our righteousness, and the effectual minister of the grace which is to be brought to us at His appearing, will then operate upon the living and the dead alike, as we are taught expressly and at large elsewhere.⁵ As to the effect of this transformation, it is expressed in a corresponding form of words: What is now the body of our humiliation is to be of like form in that day to the body of His glory;⁶ when God's predestinating love to His redeemed fulfils itself in outward act.⁷ For us the Lord once took the form of sinful flesh—the body of *His* humiliation—a body capable of dying and ordained for death, in which body, after having first shown to His chosen witnesses on the holy mount that not humiliation but glory was the proper habit of His person, He humbled Himself, as God's appointed Lamb of substitution, to our moral level in judicial death. That ever-blessed work once over, He is free now to decorate His chosen at His will, and to put His own beauty on his bride. And His power is equal to his will. Our bodily transmutation, therefore, from humiliation to glory is to be—

'According to the energy of His ability even to

⁵ 1 Cor. xv.

⁶ σύμμορφον τῇ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ.

⁷ Rom. viii. 29.

subdue all things to Himself.⁸ Omnipotence belongs to *God*. The interest of this passage consists in its clear and positive attribution of Divine will and power to the Man Christ Jesus. He is eternally the Lord, Jehovah, and here acts accordingly. And Paul's testimony to this fundamental truth is the more forcible because it is his ordinary habit to refer the quickening and resurrection, both of the Lord and of our bodies, to the Father.⁹ But he is here only consistent with himself, having written these words in a perfect remembrance of his earlier declaration of the mystery of godliness.¹ It is still no robbery for Him who once was known only in the form of God to assert, under His altered form, the essential continuity of Divine equality. Death is of God—His sentence upon sin. In human form, God has annulled His sentence, by submitting to it, and in the form wherein He wrought that mighty act He will be seen and known for ever by His saints. His power, hidden now in human hands, will prove itself at its next great manifestation in the change and resurrection of the just.

⁸ κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ δύνασθαι αὐτόν κ.λ.

⁹ Rom. vi. 4 ; viii. 11 et al. It should be noticed also that the word ὑποτάξαι, which in 1 Cor. xv. 27, and elsewhere, is used to describe the act of the Father in putting all things under the feet of the Man Christ Jesus, is here employed to assert the ability of Jesus to subdue all things unto *Himself*.

¹ Ante, chap. ii. 6.

CHAPTER IV.

VERSE 1. 'Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for,' &c. In an earlier chapter, after setting forth the personal grace and glory of the Man Christ Jesus, and declaring the counsel of the Father, he had exhorted them to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, anxious only to walk worthy of the name they bore.¹ Now, as a natural sequel to the testimony just borne to the Divine omnipotence of their expected Saviour, his word of encouragement is to stand fast and firm in such a Lord. And as men are wont naturally to offer gratulations to each other in the hour of assured success, when a feeling of security supplants the sense of peril, and the hearts of comrades are knit freshly to each other in the joy of a common triumph, so here, Paul, warmed by the sure presage of victory which he has just recorded, and as if in spirit already in possession of their common hope, is lavish of endearing words to those who in that day would be his joy and crown. They are so already; for because he trusted, both in his own behalf and theirs, in the faithfulness of God who called them, he will no more doubt their continuance in the faith than he did his own. Loved were they always; longed for in their

¹ Chap. ii. 12-16.

absence, and to be a joy to him for ever, through the grace and power of Him for whom they looked. We have in the emphatic words, 'so stand fast,' a clear intimation that the right attitude of a believer, while the present dispensation lasts, is that of a wakeful expectation of his Lord's return. As a soldier of Christ, his warfare is mainly defensive. Asserting boldly the name and claims of Jesus as the only Lord and Saviour, and his own standing in the grace of God, he is left for a while to maintain with meekness before men that good confession, and in the full assurance of a hope which maketh not ashamed to condemn the world that cares for other things.

Verse 2. 'I beseech Euodias and Syntyche,' &c. An unenviable notoriety is here given (not to shame them, but for our profit) to two Christian women who, alike zealous for the truth, were yet of different minds, like Martha and her sister Mary, as to what true service means. Such things were common then, and are so still, and Paul may perhaps have recollected his own sharp dissension with his fellow-labourer,² when addressing this double entreaty to these disunited helpers in the work. Their differences were known, no doubt, to the bishops and deacons at Philippi, and, indeed, to the whole assembly of the saints. But they continued, wrongly as is evident, yet plausibly, or we should not have had so pointed an entreaty on the Apostle's part to unanimity. Nor would he have endeavoured to interest

² Acts xv. 39.

another specially in their case, if he had not felt that their actual relation to each other was operating as a hindrance to the Gospel. This appears plainly from what follows.

Verse 3. 'And I entreat thee also, true yoke-fellow,' &c. To the contending sisters his word would convey both entreaty and injunction.³ His true yoke-fellow he only *asks*⁴ to mediate and seek to bring together again two who had entitled themselves to his honourable as well as loving remembrance as his fellow-labourers in the Gospel. Who this true yoke-fellow⁵ was it is in vain to conjecture, as we have on this subject no trustworthy information. It is of more interest to notice the prominence here given to women in the work of the Gospel. Euodias and Syntyche were probably among the women to whom Paul and Silas spake by the riverside,⁶ and had since sought diligently to propagate, in such manner doubtless as became the Lord's true handmaidens,⁷ the truth they had themselves received. Lydia, the mother of the Church at Philippi, was most likely dead at the date of this Epistle, or her name would hardly have been lost in this general reference to Paul's fellow-labourers. Why Clemens is here particularly named, and whether he was then at Rome or at Philippi, are also matters of uncer-

³ παρακαλῶ.

⁴ ἐρωτῶ.

⁵ Some prefer to regard σύζυγε as a proper name. It will then be, 'And thee also I entreat, my sterling, or trusty, Sysygyus,' &c. I am content, however, with the common reading.

⁶ Acts xvi. 13.

⁷ 1 Cor. xiv. 34, 35; 1 Tim. ii. 12.

tainty. That he is the same who is later known to us as Clemens Romanus, and whose Epistle to the Corinthians is the earliest extant example of patristic, as distinguished from Apostolic, writings, is not at all improbable; but, like most other facts of no true spiritual value, it is incapable of proof. The mention here made of 'the book of life' may well bring to our remembrance the Lord's words to the seventy who had freshly proved the virtue of His name.⁸ Were the names of those who preached Christ spitefully at Rome also written in the book of life? He is silent on this point, and so am I.

Verse 4. 'Rejoice in the Lord always; and again, I say, rejoice.' This is not a simple repetition of his earlier words,⁹ but derives a special emphasis from what immediately precedes. For joy in the Lord as a social blessing implies also one-mindedness in Him. Dissension breeds no joy in hearts alive to God. Christ in His grace is as one that serves among His people; and if His mind only were in them, His joy also would remain in them, and their joy would be full. Gladness is in truth the natural temperament of a child of God, who is Himself the fountain of every pure joy. It has therefore its dwelling in the tabernacles of the righteous, who are blessed of Him. The Lord is the reason of their joy, and its present measure is their knowledge of Himself. If, therefore, other mental emotions throw this into the background, or interrupt it for

⁸ Luke x. 20.

⁹ Chap. iii. 1.

a while, if the heaviness which manifold temptations bring is suffered to shut out the Lord's light from the soul, it proves only that faith is no longer in its proper exercise, and that the Lord has lost for a season His true place in our hearts. For to bless Him at *all* times is the habit of a healthy faith.¹ Nor can we honestly rejoice in Him if our memories are charged with aught against our brother, for self-renunciation is a necessary condition of true joy in the Lord.

Verse 5. 'Let your moderation be known unto all men,' &c. With a constant and unbroken joy in the Lord there should be associated that disposition of mind which was a special grace of His own character.² In the word here used by the Apostle³ there are united, with perhaps equal force of expression, the three distinct notions of probity, gentleness, and a readiness to yield. It is a prime quality⁴ of the wisdom which cometh from above, being a marked feature of that 'mind of Christ' which should be found in every believer. For it is by such testimony rather than by words that men are forced to acknowledge the genuineness of his lip-confession of that Name. It is a virtue which demands for its efficient exercise an habitual forgetfulness of self; and because self is never absent from our thoughts

¹ Ps. xxxiv. 1; 1 Pet. i. 6.

² 2 Cor. x. 1.

³ τὸ ἐπιεικὲς ἑμῶν. 'Suitableness' is the best single representative of this word. The verse would then have this meaning: 'Let all men see that your behaviour is suited to your confession and your hope.'

⁴ Jas. iii. 17.

except when the Lord is by our side, he adds the comforting assurance of His constant nearness. There is a double force in the word 'near.' It has an obvious and pointed reference to the Lord's return from heaven, but it means also that felt *present* nearness which is known and enjoyed by such as put their individual trust in Him. It is in the Lord's absence that the unfaithful servant abandons meekness and self-forgetfulness in favour of carnal pride and self-seeking, while the imminency of His personal return is a constant incentive to the true servant to be conforming himself more and more assiduously to his Master's ways. And He will stand by all who manfully endeavour in the spirit of self-judgment to adorn the doctrine of their Saviour-God, even as He stood as a comforter by Paul in his afflictions for the Gospel's sake.⁵ For the Lord is ever a found help in time of trouble to His people. He is nigh to them that are of broken heart, and saveth such as be of contrite spirit. He is nigh to *all* who call in truth upon His Name.⁶

Verse 6. 'Be careful for nothing,' &c. The care of this world chokes in its growth the Word of God, surcharging the hearts of those who give to anything but Christ a settled place in their affections.⁷ It is accordingly prohibited as positively to the believer as joy in the Lord is enjoined. For care is incom-

⁵ Acts xxiii. 11; 2 Tim. iv. 17.

⁶ Ps. xlvi. 1; xxxiv. 18; cxlv. 18.

⁷ Matt. xiii. 22; Luke xxi. 34.

patible with trust; and to cast all our care on Him who takes thought for His children without neglecting the very sparrows is the only just return which we can make for the all-gracious and heart-sufficing declaration of His Name. If we call upon the *Father* we should have the children's trust.

But confidence towards God is a thing utterly distinct from carelessness of soul. Its deep spring is a faith which truly estimates the character and manner of the God with whom we have to do. The boldness of its access to the Father is tempered, therefore, always by reverence and godly fear. The natural distance between God and man, which in Christ is annihilated for the true believer, is remembered only the more earnestly by those who, rejoicing *in the Lord* alway, do not forget that they are themselves both on the earth and also in the body of this flesh.⁸ The consciousness of having all in Christ gives an importunity of its own to filial faith, but keeps it still in watchful exercise. Prayer, therefore, and supplication—the first to utter the devotional trust and declare the general desires to Godward of the soul,⁹ the second to urge our sense of special need¹—are in every case to supersede the fruitless and care-laden self-communings of nature. With these are to be joined perpetual thanksgiving, which is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us.² For all who come with understanding to the

⁸ Eccles. v. 2; Matt. vi. 6, 7.

⁹ προσευχή.

¹ δέησις.

² 1 Thess. v. 18.

throne of Grace know well before they ask for anything that they have received already far more than they can possibly desire in the gift unspeakable of God's own Son. And it is as standing in His ever-blessed acceptance that they are entitled thus, by sovereign grace, to make known their desires to the Father. The sense of present need not only excites those who know God to a fresh discovery of His delivering power and fruitfulness,³ but serves also to recall to their minds the blessed contrast of that rich inheritance which awaits in heaven those who are learning to know earth and its things as pilgrims know the waste through which their homeward journey lies.

Verse 7. 'And the peace of God,' &c. A conditional promise, the fulfilment of which lies therefore mainly in our own power. God meets with blessing those who rejoice and work righteousness, remembering Him in His ways.⁴ His *peace* is the return He makes for our truthful confidence in prayer, being itself but the natural effect of our heart's conviction that God is on our side. While we have any reserve in our souls that peace can never really be the guardian of our hearts and minds. It is an ancient promise,⁵ freshly ratified to us in Christ, in whom all promise now is yea to the believer. As to the nature and quality of this peace, it excels all understanding, or, in other words, has in it nothing

³ Ps. xlv. 1.—'a found help,' &c.

⁴ Isa. lxiv. 5.

⁵ Isa. xxvi. 3.

rational, being both in origin and effect outside the range of natural thought, for it is the peace of *God*, not of man. It stands thus in marked contrast to that tranquil state of undisturbed self-complacency which men in their natural state call 'peace of mind,' the fatal source of which is a double ignorance both of God and ourselves. For *God's* peace is the peace which He has made for us and with us by the blood of His Son's cross. It is the portion only of the pardoned and reconciled sinner, and, like the love which is its parent, cannot be measured or estimated by the human mind, though tasted and enjoyed through the revealing power of the Spirit, as it flows like a river through the soul that is athirst for Him.

Verse 8. 'Finally, my brethren,' &c. The same formula of conclusion with which he opened chap. iii. is here repeated, and this time he is really near the end. In the former instance he sought to put his brethren on their guard against evil. Now, having shown to them distinctly the way of peace, he adds this most comprehensive positive injunction which forms a just complement to his earlier teaching. For while to maintain and defend the faith is of the very essence of practical godliness, true Christian life is not a life of negative consistency only, but of active and unremitting duty also. In considering, therefore, the language of this verse, we should well remember that the descriptive words used are all of them to be referred to *God*, whose peace is supposed to be keeping both heart and mind, as the true

standard of their meaning. The thoughts of His children are not to be unoccupied, but fixed earnestly on things worthy in His eyes. And before all others on—

‘Things *true*.’ This points in the first place to the duty imposed on all children of God of keeping His true sayings in their hearts, and also of proving, by a direct reference to His written word, all doctrinal statements and opinions of men, or, as it is elsewhere said, of trying the spirits whether they are of God.⁶ But in a secondary sense true things may be found everywhere in God’s creation to occupy and interest men’s minds. Both facts and principles, moral and physical, abound in the world with which the natural intellect concerns itself. Is he here, then, inciting believers to the like pursuits? The proper reply to this question is that whatever is true is a thing of God, to be admitted therefore, and not denied, by all who know and truly worship Him. But inasmuch as God is Himself the great object of His children’s study, and because His own Spirit has been given them, that they may know His things as distinguished from the things of men,⁷ their interest in natural science must ever be of a secondary and subordinate kind. The heavens, which invite and partially reward the laborious investigations of astronomers, are regarded with a different eye by one who thinks of them with a believing reference to Him who, by His power, spread them forth and

⁶ 1 John iv. 1.

⁷ 1 Cor. ii. 12.

garnished them, and who rides upon them in His excellency in His people's help. And so also of all other departments of scientific knowledge. Intellect toils after discoveries which never satisfy; faith penetrates beyond discovery, and reads Him who is invisible in what it sees. The heavens declare the glory of *God*, but this declaration falls too often on dulled ears, and appeals vainly to blinded and self-flattered hearts. There are true and false theories on almost numberless subjects, and the believer, as a child of light and wisdom, has to consider which among the ordinary topics of human discussion or inquiry is really worthy of his attention. Do they immediately, or in any natural way, connect themselves with his definite heavenly calling, or are they after all mere earthly things? We should remember that whatever leads in its natural course away from Christ and from things heavenly is not *true* for them that walk in Him. It is *falsely* called 'knowledge' if it does not lead to God.⁸

It ought not to be needful to insist also on the absolute necessity of truth, both in word and deed, in the dealings of God's children, both with one another and with the world. They who have been made manifest to God should scorn the vain shelter, under any circumstances, of a refuge of lies. But men (and especially women) lie from kindness not less frequently, perhaps, than from fear or interest or malice; but white lies turn black as night beneath the searching

⁸ ψευδώνυμος γνώσις. 1 Tim. vi. 20.

eye of the Father of lights. And truth, which to the believer is *Christ*, will not only shame its adversaries, but exact also penalties, that must be felt, from its unfaithful friends. We are safe from lying and all other species of baseness only so long as we keep in memory the soul-ennobling reality of our relationship as new creatures in Christ, both to God and to each other in His sight.⁹

‘Things *venerable* or respectable’¹ also should engage our thoughts. What these things are in a believer’s estimation will vary with the state of his own soul. For the word now before us, like all other words used by the Spirit, yields up its full meaning only in the light which makes all things manifest. Many indeed are the objects of true or false veneration among men; but nothing is honourable in the Spirit’s eyes that does not find its living witness and expression in the Lord Jesus Christ. No work therefore of man that is not wrought in God should be venerable in the estimation of a true believer. He will be conscious often of a sympathetic admiration for the actions and sentiments of men who are zealous towards God apart from knowledge,² but veneration is for that only which finds approval in the light of God. Hence objects of art and works of genius which captivate the natural imagination, and names which are popularly idolised as belonging to the world’s heroes or benefactors, are more often

⁹ Col. iii. 9; Eph. iv. 25.

¹ σεμνά.

² Rom. x. 2.

an avoidance than an attraction to a really spiritual mind. And truly it were well if modern Christians thought more on this point, and asked themselves honestly how far the habit of flocking with the world to its galleries and palaces of art, to feed their eyes upon some well-graced lie to which men are not afraid to give the name of 'Christ,' can be really pleasing in the Father's sight.

The plea most commonly employed to sop the Christian conscience on this subject is that scriptural paintings, and sacred art generally, are but a helpful paraphrase of inspired words. But this plea is as false as it is plausible. For, first, such devotional aids are superfluous to those who believe in the Holy Ghost and rely upon His teaching ; and secondly, no cunning fiction can ever represent unadulterated truth to any mind. Faith neither comes nor grows by sense ; it is both born and nourished of the word of God. Art, as an imitator and interpreter of nature, has its proper and legitimate sphere ; but things spiritual can be neither truly nor blamelessly represented through a medium which has no deeper source than the human imagination, and can never act therefore healthfully upon a new-born soul. For the true portraiture of Christ, which gratifies and feeds the souls of God's elect, is not such as imagination can conceive and art transfer to canvas, but that which the Comforter engraves upon the fleshy tables of the heart, as He reveals things unseen by the eye and unimagined by the heart of man through

His effectual ministry of the word of grace.³ And can it appear strange to any thoughtful believer that the day of the Lord is declared to be against what the world so highly prizes,⁴ when it is remembered that the most admired works of art are, speaking generally, false delineations of the very truths whose living substance is rejected by the world? A painted or a sculptured Christ may excite in a certain class of minds a religious emotion of a spurious or factitious kind; but God is a *Spirit*, and it is not sensuous worship that the Father seeks.⁵

Nothing corruptible is worthy of honour on its own account, and things highly esteemed of men are, if we will hear Christ's words, abomination often in the sight of God.⁶ The works of men's hands are vanity, and so also are their mental conceptions; but men are themselves to be honoured for their Maker's sake, and for a like reason, in a more especial sense, those in present power or authority.⁷ Above all, behaviour on the part of any who name the name of Christ, that savours of the true dignity of their calling, as children of the Highest, should be a cause of joyful and thankful admiration always. External consistency or mere religious mannerism is, on the other hand, a thing rather to be abhorred; but the habit of such as, in simplicity and godly sincerity, have their conversation in the world by the grace of God; who are modest and of lowly mind, yet stand-

* 1 Pet. i. 8.

* Isa. ii. 16, 17.

* John iv. 23, 24.

* Luke xvi. 15.

* 1 Pet. ii. 13, 17.

ing in their lowliness immeasurably above the loftiest natural pretensions—full of the serious gravity of truth, while their hearts are flooded with both joy and peace by the power of the Holy Ghost, and meekness, righteousness, and kindness shine in all their ways—in a word, that rarest of spectacles beneath the heavens, *true Christian character*, should never fail to win from God's saints both an emulative and admiring regard.

‘Things *just*’ must be remembered also by the children of Him who is Himself the habitation of justice.⁸ The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and if we know that He is righteous, we know that every one which doeth righteousness is born of Him.⁹ Faith cannot escape shipwreck if separated permanently from an honest conscience. Yet it must be sorrowfully admitted that in many respects the injunction here laid upon us is too liable to be neglected or forgotten. For indeed an unremitting vigilance is requisite to keep God's children clear of blame in this particular. I speak not now of right-doing in the larger sense of fair-dealing in the ordinary intercourse of life, but rather of the smaller and less obvious claims of justice. ‘The tongue of the just is as choice silver;’¹ but what countless injuries are wrought, not among unbelievers only, by an unbridled tongue! Then let us think only of the various relationships of life, and of the difficulty which attends the effort to avoid all partiality, and

⁸ Jer. l. 7. ⁹ Ps. xi. 7 ; 1 John ii. 29. ¹ Prov. x. 20.

be in all things just and equal, and we shall not think this a superfluous charge. Whether of omission or commission, petty and even large sins against justice are of too frequent occurrence among those whose praise it should be that they do not walk as other Gentiles walk. For the perfect man is found no longer upon earth. Want of thought, indolence, carelessness, and other like faults of a negative kind, work often positive injustice in their effects. We are, in fact, sure of doing justly only so long as we are walking in that love which seeketh not her own.

‘Things *pure*’ come next in order. Right thoughts towards others make us practically just; but pureness is a personal trait which mostly escapes external observation, and is to be estimated only by the Searcher of hearts. It is the first, as well as first-named, attribute of the wisdom which cometh from above,² and should be found both in the lips and hands of those who have purified their souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit. Christ only is personally pure, and of all who truly hope to see Him as He is it is written that they purify themselves even as He is pure.³ Self-purification is, like repentance, a lifelong exercise; God’s goodness leading to the latter, and Christ’s gracious excellency exciting to the former. As an object of ceaseless desire and pursuit, but withal of impracticable attainment in this life, this purification matches the ‘perfection’ which the Lord would also have us seek.⁴ It

² Jas. iii. 17.

³ 1 John iii. 3.

⁴ Matt. v. 48.

is by pureness that ministry is proved to be of God,⁵ and to keep himself pure is the first anxiety of one who truly occupies for Christ.⁶ It is the servant who loves pureness of heart that will enjoy in an especial sense the friendship of the King.⁷

‘Things *lovely*’ also should be pondered by those born of Love. Kindliness and suavity of manner are, when based on godly sincerity, an ornament of grace to the believer. Roughness and rudeness are never of the Spirit of Christ, while an uncompromising firmness in the maintenance of right is an essential feature of true Christian character. The thing most to be dreaded in behaviour is hypocrisy, and the absence of this all-pervading evil should be a clear mark of distinction in the demeanour of a child of light from the amiable insincerities of worldliness. Kindly affection towards those who are through grace partakers of their hope, and a sorrowing tenderness towards such as are ignorant of God, will not fail to mark all whose souls are watered always by the Spirit’s love. Like every other true fruit of light, this right-toned amenity and amiability grows only on the root of a practical and self-denying faith, and will be borne most abundantly by those who keep closest company with the Lord.

‘Things *of good report*.’ While the praise of men is a thing which a true servant of Christ will rather shun than seek,⁸ his conduct should be ever

⁵ 2 Cor. vi. 6.

⁶ 1 Tim. v. 22.

⁷ Prov. xxii. 11.

⁸ Luke vi. 26 ; Gal. i. 10.

such as to command the favourable suffrage of impartial minds. God is glorified by the outshining in good works of the light that is in them before men.⁹ Having no evil thing to say of you¹ is an effectual seal upon the lips of those haters of God's truth who watch for occasion in the halting of His people; while, on the other hand, the glaring inconsistencies of ordinary Christian walk afford too often a welcome pretext to revilers' tongues.

'If any *virtue*.' Virtue, in its largest sense, is what becomes a *man*. Before Christ came it was pursued as an ideal by all right-minded Gentiles, while in Israel it was known under another and a higher name—'the fear of Jehovah'—since to love, to honour, and to serve his Creator is the summit of a creature's excellence. In Jesus, the true 'desire of the Gentiles' as well as 'the hope of Israel,' what was vainly imagined by the former and imperfectly attained by the latter stands now openly revealed in its perfection to the believer. For to Him only, as 'the Just One,' does the name 'Man' attach as a title of true honour, and by Him alone, in the days of His flesh, was Jehovah known perfectly, or loved, or feared, or served. The virtue, therefore, which believers are exhorted now to add to their faith is that kind of manliness that was found in Christ; a courage which despises all dangers in the path of right, that is, of obedience to God. Natural integrity, on the other hand, like natural amiability, is

⁹ Matt. v. 16; 1 Pet. ii. 12.

¹ Tit. ii. 8.

but a fair 'flower of the grass,' which fades into its native dust at the revelation of the Lord.²

'If any *praise*,' &c. There is praise of more than one kind to be thought of by the saint. First, and supremely, the praise of *God*, which awaits the patient well-doer in the day of God.³ There is, next, a praise which godly men bestow on godly acts, but which the world neither awards nor appreciates.⁴ There is also a praise, to be by no means lightly esteemed, which practical well-doing and a ready submission for the Lord's sake to the ordinances of man call forth from the rulers of this world.⁵ Such praise may be honourably won from the very worst of human governments; but, on the other hand, a partaker of the heavenly calling, whose registry and civic rights are not here but above, can never seek consistently the reputation of a social or political reformer. For such a distinction is at variance with his position in this world as a confessor and partaker of Christ crucified, and with his relations, consequently, both to God and man. Discerning God under each and every species of human government, and referring the responsibilities of those who rule to Him who allows the world's rulers in their place, the confessor of his dead and risen and exalted Lord is to live for God in Cæsar's presence, and regard the rights of both. If, as he openly declares by his confession of Christ crucified, he is dead to the world

² Isa. xl. 6; Job xlii. 5, 6.

³ Rom. ii. 29; 1 Cor. iv. 5.

⁴ 2 Cor. viii. 18.

⁵ Rom. xiii. 3; 1 Pet. ii. 13, 14.

and a stranger and pilgrim upon earth, let him not live here as a citizen, nor set his heart upon the improvement of that which is unacknowledged by the Father, but seek rather, by walking in the truth which sanctifies, the honour that awaits the unflinching keeper of the faith.

Verse 9. 'Those things which ye both learned and received,' &c. This verse contains an egotistic climax of the very boldest kind. He has already placed before his brethren the fitting objects of their interest and pursuit as Christian men. And now, as if he felt in his own soul that no speaker of God's words is worthy of attention who does not personally exemplify them in his ways, he makes this large but confident appeal. He had taught them, and they should call to mind his doctrine. They had received from him, as a minister of God, things unimagined by their minds before, and had hitherto walked worthy of their hope. Let them well remember what they had received, if they would still deserve his praise.⁶ They had heard of his ways in other Churches, and had observed his manner of life among themselves; and if they recalled these things to mind they would find that both truth and honour, justice and purity, attractive kindness and general praiseworthiness were plainly noticeable in his character. For he had walked *in Christ*. If, therefore, they did as he had taught and done, they should be sharers also of his joy. For as in all his

⁶ 1 Cor. xi. 2.

afflictions he was comforted of God, and kept in an abundant enjoyment of Christ's consolations,⁷ so also would it be with them who walked by the same rule. He had promised them 'the peace of God' as the effect of their confiding prayers; he now adds the assurance of the God of peace Himself as the sustaining companion of their way. For He is evermore with them who are in heart with Him. Jesus was left alone but once, when judicially forsaken for our sakes, when for peace He had the great and unknown bitterness of penal death in our stead. And they who serve and imitate Him shall even here partake His honour and His joy.⁸

Verse 10. 'But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly,' &c. What he has laid as a perpetual injunction on his brethren he now practises himself on their account. Joy in the Lord was constantly the inward habit of his soul, as one who had both seen Him and believed;⁹ but it rose or fell, as to its measure, with his perception of the fruits of grace in others. Already he has testified his joy at the vigour of their faith and their fruitfulness to Godward in their zeal and steadfast labour in the Gospel. He now speaks of the gladdening effect upon his spirit of their special remembrance of himself and his personal necessities. He had been long wishing to hear from them, and expecting some token of their love. For he knew what they had been to him when at

⁷ 2 Cor. i. 4, 5.

⁸ John xv. 10; xii. 26.

⁹ Conf. 1 Pet. i. 8.

Philippi, and felt sure that in his later trials and afflictions for the Gospel's sake their hearts were with him still. But delays had occurred. Love was ready, but opportunity was wanting; their friendly arms were not long enough to reach him, and their trusty messenger had sickened on his way. His joy therefore in the Lord was proportionately great when Epaphroditus came at last to verify his waning expectations, and confirm his trust in their unaltered love. The wintry chill of distance seemed changed for him to a summer sweetness of enjoyed communion as he looked with his own eyes upon their gifts; and in embracing their messenger he embraced them all.

Verse 11. 'Not that I speak in respect of want,' &c. Yet it was not his flesh only, or chiefly, that so gratefully responded to their care. Rarely indeed was Paul in circumstances which would render superfluous such acts of practical benevolence, but he would have his kind and thoughtful helpers understand that his joy was on their account rather than his own. For he had learned of God the secret of perpetual sufficiency. His personal emptiness was his fulness also in the Lord. Very different might be his state and prospects as to external things at different times, but in none of these was he dependent of necessity on human aid. It was a lesson to be learnt yet more perfectly as he fulfilled his course, but a goodly proficiency he can already show. Nor

does he hesitate to enumerate openly his attainments in the school of God.

Verse 12. 'I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound,' &c. Large words these are, and bold, yet fit both for their hearing and for ours, since he wrote them before God, to whose glory only is this self-display. For it was not stoical indifference that hardened Paul against the effects of temporal vicissitude, nor did native force of character render him superior to the burdens which crush ordinary men. What he was practising he had first acquired through a secret initiation in his Teacher's ways.¹ And these things he would let them at Philippi know, that they might themselves aim at a like measure of godly experience, and that they might never think despondingly about him in his absence, should he at any time be cut off by adverse circumstances from the welcome and precious ministry of their love. The self-sufficiency of which he boasts was but the overshadowing of his spirit by the power of the God of peace. What he had taught them a little before he is now exemplifying in his own case, and declaring for the encouragement of such as would follow in his steps.

Verse 13. 'I can do all things through Him² who strengtheneth me.' Whose strength it is that is thus perfected in weakness, he tells us explicitly elsewhere;³ and it is to draw their hearts closer to

¹ μεμύημαι.

² Χριστῷ is omitted in the best copies.

³ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

the Source of his own confidence that he puts them in possession of these privacies of personal communion. His self-laudation is at the same time his confession of entire natural insufficiency; for it is in the Lord only that he is strong,⁴ and his words are written in the hope that they who read them may in like manner learn to be both weak and strong. But lest what he has just said should in any wise diminish the pleasure they would otherwise feel in ministering to his necessities, he adds what follows.

Verse 14. 'Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.' They had surely done both well and wisely in what they did. Such thoughts and acts on their part were both lovely and of good report. For in ministering to one who rated himself less than the least of all saints, they were ministering to the Lord. Nor was this the first effort of their love on his behalf, as he proceeds now to remind them.

Verse 15. 'Now ye Philippians know also,'⁵ &c. From the day when Lydia, with newly-opened heart, had constrained Christ's messengers to make her house their home, the spirit of thoughtful kindness and ready reciprocation in all offices of love seems to have distinguished the Church at Philippi. They should not have been singular in this respect, but

⁴ Conf. Eph. vi. 10. A better rendering of the words πάντα ἰσχύω ἐν τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντί με will be, perhaps, 'I have a fitness for all emergencies in Him who strengtheneth me.'

⁵ Or perhaps, 'And ye, too, are aware, O Philippians,' &c. I prefer the usual rendering.

for a while they evidently were, other Churches learning slowly from them the habit of practically recognising the moral claims of those who cared for and ministered to their spiritual wants.

Verse 16. 'For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.' Strange it may well seem to us who read these words that they whose 'work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ' are recorded by the same witness,⁶ should have been so slow to recognise and to assert one of their highest privileges. Yet let us not wonder only as we read, but *learn*. The lesson is for us who read. The grace once lacking to the saints at Thessalonica was afterwards supplied, and we accordingly find them included in the general eulogy bestowed by the Apostle (in an Epistle of later date than that addressed to the Thessalonians) on 'the Churches of Macedonia.'⁷

Verse 17. 'Not because I desire a gift, but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.' This fresh disclaimer of all personal aims is made with an immediate reference to the day of God. His own joy and glory in that day would be proportioned, he would have them know, to theirs. To be a recipient, therefore, of their bounty now is, to this faithful steward of God's mysteries, an earnest of more abundant honour in that day to those who, under his training, had learned so well to imitate the ways of God.⁸

⁶ 1 Thess. i. 3.

⁷ 2 Cor. viii. 1.

⁸ 2 Cor. ix. 7.

Verse 18. 'But I have all, and abound: I am full,' &c. Their acts of personal kindness to Paul are accepted as a sacrifice to God, whose servant he is. For they bore on them a sweet savour of Christ. With great hearts these Philippians had but slender means; yet out of their deep poverty they could abound, in their loving and constant remembrance for Christ's sake of the Apostle's greater need; and with such sacrifices God is always pleased.

Verse 19. 'But my God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory, by (or in) Christ Jesus.'⁹ What they did thus, in their self-denying love, they might do fearlessly. For the living and true God, whose grace they knew, and whom Paul, in his fuller knowledge, calls emphatically his *own*, would amply recompense. They had filled this true minister of God with their willing and grateful kindness, and his God should fill them in return with the blessings of His goodness. It is a large promise and of a continuous fulfilment. Both here and hereafter the true need of God's children will be met by Him in faithfulness, according to the measure of His own fulness, both of grace and glory in Christ Jesus: Peace flowing like a river here below through hearts sore tried often by manifold temptations, and His own eternal kingdom and glory when the days of trial have their end.

Verse 20. 'Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.' This is not a formal

⁹ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

doxology only, but connects itself closely with all that goes before. Their liberality and Paul's gladness—his independence also of all human aid, the fruit which abounded and should yet abound, whether in him or them—were things purely of *grace*, and therefore to the praise and glory of God.

Verse 21. 'Salute every saint in Christ Jesus,' &c. A final charge to let their love be as far-reaching as their faith. Themselves by grace in Christ, they should have a brother's greeting for all who are sanctified by faith in Him. Their love should stretch itself beyond Philippi, finding its proper objects wherever Christ was truly named. Meanwhile they are themselves greeted in the spirit of that same love by those brethren who were Paul's more intimate associates at Rome. Their names are probably omitted because unknown personally to the Philippian saints. Nor are they remembered by these only.

Verse 22. 'All the saints salute you,' &c. All who at Rome loved Christ unite in a sincere greeting of their Macedonian brethren for the sake of Him whose name they bore. But with an especial cordiality they are remembered by those of Cæsar's household, because of all the saints then at Rome these were thrown into closest contact with Nero's prisoner, and had naturally a larger participation in his special sympathies. As to the social position of the imperial officials here generally mentioned, we know nothing certain; but from the greetings ap-

pended to his Second Epistle to Timothy they would appear to have been of both high and low degree.

Verse 23. 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.' Affection finds its voice in kindly greetings; but a benediction in this Name from God's inspired servants brings strength as well as joy to its recipients. Paul knew this well, and therefore habitually closes in this form his communications to the saints.

THE END.