

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

ON THE

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

BY

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"See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from Heaven."—HEB. xii. 25.

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P R E F A C E.

THE Epistle to the Hebrews is a solitary and remarkable instance in which the Holy Ghost has dictated a very important book of Scripture in the form of an anonymous letter of exhortation.

It cannot be a matter of surprise to any, that this circumstance has proved a fruitful source of disputation among Biblical critics. From the earliest ages of the Christian dispensation, to the present hour, the authorship of this Epistle has been a frequent topic of discussion. To the simple-minded Christian, who, by the sure guidance of that unction from the Holy One which gives to very babes in Christ ability to distinguish truth from error,¹ the discovery of the writer's name will be a matter of comparative indifference. Discerning in it, as he surely will, the voice of the true Shepherd, he will assure himself, that had it been expedient or necessary to the work of edification that it should be

¹ 1 John ii. 20.

known, the grace and wisdom which have, in other instances, distinctly indicated the instrument which God employed, would not have concealed it in the present case. But as this question still frequently recurs, and is, like all such questions, employed by the enemy as an instrument for disturbing the souls of men in their reliance on the Word of Truth, it may be useful to state briefly the question as it stands.

Among modern Christians the balance of opinion has stood mainly between the names of Paul and Apollos. That the latter, who is elsewhere noticed by the Spirit as a man both "eloquent" and "mighty in the Scriptures,"² should have been the author of this Epistle, has seemed almost conclusive to some who have sought their proofs in the presumptive evidence of style and language. Of the arguments which might be used in favour of its Pauline authorship, I shall here allege that one alone which rests on the words of his brother apostle in 2 Pet. iii. 15, 16, and which appears to me decisive of the question.

To appreciate fully the allusion there made to his "beloved brother Paul," it is necessary to remember that the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the Epistles of Peter have morally a common object. The former is characterized by its author as an "exhortation,"³ while the latter also were written for the declared purpose of "stirring up the minds" of those addressed by "way of remem-

² Acts xviii. 24.

³ Heb. xiii. 22.

brance.”⁴ Standing, according to its acknowledged date, between the First and Second Epistles of Peter, the anonymous Epistle to the Hebrews takes notice, in a tone of affectionate severity of the decay of both faith and patience which had caused their “former days” to stand in reproachful contrast to their then condition;⁵ while the last Epistle of Peter, in which earnest warning is largely mixed with comfort and encouragement, but quite unaccompanied by any tone of reprehension or rebuke, fitly closes this series of Divine communications to the Hebrew saints.

The aim of both writers was, by means of a rich and full ministry of Christ, to confirm their brethren in their patience of hope. By both the promised advent of the Lord is kept distinctly before the view of the disciples, and by both there is delivered an impressive warning of the apostasy of the professing Christian body. Each witness labours to stir up his brethren to take firmer hold upon the God of promise, and by each the word of grace is used to guide the heirs of salvation along the ways of holiness and peace.⁶

When, therefore, I find the Apostle of the Circumcision stating at the close of an Epistle addressed avowedly to the “Dispersion,” that Paul, “according to the wisdom given unto him, had

⁴ 2 Pet. iii. 1, 2.

⁵ Heb. x. 32-34. With this compare 1 Pet. i. 5-9.

⁶ Compare, as to the similarity of doctrine in these Epistles, Heb. vi. 11-20, and x. 36-39, with 1 Pet. 5-7; and with Heb. xii. 2-4, 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13.

written unto them; as *also* in all his Epistles, speaking in them of these things," &c.—drawing thus a pointed distinction between his Epistles to the Gentile Churches and that addressed by him to the circumcision, I accept each testimony as conclusive. It affirms, first, that the teaching of Paul and Peter (though each had his specially appointed work, and one might exceed the other in the measure of the revelations made to him,) was essentially the same; and, secondly, that the Apostle of the Gentiles had expressly written to the same "strangers of the dispersion,"⁷ as are here addressed by Peter, *i. e.* to believing *Hebrews*, who, in whatever local situation⁸ they might be temporarily found, are contemplated by the Spirit of grace, as abroad upon their pilgrimage of faith; having here no continuing city, but in quest of one to come.

Exposition of doctrine, rather than critical discussion, has been my aim in preparing the following work. It is intended for Christian readers, in what spiritual condition soever they may be,—for any reader, happy or unhappy, who may find upon the title-page, or in this preface, any promise of either profit or relief. Those who already are at peace, and, in the happy confidence of faith, are joying now in God through Jesus Christ, will naturally enter on the work at its commencement.

⁷ Διασπορά. 1 Pet. i. 1. Compare, for the proper force of this expression, John vii. 25, and James i. 1.

⁸ It is impossible to say *positively* to what place this Epistle was originally sent.

For to such the Epistle will present, in all its parts, the value and attraction of the word of *grace*. On the other hand, it is my hope that, through the mercy of God, the weak or unsettled Christian, who is a stranger to solid peace of conscience, will not turn wholly in vain to such parts of this volume as the practical exigency of his spiritual condition may prompt him to examine in the first place.

With reference to this Second Edition, it is only necessary to say, that in the course of the thorough revision which it has undergone, the original work has been considerably enlarged, besides being slightly altered in some minor details. Nothing, however, has been *changed*, either with regard to its general structure or its doctrinal tone and character.

To the reader whose principal desire may be to obtain a clear and connected view of the structure and argument of this Epistle, the extent to which the practical application of doctrine has in some instances been carried, may appear undesirable and inconvenient. I shall be truly sorry, if, in any instance, an *attentive* reader is injuriously diverted from the main thread of the Spirit's argument. On the other hand, a desultory or careless perusal of a work of this description is little likely to please or profit any one. Writing in the interests of Truth alone, and for those only who are seeking truth, I have attempted always to adjust in their due proportion doctrinal statement

and practical application; bearing ever in mind, that while truth must, in its very nature, interest the understanding of all who are Truth's children, it is to the heart and *conscience* of the believer that the voice of the Spirit is continually addressed.

Should these Notes be in any degree instrumental in persuading Christians to the habit of studying the books of Scripture *consecutively*, as well as in detached and fragmentary parts, they will not have been published in vain. Desultory reading tends rather to loosen than to gird the loins of our minds.⁹ It is, indeed, a sweet privilege of the believer to be allowed to cull at will, for the refreshment of his spirit, the fairest flowers of Divine promise. For all that God has spoken He has spoken for His children's sakes. But to taste in perfection the comfort of His word, we must ourselves be seeking, not our own comfort chiefly, but the knowledge of His will. Now God has given us His Word in divers forms. If then we would honour Him in His gracious gifts, or consult full blessing to ourselves, we must accept His testimonies as they are delivered to us, and, by a patient and believing study, endeavour to gather from them *all* the precious fruits of wisdom which they promise to the inquiring man of God.¹

May He mercifully bless this aim.

A. P.

⁹ 1 Pet. i. 13, ii. 2

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 14-17; Jas. iii. 13-18.

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

ON

THE DISPENSATIONS.

AN expression occurs at the very commencement of the Epistle to the Hebrews, a full elucidation of which seems to call for more space than may conveniently be afforded to it in the body of the following work. On the other hand, a just appreciation of its meaning is highly desirable for all who would seek, from the careful study of this Epistle, a fuller measure of that knowledge which we are exhorted to add to our faith,¹ and the possession of which constitutes the chief distinction between the infantine believer and the full grown man in Christ.²

It is to the "last days,"³ which, at the opening

¹ 2 Pet. i. 5.

² 1 John ii. 14; 1 Cor. xiv. 2. Compare also the remarks in the ensuing work on chapter v. *ad fin.*

³ The reading now generally adopted by critical editors, ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων, "at the close of these days," *i.e.* at the conclusion of the period during which the revealed word has been successively communicated to men, is, perhaps, to be preferred.

of the first chapter, are contrasted with the former times in which the fathers lived, that the present allusion is made. The least attentive reader is aware of the general drift of the contrast there expressed. But there is an exactness and precision in the language of the Spirit, which we are not wise to disregard. In the present instance, if we would correctly appreciate the above-quoted expression, some degree of intelligent acquaintance must first be had with the nature and intention of those former economic periods, to which it stands in so marked and important a relation.

Nor is the study of dispensational doctrine desirable only as a means of furnishing the Christian's mind with an ordered chronology of great Scriptural facts. To note the wisdom with which God has governed the slow march of time, and brought to pass, in their appointed sequence, those events which assisted the gradual advancement of the day of light and truth, is undoubtedly both interesting and useful. But it is when contemplated *morally* that the record of past time presents its most important lessons to the soul. For not only are the varied phases of Christ's *many* glories discernible by faith in what His Spirit has dictated to the holy men of old; but the lively oracles of God contain the only safe and true solution of all the changeful phenomena of human history which remain to the mind that disregards their voice, a riddle of perplexity and doubt. The inspired Word is the sole mirror which faithfully

reflects the moral features of both God and man. For God, who has suffered human character to expand itself, by bringing man under diverse and successive dispensations, has published the results for our instruction in the unbroken Scripture of His truth. His varied dealings with His creature have given occasion to the revelation of His own perfections, which they have educed, also the manifold qualities of fallen humanity, and (where the ear is opened to receive His testimonies) have expounded man completely to himself.

Some feeling of the intrinsic importance of the subject, and a belief that this branch of Divine knowledge has been less generally cultivated among Christians than other portions of God's perfect truth, have induced me to present to the reader the following rude outline, in which an attempt has been made to sketch distinctly the leading features of these former epochs, with a view to a better understanding of the times in which our own lot has been cast. Our inquiry will be directed to three principal economies, or dispensations—the Antediluvian, the Noachic, and the Mosaic, or legal. These shall be severally considered in their order, with such passing notice of those more particular instances of Divine intervention in the course of human history, of which the Scriptures speak, as may serve to set in more distinct and ample view the general subject now under consideration. We shall find that under all the varieties of form which dis-

tinguish the earlier dispensations from each other, one common feature attaches to them all: *the reclaimableness of fallen humanity* is there assumed as the ostensible⁴ basis of God's dealings with men. Let us now cast our glance backwards for a little space.

Brief but decisive witness has been borne by the Spirit of God to the origin, the progress, and the end of human society, in the antediluvian world. Adam's transgression had preceded the first birth of human kind. Sent forth from Paradise, under sentence of a life of toil, until his measured days of vanity should end in death, man was to prove his fealty to his Creator by honouring Him in a truthful and submissive recognition of his own now degraded yet hopeful position. A choice, indeed, lay still before him. He might accept with wise humility his outcast place, and giving glory thus to God, by acknowledging his righteous work of judgment, he might look from the remoteness of that banishment to the same God as his refuge, and his ultimate reward, by confiding in Him as the faithful speaker of the word of *promise*;⁵ or he might, in the spirit of self-will and self-dependence, acquiesce, with an evil contentment, in his new position as an alien from Eden. Finding the ready soil obedient, with rich return of increase, to his labour, he might cease

⁴ I say "the *ostensible* basis," because from the very beginning, the secret of man's total ruin, morally as well as physically, has been the possession of saving faith.

⁵ Gen. iii. 15.

to remember that that labour was itself a badge of sin, that God had cursed the ground because of human guilt, and that the sweat which stood upon his face while thus he toiled for bread, was a perpetual witness that the link was severed which had once bound peace and blessedness to God's unfallen creature as the willingly dependent object of His goodness. In the first pair of human generation, both these conditions stand exemplified in their contrast. The former, which is the way of God, was discoverable only by faith, and through the effectual power of His grace. Abel chose this. He confessed God according to the truth of his natural and inherited position as a *sinner*, and thus gave glory to the God of judgment, while his trust was in the faithful promise of His mercy.⁶ The latter was the way of nature—obvious and inviting to man's master principle of self-dependence, but exactly contrary, in its tendency and result, to the way of faith. Such was the choice of Cain. But nature, though it loves not God, and turns a deaf ear to the searching testimonies of His truth, is, nevertheless, instinctively a worshipper in its own perverted way. Refusing all true acknowledgment of sin, and standing, in self-delusive confidence, upon the fallacious assumption of its own inherent capability of good, its chosen form of worship becomes the clearest conviction both of its folly and its guilt. It was thus with

⁶ For a further notice of Abel and his faith, the reader is referred to the remarks on chap. xi. 4, in the ensuing work.

Adam's first-born son. Cain tills the ground. He reaps its fruits; he brings them spontaneously as an offering to God, with expectation of acceptance for himself and for his work. But God, who is not to be deceived by outward shew, rejected both; for though thus seemingly honoured and adored, He had no sanctuary in the *heart* of Cain. Neither confession nor repentance find expression in his gifts. He worshipped in the haughtiness of an unbroken will, instead of in the reverence and godly fear, which are the unfailing accompaniments of faith. Hatred of Abel's righteous way was in his thoughts, while Cain thus outwardly drew nigh to God. Having supposed that God was even as himself, he is enraged, but not humbled, when thus undeceived. Instead of filling him with godly sorrow, his disappointment only ripens jealousy to madness. And so the first-recorded worshipper was also the first murderer, shedding his brother's blood at the bidding of a stronger feeling than the instincts of nature. He was of "that wicked one."⁷ It was the shining of God in Abel's righteous works that roused the bitter wrath of Cain. "His own deeds were evil, and his brother's righteous."

Thus the first fruit of woman's travail was sin in its most fearful type. The first-begotten of mankind, because he sought his own prosperity in proud forgetfulness of God, became a fratricide at the bidding of the devil. Such is the natural

⁷ 1 John iii. 12.

catastrophe of the flesh when left to work its own results. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth *death*." The carnal mind, being enmity against God, while it is the obsequious slave of sin, is always capable of this. Murder is one of the evil treasures which lie deep hidden in the heart of ruined man.⁸

The mark of God was set upon the murderer as a token of exemption from all vengeance at the hands of man. For as yet the right of judgment, which belongs to God alone, had not been delegated to a human hand. But the goodness of God, which should have led the guilty to repentance, becomes but an occasion to the selfish desires of the flesh. Willingly departing from the presence of God, though he well knew that the sole tenure by which he held his life, was the forbearance of his Judge, Cain becomes the founder of the first settled, social community upon the earth. The useful arts, and fair embellishments of life,—things capable, indeed, of goodly ends when used for God, but which, as merely human inventions, are the chief nourishment and solace of that "pride of life" which keeps the unrepentant world at a willing distance from the God of grace,⁹—are significantly declared by the Spirit to have originated in the family of Cain.¹

The substituted branch which grew from Adam's root, in place of slaughtered Abel, produced, mean-

⁸ Matt. xv. 19.

⁹ Isa. v. 12.

¹ Gen. iv. 21, 22.

while, its separate and abundant fruit.² Men multiplied. The several races of Cain and Seth grew on with rapid increase. The time and manner of their interfusion is not distinctly noted in the word of God. *Intrinsically* they were on precisely equal terms. Adamic nature, that is, was not less evil and corrupted in the Sethic race than in the family of Cain. Yet it is in the second line of natural descent alone that instances of grace are found. Enoch and Noah are of Sethic blood. No child of Cain obtained a good report from God through faith. But the comely testimony which is borne to Enoch seems to cast, by its brightness, a yet deeper shade upon the broad living picture in the midst of which this individual figure is presented in such pure relief.³ He walked with God—a proof that God still spake to those whose ear was open to His word.⁴ Time fast grew on. Men lived long lives and multiplied their works, while each man walked in the light of his own counsel,

² Gen. v.

³ It is not intended to imply that Enoch stood *alone* as a man of faith. The Lord had, doubtless, even then, His people whom He knew. All that is denied is the intrinsic goodness of the Sethic line. Such a notion is a merely fabulous tradition, entirely unwarranted by Scripture.

⁴ The living word of promise which accompanied the exiles from Eden, was in itself a sufficient warrant for the faith of any who still looked to God. But there is good reason for believing that the Spirit also bore direct testimony in other ways, and that among the numerous offspring of the house of Seth, Enoch was not the only prophet of the Lord, although he was, undoubtedly, the most conspicuous and highly favoured. Nothing can, however, be clearly proved from Scripture on this subject.

unchecked by any forcible restraints of law. The result has been minutely recorded in the word of God for instruction.⁵ Sixteen hundred years of natural probation brought man to such a ripeness of iniquity as drew upon a full and reckless world the unsparing vengeance of the God of judgment. He would meet man in his ways. His Spirit should no longer strive in vain.⁶ He would rid Him of that which was a daily provocation of the eyes of His holiness. Violence, whose first beginning was fraternal murder, now *filled* the earth which God had entrusted to men's hands. God's world was totally corrupt, and its corruption was the unchecked wilfulness of man.

The dispensation of natural liberty thus results in a judgment of general destruction.

Eight souls are saved by grace; and on the subsidence of the waters of judgment another world immediately begins. Man, saved by Divine mercy as a relic from a perished race, is set anew in the now vacant earth, to have it, and to hold it, according to the specialties of Divine covenant.⁷ The will of God was now more forcibly expressed, and His commandments more imme-

⁵ Gen. vi. - viii.

⁶ In *that* dispensation. For, as has been well observed, the accompanying reason, "for that he also is *flesh*," was an oracular intimation, which succeeding dispensations have but too abundantly illustrated, that *no* striving of the Spirit can improve the flesh. The declaration by the living Truth, that "the flesh profiteth nothing," is a statement of the fundamental necessity of Divine redemption.

⁷ Gen. ix.

diately applied, as a yoke of governance and a law of guidance, to the human will. The new world, like the old, began its course with blessing from its Creator. "God blessed Noah," &c. But before the blessing and the injunctive ordinances which accompanied it were pronounced, a solemn witness had been borne to the unchanged moral identity of the survivors of the flood with those whose iniquity had been their ruin.⁸ The verdict of man's utter moral corruption, which had gone before the judgment of the deluge, is repeated at the inauguration of the second father of the race. But now it was for mercy, and not judgment, that God spake these words. God said them *in his heart*, when gratefully reminded, by the acceptable offering of Noah, of the sweeter savour of a Redemption which was yet to be. He caused the secret pleasure of His heart to be recorded in the word of truth, for the comfort and assurance of the souls that fed upon that word. Meanwhile the truth of this, His newly uttered estimate of man, would be established in due time.⁹

The dispensation based upon the covenant with Noah runs on still. Nor will it cease until the last destruction (not by water), for which the present heavens and the present earth are held in

⁸ Gen. viii. 21.

⁹ Full soon. Noah, the preserved of God—the heir of the righteousness which is by faith—the beginner of a new world—is the first renewer of the actual course of sin. The father's drunkenness is the opportunity of the son's impiety. In the first the *weakness*, in the second the *wickedness*, of nature is exemplified.

sure keeping by the word of God, shall have finally removed the stage on which the long and eventful conflict of good and evil will have then been carried to its utmost close.¹

Violence had filled the world before the flood, in which no trace of special government appears. No other barrier than the feeble one of natural conscience then stood between men and their guilty inclinations. But now there was imposed on them a direct and authoritative check. A law of blood was declared to Noah, on his formal investment with the government of the earth, which, if obeyed, would have acted as a bridle on man's murderous lusts.² But war has been, notwithstanding, man's pastime and his bank. Led of his lusts, he has shed blood like water on God's earth for gain. In every climate and in each succeeding age, the hand of violence has found its occupation and reward.³

The most conspicuous and most frequently recurring

¹ 2 Pet. iii. 10; Rev. xx. 11-15.

² Blood could be shed lawfully only in the way of retribution. Man was God's minister of wrath upon the first shedder of blood. Abraham's slaughter of the kings (Gen. xiv.) has this character. So likewise the wars of Israel (so far as they were sanctioned by Jehovah) were inflictions of Divine judgment upon the provocation of human iniquity.

³ It is well to remind the reader that the growing unpopularity of war, in what is called Christendom, though, doubtless, owing in part to the beneficent effect of the diffusion of Christian doctrine, (which even in its most debased form, never fails to exercise some happy influence, though its vital power may be unknown,) is far more the result of prudence than of principle. As civilization extends, wars become increasingly inconvenient and unwelcome to all classes, but those who are warriors by profession. Peace, no less than war, is the effect of human selfishness operating under different conditions.

events in the great chronicle of human history are wars.

At *Babel* was exhibited the first unanimous re-action of the human will against the positive commandment of the Lord. That men should *separate*, and fill the earth was the expressed desire of their Maker. The labour of the foolish builders was for safe and lasting *union* and renown.⁴ "Lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth," expressed a motive strong enough to lead them to attempt a work whose top should reach the heaven which they thus defied. But God met their counsel half way in the wisdom of His might.

The call of *Abram*, the event next noticed in the Spirit's narrative, is a solemn era in the history of the world. The national division of the earth had been effected by Divine power in judicial contravention of the human will. The universal family of man thus sundered, and kept separate by diversity of tongue, obeyed alike the bias of an evil will that liked not to retain the knowledge of God, and grudged Him His true glory, though they knew Him well. It was from a family of idolaters that Abraham was chosen by the God of glory, who called him by His word of promise.⁵ The selection thus of one man to become the head and father of a separate race, may be regarded as the era of Gentile reprobation of which the apostle speaks.⁶ God turned aside from an apostate world

⁴ Gen. xi.

⁵ Josh. xxiv. 2.

⁶ Rom. i. 21-28.

to choose one man who should become the parent of a nation,⁷ whose distinctive glory among the other families of men who still served lying vanities, was to be their knowledge and worship of the true and only God. Meanwhile, He left the Gentiles to their own dishonoured way.⁸

The cradle of the Jewish nation is the Abrahamic promise. That promise bore its gracious fruit when God, with outstretched arm, redeemed the children for the fathers' sakes, and brought His people to Himself on eagles' wings.⁹ Grace, backed by righteous power, took the nation out of Egypt. Grace bore their murmurings and supplied their need, without upbraiding, till the mount of God was reached.¹ God's faithfulness had both formed and saved a people from the seed of Abraham, His friend. But at Sinai we behold a new and solemn scene. God here displays His glory in another sort. Having made them witnesses

⁷ Of *many* nations, even of all who in the time to come should be "of faith." (Gal. iii.) The reader will remember that our present subject is the dispensational government of God. It is as the father, therefore, not of elect individuals, but of an elect nation, that he is regarded in the text.

⁸ Acts xiv. 16. Yet not so as to leave Himself without witness of judgment, as well as of mercy. The catastrophe of Sodom and the cities of the plain, and the judgment executed on the Canaanites by means of Israel, were solemn examples of the certainty of that eventual visitation of human evil which must one day glorify the God whose judgment is according to truth. *Their* iniquity was early full. Whenever the world's measure shall have reached its fill, the hour of its judgment will have certainly arrived. Meanwhile His goodness does not cease, though men may slight it to their own undoing in that coming day. (Acts xiv. 17; Rom. ii. 3-6.)

⁹ Exod. iii.-xix.

¹ Exod. xii.-xviii.

both of His grace and of His power as a Saviour, He now presents Himself mediately to Israel as their Lawgiver and Judge. The Law was formally proposed to try the people's heart. It was a fatal test; discovering at the moment of its first proposal, the radical self-ignorance, as well as ignorance of God, which forms the basis of fallen human character. The covenant of works was welcomed eagerly by those whose way from the beginning had been a way of gainsaying and temptation. With the manna still around them, and in the presence of that rock which witnessed to them both their own unprofitableness and the faithful goodness of the God of promise, they close immediately with a proposal, which, in its very terms, conveyed (to one who knew himself aright) a sentence of exclusion from the now *conditional* blessing of acceptance.

By the covenant of Law, *man's* promise takes the place, as a condition of blessing, of the promise of God. "All that the Lord hath spoken *we will do.*" Such was the new and voluntary basis upon which man confidently took his stand at Sinai. Persuaded by a heart which sin deceived, he does not hesitate or pause. He deems it no hard thing to do the will of God; and so he lightly takes that mighty debt upon himself. But man is a liar, by the necessity of his corrupted nature, in every personal undertaking of good. By the foregone testimony of God, the quality of the human heart and its imaginations had already been pronounced; and

the history of Israel under the Law is a solemnly instructive confirmation of its truth. By their acceptance of the Law as a condition of blessing, they had blindly transferred their confidence from Jehovah to themselves. The long and weary discipline, which was to bruise the nation's stony heart till God should take it quite away, and, by giving them *another* heart,² should make them capable of Christ, was then begun. The Law had entered that the offence might abound. Conferring upon its subject nothing which might aid his natural weakness, while it rigidly defined a course which a creature once fallen and alienated in will, could never possibly fulfil; its effect was but to make *practically* evident the intrinsic evil of a nature which had borne the fatal seal of its repudiation from the moment of the first transgression.³ Not sin, however, in the form only of active disobedience, but the ignorance which it produces, "the *deceitfulness* of sin,"—an ignorance alike of his own heart, and of God,—is discovered by the Law to be a standing characteristic of the natural man. They knew not what they *said*, when they bound their souls by willing promise to the covenant of death. They knew not what they *did*, when, going about to establish their own righteousness, they slew the Son of God, and hanged Him on a tree.

The advent of the Only-begotten of the Father was the last experiment of Divine wisdom and patience upon the presumed reclaimableness of the

² Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

³ Rom. vi. 14.

seed of Adam.¹ "They will reverence my Son," was His word, who for long had risen early to send prophets, whom they treated evilly and slew. No hard exaction from a people who still made their boast of God! But the whole head was sick, and the whole heart faint. They beheld, but did not recognize, Jehovah in their midst. The wonders which He wrought were, to their blinded hearts, but an occasion of blasphemous reproach,² while for the grace and truth which flowed from the lips of the incarnate Son of God, they judged Him fit to die.³ They sought to the idolatrous Gentile for authority to quench the Light of Israel. And what they sought they found. Flesh, circumcised and uncircumcised, was willingly confederate against the only Temple of the living God. Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were found united to conduct God's Holy Child to death.⁴ The wisdom which directed, and the power which administered the world's affairs, gave willing sanction to the murder of the only Righteous One. It was in guilty ignorance of the wisdom of God that the authorities of this world crucified the Lord of Glory.⁵

The death of Jesus closed the hitherto ostensibly

¹ It was this, but it was also much more than this. For though the Lord presented Himself to Israel as their Shepherd and Deliverer, He taught distinctly, and from the first, the total unprofitableness of the flesh, and the consequent necessity of a new birth. See Gospel of John, *passim*.

² Matt. xii. 24.

³ John viii. 31-59.

⁴ Acts iv. 27.

⁵ 1 Cor. ii. 8.

open question respecting the reality of man's natural condition in the sight of God. God had Himself been manifested in the flesh, and had been disallowed and rejected of men. His love had been repulsed by hatred; His truth had been condemned by falsehood; His holiness had been derided by self-righteous hypocrisy and incredulous wickedness. Mankind had thus been fully and variously tried, and were found to love darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

Jesus, rejected of men, is gone into the heavens. From the right hand of the Father, where the Despised of men now sits enthroned, there has been sent forth a new and Divine witness to the glory of the risen and ascended Son of God. The descent of the Holy Ghost upon the day of Pentecost was the effectual commencement of a new and special dispensation among men.⁶ He was and is the power in which alone could be set forth in truth the testimony to the finished grace of God. It is, therefore, to the dispensation of gracious testimony in the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven,

⁶ This may, perhaps, in the judgment of some, require explanation. I do not forget that grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, and in the second chapter of this Epistle, the preaching of the Lord will come more immediately under our notice. In the meanwhile, it may be sufficient to remind the Christian reader, that the sin which condemns the world was filled to its measure by the rejection of the Son of God. The demonstration of the three great facts of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, was not until the Spirit came, who should witness, as the glorifier of Jesus, to the perfect Truth, in its relation both to God and man. (John xvi.)

that the expression, "these last days," in strict propriety applies.

It has been shown already that the presumed possibility of human restoration had been, down to the time of Messiah's rejection, the ostensible basis of God's dispensational dealings. God dealt with man as yet alive, though sinful; as out of the right way, but with inherent capability of return. God reasoned with him; He exhorted; He reproved; He convinced the sinner by the pleadings of His righteousness, and invited and encouraged him by words of gracious promise.⁷ The result of this long suffering patience is but too well known to the believer.

But now God takes a ground which, though it always had been recognised by the faith of His elect, had not till now been publicly and exclusively assumed in the dispensational administration of Divine truth. The basis of the Gospel testimony is the declared ruin and irreclaimable perdition of fallen man as such. It is to those who are *dead* in trespasses and sins, that life is offered as the gift of God through Jesus Christ. *Salvation* is the promise of the Gospel. The testimony of the Spirit is to Christ crucified as the *wisdom*, as well as the power of God. God now preaches peace by Jesus Christ to man, whether Jew or Gentile, as a sinner, in himself irretrievably lost. Peace now visits the human conscience, when received by faith through the Gospel, by means of a righteousness which is *absolutely unconnected* with the former Adam and

his natural seed—"the righteousness which is *of God by faith.*" No longer demanding self-justification as a condition of acceptance with Him, God now calls upon man for an acknowledgment of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, according to the conviction of the Spirit of truth. But that Spirit's witness is alone of JESUS. In declaring His exaltation, He condemns the world which rejected and crucified Him. Judgment is recorded against both the world and its prince. The Judge already stands before the door. At His appearing and His kingdom He shall judge both the living and the dead.^s

In the interval, God speaks from heaven. His present word is not in judgment, but in grace. For now is the accepted time, while the long-suffering of the God of patience daily works salvation to some vessel of His mercy, until the measure of His Church shall be complete.

^s 2 Tim. iv. 1.

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

ON THE

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

CHAPTER I.

THE solemn abruptness with which, unprefaced by any introductory address, the Spirit of God has led the writer of this Epistle to open his subject is remarkable; and is immediately noticed by the attentive student of Scripture as a peculiarity. One other Epistle only—the first of the three which bear the name of John upon their titles—resembles it in being without any opening salutation of the parties addressed.

Verses 1, 2. “God who in divers measures and in divers manners spake,”¹ &c. These words appear

¹ Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως. There is a significant emphasis in this assurance, that “*God* spake” to the fathers, of which we do well to take notice in a day when the doctrine of Divine inspiration is so assiduously controverted, and in so many different ways. If holy men of old spake in the name of God, it was only as they were “moved by the Spirit of God.” The words, therefore, which they uttered were the words of God. Speech is the vehicle or expression of thought and purpose. Words, therefore, which faithfully convey God’s meaning, are the words of God, though human lips be employed to shape them to the apprehension of mankind. The words, therefore, whether of Moses or of his successors in the prophetic office, carry with them the sanction of the Name in which they were spoken. There was, indeed, a material difference in the

to intimate, first, the gradual, and, as it were, irregular manner in which the word of Scripture had been communicated from the first; and, secondly, the diversity of form under which the Divine revelations had been made. God had spoken to the fathers *by the Prophets*.² By this expression we are here to understand the ancient oracles of God at large. The Law and the Psalms are comprised, together with the later prophetic testimonies, under this as a generic term, by which all Scripture might be represented which contained any portion of recorded but unfulfilled promise.³

Viewed in this light, the books of the Old Testament form one continuous prophecy of Christ. *The Law*, as well as the Prophets, prophesied until John.⁴ For from the moment that the work of sin was done, which made the first man, Adam, no longer capable of blessing on his own account, God had begun to speak in gracious promise of good things to come. The second Adam was announced in figure, ere the first effect of sin was felt in the expulsion of the first transgressor from the garden of the Lord. The ancient testimonies were, therefore, to the fathers who received them with an ear of faith, the word

condition of those who spoke to the fathers in the Old Testament, and that of the "apostles and prophets" of the New. The latter, having the gift of the Holy Ghost, as the Spirit of adoption, and the power consequently of Divine communion, understood and enjoyed what they declared to others, which the former prophets did very imperfectly, or not at all. (Comp. 1 Pet. i. 10-12; 1 Cor. ii. 9-15.)

² Rather, "*in the prophets*"—ἐν τοῖς προφήταις.—It was God who spoke. See preceding note.

³ This use, by synecdoche, of a single descriptive title for the general contents of Scripture, is not infrequent. Thus the apostle (Rom. iii. 19), while quoting exclusively from the Psalms and the Prophets, cites his proofs as the verdict of *the Law*. (Compare John x. 34, and xv. 25.)

⁴ Matt. xi. 13.

of *life* as well as promise. Life, which in themselves was confessedly a forfeited thing because of sin, was sought for, and by faith was found, in the recorded promise of the living God. The Scriptures were then, as now, the word of *Christ*. His Spirit moved the men who prophesied of Him.⁵ But earlier than the written word, the oral promises of God had fed and comforted the heart of faith. It was in the sustaining power of a faith which lived on the sure word of grace, that Enoch spake in prophecy of that far-dated judgment which has yet to be fulfilled.⁶

With the declaration of the Abrahamic covenant of promise, there was laid a broader and more commodious, though not a surer, footing for the faith of God's elect. His secret was with them that feared His name.⁷ He would show them His covenant in due time. With longing patience was it waited for by many prophets and by many kings,⁸ who passed their earthly days as sojourners and strangers, until that day of Christ should come which was to justify and to reward the long-tried patience of their souls.⁹

But although the voice of God had spoken thus distinctly in the prophets, it was of earthly things, as well as upon earth, that He had chiefly spoken to the fathers. It was, indeed, of *Christ*, that Moses and the prophets spake. Good things, whose value none could know, but those who mourned their own inherent weakness and corruption as conceived in

⁵ 1 Pet. i. 10, 11. ⁶ Gen. v. 22; Jude 14, 15. ⁷ Ps. xxv. 14.

⁸ And, without doubt, by very many more, who in every age remained as a remnant of true worshippers, unnoticed or despised amid the multitudes, who idly boasted in the outward privileges of God's people, while their hearts were far from Him.

⁹ Luke x. 24; 2 Sam. xxiii. 5; 1 Chron. xxix. 15.

sin, were shadowed forth in type, and were spoken of in promise, to the true children of the covenant. But the peace which was to flow as a full river from the finished work of righteousness, and the quietness and assurance which should be the permanent effect of that same righteousness, were to be tasted and enjoyed, not only in the purged consciences of the preserved of Jacob, but externally, also, in the long enduring blessedness of realized *earthly* promise, which, as the nation of Jehovah's choice, they were to know and to delight in, in *Immanuel's land*.¹

Such had been constantly the drift and burden of the Jewish prophecies. True it is, and a truth to be constantly remembered, that the faith of God's elect, while it waited for Divine salvation according to the tenor of an earthly promise, never found its *rest* in

¹ Isa. xxxii. and xlv. 18-25. I am to be understood as speaking of the proper Jewish expectations of Messianic blessing. Justification in Him was the chief of these—the basis of all the rest. (Isa. xlv. 25.) A full abundance of earthly blessing, to be administered and secured in the manifested royalty of Christ the King of Israel, was to be the immediate result. The question put by the disciples to the risen Lord (Acts i. 6,) is an instructive proof of this. Already the Lord had opened their understandings, that they might understand the Scriptures. (Luke xxiv. 45.) It was in the divinely-imparted light which they had thus received, that they read so distinctly the verities of Jewish promise. All had now been done. Christ had suffered (as they now perceived) according to the Scriptures. According to the Scriptures, also, He had risen from the dead. What, then, now remained to hinder the immediate fulfilment of the national hopes—of the glories which the prophets of Israel had so vividly described in connection with the manifested sceptre of the reigning Son of David? Was not the kingdom *now* to be restored to Israel? The Lord's reply is neither an upbraiding of their ignorance, nor a correction of error in their question. That which their hearts desired should happen in its season, at the Father's will. Meanwhile, another calling, and a higher hope, were presently to be revealed to their faith, when the Comforter should have openly declared within the Church the doctrine, until then kept secret, of the *heavenly* calling, as an immediate and present truth.—*Compare Notes on the Ephesians, passim.*—Spec. ch. iii.

anything below the heavens. The God who raiseth the dead was the abiding strength and the exceeding great reward of the fathers, who obtained a good report. The 11th chapter of this Epistle will open this more fully. Considered, however, dispensationally, and according to the specialties of declared promise, the Jewish prophets spoke of earthly things.

But now another testimony had been given, and by a greater Witness. God, who had spoken by the prophets of good things to come, "hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." The reader should be careful to bear constantly in his remembrance that the persons immediately addressed in this Epistle are *Jewish* believers. If this be lost sight of, many of the contrasts with which it abounds will be materially weakened, and much of the peculiar force of the Spirit's language must remain unfelt.

In the present instance we have a threefold contrast. First, "these last days" are opposed to the time past of prophetic testimony. Secondly, "the fathers" are compared, in their relations to God, with "us." And, lastly, *the* SON is mentioned, in broad and emphatic distinction from the prophets, who before had borne their several and united testimony to Him.

With respect to the first of these expressions, "these last days," its general signification² is equi-

² Compare, for a similar expression with like meaning, 1 Cor. x. 11; *τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων*, "the ends of the ages, or dispensations." Speaking of the present dispensation in its general sense, it may be held to date its commencement from the baptism of the Lord, and will continue until the second advent of Christ in glory shall have introduced that new economy which elsewhere is described as "the dispensation of the fulness of times." (Eph. i. 10.) But the language of the text is susceptible of a stricter definition, as is attempted to be shown

valent to the common phrase, "the present dispensation," as distinguished from those which have preceded it in the order of time. As to the second, the pronoun "us" comprises, in its wider meaning, all who now are hearers of the word of God. But until the promised advent of the Saviour for His own, *the Church*, in which neither Jew nor Gentile has a place, is the only faithful listener to the truth. As partakers of a common grace through faith, believers in the present dispensation are of kindred to the fathers who believed of old, widely as they may differ in point of special privilege or calling.³ Primarily, however, and with a lasting force of application, it is to believing Hebrews that this Epistle is addressed. "Salvation is of the Jews," and it was "to us," to the children, that is, of the fathers unto whom the prophets spake, that God had first addressed His latest message by His Son.⁴ For "Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers."⁵ It was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel that the Son of Man was sent, when, in the days of His flesh, He preached the word, and manifested in their sight the presence and power of the kingdom of God. It was, moreover, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the men of Israel assembled there, that the Spirit of God, upon His first descent from heaven as the messenger of the Son, addressed Himself imme-

in the Introduction to these Notes, which the reader is earnestly requested not to pass over unread, as it bears materially on the elucidation of the opening verses of the present chapter.

³ And wide, indeed, as well as real, is the difference that does exist. See, on this subject, the remarks on chapter xi. *ad fin.*

⁴ "To the Jew first, and also to the Gentile." (Rom. i.)

⁵ Rom. xv. 8.

diately in the Gospel of reconciliation. "Unto you *first*, God, having raised up His Son Jesus, hath sent Him to bless you,"⁶ &c.

This last quotation is an important one, and will help us much to understand the peculiar force of the passage now before us. Peter had referred the Jews to whom he spake to the prophecy of Moses respecting Messiah, the promised restorer of Israel. Presently he applies this, and the testimony of the prophets generally, to the Christ as he was then declaring Him. Jesus, the true Hope of Israel, was in heaven. God would send Him upon the repentance of the nation (verse 20). In the meanwhile, Peter, standing as an ambassador of Christ, and in the power of the Spirit, personifies, as it were, his testimony, saying, "God..... hath sent *Him* to bless you." In the unity of the Godhead, it was Christ Himself who spoke when the Spirit spoke. *God* spoke. The special subject of the apostolic doctrine was the rejected and exalted Christ; the power of testimony was the Spirit of Jesus—the Comforter, who was His very self.⁷ In a similar manner, God is here said to have spoken by His Son.⁸ Taken in

⁶ Acts iii. 26.

⁷ John xiv. 18; 2 Cor. iii. 17.

⁸ *Ἐν ὑμῶ*. The absence of the article here is very emphatic. There had been *many* prophets in the fathers' days, some true, some false. The former are distinguished as those to whom alone, and by a Divine sanction, the title belonged, by the article. God spake *ἐν τοῖς προφήταις*; they spake as they were moved of Him. But there is but one Son. The relationship of the only-begotten to the Father could be pretended by no rival. Others might claim to be the Christ; and there is one who sets himself as God in the temple of God; but all such "wicked ones" speak as of themselves. In Jesus only was beheld the glory of the only-begotten of the Father. God was in Christ; and He who spake to men delivered the true words of God, not as the prophets, by occasional impulse and in another's name, but daily, and in all places, speaking with authority as the very *Word*, the Fountain and Author of all truth.

its fullest meaning, this expression comprehends the Lord's earthly ministry. More strictly and immediately, however, it is the testimony of the Holy Ghost, the operative power of Him who now continues to speak from heaven, that is meant.⁹ God *now* speaks to us in Christ. The Spirit is the power of that voice, and the purged lips of believers are its echo and its instrumental utterance.

This mention of the SON presents to us the proper subject of the Epistle. It treats of Christ, according to the glory of His person, as the living and eternal realization, in perfect fulness of grace and power, of Jewish promise and figure. How the fulness of this glory and blessedness is opened to the believer for his present stablishment and delight, in the varied *official* title of the Son, as the apostle and High Priest of our profession, is shown in the chapters which follow. In the one before us we have a rich and very full display of His original and native glory, as the only begotten of the Father, an assertion of His proper and eternal Sonship as the WORD.

Now, with reference to this, and in connexion with what has been stated in the preliminary essay, it is remarkable that the truth first predicated of the Son of God is His heirship *by appointment*: "whom He hath appointed heir of all things." The essential glory of His Divine nature is stated in the verse which follows. But the Spirit of God leads our minds immediately, by this previous mention of appointed heirship, to contemplate the actual position of the blessed Lord in the glory into which He

⁹ Characteristically, it is a heavenly testimony, with reference both to the place from whence it immediately proceeds, and also to the end and purport of the word spoken (chap. iii. 1).

entered after His resurrection from the dead,¹ and thus discovers to us the *manner* in which God now speaks to us by His Son. It is not as a teacher and witness upon earth, that Jesus now speaks, but from His seat of glory at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. Moreover, by making mention first of the awarded blessings of Divine inheritance, with which Jesus stands invested as the result of His fulfilled obedience to the Father's will, a point of view is chosen for us, from whence the excellency of His Person, the ineffable riches of His grace and love, as well as the intrinsic verity of His power and Godhead, may be most readily and abundantly discerned on our parts.

In the counsels of God, Jesus had been from everlasting the destined heir of things as yet not made. In the unity of the Divine nature, He was eternally co-equal with the Father, while relatively, as the only-begotten Son, He possessed, in perfect fellowship of Divine glory, the proper heirship of universal blessing.² *That* inheritance was not by appointment. It attached to Him from all eternity by right of birth, even as by right of creation all things were His own. But that counsel which respected His *appointed* heirship must attend for its fulfilment both His incarnation and His death. God's equal must first empty Himself, to become capable of receiving that investment as the gift of God. The Son must first be disallowed and dishonoured in His *natural* title, that He might be thus proclaimed anew from heaven, as the appointed heir of all. And thus it was. Thinking it no robbery to be equal

¹ Compare, with reference to this, Rom. i. 4.

² John xvii. 5.

with God, He had emptied himself² to become a vessel of Divine pleasure in perfect human obedience. Coming into the world in the fulness of grace and truth, and there presented by the Holy Ghost to the natural seed of Abraham, as the Son of David and the Son of God, the Christ of promise and the King of Israel, He had been utterly dishonoured and disowned. His lesser titles were a mockery; His mightier name, a blasphemy. He came indeed unto His own, but His own received Him not. They turned His glory into shame; they chose a murderer before the Holy One and the Just. With solemn counsel and advisement, they condemned the Prince of Life to a transgressor's death.

It is upon Jesus, the despised and rejected of men, that God has set the glory of universal heirship. He was born into the world the seed and heir of David, the fulfilment also of the promises to Abram and to Eve. He is declared in resurrection to be the Son of God with power. Earthly honour as the King of Israel was denied Him. He is now appointed heir of *all things*.³ Things in heaven, as well as things on earth—the earth itself, with all its fulness—all that owes its place in creation to the alone Word of creative power⁴ is comprised in the inheritance of the ascended Son of Man.

His power and glory as the alone effective Creator

² Ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν, μορφὴν δούλου λαβών. (Phil. ii. 7.)

³ The force of this expression would be peculiarly felt by a Jewish believer. The mention thus early of the appointed heirship of Jesus is noticeable as a characteristic trait of Him who is the Spirit both of wisdom and of grace. For there is thus presented to the contemplation of the Jewish reader, a view of Christ which at once meets and pre-occupies those feelings and expectations, of which Messianic glory was always the substantial and defined centre in the national mind.

⁴ John i. 1-3; Col. i. 16.

are next affirmed, "By whom also He made the worlds."⁵ Not one, but all. The ages, in the ordered sequence of their ever-flowing course, are the work and ordinances of the Son. *God* made them by the Son. Creation, under what aspect soever regarded, is a Divine work. The wisdom which designed it, and the power which produced it, are alike of God. But Christ is the wisdom, and Christ is the power of God.⁶ In the creation, as well as in the administration of the ages and dispensations, He has been (conjointly, in the unity of Godhead, with the Father and the Spirit) the producér, and remains for ever the maintainer of them all. All things consist in Him,⁷ for He is God.⁸

Verse 3. The proper glory of His person is now more fully stated, "Who being the brightness of His glory," &c. Relatively to the Father, He is the eternal Son. Descriptively, He is, in His essential Sonship, the positive expression of the Divine subsistence.⁹ In this definition of Christ, His person is presented under its Divine aspect alone. Incarnation, it is true, did not, in one sense, render Him less the express image of the invisible God, than He had always been before the worlds. Rather, it made yet more apparent, and that after a sort more wondrous

⁵ Τοὺς αἰῶνας. Both "ages," and what they witness and contain. The expression is capable of a very wide interpretation, a striking example of which is to be found in Eph. ii. 7. In the present passage, I believe it to be simply equivalent to "creation." (Compare chap. 3.)

⁶ 1 Cor. i. 24. ⁷ Τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκε. ⁸ Col. i. 17.

⁹ Χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ. "*Das Ebenbild seines Wesens.*"—LUTH. "*Ein Abdruck seines Wesens.*"—DE WETTE. "*Il carattere della sussistenza d'esso.*"—DION. All these renderings are good; the last is the most exact. "Person" seems less complete and expressive as a translation of ὑπόστασις, than "subsistence."

than before, the reality, in all its blessed fulness, of the Divine being and action. God was *manifested* in flesh; the Word, who had become flesh, was himself essentially God. But the moral brightness of the Divine glory then shone forth from a *form* which was human, not Divine. What seems to be exclusively intended in the passage now before us, is an assertion of the majesty of the Son, while “in the form of God.”¹ Taking the words in their broad and general sense, they describe the second person in the Divine Unity as the sole medium of the visible manifestation of God. Objective Deity is displayed to the creature in the Person of the Son alone.²

Thus, then, there is furnished by the Holy Spirit to the Hebrew saints, His one effective answer to the question addressed of old by the prophets to their fathers: “To whom, then, will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?”³ In the folly of their hearts, they had essayed to make a graven image a fit semblance of Jehovah; and now, from the heaven which had received the incarnate, but world-rejected Son, the voice which hewed the former generations by the prophets,⁴ and had consigned the earthly city of solemnities to desolation, until the promised day of His return,⁵ speaks comfortably to the remnant according to the election of grace. God’s faithful likeness now shone forth upon them in the

¹ Phil. ii. 6.

² It is a scriptural statement, that angels see God (Luke i. 19)—that they behold the Father. (Matt. xviii. 10.) At the presence of Christ’s majesty it is that the seraphim veil their faces. (Isa. vi.; John xii. 41.) Jesus is Jehovah. The expression, “seen of angels” (1 Tim. iii. 16), is not here in point. I do not think that the language of the text is limited in its meaning to God’s manifestation of Himself to *men*. ³ Isaiah xl. 18. ⁴ Hosea vi. 5. ⁵ Matt. xxiii. 37–39.

annunciation of the gospel of salvation.⁶ The appropriateness of this rich and full declaration of Messiah's personal glory, in an epistle addressed to them, whose watch-word of sad but hopeful patience had been, "Verily, thou art a God that *hidest* thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour,"⁷ will easily appear to the attentive student of the Word.

But further, and yet more demonstrative evidence is adduced, in the words which now follow, of the fulness of Godhead which dwells in the Son, who is described as "upholding all things by the *word of His power*." We have already regarded Him as the effective Creator of the worlds, which God is said to have made by Him. We have seen Him also manifested as the visible effulgence of the Father of lights—the authentic expression of the invisible God. But in the words just quoted, we have separate mention, first of Himself, as the upholder of all things, and then, of the "Word of His power," as the instrumental energy by which the things are so sustained. Christ, who is elsewhere spoken of, both as the Word of God, and the Power of God, has here assigned to Him as His *own*, those attributes of Almightyness, in word and power, which chiefly glorify the only God.⁸

The omnipotent divinity of the Son having been thus emphatically asserted, mention is next made of that decisive act which will abide in its results as an

⁶ Psalm lxxxix. 15.

⁷ Isaiah xlv. 15.

⁸ The believer, while finding in such passages as this a principal aliment of his faith, is led into a region of truth whither the understanding can but feebly follow, if at all. No man knoweth the Son. The Father does, and He alone. The Spirit of the Father reveals Him to our faith according to the truth and fulness of His ever blessed Person. But it is well for us to remember that as yet we only know *in part*.

eternal attestation both of His power and His grace. "When He had *by himself* purged our sins," &c. The Scripture elsewhere treats in full the blessed subject of the Lord's humiliation; of His obedience unto death, even the death of the cross. The Divine work of redemption is here presented in another light. It is as the act of Him who *gave himself* for our sins, that it is now reviewed. The work itself is considered in its relation to the Workman. The personal competency of the Son of God to effect the mighty task of His people's deliverance, is the point to which prominence is here given by the Spirit. *He purged* our sins. Moreover, it was not only *by himself*, unaided by all else, but also *for himself*, that He thus Divinely wrought.⁹ No mention is here made of the Father. For it is not the purport of the passage to illustrate the filial grace of Jesus as the doer of the Father's will, but to affirm His proper sufficiency in person, and to prove His reality in point of fact, as the effectual cleanser of the sins of His people; even as He had made them and had held their souls in natural life, as the alone Creator and Upholder of the creature. It was Jesu's will to save—to purge our sins, and His power has justified the desire of His love. The mode and process are not here intimated. The result only is stated in the words which follow, in proof of the sufficiency of Him who undertook the work: "He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Nothing is here said of resurrection, as an act of God of which

⁹ Δι' ἑαυτοῦ καθαρισμόν ποιησάμενος. The force of the middle verb is evident to the critical reader. The words, δι' ἑαυτοῦ, are omitted by Tischendorf and some others; nor are they necessary to the clear sense of the passage.

Christ was the subject. Nay, the very fact of resurrection is left unexpressed. The condensed energy of the Spirit's language in this remarkable verse is most striking. The Son had quitted heaven (though in another sense remaining there still¹ for a purpose. That purpose was to put away His people's sins. The purpose having been effected, He resumes His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high, in token of its absolute and everlasting completion. God now speaks to us *by Him*.²

Verse 4. "Being made," &c. A comparison of the Son with angels is now introduced, in immediate connexion with His ascension into glory. If we remember that the persons specially addressed are believing Hebrews, the propriety and peculiar force of such comparison become immediately apparent. Angelic ministration had, from the earliest times, been a chief instrument of Divine power, as well as a frequent medium of communication in the dealings of Jehovah with His people. Angels, therefore, at all times occupied a lofty height in the contemplation of a Jewish mind. And justly so; for high, indeed, was the official dignity with which they might become invested as the representative ambassadors of God—the efficient ministers of His almighty will.

The most memorable and august³ display of angelic glory ever made to men was when, at Sinai, the

¹ John iii. 13.

² With similar majesty of expression, the Son of God delivered Himself, when unveiling to His own a glory which they could not worthily perceive until the Comforter should come: "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go to my Father." (John xvi. 28.)

³ I pass by, in this statement, the earlier instances of angelic visitation recorded in the book of Genesis, not doubting that the Lord of life Himself was thus revealed to the fathers.

first covenant of works was ordered and delivered instrumentally through them. It was Jehovah's covenant; but, as we are expressly taught, it was communicated and received "by the disposition of angels."⁴ Next to that of Jehovah Himself, the holiest as well as highest name in the estimation of an Israelite was that of His angel. Prophetic faith discerned, no doubt, under that official title, the person of Immanuel with a certain degree of distinctness.⁵ But the demonstration of the Holy Ghost was needful to set in clear, soul-satisfying evidence, the great and blessed mystery of godliness. The astonishing truth of *man's* supremacy, where angels worshipped, was something which entirely transcended the national expectations of Messianic glory. It is this last truth which is so strikingly exhibited in the present and immediately succeeding verses.

God has given a name which is above every name to *Jesus*, whom He raised from the dead. The manifestation of the Son of God in the seat of Divine Majesty is in the form and likeness of *man*. In His absolute and original character, as the only begotten of the Father, He is incapable of angelic comparison, inasmuch as no creature may compare with the Creator; but the incarnation having been once effected, through the self-humbling grace of the

⁴ Acts vii. 53; Gal. iii. 19. A full contrast between the respective ministries of the first and second covenants is presented in the sequel of this epistle.

⁵ "An Israelite indeed" would recognize the divinity of Messiah's person. (John i. 49.) But it is doubtful whether mere Jewish theology did not always leave His name below that of angels (Matt. xxii. 42); though they were not ignorant of His official title as the Son of the Blessed.

Only-begotten, He thus became capable, under His new form of flesh, of a name which might be a worthy and commensurate expression of the proper dignity of His Person. That name is Jesus. Divinely imposed on Him while yet unborn—mocked and dishonoured⁶ by His own, who waited for another Saviour—it is now declared with power to be the name of none other than the eternal Son of God, by means of the resurrection from the dead. Incarnation had placed the Son of God in a lower sphere than that of angels. Their dwelling is in heaven; they see the face of God. Excelling in strength, they do His pleasure in the light of His countenance. If sent forth from thence, it is still in their unaltered character and quality as ministers of power, the resistless agents of Divine command. An angel can combine no other nature with his own. As a perfect vessel of Divine creation and appointment, he is as incapable of descending below his assigned place in creation as he is of raising himself above it. Angels may fall, but never can descend. They have in part already fallen,⁷ while elective power retains the remnant in their place.⁸ *God* only can descend without impair. This Jesus did. He came to dwell below the heavens, which were His handiwork. Himself the Light of life, He made a weary sojourn in the midst of darkness for our sakes. He *put off* strength to work the works of God. With a power which, in the perfection of His human character, He gloried to ascribe to God, but with a patient sufferance which was all His own, He carried His obedience to the

⁶ "Save thyself and us." "He saved others. Himself He cannot save," &c.

⁷ Jude 6.

⁸ 1 Tim. v. 21.

full measure of the Father's will. "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."⁹ Angels might watch this wonder in its growth, and be the admiring and adoring witnesses of its end and its results. Their desire still is towards the knowledge of the mystery of godliness—to unravel and investigate the unsearchable way of Divine, redeeming love.¹ But the work was none of theirs. *Man* wrought it in a pure obedience to God—the Man Christ Jesus. Yet was the work entirely Divine. That patient man was God's eternal Son. It was the mighty and enduring energy of perfect Love that formed for Jesus that lone path of straitness and distress which earned for Him the title of "the Man of Sorrows." Angels, moreover, cannot *suffer*. They act as swift messengers to do the will of their Creator. But Jesus suffered from man, from Satan, and *finally* from God. The visitings of wrath in judgment, the aversion of the Father's face, the reality of death's most bitter taste, brought to its consummation His soul's prolonged acquaintance with our griefs.² For, as His people's substitute, He suffered thus. He drew His labour to the grave, and left it there.³ There God

⁹ Phil. ii. 8.¹ 1 Pet. i. 12.² Isa. liii. 4.

³ In a day when much confusion of thought prevails as to the true character of the Lord's sufferings, and not a little unsoundness of doctrine finds welcome acceptance with the unwary, it is necessary to avoid, as far as possible, any misconception of one's views. There ought, surely, to exist in every believer's mind a capacity to distinguish, as it were instinctively, between the gracious patience of Immanuel in the days of His flesh, and the "hour" of judicial suffering, for which He had come into the world. But the "pure minds" of God's children are easily susceptible of defilement, and the slow but sure effects of plausible, but most erroneous teaching upon a subject of such interest to every believing heart, are but too painfully evident in many quarters at the present moment. I wish,

has found it, and from thence has owned it. The award of universal inheritance is due, by the declared decree of the supreme Jehovah to the justified Son of God.⁴ The glorification of the ascended Christ was the replacing—in His new form (a form so strange in heaven!)⁵ of palpable humanity—of the Son in His primeval seat of co-equal majesty with the Father. It was thus by means of incarnation (which rendered Jesus capable of receiving, as a reward, that pre-eminence which was *naturally* His own as the only-begotten) that His name is brought into comparison with those of angels; inasmuch as “He is the Son, He hath obtained *by inheritance* a more excellent name than they.”

This subject is expanded into fuller detail in the remainder of the chapter. “For unto which of the angels said He at any time,” &c. (verse 5). Two separate quotations from the Old Testament are adduced in this verse. Both alike apply to the Lord Jesus as alive from the dead, and not in the days of His flesh. The former of these is from the 2nd Psalm,⁶ the subject of which is the royal glory and *earthly* dominion of the once-rejected Son of God, according to the Divine decree which stood fast and firm, although the heathen might rage, and the

therefore, to state distinctly, that I refuse and denounce as unscriptural and unsound, the notion that a punitive or expiatory character attaches in any sense to the daily life of Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself. It is in the Cross alone that either expiation or judicial visitation have any place. There it was that Christ was “made a curse” for His people; and there, also, in His own body He bore their sins. (Gal. iii. 13; 1 Pet. ii. 24.)

⁴ 1 Tim. iii. 16; Ps. ii.

⁵ The pointed opposition of the “form of man” to the “form of God,” in Phil. ii. should be always borne in mind, though the creature was from the beginning, in his proper sphere, an image and likeness of his Maker. (Gen. i.)

⁶ Ps. ii. 7.

princes take counsel together, against Jehovah, and against His Christ. Now it is manifest that the decreed title of the incarnate and rejected Messiah is quite a different thing from the Name which belonged eternally to the Son of God, in His purely Divine character as the only-begotten of the Father. *That* was no subject of time. Nor was it owing to express decree. He *was* the Son, anterior to all decree. No counsel, therefore, which was properly Divine, existed, or could exist, without His original participation. But the expression, "this day," is both definite and precise. It marks a certain time, a positive era, or date. Clearly as this should appear upon its simple statement, the point is happily placed beyond the necessity of extended disquisition by the express testimony of Scripture.⁷ The apostle Paul cites this passage in direct corroboration of his own testimony to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.⁸ We shall find also a similar use made of it in the fifth chapter of this Epistle. It was then to no angel, but to the Man Jesus of Nazareth, whom men had slain, but whom God had raised from the dead, that this greeting of filial title was addressed.⁹

The second quotation, from 2 Sam. vii. 14, respects the Lord more immediately in His strictly Messianic character as David's seed. This title also, having been disallowed of men, has been vindicated and anew declared of God. It is Jesus Christ, *of the seed of David*, who was raised from the dead, and thus declared in power to be the Son of God.¹ "The

⁷ Yet it is a remarkable fact, that this obvious point has been very generally overlooked; and the passage consequently quite misinterpreted by many who are no enemies to the truth of God.

⁸ Acts xiii. 33.

⁹ Acts ii. 22-36.

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 8.

sure mercies of David" are secured in Him, who is to return no more to corruption.² What God had promised to the son of Jesse concerning his true seed, could vest in no object of a nature alien to David's flesh. Angels, therefore, are excluded by necessity of their nature; the covenanted promise must find its destined object in a *man*. It has done so in Jesus, the Son of Man—David's true seed according to the flesh, but essentially and from everlasting the very Son of God.

Verse 6. "But when He bringeth again the first-begotten into the world,"³ &c. A close connexion subsists between this and the preceding verse. He had quoted, in proof of the Sonship of the Christ, a testimony and a promise, of both which Jesus was the single object. Having thus shewn that the filial title forms no part of Angelic glory, but is appropriated exclusively to the ascended Son of Man, a new quotation is next made, to show in what relation angels stand to Him who has been thus pre-eminently named. It is the application of the distinctive epithet "first-begotten" to the Heir, that indicates the connexion of this verse with the foregoing quotation.⁴ Now there are two things affirmed of the First-begotten: First, He is to be brought into the world; and, secondly, He will, when thus introduced, receive the worship of all the angels of God. Before going

² Acts xiii. 34.

³ "Ὅταν δὲ πάλιν εἰσαγάγῃ τὸν πρωτότοκον εἰς τὴν οἰκουμένην.

⁴ The connexion is a moral one. In Ps. lxxxix. 27, the title "first born" is applied to Messiah as the subject of the Davidical covenant. The use of the article in the present verse before *πρωτότοκον* is either to give a technical force to the word as a well-known Messianic title, or else to indicate the identity of the person mentioned with the "Son" in the preceding quotation.

further into the subject, let us endeavour to ascertain precisely from Scripture, the proper meaning and limitation of the term "first-begotten."

"First-born," or "first-begotten," is not a title of pre-eminence simply; it is always a *relative* expression. As such, it is applied in Scripture to the Lord Christ both before His incarnation, and at His resurrection from the dead; but never during the days of His flesh.⁵ With reference to the Divine glory of His Person, He is called the first-born of every creature; the explanation of which phrase is given in its immediate context: "For by Him were all things created,"⁶ &c. His birth, that is, as the Eternal Son, is antedated to the creation, which is the work of His own hands. When, in the ripened fulness of the times, He was visibly presented, full of grace and truth, as the incarnate manifestation of Divine love, it was under the title of "*the only begotten* of the Father." He came thus into the world.⁷ He stood under this title in His proper and exclusive character of Son, independently of all or any special relationship with His people, which either then subsisted, or, in the after fulfilment of Divine counsel, might eventually be declared. Immanuel, or "God with us," is likewise the only begotten of the Father. But when the results of this great work of love are stated, and He is Himself revealed in resurrection as the first-fruits of His own eternal victory over death, we find the title "first-born" again applied to Him by the Holy Ghost. He

⁵ Matt. i. 25, and Luke ii. 7, do not here apply. He is there described as *Mary's* first-born.

⁶ Col. i. 16.

⁷ John i. 14, 18.

is there described as “the beginning, *the first-born from the dead.*” A relation is here very plainly implied to those, who, like Himself, and in Him, are born out of death; who will rise by virtue of their portion in Him, who is the Resurrection and the Life, but who follow, as it respects the actual accomplishment of their hope, the First-fruits in the appointed order of God.⁸ Now the beginning of resurrection is also the First-born of many brethren, whose predestined glory is to be *conformed* to Him.⁹ But the form of Jesus is the form of *man*; He is the second Adam, as well as the true Lord of glory. Enough has now been alleged from the Word of God to prove, it is hoped conclusively, these two important points. First, that the expression we are now examining is not a synonyme for “only-begotten;” and, secondly, that it does not relate to the Lord Jesus while He dwelt a stranger on the earth.

Let us now proceed to the general interpretation of the verse. “When He bringeth in,” &c. With reference to His first advent, Christ is said in Scripture to have come into the world—to have been sent—and to have been born. He is here said to be *brought* or introduced into the world. Moreover, it is under a title which, as we have just seen, does not apply to Him at His former advent, that He is again to come. When, therefore, it is promised that the First-begotten shall again¹ be brought into the world, there is a

⁸ 1 Cor. xv. 20-28. In chap. xii. of this Epistle, the term “first-born” is applied characteristically to the entire Church, as a relative title which distinguishes it from other partakers of Divine redemption. This point will be more fully noticed in its place.

⁹ Rom. viii. 29.

¹ I forbear from any argument in proof of the correctness of the marginal translation, “when He bringeth *again.*” To most readers

reference very clearly implied to His previous *expulsion* from the world. Men drove Him ignominiously from the world, when, by the grace of God, His beloved Son was crucified in weakness. He will re-enter it in majesty, according to the power of God. His own testimony to the judges of unrighteousness was, "Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and *coming* in the clouds of heaven."² He will be brought with solemn pomp of royal and Divine dominion into a world which once has witnessed His reproach. Then, among other wonders, will it openly be manifested, that the homage of all angels is rendered willingly to Him whose honour is God's principal delight.

With reference to the language³ of the present passage, it may further be remarked, that it is not to be confounded with the statement elsewhere made, that God, when incarnate, was beheld of angels. Still less do these expressions apply to that angelic ministration, of which the self-emptying and willingly dependent Son made Himself capable, and which He actually accepted in the hour of His need, when heavenly messengers conveyed, at the bidding of the Father, a sensible refreshment to the patient but exhausted sufferer of His will.⁴ Nor has it, further, any connexion with the multitudinous worship of the

of the original it will, I conceive, appear preferable to that of the text. Alford, who fairly discusses the question of construction, arrives at the same conclusion.

² Matt. xxvi. 64.

³ The words in the text are an exact quotation from the Septuagint version of Deut. xxxii. 43. In our present Hebrew Bible the passage is omitted. The same words are given by the LXX. in their version of Ps. xcvii. 7; the verb only being changed from the second person to the third: *προσκυνήσατε αὐτῷ πάντες ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ* [*sc. Θεοῦ*].

⁴ Matt. iv. 11; Luke xxii. 43.

heavenly host, who, when Mary had brought forth her first-born son, appeared, and bore consenting and harmonious witness to the amazing truth which Jehovah's angel had but just before announced to the bewildered shepherds of Bethlehem.⁵ That angel's tidings were, that in the city of David, had been born a Saviour, even Christ the Lord. An announcement which called forth a new and joyful doxology from the host of heaven. But *then* they praised the Sender, not the Sent. *God in the Highest* was the object of their worship, though its moving cause might be the lowly Babe, which lay, unkingly cradled, at the royal city of His birth.

It is not, therefore, to the former advent of the Son of God, when, in fulfilment of the ancient promise, He was born a child of Abraham's family, and of David's seed, that the quotation in the present verse refers. What is here contemplated is rather the epiphany of His glorious kingdom, when, after long expectance on His Father's throne, He shall have received investment of His own appointed royalty as the only "King of nations." The era here referred to, is the time when He shall come manifestly forth, and every eye shall see Him, as He brings nigh to earth the majesty of His presence,—coming, as He will, to be at once the Judge and the Restorer of the world. It is into this habitable earth, which God created, but which man, at Satan's bidding, and as the willing victim of his deception, has corrupted through his lusts of evil, that Jesus will be brought. He will visit it with power, and in the perfect majesty of apparent glory, but in vindication

⁵ Luke ii 13, 14.

of a right which once had been derided and disowned. Men bowed the knee in mockery to Jesus, when they hailed, with scornful homage, the patient Wearer of the crown of thorns; for then was not the hour of His kingdom, but of His reproach.⁶ It was man's hour, and the power of darkness; the scripture must be so fulfilled. But glory was ordained for Him; for it was the very "*Lord of glory*," whom the powers of the present world judged worthy of the Cross.

Already this is recognized in heaven, where angels, and authorities, and powers, now own subjection to the risen Christ. Already, too, it is known and rejoiced in by the Church of God, within which are unfolded by the Spirit those mysteries of blessedness which still remain unknown, and undesired by the world. But nothing is now hidden, in the wisdom of God's will, but for its manifestation at His own appointed time. Christ *now* is hidden in God. With Him is hidden there His people's life; for it is Himself who is their life.⁷ He is no longer visible to those whom yet He loves, and of whom He is beloved as well as worshipped. The heavens have received and still retain Him, since the day when He vanished from the wistful gaze of those who witnessed the translation of the Son of Man.⁸ But He has gone away with purpose of return. He will come in like manner as He went; He will return to the self-same world which He has left; He

⁶ "*Now is my kingdom not from hence*" (John xviii. 36) was His own word of explanation to the wondering governor of Judæa when he questioned Jesus, with mingled feelings of alarm and scorn, touching that title which sounded meaningfully, and yet incredibly in his ears.

⁷ Col. iii. 3, 4.

⁸ Acts i.

will be owned in fear where He was once rejected with contempt; He will come in the power of the kingdom which He is gone to receive.⁹ As *King of Israel*, He was delivered, with scourging and with spitting to the Cross. The glory of His power will in that day justify His mightier title of *King of kings, and Lord of lords*. Nor will He come alone. Besides the holy myriads of His saints, whose calling is to suffer and to reign with Him, He will be brought upon His way by the whole angel host of God. For the Son of Man shall come "in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels."¹ The Father has conferred *His* honour on the Son.² Judgment and worship are assigned to Him. To Jesus *every knee* must bow. In the same world in which He had not where to lay His head, supremest homage shall be rendered to the once rejected Son of Man.

Verses 7-9. Thus far the comparison has been between filial relationship and ministerial place. The Son's inheritance is found to comprise within it all angelic worship. In what next follows, we have yet more fully and expressly shown to us, the essential difference *in nature* upon which all outward and official orders of distinction rest. Angels were *created* to serve. "He *maketh* His angels spirits, and His *ministers* a flame of fire." They are indeed spirit, and not flesh; they bear, moreover, a descriptive semblance to Him, who is himself a consuming fire; but they have their being, and are kept in their appointed spheres by the word of Him who made them. In all their might and excellency, they

⁹ Luke xix. 12.¹ Luke ix. 26.² John v. 22, 27.

are wholly His who formed them for Himself. They are angels and ministers *of God*, and the God of their creation, as well as the object of their homage, is the Son.

In the quotation from Ps. xlv., which immediately succeeds, there is a striking declaration of the original Divinity of Him who is to be known in power as the enthroned monarch of the kingdoms of this world.³ The main object, both of this passage, and of those which have gone before, is not so much to assert the Deity of the Son in the abstract, as to show that in all the varied aspects under which the Christ appears (who is the fulfiller in His Person of all Divine testimony and promise), it is none other than the very God who is declared. The subject of Ps. xlv.⁴ is Messiah the King. The sphere, however, of that dominion, which is the leading theme of Jewish prophecy, is not heavenly, but earthly. But the essential majesty of His *Person* is insisted on in language far above the apparent necessities of the sphere in which, dispensationally, His glory is there displayed. To be the fulfiller of Davidical promise, and so to take a kingdom, and to exercise a sway *below* the heavens, needs less than the presence of the only God. Thus flesh might reason, and so sight would judge. But such was not the counsel of the all-wise God of promise. The mystery of godliness reveals to the believer the unity of the Giver and the Receiver of the primal promise and blessing. *The qualification for effective human rule*

³ Rev. xi. 15.

⁴ For a fuller notice of the general scope and meaning of this most beautiful Psalm, as well as of other Psalms referred to in this chapter, the reader is referred to my *Notes on the Psalms*.

*and supremacy is only found in the intrinsic righteousness of the Divine nature. Power belongs to God alone.*⁵ The throne of the dominion, which will hold the government of all *beneath* the sun,⁶ is set in the stability of an eternal right. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever."

In the former Adam there was vested a probationary title of all sublunary rule. God's chiefest creature was entrusted, as His image, with the rights of God.⁷ The result was to demonstrate the unfitness of the creature to abide in honour by the maintenance, *in righteousness*, of sovereign place. Adam proved by his fall both his personal unworthiness and his consequent incapacity to be the head of government and guardianship to a dependent creation. The fitness of the *second* Adam to bear the sceptre of the world's dominion, is based upon the natural Deity of His person—on His *being* the Lord from heaven. He that is to be feared as the King of nations is the true God. He is the living God, and an everlasting King.⁸ The language of the 8th verse is not to be confounded in its meaning with that of the 9th. In the first the Lord's Divinity is stated absolutely, and the sceptre of righteousness is ascribed to the Son as an attribute which belongs originally to Him who is the Judge of all the world.⁹ In the other verse we see Him as the Perfect One, to whom Jehovah bears His witness, and to whom the rewards of righteousness are assigned as to the *Man* of God's pure sanction and delight. Jesus has proved, in

⁵ Ps. lxii. 11.

⁶ Ps. lxxii.

⁷ Vicariously, that is, and so far as respected the condition of the subject creature, which must stand or fall with its appointed head.

⁸ Jer. x. 7, 10.

⁹ Rom. iii. 5, 6.

finished human obedience, His fitness to receive the rod of human rule.¹ He is the Just One. He walked thus in His fleshly days. He loved righteousness, and hated iniquity, in a world which loved darkness rather than light. It is, *therefore*, that the more abundant unction of the oil of gladness is placed upon His head for ever. *His* God hath so anointed Him.

In close connexion with this subject, a new and strange comparison is now introduced—one which is not adversative, like that of angels, but only in degree. Jesus is said to be anointed with the oil of gladness above *His fellows*. Angels are no fellows to the Son. They are in every way contrasted with Him, as we have seen. His fellows are none other than they who are elsewhere said to be partakers of His flesh and of His bones,² and whose predestined glory it is, by the exceeding riches of the grace of God, to be conformed to the image of His Son; for He is to be, and is, the first-born of many *brethren*. The companions of His patience, and the sufferers of His reproach, will share the anointed fellowship of Messiah's reigning joy. We may well devote a little further space to the consideration of this wondrous and most blessed truth.

We have just now been reminded that the pre-eminent Receiver of this unction of gladness is, in nature and in power, the eternal God. As such, His challenge from of old had been, "To whom will ye *liken* me, or shall I be *equal*? saith the Holy One."³ And we have already seen the primary answer to this question in the personal delineation of Jehovah's

¹ 2 Sam. xxiii. 3.

² Eph. v. 30.

³ Isa. xl. 25.

fellow. But God's true image and glory is not to be visible in the incarnate Son alone. His glory is to shine through its appointed media, even as the Father's brightness is revealed in Him. And so in the mystery of God's eternal counsel, there has been found for Emmanuel a companionship with fellows of His glory and His place. When man could point to none with whom the Highest might compare, God has Himself discovered, in the fair invention of redeeming love, a manner of comparison whereby His glory should be yet more marvellously known than in the solitary majesty of His only immortality and light. He has matched Himself, in grace, with children, whom He has fitted to receive from Him a Father's love. In Christ He has begotten for Himself a progeny, who, in the mystery of their new creation, participate both His nature and His joy. Born, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible; born of the Spirit, and not of the flesh,—of God, and not of man,—they awake, at the quickening voice of Jesus, from the sleep of natural death in sin to the consciousness of a life which only breathes in perfect righteousness,⁴ and which looks for glory as its proper hope and end. It is unto the fellowship of the Son of God that the justified (because believing) sinner is now called.⁵ Those joys which Christ counts such—joys for the sake of which He bore the cross—are already the promised portion and the pledged possession of the brethren of His love. Of this the Holy Ghost is in their hearts both the living earnest and the seal.⁶ Only in measure will His joy excel. By how much it is better and more

⁴ Rom. viii. 10. ⁵ 1 Cor. i. 9. ⁶ 2 Cor. v. 5; Eph. i. 13, 14.

blessed to give than to receive, by so much will His joy exceed the happiness of those whose perfect blessedness it is to be receivers of the fulness which is His; who know that all things are their own, *for they are Christ's*. The Church is the companion of the Lord whom angels serve. They stand and veil their faces in His presence. But she will sit upon His *throne*—an elevation equally beyond all human powers, whether of contemplation or attainment; yet the place where *faith* even now may rest adoringly upon the bosom of Divine and perfect love. For the believer knows to what a dreary depth that love has first descended, that its chosen though guilty objects might be counted worthy of that seat.⁷

Verses 10–12. The proper glory of Christ as the Former⁸ of all things, the pre-existent originator of all beginning, is further illustrated in the next quotation. The passage is one, not of description, but of comparison. It is to identify the appointed Heir of all things with the Ancient of days, that it is here cited by the Spirit. His goings forth have been from old, from everlasting. The heavens and the earth are alike the work of His hands. He is the eternal Survivor, as well as the Ancestral Source of all created being.¹ The creature, even in its fairest form, and under its grandest character, is intrinsically subject to decay. It is dependent wholly for its continuance upon the sustaining power of the Creator. The things which *are* will not for ever be.

⁷ Eph. ii. 5, 6, iv. 9.

⁸ יִצְרָךְ Jer. x. 16.

¹ God only hath immortality. The new creation, which will stand in the power of eternal redemption, abides with God. I speak in the text of Deity as it intrinsically differs from all that is below itself. All creature life and being is existent only at the pleasure of the Divine will.

The heavens, which now declare the glory of God, will one day pass away. The same Almighty Lord, who spreads them as a tent to dwell in, who has filled them with beauty and magnificence by the garniture of His Spirit,² and who makes them black with sackcloth at His will, shall change them in due time. They will be changed, that new and yet more fair creations may appear.³ That new Creation will indeed remain. Founded in the power of redeeming love, it will be the perpetual dwelling-place of righteousness and life, a work no more to be repented of by Him who grieved in heart to see the spoiling of the first creation through the sin of man. God will roll off from sight the heavens which now are. With a great noise they will depart before the urgent power of His will, who now upholds them in their place. But a perpetual Christ remains. "Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail."⁴ His nature and condition are subject to no change; He is eternally Divine. As He has been from everlasting the unchanging Source from whence has emanated every manifestation, whether of majesty or holiness, of truth or wisdom, of grace or power, which in the successive dispensations of the Divine will has hitherto been unfolded to the creature, so in the coming dispensation of the fulness of times, there

² Job xxvi. 13.

³ Rev. xxi. 1-5.

⁴ It is noticeable that the quotation from Psalm cii. is taken from the Septuagint. The Hebrew text does not contain any equivalent to the word "Lord." It seems to be here introduced by the Spirit of God in order to give a clearer distinctness to the quotation in its present application. In the Psalm, on the other hand, the omission of express *title*, while the perfect attributes of Divine being and majesty are ascribed to the One addressed, enhances still the wondrous power of the contrast which the passage presents of the perfect self-abasement in grace of the Son of God, to the essential and supreme glory of His Person.

will be found concentrated in the Person of the Man whose name is "Wonderful," the total fulness of all Godhead in its widely-spreading and beneficent display. "The God of the whole earth" is the title with which, in the written record of prophetic promise,⁵ He is already greeted whom the Christian knows and looks for as the great God and *His Saviour* Jesus Christ.⁶

Verses 13, 14. The series of Messianic quotations from the Old Testament closes with the revelation of the Heir of all things in the attitude of expectant session at the right hand of God. We have already seen how He has won that seat at His triumphant re-ascension in accomplished victory, after having wrought the mighty work for which He quitted, for a time, the place which had been always His. His position on the throne of God is now declared with reference to the Father's will. For it was at the Father's invitation that, after having finished the work of His obedience upon earth, He took that place. It was said to Him at His ascension, "Sit Thou at my right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool." The importance of this passage will be obvious to the thoughtful Christian. For it is not only an additional corroboration of the already cumulative testimony to the Sonship and glory of the exalted Christ. It affirms, besides, the all-important circumstance of His present expectancy. Jesus sits, but not on His own throne.⁷ He *waits*, but does not reign.⁷ All power, indeed, is His, in

⁵ Isa. liv. 5.

⁶ Tit. ii. 13.

⁷ The reader will easily perceive that in speaking thus antithetically, I am dealing exclusively with the subject of the Lord's dispensational position. The foregoing pages have insisted sufficiently, I trust, upon

heaven and in earth. Angels, and authorities, and powers, are submitted to His sway. In the estimation and confessed acknowledgment of those who now obey the truth, He is the only Lord of all. But the power of His kingdom is as yet appreciated only by the believing subjects of His grace. The time for its decisive vindication is as yet not come; its accomplishment is still deferred until the day determined shall arrive. A preparation must be made for this, in which the agent is the Father, while its object is the Son. He sits at God's right hand until *He* makes the haters of His Christ a footstool for His feet. The Lord God Omnipotent will surely reign; His kingdom and the power of His Christ will come. But while the dispensation lasts of Gospel grace—the season of Divine long-suffering in Gentile mercy⁸—Christ sits in heaven at the right hand of God. God speaks in patient mercy by His Son. Anon His speech will be in wrath. The Christ of men's derision and contempt will suddenly be known in vengeance as the Mighty One of God.⁹

The session of Jesus, on the *Father's* throne, is closely connected with the specialty of His title as the Melchisedec Priest, a title more fully to be examined further on. It was for no angel that this

the proper glory and majesty of His Person to prevent misapprehension on this point. In one sense, the Father's throne is also Christ's, all that the Father hath being His. They are, however, pointedly distinguished in another sense. Again, the Lord reigns, in so far as all power in heaven and on earth is already committed to His hands. Howbeit it is to the Church, and in the Church, that the glory of this power is now revealed; and that by the Spirit, which the world seeth not nor knoweth. But in that coming day *all* eyes shall see Him, whose title (to be justified at His appearing) is that of "Prince of the kings of the earth." (Rev. iii. 21.)

⁸ Rom. xi.

⁹ Ps. ii. 4, 5.

place had been reserved; it is the Lord who may alone sit there. "Jehovah said unto my *Lord*," &c. Worship and homage are the attendants of that seat. There are lesser thrones in heaven, whose exalted occupants must worship *there*. Thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, bear each their measure of Divinely-adjusted sway. They rule for God where He appoints their rule. In governing they obey; their province, as their title, is to be the *ministers* of God. With reference, moreover, to the latter clause of this verse, it may be noticed that angels can have no personal enemies; their animosities and their affections are but varied expressions of their zeal for God. *Rest* also is no attribute of angel life; they live and shine as the ever ready messengers of Him who dwelleth in the high and holy place. To God alone, and to the Lamb, are ceaseless praise and adoration paid.

And now another marvel is revealed. We have seen how all God's angels are prepared to greet with worship the second entrance of the First-begotten into the world. We have seen, too, that they are already the willing vassals of Him who is the Head of all principality and power. The nature of their present service is now more particularly declared. "Are they not ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who are about to inherit salvation?"¹ A wondrous truth! Yet let it not seem strange in the eyes of those for whom *Christ died*, that even such things should be found among the true sayings of the blessed God. A grateful portion is it, surely, of the "present truth," and one which

¹ Διὰ πούς μέλλοντας κληρονομεῖν σωτηρίαν.

the believer will do wisely to keep constantly in view. The ministers are angels; the receivers of the ministry are heirs. They are fellow-heirs with Christ, owned now as the children of a Father whom they know and joy in as their Saviour and their God. Once sunk in sin beyond all natural hope, they are now, through grace, become in Christ the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty—begotten to the living hope of their enduring heritage through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.² The heritage for which they wait is, in one single word, “Salvation,” Christian salvation is not a mere escape from wrath. The vessels of God’s mercy are by Him prepared in Christ for *glory*. They who receive abundance of grace, and the gift of righteousness, shall *reign in life* by one, Jesus Christ. The receivers of Divine forgiveness through the blood of Jesus are also *sanctified* through faith in Him. Now the inheritance of God’s saints is in light. They are themselves the children of light. They will shine thus in glory to His eternal praise, who is both the God of glory, and the Father of lights.³ Angels assent to this. Great is the pure joy which they taste in heaven at the turning of one soul to God; they celebrate, with louder strains of joyful adoration than were rendered at creation, God’s chiefest work of wisdom and of love. They desire to behold, with deeper search, the still unfathomed mysteries of Divine redemption. Meanwhile, they bear their willing part in the furtherance of His good pleasure, whom they only live to serve. They are sent forth to be

² 1 Pet. i. 3.³ Acts vii. 2; Jas. i. 7.

the ministers of help to those whom God holds worthy of such ministry, because they bear the title of His Son.

Little, indeed, it may be feared, is this truth at present estimated in the Church of God. For an active and simple faith is needed to perceive, in what men carelessly regard as accidents of time and place, the positive working of angelic ministry. And faith, in its application to the things of daily life, is at a feeble flow indeed in this our day of evil. Yet it is only thus that the just man can be said to live. A Christian, if the Spirit lead him, does not walk by sight. It is not from events, or from appearances, that he is left to argue that God *does* at times exert immediate influence on present things. *Men* can do this, who naturally know not God. For God is not as yet ostensibly disowned of men.⁴ Remote and general dispositions of Divine Providence are commonly acknowledged by the thoughtless world itself. It belongs to faith alone, which knows its access by the Spirit to the Father's presence in the full welcome of the Son's acceptance, to walk, in a confidence not unmixed with fear, under the sweet yet solemn consciousness of being thus attended from on high. It is a truth which brings the shadow of God's majesty with a peculiar nearness over the believer's soul. That we are seen of angels is an assurance to which the Spirit elsewhere practically bids our heed.⁵ A happy thought, yet one of sober-

⁴ Though He is so virtually wherever heed is given to the lying spirit which now endeavours, in so many varied tones, to persuade the willing ignorance of the age, that although God is, He does not *speak*; and that by a rhetorical figure only can the Scriptures be said to be the living Word of God.

⁵ 1 Cor. xi. 10.

ing effect, to be thus seen; to be the objects of near gaze, and very contact, to those holy visitants of watchful love, who, standing as the bright apparitors of heavenly majesty beside the throne on which the Son of God now rests, are sent forth to speed upon their way the pilgrim brethren of their Lord.

CHAPTER II.

THE preceding chapter has largely demonstrated the eternal Sonship and the personal majesty of the once-rejected Christ; has declared His supremacy, as the appointed Heir of all things, to the angels who excel in strength, and, in thus setting forth the superlative perfection of the object of his faith, has opened to the believer a distinct though general view of the nature and quality of his standing as an heir of salvation. It is upon the doctrine of His Person and pre-eminency that the hortative warning is founded with which the present chapter opens.

Verses 1-4. "*Therefore we ought,*" &c. God hath spoken by His Son. He has addressed Himself in Him *to us*. We, therefore, who have heard, should give a proportionately earnest heed to what we have received. A more diligent regard is due to what is now spoken than to what the fathers heard, for four principal reasons. First, because of the essential majesty and glory of the Messenger of the new covenant, by whom God now speaks. The things heard by us were spoken by *the Lord*. Secondly, because the message now addressed to us is *final*. Thirdly, because of the infinite preciousness of the things concerning which the word is spoken; and,

lastly, because of the hopeless perdition which is the declared alternative to those who now reject the testimony of saving grace.

The danger to which the Hebrew christians stood peculiarly exposed, was that of a gradual moving away from the pure and perfect standing of finished grace to the older, but, for the time, abandoned confidences of traditional religion. They had to give good heed, lest what they had received in the Gospel, as the perfect truth of God in Christ, should gradually lose its hold⁶ upon their hearts; lest having ceased (through that dimness of spiritual vision, which follows as the natural effect, where faith is not duly exercised,)⁷ to perceive the living beauty of the truth, and so to love it and delight in it, as that which satisfied the longing of their souls, they should yield to the ever present temptation to turn again to the vain conversation which had been delivered to them by their fathers, and from which the precious blood of Christ had set them free. But this would be to draw back to perdition. Hence the solemnity of the present appeal. There was no escape from the wrath already impending over the children of disobedience, if this great salvation were neglected.

This solemn position is sustained *à fortiori* by a reference to the former covenant, and its results. The word spoken by angels had been steadfast. The

⁶ With respect to the concluding words of verse 1: $\mu\eta\ \tau\omicron\pi\epsilon\ \pi\alpha\rho\ \alpha\ \rho\ \acute{\rho}\ \upsilon\ \tilde{\omega}\ \mu\ \epsilon\ \upsilon$, while their moral drift is quite clear, it is not easy to render their sense exactly. "*Damit wir nicht etwa darum kommen*" is DE WETTE'S version. "*Che talora non isfuggiamo,*"—DIOD. "*Dass wir nicht dahin fahren,*"—LUTH. The E. V. is sound and sufficient, though for strictness of translation, the margin is preferable to the text.

⁷ 2 Pet. i. 9.

blessings indeed which the Law proposed had failed, because they were conditional upon the obedience of the people; while for the same reason, the curse which it denounced had taken its effect, and had attached, with more or less intensity of infliction, to the natural seed of Abraham.⁸ They had not escaped. But besides the general historic reference to the nation of Israel, which is here implied, there is a direct allusion to the character and necessary effects of the Law as an administrative dispensation of God, in order to compare it with the Gospel under the same point of view.

After noticing the intrinsic inferiority of a communication made to man "by angels," to that which is now spoken by the Son, the distinctive nature and operation of the Sinaitic covenant are briefly intimated in what follows. Conferring nothing upon man, and thus, in its form and language, hiding rather than revealing the true character of God, it lay on those who had received it as a strict and inflexible demand of right, which nothing but complete obedience could discharge. Penal in its essence, as well as prohibitive in most of its injunctions, the Law adjusted punishment exactly to transgression. "*Every* transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward." God measured human conduct by the letter of His own commandment; and visited delinquency with death.⁹ Dispensa-

⁸ Compare Levit. xxvi. 14-43; Lament. ii. 17; Dan. ix. 11; and 1 Thess. ii. 16.

⁹ Historically, and in point of fact, this was not always rigidly insisted on. It was so at first. The fate of the Sabbath-breaker (Numb. xv. 35), and the several instances of special judgment which befel the people in the wilderness, exemplify this. But mercy ever rejoiced against judgment, and God was not extreme to mark imme-

tionally considered, the covenant ordained by angels went no farther than this. Its dominion is over a man "as long as he liveth."¹ Moreover, the Law dealt only with external acts. It judged men according to their *deeds*.² Hence its penal visitations were upon things palpable to the senses. Human testimony was therefore necessary for the establishment of legal judgment. He that despised Moses' Law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. The Law thus wrought effectually as a ministry of death. But this ordinance of judgment, although spoken by angels, was the word of *God*; and that word may lose no jot or tittle of its force. The Law, therefore, remained stedfast, until by its perfect accomplishment in Christ, it was taken for ever out of the believer's way.³

But if God has justified His sayings which He spake by angels, how much rather will He establish that which He is now speaking by the Son. Now the Law, as has been shown, enjoined obedience, and

diately what was done amiss. Had He done so, no remnant could have been left. Long-suffering patience bore with the multitude of the people's iniquities, from day to day, as their provocations increased, and the evil of their doings ripened beneath the prolonged continuance of prophetic testimony. Still judgment came, though long deferred. For God is not mocked. In the captivities and dispersions of the nation, Jehovah had vindicated the testimony of His servant according to the truth of His own holiness.

¹ Rom. vii. 1. The ultimate decision of the day of judgment is not here in question. As to this, see Rom. ii. 12-16.

² True it is that to the regenerate soul, the Law was spiritual. As such it discerned the thoughts and intents of the heart. "Thou shalt not covet," ruined all hope of legal justification in the conscience of one whom God instructed in the secret of His way. *Jewish* faith deprecated the Law of debt as much as *Christian*. "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified," is the language of such as hoped *in God*, and not in themselves. It is under its outward and literal aspect only that the Law is contemplated in the text above.

³ Matt. v. 17.

promised life as a reward. On the other hand, it slew the rebel with the sword of temporal⁴ vengeance. It is in marked contrast to this, in all its points, that the things now addressed *to us* present themselves in the word of Christ.

The Gospel speaks the language, not of a Law-giver, but of a Saviour. Its burden accordingly is not a restatement of God's righteous claims upon His creature, but a declaration of positive and sovereign grace. It is thus a ministration, not of sin and death, but of life and righteousness. That blessed ministration proceeds upon the previous proof of the total unprofitableness of the flesh; and witnesses of righteousness, and life eternal, as the free, unqualified gift of God in Christ. Its moving cause is the completeness of the sinner's ruin in his natural condition. God acts, in Christ, upon *that*. His love to the world, His kindness toward man, appeared in the sending of His Son as a propitiation for human sin. Thus, while the original spring of Divine redemption is in the secret depths of God's own nature, which is love; and, as it respects His elect people, their special blessing is based upon the promise and grace which were given them in Christ before the world began, yet its occasion of display, the immediate motive of its effectual operation, was the actual condition of the world in its ripeness of sin and death. "For when we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."⁵ God thus commends to us His love.

⁴ Resurrection from the dead, and eternal judgment, were truths well known to the fathers, and generally held through their tradition by the nation of Israel. As a positive dispensation of God, however, the Law dealt only with earthly and temporal things.

⁵ Rom. v.

The grand topic, therefore, of the word now spoken is SALVATION. God speaks no more to men of personal obedience unto justification, with the alternative of hopeless condemnation upon failure of their covenanted engagement. This was His language when He spake by angels in the Law. He now *preaches peace* by Jesus Christ. Finding in the obedience of His own Son a righteous channel through which His love to man may freely reach its object, He now speaks of the full remission of many offences—of the forgiveness of *all* trespasses through the precious blood of Jesus. Abundance of grace, and the free gift of righteousness, are the burden of the Gospel. It is the ministration of righteousness; and, *therefore*, of both life and peace.

A word which ministers such things, if it be not accepted with love and honour, will be slighted by indifference, or rejected with contempt. Now, as we have already seen,⁶ God's capital question with men has always been whether they would own Him according to His actual manifestation of Himself. But the testimony which declared His title to obedience as a Lawgiver, when applied as a test of quality to man's alien will, produced rebellion as its result. And as it is elsewhere written: "The Law entered that the offence might abound."⁷ The proof, on the other hand, to which men are *now* subjected is, not whether they can establish for themselves a claim, in equity, to the Divine favour, but whether they will accept, at the hands of the Father, salvation as the unconditional grace of His perfect love in Christ. The question, therefore, which is now addressed to

⁶ Introduction—*passim*.

⁷ Rom. v. 20.

the conscience is, "How shall we escape, if we *neglect* so great salvation?" Acquired by merit it can never be, while from outward knowledge it cannot be hidden; for "their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world."⁸ Both Israel and the Gentiles know. But the message, though distinctly heard, may be listened to with apathy, or fruitlessly received into the mind, while the heart and conscience remain strangers to its power. But that which men are in danger of thus carelessly disregarding, is nothing less than God's *great* salvation. It is so described, first, because of the greatness of Him who is the Saviour. Secondly, because of the magnitude and hopelessness of that ruin out of which it saves. Thirdly, with reference to the exceeding and eternal weight of glory—the transcendent fulness of those unsearchable riches of Christ, which are the appointed heritage of those who are entitled and provided for in the word of grace as "heirs of salvation."

But in proportion to the greatness of the salvation, which awaits the believer in Jesus, is the infinite measure of that inevitable judgment which impends over the despiser of the word of reconciliation. "How shall we escape?"

With respect to this, it is to be remembered, that not only are the certainties of life and incorruptibility brought to light by the Gospel, but likewise their fearful contraries, the second death, and everlasting wrath. Both these opposites had been revealed (the former more distinctly than the latter) imperfectly in earlier days. Faith saw them in the

⁸ Rom. x. 18.

word of promise.⁹ But now, by the testimony of the Gospel, they are made distinctly manifest. God has given *to all men* an earnest of judgment, as well as a full assurance of righteousness to the believer, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.¹ The conditional blessings and cursings of the Law are now displaced and supplanted by the testimony of the Spirit of Grace to salvation through the blood of the Cross, as the only refuge from the wrath which is to come. As then there has been, and continues still to be, a fulfilment upon the subjects of the Law of the penalties which it contains, so will there be assuredly an accomplishment, in its appointed time, of the perfect word of God in Christ. Judgment to come is as clear a testimony of the Holy Ghost as present salvation through the faith of Jesus. Meanwhile, there is a temporary impunity to the despisers of the gift of God. The visitations of the Law were immediate and decisive; a man could not despise *that* word and live. But the time of Gospel testimony is the sinner's opportunity. For now is the day, *not* of wrath, but of salvation. The scorner sits at ease, regardless alike of the gracious entreaties, and of the solemn warnings of the Gospel, until the protracted season of long-suffering grace be closed, and the day of vengeance be at length revealed.²

The instrumental means of testimony to this great

⁹ On the subject of future retribution generally, see among other passages, Numb. xxiii. 10; Ps. l.; Pro. xiv. 32; Eccles. v. 8, &c.

¹ Acts xvii. 31; John xvi. 10.

² In the present passage the *certainty* of retribution to the careless despisers of grace is the point insisted on. Later in the epistle (x. 26-39), we have a reference to its *measure* in comparison with the effects of legal judgment.

salvation are next mentioned. The Lord had begun to speak of it while yet on earth. The words which Jesus spake were spirit, and were life. To as many as the Father brought to Him, He gave immediately *eternal* life. Forgiveness of sins was freely spoken by His lips to all whose hearts were rendered capable of perceiving and owning in Him the presence of Jehovah. Especially He had announced the message of this great salvation, when, after He had risen from the dead, He greeted His disciples with the word of peace; while, to confirm that joyful word, He showed to them His hands and feet, from whence had flowed that precious blood, by means of which the covenant of peace had been eternally secured.³ But the message of salvation which the Lord began to speak was not completed by His personal ministry. He had "many things to say," both for comfort to His own, and in testimony to the world, which He would not utter then, because the fitting time was not yet come. There was another Comforter whom He would send, and whose advent should be for a testimony to the perfect truth. It was not, therefore, until the descent from heaven of the Holy Ghost, that they who had listened to the voice of Jesus, and received their charge from Him, were enabled boldly to declare the Gospel of this great salvation. It was as endued with power from on high that they began to speak.⁴ The subject of their testimony was the Lord Himself. They preached a *Saviour*. Repentance, and remission of sins, were declared in the name of that Jesus of Nazareth, whom men, indeed, had crucified; but whom God had raised from the

³ John xx. 19, 20.

⁴ Acts i. ii.

dead. The fruit of this testimony was to be the formation of the Church,—*His* Church. He had promised to Himself a Church while yet upon the earth. He had said, “Upon this Rock *I will build* my Church,” when Simon, expressly taught from heaven of the Father, had made confession to His perfect title of “the Christ, the Son of the living God.”⁵ And now that mighty work had been effectively begun. Its deep and sure foundation, which was laid from eternity in the purposes of God, had been prepared also, in *fact*, by the shedding of the blood of Christ, and now stood openly revealed to faith in the Person of the risen and ascended Son of God.

Moreover, God had borne special witness (verse 4) to the chosen messengers and hearers of His Son. It was from the *Father* that the promise of the Holy Ghost had been received, who now was come from heaven as the willing minister of Jesus. With rich diversity of miraculous power, and with a lavish distribution of effectual gifts, had the Father of Lights expressed the full concurrence of His will from the beginning of that apostolic ministry of Christ for which His feeble witnesses had been thus prepared.⁶ Themselves completely cleansed from all defilement through the once shed blood of eternal redemption, they were filled and sanctified as by the pure fire of God, when the Holy Ghost, descending in a form which men might see, sat openly upon each vessel of His choice, and gave to each, with sovereign distribution of His grace, a new and

⁵ Matt. xvi. 16-18.

⁶ Acts i. 8; ii. *passim*.

authentic utterance of things which God alone had power truly to declare.⁷

The object of the extended comparison of the Son with angels, which is presented in the former chapter, is rendered thus yet more apparent to our minds. The ministries respectively of the Old Covenant and the New stand representatively, the first in angels, the second in the Son. Both were glorious; for both were of God. But the glory of the first had faded, and was, as it were, forgotten in the transcendent glory of the second. By how much life is better than death, and the ministration of righteousness a more excellent thing than the ministration of condemnation, by so much had the word of grace excelled the former testimony of the Law. God had

⁷ 1 Cor. xii. For although the disciples were competent witnesses of the resurrection of the Lord, it was the Messenger from heaven who alone could testify with power to the ascension, and heavenly glory of the Son of Man. (Comp. John xv. 26, 27.) Moreover, the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost was God's visible appropriation of the first-fruits of redemption. God could now rest in man through his complete purification by the blood of Jesus. The disciples were sanctified by faith in Him. The presence of the Holy Ghost attested this. The proper origin of the Church is to be found in this event, for the Church had a *formal* existence in *fact* only from the moment of its baptism with the Holy Ghost. No longer listeners at Moses' seat, the disciples were themselves become the sole dispensers of the truth of God. As the ground and pillar of the truth, the Church was now set on its foundation in the open sight of men. Its hope and calling were indeed but partially disclosed, until the time arrived for the full development of the mystery of God through the apostleship and ministry of Paul. It existed, however, as an objective thing, from the day of Pentecost. The full statement of the doctrine of the Church is to be found in the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians. In the present Epistle its heavenly calling is affirmed and illustrated; but its relation to Christ, according to the perfect counsel of the Father's will, is not completely shown. The Epistle has a different object. The effect, it may be added, of the descent of the Spirit upon the Church is two-fold. First, He is the unction of Divine intelligence to the saints; and, secondly, He is the power of effectual testimony in the world. Both these results appear conspicuously in the Pentecostal Church.

now made His own desire and ability to bless the ground of His new and final revelation of Himself to man, instead of man's presumed capability of merit on his own account. The Spirit's present testimony is to *God*—in the perfect fulness, the abundant riches, of His grace in Christ. Well may the question then be asked, how they are to escape who negligently slight so great salvation!

Verses 5–9. Having now fully asserted the Divine supremacy of the Son of God, and having aroused their souls to wakeful heed by the solemn warning which we have just been reviewing, he proceeds in the following verses to exhibit the reverse and counterpart of the mystery of godliness, by setting forth the true humanity of Him who is thus made known as the appointed Heir of all. This also is made the subject of angelic contrast. In the former chapter it was shown that the glorification of the exalted Christ was the enthronement, under a new form, of the eternal Maker of all things. The reality of that *nature* whose form has thus been glorified, and the appointment, therefore, of *man* to more than angel honour in the person of the Son, is now brought more immediately before our view.

The subject is first taken up in connexion with a passage in the foregoing chapter. It had been said (chap. i. 6), "And when He bringeth again the First-begotten into the world, He saith, Let all the angels of God worship Him." We now read (verse 5), "Unto the angels hath He not put in subjection *the world to come, whereof we speak.*" But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is *man*?" &c.

⁸ Τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν περὶ ἧς λαλοῦμεν.

There are two principal points to be considered in this passage. First, we find mention made of a world which, relatively to the present dispensation, is "the world to come;" and secondly, the entire sovereignty of this world is claimed for man. A fuller expansion of this subject in its detail, and its immediate relation to the Person of the Son of God, will follow presently. Let our first endeavour be to settle, by clear scriptural testimony, the true force of the expression, "world to come."

The first thing to be noticed in such an inquiry is the obvious fact, that the sphere and substance of this promised dominion, so far as it is specified by the above-mentioned expression, are neither heaven, nor heavenly things. The descriptive quotation from Ps. viii. might alone suffice to establish this; for it is of earth, and earthly things, that that Psalm speaks.⁹ But a somewhat fuller examination of scriptural evidence upon this point appears desirable, that the subject may be set in a still clearer light. Let us then remember that the point to be established is, not only that what is here spoken of is the existing habitable earth, but that it is the same earth in a future dispensation—the world *to come*.¹

⁹ Characteristically, that is, and in its primary meaning. We shall see hereafter how the language of that Psalm is extended in its interpretation so as to comprise within its terms the *whole* dominion of the reigning Christ.

¹ The word *οικουμένη* occurs in the New Testament sixteen times. Neither in Scripture nor anywhere else does it ever mean heaven in any sense. Generally its use in Scripture is similar to that which it received in classical writers, *i. e.*, "the civilized earth" as opposed to the rest of the world. (Compare LIND. and SCOTT *in loc.*) It is, however, found not unfrequently in a much wider sense, as will appear in the paragraph immediately following in the text, where the presence of the word in question is indicated by its English representative being printed in italics.

When the Son of Man endured in the wilderness the temptation of the devil, one of the fruitless lures of the deceiver was the sudden presentation to the view of Jesus of the kingdoms of the *world* and their glory. The form in which God's equal stood before him seemed, in the eyes of the first man's destroyer, an assurance that even in the self-humbled Son of God there might be found that selfish lust of power which he knew, by successful experience, to be the master passion of the human soul. He rightly judged that the dominion of God's earth was not to be for ever left in *his* polluting grasp. His error was to think that he, the father of lies, had anything of his within the Holy One of God.² But the kingdom of Messiah was not *then* to be displayed in power as an earthly rule. He had come to suffer, not to reign. His reign would come in its appointed time, when God should vindicate in power the long suspended promise of His truth. The state in which the natural man remains, while Jesus sits at God's right hand, has been already brought under our view. He who is earth's rightful Lord has no share of his affection, and enforces no claim on his obedience. If God now speaks by His ambassadors, it is with words of persuasive entreaty, not of peremptory and irresistible command. As viewed from heaven, men are still seen to be in fixed and determinate opposition to God, and to His Christ. Meanwhile the Gospel, which is God's pure message of entire love to those who naturally are His foes, is preached for a testimony in all the *world*.³ But until the hour of his binding be arrived, Satan though powerless to

² John xiv. 30.³ Matt. xxiv. 14.

harm the elect vessels of mercy, who are divinely kept through faith, deceives with his delusions the *world* wherein the word of grace is preached.⁴ The final effort of the arch-deceiver's energy, before the second coming of the Lord with power, will be the gathering together of the kings of the whole *world* "to the battle of that great day of God Almighty."⁵ For God has set apart a day, and chosen Him a Man whereby to judge *the world* in righteousness.⁶ God's day begins, as well as ends, with judgment, though its coming be to introduce the world's Millennial peace.⁷ But before that day arrives men's hearts will fail them in perplexed and dreadful apprehension of the things which will be looked for as about to come upon *the earth*.⁸

From the passages to which reference has just been made, it is abundantly manifest, first, that the habitable world is, in the present dispensation, the sphere of Gospel testimony; and secondly, that the prospective termination of this day of grace is judgment at the coming of the Lord. It is also further evident that the governing influence which is suffered to direct the course of the world as it now exists is of Satan, and not of God. The same Gospel of truth which claims for Christ the perfect title of all dominion, in the determinate purpose of God, declares the devil to be the prince as well as god of this present world. The Holy Ghost assigns to him in testimony that place of wrong, until the time be come for the manifestation of the kingdom of God, and the power of His Christ.⁹ But the

⁴ Rev. xii. 9.⁷ 2 Pet. iii.⁵ Rev. xvi. 14.⁸ Luke xxi. 26.⁶ Acts xvii. 31.⁹ Rev. xii. 10.

dominion of the destroyer must be taken away before the reign of human blessedness and safety can commence. For it is plain that the world, whose kings are presently to be gathered, by the craft and power of the devil, to open battle against Jehovah and His Christ,¹ cannot rightly be regarded as already rejoicing beneath the blessing of that divinely sanctioned human rule² of which the prophets speak.

Since, then, it is manifest from Scripture that the world which now is awaits the revelation of the day of Christ, while a promise is given in explicit terms of a coming world, which is to own complete subjection to the Son of man in blessing; since, too, it has appeared already from the former chapter, and is elsewhere expressed in Scripture, that the Lord shall certainly be brought again into the self-same world which He has left, it follows that in the expression "world to come," no other meaning is conveyed than that it is the *now existing earth* which is to be thus subjected to man.

¹ Rev. xvi. 14, 17; xix. 19.

² Most assuredly "the powers that be are ordained of God." (Rom. xiii. 1.) It is the joyful privilege of a Christian to render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's. For in the existing powers he recognizes God, whose ministers they are; and who holds them responsible to Himself for the righteous discharge of their trust. But government in human hands, if it be not exercised in confessed subjection to His will, is never according to the mind of God. Such government can never therefore be a source of unmixed blessing to the world. For he that ruleth over men must *be just*, ruling in the fear of God. (2 Sam. xxiii.) *Personal* uprightness, and devoted subjection to God, are conditions of human government which, though indispensable to the world's happiness, exist in no merely human being. They are found in the Just One alone. With respect to Gentile dominion generally, until the rightful Monarch be revealed, the similitude chosen by the Spirit of holiness, in order to convey most aptly the Divine estimate of their moral character, is that of ravenous birds and beasts. (Isa. xlv. 11; Dan. vii. viii.)

Nothing is more certain than that the prophetic Scriptures everywhere abound with unfulfilled predictions of earthly blessing. Of these prophecies a remarkable sample is exhibited in the present quotation from Ps. viii. Like all the rest of Scripture, this psalm regards as its eventual object the person of the Christ. Its citation here is for a double purpose. First, in order to assert the proper manhood of Him who is its subject; and secondly, by a recital of prophetic *earthly* promise of which man is the object, to shape the thoughts of the believing Jews aright respecting the true nature and results of their actual calling, as partakers of the heavenly calling, and so companions of the *patience* as well as kingdom of Jesus Christ.³

The first point to be noticed, then, in this quotation, is the distinctness with which the proper manhood of God's Heir is shown. "What is man?" was the wondering inquiry of lowly-minded faith, when led by the Spirit of God to ponder the riches of Divine wisdom and power, revealed in all their bright display in the heavens of His glory, and to weigh the intrinsic littleness and unprofitableness of man at his best estate, against the wide extent of his appointed mastery over the works of God's hands. What is man? Vanity at his best, is the reply which comes spontaneously to the lips of every child of truth. No other answer can be rendered, when the question is addressed to one who recognizes in himself an experimental authentication of that word which makes king Solomon and all his glory of less account than the fading flower of the field. But

³ Rev. i. 9.

God can answer His own Spirit's question, not in despondency, but in triumph. The eager but still baffled search of those who strove to penetrate the unexpounded promise of good things to come, is now succeeded by the open revelation of the perfect truth, according to its full accomplishment in the Person of His Son. To the question, "What is man?" God answers, "*Christ*."

Man is the image and glory of God. The first Adam was so as a shadow; the Second is its realization in abiding truth and power. But man, in the scale of original creation, though placed in headship over creatures lower than himself, held an inferior place to angels. To the former Adam it might well have seemed a lofty honour to be but little lower, in his weakness, than the angels who excel in strength. Moreover, angels were in heaven. On earth, indeed, man held dominion without peer. Whatever God had made below the sky was his. He named God's creatures at his will. The God who set the first man over His creation, and who walked with him in Eden, was alone the Lord of him who had the homage of all else below. But Adam was both *from* and *for* the earth. He had neither place nor hope in heaven while unfallen; his sphere of blessing was exclusively terrestrial. God fitted him for natural joys, and blessed him on the earth, not absolutely, but with blessings whose continuance was made dependent on the personal obedience of the receiver.⁴ Glory and honour rested upon Adam,

⁴ He had no access, even in hope or desire, to heavenly things. His walk was by sight, not by faith. His rest was paradise. God visited and blessed him in that rest. It was as a stricken and de-

while innocence continued in his ways. Shame and dishonour were the immediate effect of his transgression. Death then became the lord of one who just before had held dominion over every living thing. God's counselled purpose of abiding human excellency remained indeed unchanged, but the man whom He had formed from dust was found no fitting vessel to contain that glory, which was the destined portion of the true image and likeness of the living God.⁵

But Adam was a figure of Him that was to come.⁶ The gift of dominion which the first man could not hold, because himself the vanquished slave of sin and death, has passed, with heavenly addition, into the hands of the Second. As might be expected in a Messianic prophecy, the language of Ps. viii., while generally descriptive of paradisaical dominion, is of far more extensive import. *All things* are there made subject to the rule of man. For the Spirit's object in that Psalm is the second Adam, not the first. But things in heaven, as well as things on earth, are comprehended in God's gift to Him. The dispensation of the fulness of times is to witness the supremacy of His Anointed in acknowledged headship over all.⁷

Man therefore is to rule, and all things are to be made subject to his sway. No creature, whether heavenly or earthly, has been exempted from that yoke (verse 7).⁸ But this dominion is as yet a thing

graded outcast from that primal seat of happiness that man first knew by faith the hope of heaven, through the word of gracious promise.

⁵ 2 Cor. iv. 4.

⁶ Rom. v. 14.

⁷ Eph. i. 10.

⁸ It is worthy of remark, as an instance of the unconscious aid which accurate verbal criticism brings to the service of true spiritual exposition, that the words, "And ~~has~~ put all things under His feet,"

*didst set him over the works
of thy hands*

unseen. Its time has not yet come. "We see not yet all things put under Him. But we see *Jesus* crowned with glory and with honour," &c. (verse 9.) The Name and Person of the Man whom God has purposed thus to honour, of Him who alone is worthy to exercise this universal sovereignty, is now more pointedly presented to our view. The object which now fills the delighted eye of Christian faith is not the visible display of Christ's royal glory, according to the title which proclaims Him King of kings, and Lord of lords. For the revelation of His kingdom, the believer is content to wait with hopeful patience, well assured by the promises of Him who cannot lie, that in that mighty and triumphant light He will himself appear.⁹ His present joy is to behold his soul's deliverer at God's right hand. Under the very name and in the self-same flesh, wherein He underwent in grace the pains of her salvation, the Church now sees and worships the exalted Son of Man. We see *Jesus* crowned. It is thus that the Comforter now presents to the eye of faith the "Rejected of men," to fill the joy of all who truly know through grace the saving power of that name.¹

But it is further said, that He who is thus crowned "was made a little lower² than the angels." The

are almost unanimously rejected from the text by modern editors. Occurring as they do in the Psalm from which the apostle is quoting, their absence is in strict keeping with the Spirit's general argument in this passage; which goes to shew that while truth sits crowned with glory in the heavens in the person of the exalted Son of Man, the time for the manifestation of His promised kingdom is not yet come.

⁹ Col. iii. 4.

¹ John xvi. 14; 1 John. i. 4.

² βαχύ τι. Many prefer to render this "For a little while," the expression being equally applicable to time, space, or quantity. The E. V. however, appears to give the truest sense.

Lord from heaven had assumed in self-humiliation a place and form which were the glory of the first created man. He stood on earth a willingly dependent worshipper of God. But He had descended thus in order to be capable of that mediatorial work which none could do who was not really Man.³ It was "for the suffering of death" that Jesus was made lower than the angels. A low abasement for the Son of God! That which in Adam was his highest honour, was to Jehovah's Fellow but the first immeasurable step in that descent for our sakes which had its termination in the grave. Death has no power over angels.⁴ It never reached so high. Its prey is man, by His appointment who judged His sinful creature thus in a redeemable penalty, if only a fit surety could be found. It was for death's sake, then, that Jesus took this lowly place. It is as having died the death which only sin could merit, and died it without sin, that He now wears, as the endless reward of His obedience unto death, the crown of life, and all the honours of the Father's throne. He tasted death for us, that He might prove in resurrection, as the First-born from the dead, the perfect blessedness of life to God: "He liveth unto God."⁵ The incarnation which enabled Him to die, with perfect realization of the bitterness of death, was likewise His ability to tread the path of life in conscious entrance to the joy of Him who raised His Holy One again from death.⁶ But both His obedience and its renewal were for our sakes. Having been made a curse for us upon the cross, He has

³ 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6.

⁵ Rom. vi.

⁴ I do not speak here of the *second* death.

⁶ Ps. xvi.; Acts ii.

also been accepted for us in His resurrection from the dead. The first fruits of Divine salvation have refreshed the lips of the Saviour Himself. As it is elsewhere written: "His glory is great in thy salvation; honour and majesty hast thou laid upon Him. For thou hast made Him most blessed for ever; thou hast made Him exceeding glad with the joy of thy countenance."⁷ Jesus, then, thus crowned and honoured, is disclosed by the Spirit to the ready gaze of faith. And joy is the result—a joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. For in seeing Jesus on the throne, we see the Pattern and Forerunner of all those who now, as justified by the faith of Him, rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

We have, further, in the latter clause of the verse, a statement both of the paramount occasion, and the definitive intent of this descending and ascending of the Son of Man.⁸ It was "in order that He by the grace of God should taste of death for every man."⁹ As in the former chapter, the work of redemption has been celebrated to the praise of His glory, who personally wrought that work; purging thus, both by and for Himself, His people's sins; so here, since the doctrine of Christ's proper humanity is the more prominent topic of consideration, both His humiliation and His exaltation are referred distinctly to the *grace of God*. For if Jesus died willingly, it was because He was obedient unto death. It was at the commandment of the Father that the Son laid down

⁷ Ps. xxi. 5, 6.

⁸ John iii. 13; Eph. iv. 9, 13.

⁹ Ὑπὲρ πάντων. Perhaps, "for every thing" is to be preferred, regard being had to the eventual, as well as immediate results of the Cross. (Comp. Col. i. 20; John xii. 32.)

His life.¹ What, therefore, we are here reminded of is that supreme love of God to man, because of which He sent His only begotten into the world, that we might live through Him.² In commending thus the bitter cup of death to the lips of His Beloved, God manifests His gracious love to us.³

But the glory, not less than the degradation of the Son of Man, was necessary for the effective demonstration of this grace. For if it is by the removal and extinction of their sin through the sacrificial death of Jesus, that God testifies His kindness towards those who by faith now take Him at His word, and, by naming Jesus Christ the *world's* propitiation,⁴ leaves the despisers of His grace without excuse; it is by setting Him on high that He has constituted Him the active dispenser of salvation. For each several vessel of mercy He has tasted death, and has thus entitled each believer to echo the Apostle's bold confession of his faith, "He gave Himself for me."⁵ But, besides this, He is, as seated on the throne which governs all, the hope and stay of all, that whether in heaven or on earth has suffered through the entrance of sin into the world, and which will hereafter own Him (in their several grades, and widely differing spheres) as the Reconciler of the creature to its God.

Having thus shown upon what foundation it has pleased the God of all grace to establish both the individual safety of His people, and the administration of His own eternal kingdom; in the verse

¹ John x. 18.

³ Rom. v. 8.

² 1 John iv. 9; Titus ii. 11; iii. 4.

⁴ 1 John ii. 2, comp. with John vi. 51.

⁵ Gal. ii. 20.

which follows, the apostle opens further the doctrine of God's sovereign goodness in its present application to the Church.

"For it became Him for whom are all things,"⁶ &c. (verse 10.) The wide reach of redemption, as being in its aspect commensurate with the effects of sin, has already been declared. We have now a more definite expression of the special purpose of God, whose counsels of grace and holiness have received their practical efficacy through the death of Jesus. *To bring sons unto glory* was the worthy purpose of the Father of glory. But the natural condition of those whom He contemplated as the objects of this purpose, was that of hopeless alienation from Himself—of mere and total condemnation by the necessity of His holiness. For sinners are not sons of God; but, because conceived in iniquity, they are children of wrath. And such are *all by nature*.⁷ Yet God had provided, in the counsels of His love, for *many* sons. He had ordained a heritage of glory for those whom already He regarded in the nearness of adoption, according to the sure election of His own good pleasure.

But because God set His love upon His children while yet dead in sins, their perfect justification must be first effected before the hope of glory could be theirs. *Salvation* must evince the manner of the Father's love. But again, if God saved sinners, it must be in a way worthy of Himself. If grace alone

⁶ *διὸ ὁὖν τὰ πάντα καὶ δι' οὗ τ.π.* It is interesting to compare with this the language of the apostle in Col. i. 16, when speaking of Christ. What the Father is originally, and in a paramount sense, the Son is effectively, and with a view to manifested glory.

⁷ Eph. ii. 3.

could reach the children's need, that grace must reach them in the way of perfect righteousness. Now it was God's own truth that had riveted the chain of hopeless bondage on the human soul. The very strength of the sin which governed each man's will was in the Law, which, by explicitly declaring the requirements of Divine holiness, made every man a sinner by the verdict of his own conscience, the moment its true power as the word of God was felt within the soul. Man, when defined by the letter of the Law, is a sinner upon whom its curse already lies. To remove the awful burden of this curse, and to raise the chosen vessels of the Father's mercy from the wretchedness of guilty alienation to the righteous liberty of filial acceptance, was the work of salvation. For the doing of that work the Father sent His only-begotten into the world. But the coming of the Saviour in the flesh was His preparation only for the battle of His people's deliverance. To discerning faith, indeed, to look upon the new-born Saviour was to see salvation;⁸ for faith saw in the *Person* of the Lord of life a pledge of the performance of His work. But the declaration of His glory, as the perfect Captain of salvation, could only be made upon the consummation of that victory which was to set His people free. The enemy was there, until triumphantly subdued, to mock His title, and dispute His claim.

This triumphant glory of the Son of man began to dawn amid the darkness of that night on which, because the hour of the Father's will was come, He was betrayed for death into the hands of men.⁹ Al-

⁸ Luke ii. 30.

⁹ John xiii. 31.

ready He had suffered "many things." The patient course of His obedience, as He perfected the cycle of all righteousness, had been accomplished under the weary burden of suspicion and reproach. As the Doer of all truth, He had wrought the Father's will amid the daily contradiction of sinners against Himself. But the honour with which God would glorify Him in Himself—exalting Him to be a Prince and Saviour at His own right hand—must arise from His fulfilment, in His own unspotted Person, of that just and inflexible decree which had made the curse of God the judgment of His people's sins. As disobedience had led man from life to death by the necessary sentence of the righteous Judge, so, by obedience unto death, the sinless Lamb of God would win *in righteousness* the path of endless life for those whose trust should be reposed in Him as the divinely-chosen Captain of salvation. The power of the enemy must cease to act effectually against the objects of the Father's choice, the moment there was found a channel through which the pure desires of Divine and perfect love could reach their righteous aim. The fulfilment, in the life and death of Jesus, of the perfect will of God *for us*, accomplished this. The perfect obedience of the one Man, Jesus Christ, because it stands for ever before God in gratuitous substitution for the bankrupt sinner's debt, as well as in entire acceptance for its own intrinsic worthiness, has opened to the God of holiness and truth the fitting means of compassing His glory as a Saviour.⁹

⁹ The infinite importance of the doctrine of this verse is readily

It thus became the Father of glory to found the title of His Son's abiding honour upon His suffering obedience. More will be said in chapter v. on this most interesting subject; we may note in the meanwhile from another Scripture, how thoroughly the mind of the ever-blessed Sufferer was in sympathy with the thought of Him whom He had come into the world to serve: "The third day I shall be *perfected*,"¹ was His anticipative note of triumph, when about to close His patient labour by repairing for the last time to the city which had slain the prophets, and was presently to fill the measure of her guilt by smiting the Judge of Israel upon the cheek, and numbering the Just One with transgressors. And now the heart's desire² of the obedient One has been fulfilled, and the exalted Christ now again glorifies the Father as His companion on the throne,³ even as when on earth He had glorified Him by His obedience unto death. It is to the praise of the Father's glory, as well as in the exercise of His omnipotent power, that the work of salvation now proceeds; and that work is wrought by means of Jesus' name alone. God thus puts honour on the victory of Him by whom the written law of death has been for ever taken from the children's way, while principalities and powers have yielded up their spoils, and bow beneath the might of Him who, as the fruit of His

perceived by the believer. The *death* of Christ is thus insisted on as the sole ground of all our hope. His *life* alone was profitless to save. For the glory which He gave to God by the perfection of His personal obedience did but the more emphatically sever Him from those who still continued "under sin." The harvest of Divine salvation could only spring from the consignment of the solitary grain of goodness to the dust of death. (John xii. 24.)

¹ Luke xiii. 32, comp. *infra*, chap. xii. 2.

² John xvii. 1.

³ Rev. iii. 21.

great conquest, has made death as well as life His own.⁴

Verses 11–13. The paramount supremacy of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, in the work of salvation, having been declared, and His especial relation to Jesus as the Captain of His many sons' salvation clearly shewn, this branch of the subject is further expanded in the next three verses, by setting forth the nature of the relationship which grace has established between the Saviour and the saved. And, first, there is the general assertion of their oneness—"For both He that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified, are all of one."⁵ The root of this astonishing statement is the Divine generation of the children who are born *of God*.⁶ But that is not the prominent truth of the above expression; it testifies rather the perfection of that gracious identity which Jesus had assumed for ever with those for whose sakes He had suffered in the flesh, in order to become effectually the Captain of their salvation. It is a precious and enduring fruit of the incarnation of the Word that is here presented. Thus only was it that the eternal Son could say "*my God*" to Him who had been the children's refuge, and the portion of their hope, since grace first spoke in promise. By death and resurrection He has raised this blessed fellowship to another and a higher sphere, seeing that thereby the children are exalted in Himself to the wondrous level of communion with the Father's

⁴ Col. ii. 14, 15; Rom. xiv. 9.

⁵ Ἐξ ἐνὸς πάντες. "*Sind alle von einem. [Vater.]*"—DE WETTE. "*Sono tutti d'uno.*"—DIOD. Perhaps it should rather be rendered by "one-wise," or "of one nature," as suggested by some.

⁶ John i. 13.

love. It was the joy of Jesus,—ere He went Himself on high, to lead captivity captive, and to receive gifts for men,—to declare this to the men whom the Father had given to Him out of the world, “I ascend unto my Father and *your* Father, to *my* God and *your* God.”⁷ He is not, then, ashamed to call them brethren; for, as begotten of the Father, they are the equal sharers of that love which satisfies the soul of the Beloved;⁸ while, by the gracious act of incarnation, the living Word has placed Himself for ever within the sphere of human fellowship as the sharer, as well as source, of all His people’s joys.

Three distinct passages are next quoted from the Old Testament, in confirmation of the general statement of the oneness of the Sanctifier and the sanctified. In the first of these⁹ the risen Sufferer of death is presented in the act of announcing to His brethren the perfect name and glory of Jehovah. In the midst of the assembly of His people He declares the God of peace—teaching His true praise to them who now, through the shedding of His own precious blood, are sanctified as worthy worshippers of the one God and Father. The place of the risen Jesus is the midst of the blood-bought Church of God. Himself at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, to represent His people *there*, according to the efficacy of His once shed blood, He is by the Spirit still in the midst of His suffering brethren here below. It is there that He discloses, in the fulness of His gracious love, the riches of the glory of the Father’s name, causing the light of that excellent glory to become the very home of their

⁷ John xx, 17.

⁸ John xvii, 23.

⁹ Ps. xxii, 22.

desires, as they behold in Him who has entered there as their Forerunner, a pattern of that manner of love which the Father already hath bestowed on *them*. He is *their* God in everlasting peace. The glory unto which He is bringing individually His many sons, as He calls successively the vessels of His mercy by the sure word of His grace, already rests *for them* upon the perfected Captain of their salvation. Hence the *natural* language of God's children, even here on earth, is the joyful celebration of His praise through Jesus Christ.¹

In the next quotation² there is a prophetic expression of the personal faith of Jesus while on earth. The seed of David, and the object of the promises, is thus represented as awaiting in perfect confidence the righteous award which in due time should be made to Him who alone is worthy, by the God whom He had glorified in perfect obedience; although for an appointed season His gracious labour might seem to have been spent for nought and in vain, while man and Satan appeared only to prevail.³

The last of these illustrative citations is from Isa. viii. 18. The application of this passage to Jesus, as the disowned of God's professing people, is quite obvious. In like manner as the prophet and the children who received their names from heaven, were signs in Israel from the Lord of hosts, so now, while yet He hides Himself from Jacob, and is as a stumbling-block to both the houses of Israel, the

¹ Rom. v. 11; Phil. iii. 3.

² It is doubtful whether this is taken from the context of the one which immediately follows, or from 2 Sam. xxii. 3. In both passages the LXX. have *πεποιθώς ἔσομαι ἐπ' αὐτῷ*, though the original passages do not exactly coincide.

³ Isa. xlix. 4.

elect vessels of God's calling are gathered by the quickening Spirit to the name of Jesus, and by Him are owned and fostered as the Father's precious gift.⁴ They are the household and family of the world-rejected Son of God.⁵ They are consequently the *witnesses* of God both to gainsaying Israel and to the unbelieving world. It is to them, moreover, as disciples of the truth, that the mysteries of the kingdom, and the hidden wisdom of the God of glory, are revealed.⁶ The glorious mystery of the elect Church, as the peculiar portion of Him whom man rejected, but God has crowned with glory, is indicated rather than declared expressly in the present passage.⁷ It should be well remembered, that the *primary* object of each of these quotations is the establishment and *illustration of the blessed truth, already stated affirmatively* in verse 11, of the Lord's abiding and indissoluble oneness with *all* to whom He stands related as the perfected Captain of salvation.

Verses 14, 15. In close connexion with the doctrine declared and illustrated in the foregoing verses, we have now a restatement of the fact of Divine incarnation in its special bearing on the calling of God's elect. It was *for the children's sakes*,⁸ that the Son of God took part of flesh and blood. This has already been exhibited in its relation to the grace

⁴ John x. 29; xvii. 6, 9, 11, 12.

⁵ *Infra*, chap. iii.

⁶ Matt. xiii; 1 Cor. ii.

⁷ In John xxi. 5, we see the Lord showing Himself after His resurrection to the disciples, as the Father and Provider of those whom God had given Him. It is in this passage alone that Jesus accosts them by the term (*παῖδια*), here found in the quotation from Isaiah.

⁸ The 14th verse expands the force of the quotation from Isaiah viii. 18, so as to make it comprehend not the Church only, but also the nation for which Christ died, and all others who eventually become partakers of the blessings of redemption.

and glory of the Father, who had provided for the fulfilment of His counsels, the perfect Captain of His many sons' salvation. It is here presented in another light. The personal grace of Jesus, and His devotedness of perfect love towards *His own*, are now the nearer object of our contemplation. The purpose of deliverance⁹ was in His heart before He took on Him the children's form. He knew the nature of their bondage, and the sole condition of their emancipation. Because the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He likewise would become partaker of the same. For only thus He might come lawfully within the lists of conflict with the children's foe. Jesus arrayed Himself for *death* by taking thus the children's flesh and blood. For death was the weapon whose sure use should win the victory of their deliverance by destroying once for all him and his work who had the power of death.

Satan's work of sin is perfected in death. God willed it thus; giving the deceiver power over his victim as the minister (in God's own way and season) of the sentence which had righteously been spoken against human sin. That Jesus might enjoy the children as the gift of God, He must first take away the yoke of the oppressor. But because the right of Satan to destroy was founded on the victory of sin, which made man, under all conditions of his natural life, the lawful prey of death, Jesus, who loved the children, though as yet they knew Him not, took also flesh; that in their stead, and under their true likeness, He might undergo that death which should for ever spoil the devil of his claim.

⁹ Verse 15.

The limitation of the atoning work of Jesus to the *children*, as its object, should be carefully observed. The Lord knoweth them that are His own. The Shepherd knew His sheep before He came into the world to give them new and more abundant life.¹

It was for the destruction of the devil, then, by means of death, that the Son of God became incarnate for the children's sakes. He will thus "deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage!" It is the state of the believer's soul while under law that is contemplated in this description. Bondage, not liberty, must be the practical condition of all who are not standing in the conscious liberty of redemption. And such was the state of those Jewish saints who expected the advent of the promised Saviour while themselves personally under Law. They were slaves, not heirs. They were bound, moreover, in a covenant of impossible fulfilment. But the penalty of that hard bond was death. The Law, therefore, *wrought* death. God ministered it through the Law; and Satan was His minister. Thus hope was excluded; and peace could never come to those who only knew the ministry of condemnation. A live-long fear of death pressed heavily upon their souls. Because their consciences were never purged from sin, they could not know exemption from the fear of God's recorded judgment upon sin.² Now "the sting of death is sin, and the

¹ John x. 10, 14.

² This is quite consistent with the presence of a hope in the Divine mercy which the children at all times fundamentally possessed. But the "consolation of Israel" was a wished-for futurity, not an enjoyed blessing, to them that were under the Law. They could not know the blessing of a conscience definitively purged from sin. (*Infra*, ch. ix. x.)

strength of sin is the Law." The death of Jesus once for all to sin³ has removed that sting, and turned that strength to nothingness. The children of the living God now walk in life amid the shades of death. Sin was the devil's work, and death was God's award in righteousness to those who earned such wages through their willing service in that work. But the Son of God was manifested to destroy the devil's works, and so to take away His people's sins.⁴ Having righteously deprived Satan of His power by accomplishing the total will of God, He is free to pass His sentence upon him who was a murderer from the beginning. The guiltless dying of the Lamb of God converts the lawful wielder of death's power into a convicted culprit, for whom vengeance is prepared. He is judged as a conspirator against the children's peace. Already is the judgment of the prince of this world passed. That sentence will be presently fulfilled. The God of peace shall shortly bruise His children's ruthless enemy beneath their feet.⁵

Meanwhile, for the believer, Satan's power over death is already at an end. For a Christian dies no more a *sinner's* death. Already passed from death to life in Jesus, the dissolution of his natural life is but his departure to be for ever with the Lord. He dies, indeed, but not to Satan; nor in the fear which death brings with it as the penalty of sin. He dies to Him who holds him still within His power as Lord of the living and the dead. It is Jesus, and not Satan, who is now associated with death in the mind of a believer. He falls asleep in Jesus, to

³ Rom. vi.⁴ 1 John iii. 5, 8.⁵ Rom. xvi. 20.

wake up in His likeness in due time. Death is therefore no longer an object of just dread to the believer. As the closing scene of a life which is mortal only on account of sin, death must, indeed, when rightly considered, be always a solemnly impressive thing; but the Christian who has truly learned the cross, knows that *there* he has already confronted and subdued the last great enemy of his soul. Death's bitter savour having, by the grace of God, been once the portion of His Son for us, can never be experienced by those whose life is hid with Him in God. We die (if natural dissolution be our lot, because the Saviour carries still) to Him who has the keys of death. In life or death, we are alike *the Lord's*.⁶

Pursuing still the subject of the incarnation and its objects, the 16th verse defines categorically, and by way of contrast, the special subject towards which the positive action of redemption-power is directed: "For, verily, He taketh not hold of angels, but of the seed of Abraham He taketh hold"⁷ (*margin*). The doctrine of the Lord's humanity, and its comparison with angels, have been already treated in earlier verses of the present chapter. Angels are now compared, not with Adam's nature, whether in abasement or in glory, but with the objects of Christ's electing grace. He has assumed as His purchased possession, not angels, but the seed of Abraham. Angels are not the seed of promise.

⁶ Rom. xiv.

⁷ Οὐ γὰρ δέπου ἀγγέλων ἐπιλαμβάνεται. κ.λ. The marginal translation is decidedly preferable to that in the text of our E. V., though that also contains a fragment of the truth which is here occupying the Spirit's mind. The Jewish humanity of the Lord is a point never to be lost sight of. (Comp. John iv. 22.)

Christ is personally such, in fulfilment of the Father's counsel, who, in due time, sent Him into the world. For the birth of Jesus into the family of David, after the flesh, was the accomplishment in His person of the Abrahamic promise. But the same title attaches also to His people, who receive, by virtue of their faith, the common badge of Abraham's lineage. Called and adopted by that appropriative love which makes the Father and the children one,⁸ the saved are thus far identified in privilege and title with the Saviour. For as many as are Christ's are Abraham's seed, by the witness of the Spirit in another place.⁹ We shall presently see within what limits this expression is to be understood in its existing application to the Church. It is to be remarked, in the meanwhile, that the expression, "seed of Abraham," is, as a generic term, descriptive of the entire family of faith. For "they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham."¹ Believers, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, are comprehended in this term.² They that are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. By the Lord's own figure, Abraham's bosom is the rest to which the ministering spirits bore the liberated soul of the neglected child of promise.³

Considered thus, the three expressions, "seed of Abraham," "brethren," and "people" (verse 17), are terms of commensurate signification, their meaning being limited exclusively to the real family of faith. For to such alone do the peculiar blessings of redemption attach. He taketh hold of such. And

Verse 13.

² Rom. iv. 16.⁹ Gal. iii. 29.⁸ Luke xvi.¹ Gal. iii. 7.

never will they fall, nor ever be plucked forth from that sure grasp.⁴ But although the work of redemption is complete, and Jesus sits on high as the triumphant Captain of salvation, yet as it respects the objects of this grace, they are left still, for a season, to suffer in their fleshly bodies here below. We are saved: but our salvation is *by hope*. The subject, which in the preceding verses has been dilated to the wide extent of redemption in its full results, now narrows itself to the special case of those who become actually cognizant (as the Church now is) of their peculiar position as expectant and suffering heirs of salvation: who know, because severally taught of God, both the completeness of their acceptance in the risen Saviour, and the utter contrariety of all that is naturally in themselves to God; who are conscious of deliverance through the victory of Jesus, and yet living continually within the influences of temptation. It is because, therefore, of the present condition of the children in their need, that He who is not ashamed to call them brethren has accepted in His love the priestly consecration at the Father's hands. For their sakes He has sanctified Himself.⁵

Priesthood is an institution not of man, but of God. Its basis is the gracious compassion of Divine holiness. Its object is the people with whom God has chosen, in His own good pleasure, to connect His name. Its moving occasion is the condition of that people, considered with reference to their personal inability to maintain themselves in an acceptable position in the presence of His holiness. Its

⁴ John x.

⁵ John xvii. 19.

end is the Divine glory, through the effectual fulfilment in uninterrupted blessedness of all the covenanted promises of truth. God's consecrated Priest is His own established link between the Blessor and the blest. He is the chosen Intercessor of the people's need, and the authentic Minister of the grace which meets it. He is, moreover, their only medium of accepted worship. The personal qualities of one who should worthily discharge the priestly office must be correspondent to the nature of his appointed ministration. To God and the worshipper he must be equally suitable. The fitness of the Son of God alone to be the High Priest over the house of God, in contrast with His factitious and shadowy precursors of Levitical ordinance, and the corresponding difference in the manner of the people's blessing, are demonstrated, with precious richness of detail, in succeeding portions of the Epistle. In the two concluding verses of this chapter, the subject is introduced in immediate connexion with the doctrine of His incarnation.

It was *needful*,⁶ for the children's sake, that He who was their Captain of salvation should likewise be their faithful and merciful High Priest. We must ever bear in mind that Jesus is not the *world's* High Priest. For the world is not of God. He represents *His own*. He lives to succour and to comfort them whom already He has made the acceptable people of God by the effectual work of reconciliation in the body of His flesh through death. But to fulfil this ceaseless ministry of grace, a perfect knowledge of His people's griefs was re-

⁶ "Οθεν ὤφειλεν. κ. λ.

quisite, as well as an essential capacity to maintain them still unblemished before the face of God. By His patience in the flesh He has acquired this. He has suffered temptation for His people's sakes, and therefore *morally*, as well as absolutely, He is *able* to succour them that are tempted.⁷ Jesus is God's High Priest. "The things of God" are His most sacred charge. And He is faithful to that charge. But it is for the people that He acts; and that people are the brethren of His love. In faithfulness and mercy He is *theirs*.

⁷ The subject of the sympathy of Jesus is more fully treated, in its practical application, at the close of the 4th chapter.

CHAPTER III.

THE perfection of Jesus as the Captain of salvation, and His personal fitness to fulfil all priestly service, having been declared, His blessed Person, under the twofold title of Apostle and High Priest, is now set pointedly before His people's faith as the object of their entire and undivided attention. They had received the testimony which witnessed of salvation through His finished work. They are exhorted now to set their minds exclusively on Him to whom they now belong, who, having saved them from the bondage of the prince of this world, is to be their leader and preserver through the way of pilgrimage, by which the promised glory must be reached.

They are addressed, accordingly, in the first verse of this chapter, under names expressive both of their actual standing as the acceptable people of God, and of the nature of the hope which was to animate their souls, while walking still by faith, and not by sight. They are "holy brethren, partakers of the *heavenly* calling." Already they were sanctified by faith in Him whom God has made His people's *sanctification*, as well as their righteousness and their redemption.¹ By the sprinkling of the

¹ 1 Cor. i. 30.

precious blood of Jesus, they had known, in living power and reality, a separation from the present evil world, of which the paschal night in Egypt had afforded to their fathers a fore-shadowing type. That blood had redeemed them, not only from the fearful penalties of natural sin, but likewise from the vain conversation received by tradition from their fathers.² The yoke that bound their souls, in darkened ignorance of God, to a perpetual exercise of profitless observances, had been dissolved by Him who had blotted out the hand-writing of ordinances, and nailed that covenant, which was the ministration of death, to the cross of Jesus, as a cancelled and vacated bond. In the body of His flesh, through death, a reconciliation had been made whereby they were presented without spot to God. The sanctity which the Spirit recognizes as attaching to the believer, is immediately connected with the truth of the resurrection. A Christian's life is the ascended Christ. The faith which justifies him, acquaints him, also, with the nature of the grace wherein he stands, and makes him know his union with his risen Head, that it is *in the beloved* that He is accepted. The holy separateness of the brethren is thus the effect, not of external observance, nor of inherited privilege, but of a faith which sees in Jesus glorified the truth and vital substance of their hope. Joined to the Lord in the unity of the Spirit, they are (as elsewhere described),³ 'Elect of God, holy and beloved;' and according to their standing, is the nature of their present calling. It is a *heavenly* calling.

² 1 Pet. i. 18.

³ Col. iii. 12.

To the mind of a recently-converted Jew, perhaps no truth was harder to receive, and to retain in unimpaired effect upon his heart and conscience, than the one just stated. For it was a total inversion of his earliest and most deeply-rooted feeling and desire. The *land* of Israel, and the earthly city of solemnities, were to the natural children of the covenant of promise, their boasted portion, and the home of their affections. For the calling of Israel had been an earthly calling. True faith in God could find, indeed, no *rest*, except in Him who had revealed Himself to Abraham as His exceeding great reward;⁴ but, in the meantime, it was with earth and earthly things that Jewish faith had immediately to do. For it was with reference to them that God then dealt with the people which He called His own. God had taken Him a nation from the midst of another nation, when He brought the seed of Jacob out of Egypt. He had redeemed them with a mighty hand, and had ordained His Captain of deliverance to lead them to the place which He had chosen—to the mountain of His inheritance, which he had given to the fathers for their children to enjoy.⁵ The goodly blessings of terrestrial happiness, the rich abundance of all natural enjoyments, were to be the undisturbed possession of the people which Jehovah had called to be His witnesses among the nations, to the glory and holiness of His name, as the Most High God of all the earth. For it was the King of nations who elected Israel for Himself, to be the portion of His heritage in holy separation from the idolatrous darkness of the Gentiles.⁶ If national

⁴ Gen. xv. 1.⁵ Exod. xv.⁶ Jer. x.

sin had forfeited the privileges which, by the covenant of works, were made conditional for their enjoyment on the obedience of the people, and had made the salt bread of captivity the frequent portion of a rebellious house; still, in the words of gracious promise, with which the prophets were commanded to relieve the burden which hewed the loftiness of carnal pride, and brake in pieces the false confidences of a seed of evil-doers, the *land* was ever kept before their view with prominent distinctness, as an object of their chief desire. The promised Hope of Israel, who should purge away iniquity from Jacob, was likewise to establish him in lasting possession of Immanuel's land. The wasted cities should again be raised, and the desolations of many generations be repaired. The double portion of blessing which would banish the remembrance of their former shame, was to be the sure possession of the seed of Israel in the *land* which, for their sins, had been the spoil and derision of the Gentiles.⁷ The height of Zion was Jehovah's mountain of delight and holiness,⁸ and as such was to become the centre of the world's consenting homage when the promised times of restitution should have come.⁹ That He would plant His people ineradicably in the land which He had given them, and win them praise and honour from the families of all the earth, was a promise which had been reiterated by the changeless God of truth.¹

Nor would these pledges fail to be redeemed. For the Rock of Israel is not a man that He should lie—His gifts and callings are without repentance.

⁷ Isa. lxi.

⁹ Acts iii. 21.

⁸ Dan. xi. 45.

¹ Amos ix. 15.

The death of Christ was for that nation² which refused Him, when He came in lowly meekness to fulfil all righteousness; and who will yet discern in Him the Shepherd and the Stone of Israel; when, with unveiled heart, and seeing eye, Jerusalem shall welcome the now hidden Lord of her salvation with grateful and heartfelt hosannahs in Jehovah's name.³

But while the veil remains on Israel's heart, and God has turned to be their enemy for their rejection of His love, a new and hitherto unpromised⁴ work is being wrought, whereby another people shall be formed for God. As He has once assayed to take a nation to Himself from amidst another nation, so now, from *every* nation under heaven, He is calling, by the quickening word of truth, the scattered children of His love. The manner of Jehovah's former dealings, when He formed in Israel's praises a habitation for His name, is here presented as a pattern of those better things which are discovered to the children by the Comforter, who shows to them the things of Jesus. They were an earthly prefigurement of heavenly and lasting truth. The acts which Israel's eyes beheld, and their palpable discernment of Jehovah's goodness in the rich fulfilment of His faithful promise,⁵ find in the faith of

² John xi. 51, 52.

³ Ps. cxviii.; Matt. xxiii. 39. The subject of Israel's present alienation, and future restoration, is more largely treated in my *Notes on the Epistle to the Romans*, chapters ix. x. xi.

⁴ Forming, that is, no part of those "promises" which are Israel's. (Rom. ix. 4.) A promise had been made, indeed, before the world, the manifestation of which is by preaching the Gospel (Tit. i. 2, 3; 2 Tim. i. 9, 10); but the mystery of the Church, which is developed in the present economy, was hidden in God from the beginning of the world, and not made known unto the sons of men. See further as to this, *Notes on the Ephesians*, chap. iii.

⁵ Joshua xxiii. 14.

God's elect, their antitype of more enduring blessedness. As Israel *saw* the carcasses of Pharaoh's host before they raised their song of triumph,—perceiving by *that* witness that in Moses⁶ they had gotten a true captain of deliverance; so now by *faith*, although they see Him not, the true partakers of the heavenly calling rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, in Jesus, as the crowned Redeemer of their souls. God blessed His former people with all natural blessings in a pleasant land. It is with all *spiritual* blessings in *heavenly* places, that believers now are blessed in Christ.⁷ Moreover, to the natural Israel, affliction was a token of Divine displeasure, while ease and outward honour were the sure attendants of Jehovah's favour. But now, since their illumination with the light of life, they whom the Apostle addresses as partakers of the heavenly calling, had endured a great fight of affliction from no other cause. The truth which blessed them with the knowledge of the Father's love in Jesus, exposed them to a daily conflict with an enemy who sought their blood.⁸

It is because of this pervading contrariety of Jewish feeling to true Christian hope, and the practical difficulty which every believing Israelite must find in dating for himself a new beginning from the grave of Christ, in which the former man—the Jew, as well as Gentile—lay buried with his sins,⁹ that with the rich assurances of blessing, which are presently unfolded, there is mingled such a deep and

⁶ *Joshua* is, in another sense, the typical captain of salvation, as he led the people into Canaan. In Jesus we enjoy the antitype of both.

⁷ Eph. i. 3.

⁸ Chap. x. 32; xii. 4.

⁹ Rom. vi.; Col. ii. 11, 12.

earnest tone of warning. In the labour whose object is the presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus, teaching and warning are never separated by the Spirit of God.¹ For the nature of the dangers by which the Christian is surrounded is discovered only in the light of the doctrine which ascertains his true position before God.

They are exhorted, then, as partakers of this new and heavenly calling, to dismiss from their minds the former things, and to fix their whole attention upon Him who is now presented to their contemplation as the Apostle and High Priest of their profession. For thus alone would they be safe from harm to whom their former rest was now become a wilderness of danger and of drought. The power of God could alone suffice to lead His children safely through that waste. By living faith in Him whom God had chosen as the Shepherd of His people, they would glory in that power as their safeguard and their praise.

The separate ministries of Moses and Aaron are united, in the fulness of Divine perfection, in the Person of the Son of God. It is with the former that He is first compared, as the Apostle of His people's deliverance, and the faithful ruler of the house of God (verse 2). The appointment of Moses was to bring the people out of Egypt, and to bear their burden till he brought them to the Rest. Alone with God in the far wilderness of Horeb, he received his commission of deliverance.² He was

¹ Col. i. 28, 29.

² As to the process by means of which he became morally qualified for his mighty task, see the remarks on chap. xi. 24-27.

sent to break the iron yoke of those whose groan of helpless misery had come into the ears of Israel's God. In faithfulness (through the sustaining grace of Him that sent him) he fulfilled that trust. The people knew him, and gave him homage as Jehovah's servant, when they saw the work of their deliverance completed through the power of his mighty rod of office.³ And it was in a way morally resembling this that the heavenly Deliverer had been sent. From the secret of the Father's bosom He had come to do His bidding as the Saviour of His people, when they lay without all strength in hopeless bondage under sin and death.⁴ That gracious mission He had thoroughly effected, and now, in the ascended glory of the once-slain Lamb, His people saw their safety and adored their Saviour. The will of God had faithfully been done, and His will was to save His many children from their sins.

By their redemption out of Egypt, the tribes of Israel were formed into the acknowledged household of Jehovah. Fidelity was found in Moses, as a servant, in his deputed regulation of that house (verse 5). God gave this witness to His servant's honour, though in him, too, was exemplified the intrinsic weakness and unprofitableness of the flesh.⁵ But the glory of which Moses was accounted worthy, as the faithful steward of the house of which he formed himself a part, was far less in measure, as well as different in kind, from that with which we now see Jesus crowned. For Jesus is the BUILDER of God's true and living house (verse 3).⁶ He has

³ Exod. iii.-xiv.

⁴ Rom. v. 6.

⁵ Num. xii. 7.

⁶ Comp. 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

laid its sure foundations in the truth of His own Person as the Christ, the Son of the living God. But it is upon Himself *in death* that He has built the fabric of His glory. In the majesty of His power, as the Resurrection and the Life, He has raised from *that* foundation an abiding habitation for the only wise and blessed God.⁷ Now it is the Builder of all things⁸ who has founded and completed in Himself this spiritual house (verse 4). The Church then is the workmanship of God. From the wide extent of His creation He has gathered, at His will, the lively stones of which that house is built. As no house builds itself, nor can be raised without the skill and method of some competent designer, so, from its foundation to its last details, the house which God inhabits is exclusively the *work* of God.

Verses 5, 6. "And Moses verily was faithful," &c. As then the glory of the Creator exceeds that of His creature, so must the glory of Jesus, as the Builder of the house of God, be exalted above that of Moses. But they are now more particularly contrasted in their several relations to the house when built. Moses was faithful as a *servant* and a *witness*. His ministry had reference to something yet to be. He acted, in his stewardship, in faithfulness to Him who built the house; but the servant could not minister the perfect truth of God. He stood himself within the promises, and saw Jehovah's glory in the

⁷ Eph. ii. 20-22.

⁸ *Ante*, chap. i. 3. ὁ κατασκευάσας. A word has been here chosen by the Spirit which gives the amplest possible description of the Saviour's work. *Wisdom decorates what it builds.* Whether in nature or in grace, the comeliness of God discovers itself to the seeing eye by means of the operation of His hands. (Ps. civ. 24; Prov. viii. and ix.)

mount; but the vail was on his face before the people.⁹ In his actual office, as the mediator of the first covenant, Moses was a minister of condemnation and of death. But in the manner of his ministry, as the maker of the tabernacle, and the establisher of the Levitical priesthood and its rites, he was a prophetic witness of good things to come. But what he testified, both by figurative ordinance and in words of promise, was a veiled and enigmatic mystery to the natural seed of Israel, though in the hearts of God's believing remnant they spoke hopefully of better things. Moses was thus a *preacher* of law, but a *prophet* of grace. The things to which his ministry gave witness "were to be spoken after." The true and living bread of God might not be given to the children by the servant's hands.¹

To the failing² though honoured servant of the former house, Christ is now set forth in contrast as the SON over His *own* house. He has been already glorified in His name of absolute Divinity as the Builder of the house. It is in special relation to the Father that He now appears as the *Son* over His own house. It is, indeed, His own; yet He holds it by *appointment* as the Father's gift. And Jesus is faithful as the ruler of that house. Himself the brightness of the Father's glory, He fills with that radiance the house which He has built. What Moses darkly testified, is now spoken plainly by

⁹ 2 Cor. iii.

¹ John vi.

² No mention is made, in the present comparison, of Moses's failure under the too great burden of the stiff-necked people. It is graciously omitted by the Spirit, whose object here is not to demonstrate the unprofitableness and practical faultiness of man, but to extinguish, in the revelation of the brighter glory, the feebler light, which only burned until that perfect day should rise. (Compare 2 Cor. iii. 10.)

the Son. He preaches *peace* within His house. He brings forth from His own exhaustless store, the bread which satisfies with everlasting life the believing brethren of His love. As Moses was the minister of holiness and truth, to make the people know, in fear, how far they were from God, so Jesus is the minister, in holiness, of finished *grace*, to shew His people into what nearness they are brought through the consummation of the Father's love.³ The house of Jesus is a house of joy. For it stands upon a basis of discovered truth, which makes its happy inmates know that God is love. Sadness and heaviness might well become the servile state of legal bondage. But grace and truth have come by Jesus Christ, to take away the children's prison rags, and clothe them, according to their royal title, with the garments of the rightful Heir.⁴

Believing sinners thus become, by virtue of their heavenly calling, the house of Christ; and it is by the power of God, through faith, that they are thus preserved. Now the first and most natural effects of simple faith are confidence and joy. For "peace with God" is witnessed by the Spirit as the immediate result to the believer of the finished work of Christ.⁵ He stands now with a full acceptance before the living God, as one already quickened through righteousness from his former state of death. For he has access with confidence by the faith of Jesus to that now no longer dreaded presence. But the certainty of his deliverance is likewise the beginning of his *hope*. He finds himself an heir of heavenly promise—a partaker of the heavenly call-

³ 1 John iii. 1; iv. 16-18.

⁴ Rom. viii. 15-17.

⁵ Rom. v. 1.

ing. He knows himself to be forgiven. He finds himself to be, in Christ, prepared for *glory*. To "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" is thus the natural right of those whom grace already has made heirs. Christ is Himself within them as the Hope of glory. He is known as such by the witness of the Spirit, who is the abiding seal and earnest of that hope. It is, therefore, by rejoicing in the bold, though meek and quiet, confession of their hope, that believers show themselves to be the genuine household of the Son. For what soul ever truly tasted Christ⁶ that did not find both confidence and joy in Him?

It is evident that the doctrine here stated, of the headship of the Son over His own house, contains within its principle all that relates either to discipline or personal conduct in the church of God. Elsewhere, accordingly, these subjects are variously presented in their relation to this fundamental truth;⁷ but the present object of the Apostle is not to expand the doctrine to its full extension, but rather to establish the hearts of his brethren in that *vital* godliness which consists in the lively apprehension, by faith, of Jesus as the inseparable *companion*

⁶ Let no self-torturing spirit, that lives in weary fretfulness and barren sorrow upon the bitterness of inward *personal* experiences, think that he is truly tasting Christ. He may be a believer. There are, indeed, too many such, who rarely know abiding confidence or joy, because, instead of exclusively considering Jesus, they are occupied chiefly with themselves. But vainly shall we search in our hearts, as men, for other furniture than what the Lord discovers there. To look for aught but evil in ourselves is to dishonour Jesus as the Word of *Truth*. To attempt to cure the evil that is there by any effort of our own is to deny Him in His ever-blessed work. The strength to *curb* that evil flows directly from the trusted grace of Christ. It is through the *Spirit* that the flesh is overcome.

⁷ Rev. ii. iii.; 2 Tim. ii. 19-21; Titus ii. 14.

as well as the Almighty Saviour of our souls. There only could they be preserved from falling back again under the former dominion of that vain conversation received by tradition from their fathers,⁸ from which Christ had died to set them free.

It is the presence of the master that virtually makes the house. But where Christ's blessed presence is perceived, both confidence and hopeful joy are found. Believers, then, are warned to note these tokens in themselves. Inward hesitation or indifference, is an effect of experimental distance from the Saviour. The life which is in us, as believers, can be preserved from languishing and decay, only by a watchful and assiduous communion with the Lord who is its source. The branch that ceases to abide in Him becomes a sapless and a lifeless branch. The Master also is the *glory* of the house. If Christians are not glorying in Jesus, they have ceased to bear the true distinction of the family of faith. The question here relates to the believer's experimental continuance in the grace of God. God will preserve His many sons, and bring them safe to glory in the wisdom of His grace and power. They are *preserved* in Jesus Christ, as well as called.⁹ But while remaining in the flesh, the word of warning is as needful for the conscience as the word of comfort for the heart. For faith and patience must be put to trial in the experiences of actual life, so long as the believer tarries in a world whose every thought and motion is against the truth of that position which the children occupy as the household of the risen Christ. No addition can be made, intrin-

⁸ 1 Pet. i. 18-21.

⁹ Jude 1.

sically, to the present value of their position; for already they are fully blessed in Christ. They have to *hold firmly fast* unto the end the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope.

The quotation from Ps. xcv., which occupies the five succeeding verses (7–11), is now cited as an earlier¹ testimony of the Holy Ghost, that it may form the basis of the more extended and searching exhortation which the same Spirit now addresses to the brethren of the Son. The provocation of the earthly nation was through the error of their *heart*. They never understood the manner of the God with whom they had to do. They knew His power, and believed His grace, when by faith they passed the sea which swallowed up the host of Pharaoh.² They loudly sang His praises who should bring the people to His place of rest, as He had led them forth in mercy by His own redeeming power. But they did not consider that their calling, as Jehovah's people, was to learn *His way*. They longed exceedingly to taste the goodly blessings of His land; but they understood not that He was *Himself* the portion of His people. Not knowing Him aright, they would not trust Him in their hearts; and not trusting Him, they could not tarry for His counsel.³ Interpreting the Promises according to the eagerness of selfish expectation, their confidence was turned to faintness, and their joy to thankless discontent, when they saw that Canaan might be only reached

¹ A testimony delivered by the Spirit of prophecy, with an especial reference, I believe, to the future condition of the ransomed nation, but here applied, by an obvious analogy, to the partakers of the heavenly calling as the only house which God now owns.

² Chap. xi. 29.

³ Pss. lxxviii. cvi.

by paths which none but God could find, and through a wilderness where none might live but such as He immediately sustained. While Moses knew the secret of His ways, it was by ostensive acts alone that Israel, as a nation, knew the God who had redeemed them, whether for exultation, or in deadly fear. Jehovah's presence was the safety, as well as glory, of the house which He had formed; and well His servant knew this when, pleading for the stiff-necked people, he refused to lead them as his own.⁴ The people hailed that presence with a shout of triumph, and fell upon their faces with mingled reverence and delight, when, at the visible uplifting of the hands of mediatorial and priestly benediction, they beheld Jehovah's manifested glory, and knew that Aaron's blessing was commanded from on high upon His people, in token of His favourable presence, by the fire which consumed before their eyes the accepted offerings of His altar.⁵ Yet ignorance of His nature and His way was still within their hearts. They rebelled and vexed His Holy Spirit by *their* ways. And when He gave fresh tokens of His nearness and His power, to confirm, by new and special sanction, the chosen witness of His name, although murmuring was turned to abject dread, the people's heart remained rebellious still.⁶ For nature never willingly consents to God. Its selfish heart can never cleave to Him. It seeks its own. God's gifts and blessings are desired, not to be enjoyed with *Him*, but for itself. And Israel was a fleshly nation. Divine election kept a seed of grace, whose *hearts* were circumcised, within the multitude

⁴ Exod. xxxiii.⁵ Levit. ix. 22-24.⁶ Numb. xvii.

who only stood on their hereditary claim as Abraham's natural seed ; but the rest were a stiff-necked generation, a people of no pleasure before God.

But Israel's provocation in the wilderness is exemplified by the Spirit for the admonition of the Church.⁷ The frequent stroke, which bruised but did not kill their folly, is meant to act, through its divinely-kept memorial, as a warning of instruction on the children's hearts.⁸ Egypt's gods and Egypt's pleasures were the snares which took the earthly people in the net of their destruction ; but apostasy of *heart* from God was the root and bitterness of their transgression. And the unbelief which was its cause is still the snare of destruction to those who only have a name to live.⁹ Accordingly, in what now follows, the whole weight of the Spirit's exhortation is directed to that point (verses 12-19). *Departure from the living God* was the one vital danger against which they were to guard.

By faith in Jesus they had been brought nigh to God. The precious blood of their redemption was also their separation in holiness as the family of God. Grace had established this nearness in the accepted Person of the Son of God. They had been by faith translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. By the unction of the Spirit they were made to know that they were holy brethren whom the First-born did not blush to own as His. They were made partakers of Christ¹ (verse 14) by the faith

⁷ 1 Cor. x. 11.

⁸ Prov. xvii. 10.

⁹ Titus i. 15, 16.

¹ Μέτοχοι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, "fellows," or companions of Christ. *Ante*, chap. i. 9, and the remarks there made. A Christian is, in a double sense, a partaker of Christ. He has a personal interest in Him as his Captain of salvation. He is, by grace, His fellow heir, a participator with Him of the blessings of the Father's house.

which brought them from a state of natural ruin and religious bondage to be the children of the house of God. As having tasted in the word of Gospel truth the riches of the Father's grace, they were fitted to become acquainted with His holiness in love. Communion, unreserved and diligently cultivated, with the Father and the Son, is the manner of the children's walk who yield themselves without reluctance to the leading of the Spirit of adoption.²

The saints who are addressed in this epistle had witnessed, both in word and deed, a good confession of their faith. They had borne afflictions bravely for the name of Christ. For their knowledge of the heavenly inheritance, they had taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods.³ Moreover, for the love of God they had bestowed a labour on His saints which should not fail of its reward.⁴ These things might be, and were; and yet ample room existed for the caution here expressed. Danger surrounded them on every side. The heart of unbelief, which barred the land of Canaan from their natural fathers, was yet within their flesh. Not only were the lusts of nature in their ordinary shape for ever combating against the will of God; they were exposed also to a more specious, and therefore a more dangerous, form of evil in the still existing rivalry which they who made their boast in their traditions were zealously opposing to the cross of Christ. Of all the evils with which Satan can afflict the heart on this side atheism, religion, without faith in God, is by very much the worst. For it lulls the conscience, while it weaves its web of unblest, unsanctifying

² Ro. viii. 14; 1 Jno. i. 3-7. ³ Chap. x. 32-34. ⁴ Chap. vi. 10.

exercises about the heart's affections, so as effectually to exclude the light of God. It was to this peace-corroding yet seductive evil that the Jewish Christian stood peculiarly exposed.

Now the remedy and safeguard against all evil is the truth of God. It is only by listening to the word of Him who speaks to us as children with a knowledge of our need, that believers can be kept in their true place. The *possession* of truth in the way of doctrine is not enough. God *daily* speaks, and must be daily heard, if we would know Him as our Shield.

Moreover, there is in this phrase, "to-day," a forcible appeal both to the hearts and consciences of God's elect. *To-morrow*, considered as a link in the uncertain chain of life, is not our own. From the station which we occupy to-day, as obedient listeners to the word of grace, our prospect is the glory unto which we are prepared. True wisdom teaches us so to measure our pilgrimage as to look upon each day of patience as (not possibly only, but even) *probably* the last; reckoning on no other morrow than the surely approaching day of Jesus Christ. And if thus placed on our watch,⁵ our opened ears will surely find the Shepherd's voice addressing us in very varied tones. For the believer, as a partaker through faith of the risen and ascended Christ, *all* the circumstances and experiences of the present life are vocal with the words of Him who now "fills all things."⁶ Prosperity and adversity, disease and health, progression and decline in spiritual growth, each give occasion to the faithful watcher of our

⁵ Habakkuk ii. 1, &c.

⁶ Eph. iv. 8, 16.

souls, and have each their language as interpreters of Christ. Especially, however, it is the written word of grace that conveys to us the needed admonition and support.⁷

Characteristically, the evil which besets the Christian, as a partaker of the *heavenly* calling, is the love of *earthly* things.⁸ To walk therefore, by faith, in the power and enjoyment of the risen life, beholding the invisible but eternal objects of our hope,⁹ is the true practical assertion of the liberty of our calling. It is the *living God* to whom the children are exhorted here to cleave. To be occupied with the world is to be engaged with death; for by the cross of Christ the world is crucified to the believer.¹ The Father's things are not those of the world, they are opposed to them exactly. God only joys in Christ, who is rejected of the world, and is in heaven. Natural objects and pursuits are the things which feed the hopes and interest the minds of natural men, whose life is to themselves, and not to God.

The things of the Spirit are the proper objects of attention to the spiritual man. As a pilgrim of salvation, he is warned against the fleshly lusts which war against the soul. It is the will of God, and the enabling power of the Spirit, that are opposed in the believer to these lusts.² But it is not outward evil only that separates the heart from God. A Christian has to ask himself a reason for his ordinary ways. Is he living *now* with reference to heaven or to earth? For sin is a deceitful thing (verse 13). Things intrinsically harmless when considered in

⁷ 2 Tim. iii. 18, 19.

¹ Gal. vi.

⁸ Phil. iii. 19.

² 1 Pet. ii. iv.; Gal. v. 17, 18.

⁹ 2 Cor. iv. 18; v. 7.

themselves, nay, even some of those which are in name and outward appearance *spiritual* things, works multiplied professedly *for* God, may easily become a hindrance to the heart's communion with God. The first love may be quite gone off, while outward diligence has suffered no abatement.³ The fear of the Lord is an abiding correlative to the comfort of the Holy Ghost, in the order of a saint's experience.⁴ If what he does is not in faith, it is not wrought in God. But whatever is not done in faith is *sin*.⁵

The word is addressed to them severally: "lest *any* of you," &c. But incessant *mutual* exhortation⁶ is the instrument which God has ordained for the maintenance of practical faith and godliness among His saints. It was to be a remedy of daily use. While the day of patience lasted, they were thus to succour one another from the deceitfulness of sin. It is not open evil that is spoken of, but the slow, imperceptible waning of the soul's affections from the living God; the gradual induration of those hearts which, when nourished by the sure milk of the word, were soft and tender in the sweet enjoyment of Christ's love.⁷ They were to care thus for

³ Rev. ii. 2-4.

⁴ Acts ix. 31.

⁵ Rom. xiv. 23.

⁶ Two things are implied in this exhortation; 1st, the recognized unity of the body; and 2nd, the healthy action of its individual members. They were brethren; they were partakers of the heavenly calling; they are exhorted to act as such. God and the world were the two great objects of their attention—the one to be dwelt in, the other to be shunned. They followed no divided Christ. It is humiliating to have to ponder such passages in the presence of existing facts. Still, if the Church be ruined in its outward walls, the life and sure foundation of the building standeth fast. Meanwhile, let those who fear the Lord in this, their day of evil, speak often to each other in His name.

⁷ The first and most sure symptom of this hardening of heart is an impatience of the fundamental truths of God. When knowledge is preferred to love, departure has already taken place from God.

one another's souls, as already they had proved their forwardness in ministering to their brethren's outward wants.

They were made partakers of Christ, if they held the beginning of their confidence steadfast to the end (verse 14). This settlement of soul which they are here exhorted to maintain, was the primary effect of their reception of the grace of God.⁸ And as they had begun, they should continue to the end. For there *is* an end; the patience of the wilderness is for a measured while. They had entered on the journey full of an eager and happy assurance; for by faith they had already grasped the substance⁹ of their hope. By faith, too, they must hold that substance fast. By considering objectively the Apostle and High Priest of their confession, they would keep the place, and know the blessings of the house of God. It was when Moses ceased to be before the people's eyes, that the terrible apostasy of Israel's heart took place.¹ It is when believers cease to enjoy, by daily exercise of faith, the glory and perfection of their ascended Head, that natural things

Notions of personal growth and increase in spiritual attainment, rather than a watchful dying daily to one's self, that Christ alone may dwell in the heart by faith—thrusting out self in all its forms—are often symptomatic of the same disease. Sin, as a deceiver, may infect the soul through any one of the innumerable avenues which the varieties of human character present to Satan, as the tempter of God's people. The whole armour of God can alone resist his wiles.

⁸ Col. i. 6.

⁹ There is a variation, not without significance, in the language of verse 6 from that of verse 14. *Παρόρησία* is the word which, in the former verse, is rendered "confidence." In the latter it is *ὑπόστασις*. The bold and joyful confession of early love is to be perpetuated through a deepening acquaintance with the solid nature of the blessing. (See further as to this latter term, *infra*, xi. 1.)

¹ Exod. xxxii.

resume their hold upon the heart, and the true glory of the house is gone.

On the remainder of this chapter (verses 16-19), much need not here be said. Yet it is a passage of solemn import to such as heed the certain testimonies of the Spirit respecting the progress and final results of the existing dispensation of longsuffering mercy.² Not all provoked, though with the greater number³ God was not well pleased. Them that believed not God destroyed. They fell in the wilderness, because they did not know the ways of God. So is it, and so must it be, in the history of the professing Church. Profession gives to him who makes it a name and pretension as a member of God's house. But His kingdom is not in word, but in power; and powerless formality is the predicted symptom of apostasy in its maturest growth.⁴ The living Way which leads into His rest is Christ, who is Himself His people's Refuge and their End. By faith alone that way may be observed, even as it is by electing grace that it is opened to the soul. The children's faith is not their own; it is the gift of God. Nor does He ever take away His gifts, which, like His calling, are without repentance.⁵ It is His will to bring His many sons to glory. The good work of His own beginning He will perform until the day of Jesus Christ.⁶ Yet are the Spirit's warnings not superfluous, although addressed to those who already are in Christ. God's children need the guidance of His word, for it is by that word that He saves them from the paths of the destroyer. By its

² 2 Pet. iii. 9, 10.

⁴ 2 Tim. iii. 5.

³ *Τοῖς πλείοσιν.* (1 Cor. x. 5.)

⁵ Rom. xi. 29.

⁶ Phil. i. 6.

light alone His people may walk safely through the darkness of this world. Thus, although these warnings sketch forth to us prophetically the features of an apostasy yet deeper than its type, they comfort while they warn the souls of those who in simplicity of faith can mingle confidence and joy with reverence and godly fear.

CHAPTER IV.

THE exhortation is continued, and attains its climax in the present chapter. The word of promise had been preached to Israel, yet Israel fell. The word which spoke to them of Canaan had failed to profit them that heard it. It was a word of blessing and of goodness in itself; but it was not an *engrafted* word;¹ it was not mixed with faith in them that heard it.² Because of unbelief they had despised the pleasant land; and God dishonoured those who disbelieved the sure word of His truth.³ But this example has been set forth in the Scriptures for our sakes.

It behoved, then, the believing Hebrews to fear, lest such a case should seem to be their own. By natural generation they were descended from this unbelieving ancestry; and they, too, had in their turn received a word of promise. God's rest was set before them clearly in the gospel as the object of their hope (verses 1, 2). But God had not changed.

¹ Jas. i. 21.

² Instead of the usual reading, some of the more recent editions have *μὴ συγκεκρασμένους τῇ πίστι. τοῖς ἀκούσασι*, the meaning of which is, that the former promise did not profit them, since they were not mingled by their faith among those who did believe. It is a doubtful point, and one of secondary interest; the moral being, in either case, that faith must respond to testimony, or blessing cannot come.

³ Numb. xiv.

His promise *now*, as then, can profit only when held fast by faith. It is that the children's faith may stand, not in vain words, but in the power of God, that the word of admonition is thus searchingly applied.

We have seen that confidence and joyful hope are the just and permanent effects of believing in the Son of God. But the same Spirit who establishes the justified believer in a hope which maketh not ashamed, because He sheds abroad the finished love of God within the children's hearts, is the Counsellor who now exhorts *to fear*. For dangers lie about the narrow way of life. It is a path of safety and of peace to them that walk therein; but on every side it is observed by a watchful and untiring foe. It is therefore needful for the pilgrim to be well advised respecting the manner of his journey, and the nature of the perils which beset his route.

The emphasis of Gospel warning is according to the characteristic principle of Gospel truth. It stands, that is, in precise opposition to the warnings which were given by the Law. The children are exhorted to behold in *Jesus* what the servant was directed to search for in *himself*. The danger to be dreaded in the latter case was on the side of God, who, as a Judge, was ready to award a blessing or a curse, according to the equality, or otherwise, of His people's ways. But the Christian's dread is of another kind. It is not God who is against him, but Satan and himself, for it is chiefly through our natural propensities that Satan acts against us as the great opposer of our peace. A believer has no future reckoning of doubtful issue, to the decision of

which his hope of life must be postponed; for his life is kept in God with Him who died for him, and rose again. His danger is, lest being nothing, he should begin to think himself of some account—lest in any way the *cross of Christ* should be practically frustrated and forgotten in his ordinary course of life. The counterpart of confidence in God is self-distrust; it is the man who thinks he stands who is in nearest danger of a fall.⁴ Doctrine will not maintain us in a state of conscious blessing, without a present exercise of faith. Christian life is kept in vigour by *eating* the flesh, and *drinking* the blood, of the Son of man. He has appointed that as our daily portion. It is the necessary diet of the soul.⁵

Satan is the sleepless enemy of the believer. We have therefore to keep vigilant and sober watch against his wiles. As a tempter to moral evil, he is to be suspected and anticipated by the diligent addition of the several things which make faith strong to bear the fruits of holiness.⁶ But as a deceiver and flatterer of the heart he is to be yet more dreaded; for it is in his own self-righteous heart (itself the credulous dupe of the father of lies,) that the Christian finds his deadliest foe. Essentially enmity against God, it is sufficiently deceitful to assume all forms, and counterfeit all semblances, of real devotedness to God. That outward conformity to Jesus, which is only to be truly caught and kept by looking on Him with the eye of grateful and adoring faith, is attempted often in the mere vanity of the fleshly mind. For it is only too possible for men to give outward homage to the Son

⁴ Prov. xvi. 18; xxviii. 14.

⁵ John vi.

⁶ 2 Pet. ii.

of God as their Captain of salvation, while for the attainment of their hope they are inwardly trusting to their own endeavours. Alas! how many thousands think they stand, because familiar with the nomenclature of a sound profession, while as yet the true seed of the great salvation has not begun to germinate within their hearts. But to err in this matter is a fatal thing. Nothing done on our parts *for* Jesus can be accepted as an equivalent for that faith which gives Him his true glory, by receiving and rejoicing in Him as our full and perfect Saviour. To the genuine children of the Father He is *all* their confidence and *all* their peace, seeing that He has been made to them of God their wisdom; even their righteousness, their sanctification, and their redemption.⁷

Of the multitudes who are desiring a portion eventually in the promised rest, many, it is to be feared, are endeavouring to enter it by devious and forbidden ways. Men are everywhere to be found who look to works, to knowledge, to purpose, to repentance, to practical amendment, nay, to faith itself, who do not look to *Jesus*. Yet He is the only Way of entrance to that rest. In the judgment, therefore, of Him who spake the promise, and who knoweth well the children that are His, such as are above described will seem to have come short. No natural pretension can ever touch the fruits of promise. The damning evidence of a neglected Christ will close the gates of blessedness for ever against such as strive to enter in some other way.

It is thus that, in the warnings of Scripture, judg-

⁷ 1 Cor. i. 30, where note the structure of the original.

ment is pronounced by anticipation against those who presumptuously trifle with the Gospel. But such language is intended also to have a widely different effect in admonishing the genuine believer, and thus enabling him practically to keep the way of truth. As therefore it respects the weak but real Christian, against whose tender conscience the Apostle's exhortation may be falsely directed by the enemy, let him consider that the very object of the warning contained in these verses is to perpetuate in the believer's mind, that through sense of personal worthlessness, and conscious impotency for all good, which, by the grace of God, first made the name of Jesus grateful to his ears. The passage does not teach the manner of the sinner's justification; but it applies a searching test whereby to ascertain whether Christ or self is in the hearts of those who by outward profession seek the rest of God.

It is an evil thing for the believer, when circumstances are suffered so to act upon his mind as to exclude God from his immediate contemplation as the God of *promise*. He *is* this, always and under all circumstances. He is, indeed, much more. But He never ceases to stand specifically and absolutely in this relation to the Christian. Hope will abound, with fruitful progress in the way of well-pleasing, according to the simplicity with which the most sure promises of God in Christ are lived on and enjoyed. There is no appearance of deficiency⁸ in

⁸ I feel some doubt as to the exact interpretation of the words in verse 1, *μήποτε δοκῇ τις ἐξ ὑμῶν ὑστερηκεῖναι*. I have already referred it to the Lord's discrimination in judgment between the true and the false in His kingdom. It seems, however, capable of a present moral application (such as is made above,) to the real

those who are happy, while the only reason of their happiness is Christ;⁹ who are busy and in earnest, but whose things are done in the power of that charity which is of God;¹ whose desire is to live *to* Jesus, as they live by faith *in* Jesus; who do not dishonour Him by suspicion of His love, but who know and recognize with a joy too grateful and too deep for words, the certain tokens of the Shepherd of the sheep, in the exalted Son of man;² who trust by Him to enter soon the rest of God, and who desire to be there because the Lord is there, who is their life. With much or little fruitfulness, it is the soul that *cleaves to Jesus* that will gain the rest of God. For,

Verse 3. "We which have believed *do enter*³ into the rest," &c. It is thus that the Holy Ghost declares the certainty of their success whose "helpless souls are ventured upon Jesus Christ alone." For the security of their entrance is the faithfulness and sovereign power of Him that promised; God's

believer in his ways. Both senses are admissible, and both, I believe, to be intended in a passage which serves at once as a wholesome warning for the quickening of spiritual growth, and a predictive foreshadowing of ruinous apostasy.

⁹ Phil. iii. 3.

¹ 1 Cor. xvi. 14; 1 John iv. 7.

² John x. 11; Rev. v. 6.

³ *Εἰσέρχομεθα*. It is by some preferred to render this by "are entering," in order to bring out into clear light the comparison, which runs through the whole of the Apostle's teaching in this passage, between the former and the present dealings of the Lord with His people. They were on their journey—so are we, &c. My objection to this view is, that while stating an undoubted truth, it tends to weaken the force of the accompanying words: "We which *believe*"—faith's privilege ever being to embrace and hold the *substance* of all God's promises in Christ. If the reasoning of the Apostle is to be taken in its more extended application to the professing body, as distinguished from the election, the rendering above noticed might be preferable to the one given in the text. But such a construction of the passage appears to me both to limit and to weaken its true force.

promises being but the echo of His will to the believing ear. And it is His will to bring by Jesus His many sons to glory.⁴ In the present verse, and those immediately following (3-10), the subject of the rest is more expressly treated, and the moral analogy of the present work of God in conducting the Church to her appointed rest, to His former dealings with Israel after the flesh, is yet more fully shewn. That God has a rest, and that that rest is to be enjoyed by His people, are the two fundamental truths on which the reasoning of the present passage turns. The land of Canaan was not the eventual rest of God.⁵

In examining these verses, we must bear in mind, that it is the partakers of the *heavenly* calling who are addressed. God is *now* speaking of a rest, in the Gospel of His grace. The work of creation had been finished from the foundation of the world. God saw that work, and, for a moment, took His rest in it,—finding His pleasure in the fair production of His own almighty power. Eden was *man's* rest with God; it was the fitting abode of natural innocence and terrestrial happiness. But it was not the place of *God's* abiding rest. Creation and its rest were shadows of things mightier and more blessed than themselves. The glory in which God would find, with the children of His love, the realization of His eternal thoughts of rest, would crown

⁴ John vi. 39; *Ante*, ii. 10.

⁵ The oath of exclusion was originally, that the despisers should not enter into the *land*. (Numb. xiv.) In Ps. xciv. the Spirit of God alters the expression from אֶרֶץ to מְנוּחָה, doubtless with reference to the use to be afterwards made of the passage in its present application.

another and yet more marvellous work than that first visible display of power.

Under the Law, the seventh day (verse 5) which God had sanctified and blessed as a memorial of His first creation-rest, fulfilled a twofold purpose. It was a standing witness of rest broken and destroyed by sin; it was a type also and promise of another rest, whose unbroken security should abide in the power of fulfilled redemption. It was in itself the very clearest and most emphatic witness of the unfitness of man, once fallen, for fellowship, in his natural state, with God. The enforced observance of a day of rest, under mortal penalties upon the least indulgence of men's natural inclinations, places the willing contrariety of the creature to the Creator in the strongest light. But discord of will makes rest, in the moral meaning of the word, a thing impossible. The Jewish sabbath might be, and was to the carnal worshipper, a day of restraint, but could not be a day of real enjoyment. And as with the sabbatic institution, so also was it with the land of earthly promise. Canaan might flow with milk and honey, and be the very land of God's desire; but it could be no abiding rest for those whose hearts were alien from God. The generation to whom its goodness was first reported by the word of faithful promise, entered not in because of unbelief. The generation who succeeded, and whom Joshua brought in, defiled that rest by their iniquities, until the place which God had chosen for His name was become to Him as Sodom for their sakes. To the opened ear of those who trembled at His word, and who, in full confession of the land's

pollutions, came still to the sure Covenant of promise, another rest lay distantly in view. The land which iniquity had polluted, would lose her iniquity on an appointed day.⁶ The places which Jehovah had dishonoured and forsaken would again be visited, and be again acknowledged throughout all the earth as a praise and glory to His name. There would be a performance *to the nation* of the nation's promised blessings. Meanwhile, they who lived in sorrow, as a remnant of faithfulness in the midst of national apostasy, died hopefully, in prospect of that *better* country which had always been the ultimate object of the fathers' hope.⁷

God, who had disallowed His earthly people and His land, spoke still in prophecy of a rest to come (verses 7, 8). The date of the prophetic testimony is defined. It was by David that God spake, long after the futility of any hope of permanent national prosperity under the conditions of the Mosaic covenant had been practically demonstrated. A *day* is now spoken of on which God's people are to enter on their rest. When Jordan's flood was driven back, it was to open, at the bidding of the God of Jacob, a passage for His people to the promised land. But Joshua⁸ did not give them rest. It could not be. The thorns and briars with which God filled the nation's sides, were the tokens of the people's natural incapacity to taste His rest.⁹ The solemn and fearful

⁶ Zech. iii. 9.

⁷ Chap. xi. 15.

⁸ The reader is, of course, aware, that it is the son of Nun, and not the Son of God, whose name is mentioned in verse 8. By a too strict fidelity to the letter, the translators have helped to darken, rather than explain, the sense, both here and in Acts vii. 45.

⁹ Judges ii. 1-3.

preliminaries which Jehovah's holiness made necessary, that the land might be inherited as His, were never from the first effectually performed. Israel, then, had never really known the promised rest. But by the sure word of prophecy it is kept in reserve for the nation for which Jesus died. When Israel has been born a second time, and righteousness becomes the praise of those who now are scattered as a sinful nation, both rest and glory will be found within Immanuel's land.¹

The ninth verse stands, in the order of the argument, in immediate connexion with the sixth. It states the conclusion of the foregoing reasoning, with a view to its immediate and special application to the partakers of the heavenly calling. A rest had been promised. Some, therefore, must enter it. But it had not yet been entered by them for whom it was prepared, for Canaan, in its conquest by Josuha, was no promised abiding place for the people of Jehovah. Israel, then, had not attained the rest of God. Moreover, Israel are not now a people; they are *enemies*, as concerning the Gospel in which God now speaks.² Yet God has a people, and to them the Holy Ghost speaks daily of the rest to come. Now they whose confidence and rejoicing are in Jesus Christ, are the people of God.³ And they which believe do enter into rest: already, in spirit; presently, in fact. But the time of patience, and with it, also, of daily warning, yet runs on. There remains, then, to God's waiting people, a sabbath-keeping⁴ of abiding joy.

¹ Ps. cxxxii. 13, 14; Isa. lx. 21; Ezek. xxviii. 24.

² Rom. xi. 28.

³ Rom. xi. 28.

⁴ Such is the literal meaning of the very rare word in the text. *Σαββατισμός* is found only here in the New Testament, and not at

The strong assurance of prospective rest to the believer is now confirmed by a reference to the Doer of the work to which that rest succeeds. "For He that is entered into His rest hath ceased,"⁵ &c. God rested from His finished labour of creation on the seventh day; but sin had entered and disturbed that rest. As, therefore, the glory of that first work had been defaced, and the blessing which had crowned it was blighted by a penal curse, another and *imperishable* work must needs be wrought, in order that He whose desire and intent were to display and to communicate the blessedness inherent in Himself, might attain an end worthy of His name.

Man, who bore His own image having been alienated through sin, nothing but a *perfect* reconciliation—one, that is, which should both righteously obliterate the sin and convert the enmity to love, could suffice for this end. And there was found in the incarnate Son of God, a Workman fitted to that work. For God only can do perfectly the will of God. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," was the word of Jesus, to those who watched Him with an evil eye in His gracious doing of His Father's business. Salvation is, indeed, the work of God. God rested from creation. God rests now from the finished labour of redemption. But in the manner

all in the LXX. It is obviously formed from the verb *σαββαρίζειν*, which in the latter signifies, "to keep the Sabbath;" *e. g.*, *Exod.* xvi. 30; *Levit.* xxiii. 32, &c.

⁵ The authorized version does not bring out the just force of this passage, which runs thus: 'Ο γὰρ εἰσελθὼν εἰς τὴν κατὰπαυσιν αὐτοῦ, καὶ αὐτὸς κατέπαυσεν ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων αὐτοῦ ὡς περ ἀπὸ τῶν ἰδίων ὁ Θεός. Professor Scholefield has justly noticed this, whose translation is as follows: "For He that is entered into His rest hath himself also rested from His works, as God did from His own." DE WETTE's translation is in literal agreement with this.

of its doing, the work of redemption stands most strikingly contrasted with the former work. The majesty of Divine power was the commanding energy which raised the creature at His word; it was in the lowly form of a rejected Man, that the Son of God fulfilled, by suffering, the work of a Redeemer. But the work was finished and complete. Already we have seen the Workman crowned with glory and honour at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Jesus has gone into His rest. He has ceased to labour, and being now set down upon the throne above as the Fulfiller of the work of God, He is become the perfect Sabbath of God's full delight.⁶ God rests in Him. But because, as the Doer of the will of God, He had wrought in man's likeness and for men, He has at the same time become His people's everlasting rest. They, too, have ceased from their works, as He ceased from His. They had toiled long in bondage, and had found no rest. They were imprisoned without help, within themselves. By the dying of the Lamb of God, they have been now set free. To be found therefore in Him, not having their own righteousness, but that which is of God by faith, is now the one desire of the spiritual man.⁷

The blessed results in perfect rest of that once-finished work will presently be felt, not only in the heavenly places, where principalities and powers already own the Reconciler of the creature in the throne of God,⁸ and where the Church (already crowned with blessings there in Him) will taste the perfect consummation of her happiness; but like-

⁶ Col. ii. 17.

⁷ Phil. iii.

⁸ Col. i.; 1 Pet. iii. 22.

wise to the creature here below, which groans on still in expectation of that day of joy.⁹ But in the present passage, the Spirit is not opening in detail the glories of that rest. He is rather demonstrating its existence, and exhorting us to its attainment. Accordingly, he proceeds,

Verse 11. "Let us therefore labour to enter into *that* rest," &c. At the beginning of this chapter, when, after reciting the catastrophe of those who fell, he warns us against highmindedness and carnal confidence, his word is, "Let us *fear*." But now that he has anew declared to us the verities of promise, and shown us God's sure preparation for His people's rest, in the completed work of Jesus, his exhortation to his brethren is to *strive*. The way was one of doubtful length as well as full of difficulties; they should therefore hasten on. They should beware of lingering where danger was on every side. The world, the flesh, and the devil, were about their path. The rest was beyond and above them; and Jesus went before their face to bring them to that rest. Safety was to be found in diligence and earnestness—in keeping their Fore-runner evermore in view. Thus he seeks to animate their courage, and to stimulate the desires of his fellow pilgrims, whose condition called for words of cheer, as well as for the faithful warning of the Shepherd's voice.

Salvation is the business of Christian life. Because the believing sinner finds a Saviour in the Son of God, his interests are now with his Deliverer, and not with that from which he has been saved. He is

⁹ Rom. viii. 19-22.

to work out his own salvation by persisting in the first beginning of his trust. He is to hold it fast until the end. With fear and trembling, yet with confidence and joy, he is to stand fast in the Lord, and in the power of His might. He has to hasten, and he likewise has to strive; for Christian life is both a conflict and a race. He is to fear and suspect things visible and natural. He is to pursue with eagerness things heavenly and spiritual. As the minding of things earthly is the token of the heart's aversion from the Lord,¹ so, by beholding in faith's glass the glory of the Lord, the children of God are through a daily transmutation, to be likened to the image of that glory as by the Spirit of the Lord.² It was the more excellent knowledge of the Son of God that enabled him, who is the standing pattern of the Christian's way, to count all else but loss. *Nothing* was left in his esteem below the heavens, which, in containing Jesus, held the sum of all desire. The very things which once had been his ornament, he now avoided as a loathsome thing. Things which were once enjoined of God Himself, were no longer with him as a present truth. The ancient ordinances had fulfilled their use. The schoolmaster had done his work. The Law and its factitious righteousness³ were left behind him and forgotten, from the time that he had entered on the new and living way. And now, to know *Him* and the power of His resurrection, was his single aim. He thirsted eagerly to win that rest for which he knew himself to be already apprehended of Christ Jesus. Such is the order of the Spirit's way. The

¹ Phil. iii. 14, 19.² 2 Cor. iii.³ Phil. iii. 6.

work of faith goes on within the children till the rest be gained. The work of God is to believe on Him whom God hath sent.⁴ They are not here exhorted to that work, as if it had not yet been done; for they had already eaten of that Bread of life. They knew Him, and confessed His name. That the believer enters into rest has been already laid down as a maxim of the Gospel, and we are exhorted to be in purpose and in Spirit where we are by the appointment of God's grace. Jesus has entered in. An assiduous cleaving to the Lord, by faith, will place us at the last remove from those who, by neglecting this great salvation, are closing the only door of Life against themselves.⁵

And here, before proceeding with our chapter, let me earnestly beseech those of my readers (if any such there be) who have not yet claimed by faith an entrance into the rest of God, to defer no longer the decisive step.

Heedless procrastinators and timid waverers are not less certainly excluded from the heavenly Jerusalem than vicious criminals.⁶ God rates the human soul in value above all other created objects; and in proof of this, He has given His eternal Son for its redemption, confirming by this wondrous act His previous testimony to the utter ruin of the natural man. If, therefore, we suffer *anything* to detain us from a full and unreserved acceptance of that grace which is now declared to us in the gospel, we are self-destroyed. By wilfully despising the only method of escape from the declared alternative of wrath, we provoke a judgment whose lasting in-

⁴ John vi.⁵ *Ante*, chap. ii. 3.⁶ Rev. xxi. 8.

fliction will be but an enforcement of the sentence already recorded in the Scriptures against all who now refuse to give His proper glory to the Son of God.⁷

Verses 12, 13. The purpose of the foregoing exhortation has been to quicken the pulse of spiritual life in God's believing people, by stirring in their hearts both hope and fear, and directing each of these necessary, though conflicting, sentiments towards its proper object. In what follows, we have a descriptive testimony (in immediate and natural connexion with the foregoing references to the Old Testament) to the word of God, as the effective instrument of His good pleasure, and the true medium of communion with His people at all times. It is a passage full of comfort as well as warning to those who set the knowledge of God before them as the true object of their desire. Especially is it entitled to attention in a day like the present, when there are found often among the nominal teachers of Christ those who labour actively to deprive the Old Testament Scriptures of their perpetual value and authority as the lively oracles of God.

The *idea* of an all-searching God is assented to by the natural understanding of mankind at large, and is, when so contemplated, an empty and unprofitable notion, neither giving nor evoking spiritual life. But through the application, by His Spirit, of the written Word,⁸ faith feels the nearness of His presence, whether for confusion of face, or for more abundant peace and joy. That His eye is on the

⁷ John iii. 36.

⁸ I do not believe that the objective presentation of the Son of God as the Word is at all contemplated in this passage.

secrets of all hearts, is outwardly confessed by every one who acknowledges His name. But the children's calling is *to have to do* with God. Because of the completeness of their reconciliation, they are to know Him in their secret purposes, as well as in their outward and apparent walk. It is only by a willing conformity of heart and conscience to the word of truth, that they who know God taste His presence as a shield and sun.

Life, power, and omniscience, three attributes of God Himself, are here imputed to the written word; for God is in His testimonies, for the heart of faith. The quickening efficacy of the word has been proved in each particular child of God, when begotten by it, as by incorruptible seed, to a sure hope of endless life. As the "word of righteousness," it keeps alive and nourishes God's new-born babes. Because it is a word of *power* it will certainly prevail. Its promises will bring no shame to their receiver, when life, and righteousness, and glory, form the threefold crown of those who, in their day of patience, have counted the reproach of Christ a better honour than the praise of men. It will prove itself a true discernor of men's thoughts, when, as a swift witness, it comes forward in the day when God will judge the secrets of men's hearts by Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, it acts as the detecting presence of omniscient holiness upon the secret counsels of those hearts in which the fear of God is known.

God is the light in which they who are born of Him are called to walk.⁹ But God being both invisible and inaccessible to man,¹ His *word* is the

⁹ 1 John i. and ii. *passim*.

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 16.

sole medium through which He is made present to the heart of faith. The same Spirit who has indited the written word, fulfils also His gracious mission as the indwelling Spirit of adoption—the communicative unction from the Holy One—by actively applying His own testimonies to the hearts and consciences of the “children.” It is thus, and only thus, that we can be said in truth to have fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.² It is with especial reference to the action of the word of God upon the *conscience*, that it is mentioned in the present passage. The reason of this is obvious, not only on a view of the actual condition of the Hebrew saints, but according to the principle, elsewhere stated more distinctly,³ by which true steadfastness and progress in the faith are made conditional upon the maintenance of a good conscience in the sight of God. Where, therefore, the word is willingly received as the appointed milk of spiritual nourishment,⁴ it performs its double office of warning and comforting the soul.⁵ Its penetrating keenness gives no pain to one who, in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, maintains his conversation in the world. It is when, by self-seeking or carelessness, the heart has wandered to a distance from its hope,⁶ and drooping on its way, grows downwards, and not upwards in its thoughts, and while still holding fast the fundamental ground of peace, has ceased to speak of blessedness,⁷ because no longer consciously rejoicing in the love

² Comp. Ps. cxix. 130.

⁵ Ps. xix. 10, 11.

³ 1 Tim. i. 19.

⁶ 2 Pet. i. 9.

⁴ 1 Pet. ii. 2.

⁷ Gal. iv. 15.

of Christ; that oftentimes the word of God comes searchingly, and with a sharp surprise, to scare the unwary or secure believer from the danger of his way.

The effect of self-judgment in the presence of God is to render its subject more than ever conscious of personal unworthiness and distress. Most fitly, then, as well as gratefully, does the present chapter close with a remembrance of Him, who, in His priestly grace, stands ready to revive the broken spirit of those who, by the searching power of the word of God, may have had anew discovered to themselves the intrinsic faultiness and weakness of their walk.

Verses 14-16. "Seeing, then, that we have a great High Priest," &c. As the Apostle of our confession, the Son of God has been compared with Moses. It was to deliver the people, and to bring them nigh to God, that He fulfilled the work which He was sent to do. But because God's worshippers must have to do with Him, and because the very nearness into which redemption brings the soul renders the exercised spirit more acutely conscious of natural infirmity, there could be no enjoyment of *abiding* peace, unless, besides the once-wrought work of *reconciliation*, there were a present ministry of grace in active and constant sympathy with the believer's need. For the distance between God in heaven and His feeble creature here below is too vast, and the contrast of Divine holiness with that intrinsic evil whose presence yet afflicts the saint while in the body too severe, for enduring confidence and ease to be enjoyed without some intervening

medium which should make God always near, and always near to succour and to bless.

The priestly ministry of the Son of God is the Father's gracious ordinance in anticipation of this present need. The confident profession which the abashed and contrite heart might feel disposed to relax, or even to let go, when thinking of its own short-comings, and confounded by some deeper insight into the secret of its own corruption, is to be still held fast.⁸ For He who has passed through the heavens,⁹ and now is on the right hand of the Majesty on high, is our *great* High Priest. It is *Jesus* whom we know to be thus personally at the goal of our utmost hope, and there *for us*. Faithfulness and mercy have already been affirmed of Him.¹ It is in connexion with the *greatness*² of His Person that the reality of His sympathy is here disclosed; for succour is the want most keenly felt by the afflicted soul. And power of redress is mated now with perfect sympathy, for the sufferer's relief.

There is not an inward sorrow which the sore pressed heart of a believer may contain, in which

⁸ Κ ρ α τ ῶ μ ε ν τ ῆς ὁμολογίας.

⁹ Διελθὺν θότα. τ.ο. Compare with this Eph. iv. 10. To enter into His rest, He must pass through the heavens. Elsewhere, when respect is had to His official ministry, He is said to be appearing *in* heaven for us (ix. 24); but when the subject of testimony is His personal excellency, the heavenly courts themselves are left far below the high and holy place on which His glory has its seat. (Ps. viii.; Isaiah lvii. 15.) The contrast here indicated between Jesus the Son of God, the Leader of His saints to their eternal blessedness, and that former Jesus (verse 8) who could give no rest to Israel, has been noticed by others, and is truly interesting.

¹ *Ante*, ii. 17.

² He has a threefold greatness. First, in comparison with our helplessness, for whom in grace He acts. Secondly, in prevailing opposition to all that is against us. Thirdly, and here *especially* His intrinsic glory is thus contrasted with the feebleness of the perishable priests, who could not save.

Jesus does not claim a share. *Sin* is in us the root of all distress. Divine compassion fills, in the Redeemer's breast, the place of human sin. In the reality of human weakness He has proved, in every point, the tempter's malice, and defied his power. For He knew no sin. Yet He understands temptation perfectly. Nothing can surprise Him in the confessions of His people; for He knows, with thorough knowledge, all that is in man. Nothing can be told Him, in the difficult disburdening of the heart's peculiar secret, which lies beyond the effectual ministry of His grace. In the greatness of His mercy He excels the measure of the sinner's utmost need. In the faithfulness of His affection He preserves inviolate the secret of the trusted grief. It is for His *brethren* that He acts with God. And as one that sticketh closer than a brother, He maintains their cause *in righteousness* by virtue of His own prevailing Name.³

It is the aim of Satan to turn human infirmity to account, by endeavouring, by its means, to unsettle and afflict the conscience, and thus to deter the tempted soul from confident assurance in the sight of God. In thus setting forth the priestly grace of Jesus, the Comforter would re-assure our hearts, by proving to us that the very things which naturally prompt us to avoid God's presence are, by the rich provision of His mercy, reasons for our drawing nigh. And so, they who were exhorted just before to fear, are now encouraged to come *boldly* to the

³ And while thus acting effectively with God on behalf of those who come to Him by faith, He is, doubtless, an attentive observer of those who, upon a spurious title of priestly authority, assume this chief prerogative of the anointed Son of God. Few, if any, of the manifold "wiles of the devil," have wrought such evil in the professed church of God, as the establishment of a priestly confessional upon earth.

throne of God. For it is a throne of *grace* on which the Father sits. It is, indeed, a throne of judgment likewise; for the Searcher of all hearts must weigh the value of His people's work, and estimate the tenor of their ways.⁴ But mercy is with God. If judgment act against His children who walk contrary to Him, it is to bring them back again to a renewed and profounder knowledge of the God of *all* grace. What God has provided for in the consecration of His Son is the necessities of His people, according to the unalterable requirement of His own holiness; and in the perfect adaptation of His grace, *He* knows their need of such a High Priest, and He would have them know it too. It is a very dangerous thing when Christians seem to find a superfluity in this exhortation to come *boldly* to the throne of grace. Nothing is so disastrous in its effects as carnal confidence. If grace and mercy cease to be the daily craving of our hearts, it is either because of carelessness, and consequent dullness of conscience, or from a defective estimate of the holiness of God.⁵ A sense of personal need creates in our hearts desires which exactly correspond to the provision both of grace and mercy, which the Father's goodness has prepared. Where these are felt, the value of this gracious invitation is appreciated. It is *truth* alone that gives us boldness before God. It is when the empty and self-loathing soul draws nigh with confidence by the faith of Jesus, that mercy is tasted in its sweetness, and seasonable grace is found to give the strength of God in every time of need.⁶

⁴ 1 Pet. i. 17.⁵ Gal. iii. 2; 1 John i. 8.⁶ Compare 2 Tim. ii. 1; Eph. vi. 10.

CHAPTER V.

HAVING spoken comfortably to the children's hearts, by disclosing to them the personal sympathy of Jesus as the pledge of His effectual intercession for them at the throne of grace, he now proceeds to demonstrate more precisely the nature and glory of the High Priesthood of the Son. As in respect of His Apostleship, He has been both compared and contrasted with Moses, the servant of Jehovah, so, in the present and succeeding chapters, the order and functions of the Aaronic type are examined, with a view to their permanent dismissal from the memory¹ of those whose happy calling is to consider as the High Priest of *their* profession the ever-living Shepherd of their souls.

The chapter opens with a general statement of the source and original design of the high-priestly office, and a description of the qualifications, whether personal or extraneous, which must distinguish him who occupies that place (verses 1-4). And, first, his manhood is insisted on—he is taken from among

¹ So far, that is, as their authoritative claim upon the conscience is concerned; for they still continue, as every Christian will acknowledge, to bear a real and very high value as illustrative media in setting forth the fulness of Christ.

men. An angel is no fitting priest for men ; for the moving spring of active intercession is natural sympathy. God's Holy One must, therefore, to prove effectively His intercessional grace and power, be "chosen from among the people."² Moreover, he is *taken*. Divine selection severs him from those for whom he is to act. He is God's minister. By his consecration he is separated from the people whose natural incapacity for immediate intercourse with Divine holiness is the necessitating cause of priestly consecration as an ordinance of the God of grace. It was to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins that the high priest was ordained. In his daily ministration, as the offerer of the continual sacrifice at the door of the tabernacle, or when burning, morning and evening, the appointed incense before the vail, as well as at the stated seasons of solemn convocation, he maintained the acceptable memorial of his people before God.³ But besides the ordered services of the tabernacle, in its divinely-established routine, the high priest was the daily refuge of the individual Israelite in the manifold exigencies of his condition as a member of the congregation of Jehovah. For the Levitical ministration, besides being a figure of good things to come, was granted as a present relief against the pressure of a burden which, because of natural sin and infirmity, neither the fathers nor their children could sustain.⁴ In the books of Leviticus and Numbers we may learn how necessary

² Ps. lxxxix. 23, &c. The mystery of the Incarnation is the efficient root of every blessing, even when, as in the present instance, the special form of grace could only be manifested subsequently to the resurrection.

³ Exod. xxx. xxxi. ; Levit. xvi. xxiii. ; &c.

⁴ Acts xv. 10.

priestly ministration was to the daily well-being of a godly Israelite. For not only was a mitigation of the Law's severity⁵ experienced through priestly intercession in certain instances of positive transgression,⁶ but such an institution was indispensable for ease of conscience even to a man of moral blamelessness of life, who might inadvertently incur, at any hour of the day, some outward defilement which priestly ministry alone could meet. Both ignorance and error on the people's part continually exercised the sympathies of God's high priest.

The same personal infirmity which made Aaron, and his mortal successors in the priestly office fit intercessors for their brethren's need (verse 2), disqualified them for the ministry of holy things. *Accordingly, their ministry was based in effect upon the atonement first offered for themselves* (verse 3). Every step in the process of priestly consecration emphatically attested the intrinsic unfitness of its subject to be a priest to God. The washing of water, the sprinkling of blood, the anointing with oil, and the specified garments, whether of purity or magnificence, indicated a natural destitution in the receiver of this consecration of the qualities which God required in His priest; while they gave shadowy but hopeful promise of One in whom offi-

⁵ In strictness of the letter, for instance, theft was ranked with murder. In the table, God measured sin *absolutely*, according to the standard of His own holiness. In its practical administration, respect was had to human infirmity, and in some degree also to natural conscience in its instinctive discrimination of greater and lesser wrongs. But it was by sacrificial ordinances only that this relaxation could be sanctioned, because the blood-shedding in every case implied the deadly nature of *all* sin, and how alone it could be expiated in the sight of God.

⁶ Levit. vi.

cial dignity and glory should be but the outward expression of essential perfectness and truth.

Lastly (verse 4), this honour, so necessary for the people's sake, and so expressive of the holiness and glory of God, could rest in no man but the special object of Jehovah's choice. Aaron was not the *people's* choice, even as the necessity of priesthood was not the people's own discovery. Nor was he self-elected. His fitness for the office was of the God who both called him by name, and ordained the pattern of his consecration, and the order of his ministry. It is at this point that the comparative contrast is brought distinctly into view between the Divine and everlasting Reality and its weak and perishable type.

Verses 5, 6. "So also CHRIST glorified not Himself to be made an High Priest," &c. Jesus honoured not Himself. The titles of distinction which belong to Him, as the wearer of many crowns, are the Father's proclamation by the one true witness,⁷ that He is come in whose personal perfection there is found all that, in God's esteem, is truly capable of honour. Both royal and priestly offices had been borne of old by those whom God had sanctioned by His special calling. But neither king nor priest continued in his place. They laid their honours down in death. The promises of blessing which those titles indicated to the people of God could not be realized in men who were themselves to see corruption. There was no deliverance in such. They stood for a brief space, as expressive though fading emblems of a truth which was not in themselves;

⁷ 1 John iv. 6.

and when they went the way of all the earth, the hope of waiting faith still stayed itself upon the *names* which God would one day glorify with an abiding praise, when their true Owner should have once appeared.

It was death that demonstrated the futility of royal and priestly titles when found attaching to the natural man. It was in death, and by its means, that the true Heir of both royal and priestly dignity was found and claimed of God. As therefore it is by means of His resurrection from the dead that the kingly title of Jesus has been vindicated, so it also is in resurrection that His title of High Priest was *first conferred*.⁸ God had chosen Him, indeed, to be His Priest, in the purpose of His holiness, before the types which spake of Him had been revealed. But His declared calling and appointment were postponed to His fulfilment, in obedience, of the will of God. By bringing back the crucified Redeemer from the grave, God has testified both of the gift and sacrifice for sins (verse 1), which had once for all been offered and accepted in the Cross. God called His Holy One again from death to invest Him openly with glory and honour. For worthiness was found in Jesus. In the smitten and dishonoured branch of David, God beheld His own anointed Son. In the Lamb that opened not His mouth, He knew the Doer of that sacrifice through which the spotless victim of atonement should become the deathless Minister of righteousness and peace.

The High-priesthood, then, of Jesus is accepted by Him as a part of the inheritance conferred upon

⁸ *Infra*, ch. viii. 4.

Him as the First-begotten from the dead. This truth is established by the former of the two quotations here adduced: "Thou art my Son, to-day have I begotten thee." The demonstration of His Sonship by the resurrection from the dead was the declaration that a Man was found whom God deemed worthy of an everlasting title. The connexion always subsisting between the Lord's essential dignity, and the official glories which He sustains is pointedly intimated in this passage, and should be kept continually before the mind of the believer. The discovery and assertion of *who* the Rejected of men really *is*, becomes the signal for His investment with all the honours which eternal truth can bestow upon its object. Accordingly to this primary assertion of His Sonship, there immediately succeeds a second testimony of the Spirit to His priestly calling and glory: "Thou art a priest *for ever* after the order of Melchisedec." The mediatorial flow of grace from God towards His people, and the reciprocation of true worship by the vessels of His mercy, are not things limited by time, but will endure for ever. For such administration of the things of God, there needs an everlasting Priest. While Jesus, therefore, acts for the believer according to the *pattern* of the Aaronic ministry—as a minister, that is, of suited grace and mercy, according to the actual condition of His people here below—it is by another *order* that He stands. His office is annexed to, and is an expression of His Person. It is therefore co-existent with His life who lives for ever. The peculiar force of this expression, "according to the order of Melchisedec," so frequently repeated in the course of

this Epistle, will appear more fully in the sequel. At present it is quoted in proof, first, that from of old God had chosen Melchisedec as a representative figure of true high-priestly perfection; and, secondly, that the realization of that pattern has been effected in the resurrection and exaltation of His once-rejected Son.

Verses 7-10. "Who in the days of His flesh," &c. We have considered at an earlier page the quality and measure of the Son's *perfection* as the Captain of salvation to the many children of the Father of glory. We have now another presentation of the same great truth, but in especial reference to His Melchisedec priesthood. In both these characters the consummation of His title was attained in death, and divinely asserted in resurrection. In the passage now before us a view is opened of the manner of that special preparation, through which it was purposed that God's acceptable Priest should enter on His perfect and endless ministry of blessing.

The suffering obedience of Jesus in the flesh corresponds antitypically with the ceremonial preparation of Aaron for his office. Natural sympathy has been already shown to be an essential qualification for the exercise of a priesthood which was "ordained for men" (verse 2). But in Aaron natural sympathy was associated with natural ungodliness. The weakness which he so well understood in others, because himself encompassed by the same, was both in him and them the consequence of *sin*. And, therefore, though ordained to act for other men, he must evermore have remembrance of *himself* in his offerings for sins (verse 3). In an especial manner,

as has been remarked above, this intrinsic worthlessness was indicated by the ritual of Aaronic consecration. In the blessed mystery of godliness we perceive, on the other hand, how sympathy with human infirmity can be perfectly possessed by One who *needed not*⁹ to offer for Himself, when accomplishing the one atonement for His people's sins.

It was God's equal who was found in fashion as a man.¹ The emphatic statement here made is, that Son as He was,² He learned obedience by the things which He endured (verse 8). The period of this marvellous discipleship is in general terms expressed as "the days of His flesh." Doubtless from His earliest youth, God's Holy One was daily presented in His willing and spotless obedience to the Law, as a living sacrifice of perfectness, well pleasing in the Father's sight. And as He grew in stature, and with filling years began to meditate His Father's business, He may have wept in secret at the contemplation of that hour of dread for which He knew that He had come into the world. But it is to the times of His *public ministry* as God's anointed Son, that the Spirit who descended on Him visibly, to prepare Him for that ministry, draws all our attention in the word of truth. For it was then that Jesus openly assumed, not only the title which the Father's voice conferred on Him from heaven, but that special relationship towards Jehovah, as the obedient Fulfiller of *all* righteousness, which declared Him confessedly as the dependent Servant of His will.³

⁹ *Infra*, chap. vii. 27.

² Καίπερ ὧν ὁός.

¹ Phil. ii.

³ Matt. iii. 13-15.

It was when driven by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, that the suffering obedience of the Son of God began. He had already humbled Himself, in perfect grace, to take a place among the multitude who owned their need of repentance towards God by accepting baptism from John. He was now exposed, by virtue of that humiliation, to the direct assaults of the destroyer.⁴ Thenceforward to the cross, the way of Jesus lay through sorrow and reproach. In the power of the Spirit, He performed the works of God. In the endurance of all obloquy and shame, He filled up, day by day, the perfect measure of His will. As He *heard*, He spake.⁵ With an ear that daily opened to the words of God,⁶ He received the instructions which wholly swayed the tenor of His way. Every situation into which the obedience of Jesus led Him served but to exemplify, by varied proof, the intrinsic perfection of His Person. As Aaron was conducted to his office through a ritual which marked the absence in himself of all essential qualifications, so the Son of God advanced to His official perfection through a life of suffering experience, which proved, in all its vicissitudes, and in each of the events which crowded its divinely-measured term, that in the *form of man* there might be found what should delight with perfectness the soul of God.⁷

But it is upon the complete surrender of Himself to suffer *to the death*, that the Spirit here insists. Jesus placed His life at the disposal of the Father. In loving devotedness to His will, He thus denied

⁴ Mark i. 8-12.

⁶ Isa. l.

⁵ John v. 30; xii. 49, 50.

⁷ Isa. xlii. 1; Phil. ii. 7, &c.

Himself. Yet Jesus loved His life. The prospect of death at all was strange and revolting to the Prince of Life. How far more exceedingly so when viewed in connexion with its imputed cause, and all its fearful accompaniments! For the Holy One to be accounted sin—that the very Light of life should bow and seem to be extinct beneath the hated power of darkness—that men whom He had gone about to bless should load Him with execrations, and lead Him to an ignominious death—above all, that the Father, whom He only lived to love, should withdraw from Him the comfort of His presence, and seem to forget Him as a thing accursed;—when these things are remembered, we can conceive in some, though in a small degree, the nature of that exceeding sorrow unto death which bowed the soul of God's dear Son so heavily, as the shadows of that final hour of darkness began at length to close Him in.⁸

With strong crying and tears, the Son of God made supplication for deliverance from death. In the extremity of His weakness, He thought of the Father's power to save. But eternal salvation for His *people* was in the mind of God when He thus gave up His Son to die, against the yearnings of an affection which had rested on Him from before all time.⁹ And in thus consigning the Obedient One to the baptism of suffering and death, the counsels of Divine wisdom were but preparing a yet more abundant glory for the Beloved. For the countless multitude of those who, by the riches of the Father's grace, should know Him as the God of their salvation, should confess to JESUS as the one sole

⁸ Matt. xxvi. 37, 38.

⁹ John xvii. 24.

means and author of their joy. When Jesus prayed for life, His voice was heard. Because of the devotedness which made the will of God His own,¹ the request of His pure lips should not be disallowed.² And Jesus was content to win His glory as the Father had decreed.

It is the perfect, *natural* fitness of Jesus to receive the consecration of eternal priesthood that is exemplified in the present aspect of His suffering obedience unto death. In the resurrection He stands clothed with majesty and honour as the alone Dispenser of the grace of God. To them that *obey* Him, He is the author of eternal salvation. No other name is given under heaven among men whereby men may be saved. The obedience here demanded is the obedience of *faith*. He is a High Priest of salvation to *all* who now believe (verse 9). The doctrine of these verses is as precious as it is wonderful; for it connects every action of that priestly grace, which is the daily refuge of the tried believer, with the tears of the suffering Son of God. Those tears had never flowed but for their sakes for whom He came to die; He might have prayed for present rescue from the dread which threatened Him, and more than twelve legions of angels would have been the Father's answer to His cry. But the *heart* of Jesus was in the work He came to do. He knew the prize of His obedience unto death to be the eternal deliverance of *His own*. And if He loved thus strongly, while the value of His love was yet

¹ Ἀπὸ τῆς ἐνλαβείας. The authorized version of this expression, I believe to be quite correct; possibly, the margin is to be preferred on the score of exactness.

² Ps. xxi. 3.

so little known that *all* forsook Him in His day of shame, His love is surely none the less for those who now by grace cleave to Him as the Rock of their salvation and their Hope. The brightness of His glory, as the crowned High Priest, is the perpetual memorial to all who now obey Him, of the victorious energy of that enduring love which made the sinner's Friend a stranger to the face of God. † Glory now shines, in majesty and perfect strength, from the once-marred visage of the Lamb. The glory of *God* shines there. The Father looks approvingly upon His children through the everlasting Priest of their profession. *God has greeted*³ *Jesus* in the heavenly places of His glory with the perfection both of royal and priestly honour. And because of that perfection, His believing people joy in God by Him. They learn the manner of the God with whom they have to do through the lips of Jesus, who declares to them the Father's name.⁴

Verses 11–14. In the former part of this chapter the doctrine of the Son's eternal priesthood has been stated generally, and established upon its true basis. It is the risen and ascended Christ who has received the eternal excellency of the Melchisedec title. His never-ending ministry of blessing dates its beginning *effectively from the finished work of acceptable sacrifice*. The apostle had thus brought his Hebrew brethren in the faith within full view of Him whom they were to consider as the High Priest of their profession; and his desire was to lead their souls more deeply into the exceeding riches of this hea-

³ Προσαγορευθεὶς ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ. κ. λ. (verse 10.)

⁴ Rom. v. 11; 1 John iii. 1–3.

venly knowledge. He longed to unfold in ampler detail the treasures of wisdom and delight which lay hidden in the priestly titles with which God had decked His Christ. For indeed he had many things to say on this new topic.⁵ The fulness of God's truth was in the Person of Him, who now, as the anointed Minister of the Most High God, was presented to His people as the alone exponent and interpreter of Him who is invisible. Things earthly and things heavenly came both alike within the sphere of His appointed trust; for the Father had committed *all things* to His hands. He would be glorified in Jesus as the manifested Lord of all power and might, even as He had been glorified in Him on the earth as the dependent vessel of His own good pleasure.

More especially, the priesthood of Jesus stands in an immediate and very practical relation to His people as the spiritual Circumcision, the true worshippers of God.⁶ The nature and extent of their standing and privileges as His acceptable people, can be appreciated only through an adequate perception of the Son of God in this express character. For it is in the chosen Priest alone that the people stand abidingly with God. He desired, therefore, to present this subject fully to their spiritual understanding; to show them things which, while they were a present comfort and furtherance of their joy, might likewise be their wisdom to preserve them

⁵ Περὶ. οὗ κ.λ. Concerning, that is, 'Melchisedec in the first instance, and ultimately Jesus. The figure must be first exhibited in clear distinctness, in order that the abiding truth which it foreshadows, may be more perfectly apprehended and enjoyed. *Infra*, chap. vii.

⁶ Phil. iii. 3.

from the specious snares which lay around their path on every side.

But in the spiritual state of those whom he addressed, an obstacle existed to his happy progress as their teacher, which needed sharp rebuke for its removal. He had many things to say concerning God's Melchisedec Priest. But this doctrine, though the natural meat of those who had grown prosperously on the word of Gospel grace, was a hard thing to expound to *them*. For they were dull of apprehension in all heavenly things. They no longer saw afar off.⁷ Although partakers of the heavenly calling, they had become earthly in the habit of their minds. In times long passed, indeed, they had heard and known, and joyfully confessed the great salvation.⁸ But they had not grown since then. And, standing still, they had lost the nerve and vigour of their faith, and with them also, much of their original confidence and joy. For *progress* is the law of blessing to God's saints. Not to pursue is to be left behind. And so, instead of teaching others, as became their nominal standing in the faith, the riches of God's hidden wisdom,⁹ they wanted to be taught anew themselves. They were become faulty even in foundation truths. They were babes in knowledge, and therefore unequal to their proper duty of contending for the faith. For they were unskilful in the word of righteousness¹ (verse 13).

⁷ 2 Pet. i. 9.

⁸ *Infra*, chap. x. 32-35.

⁹ 1 Cor. ii. 7.

¹ The "word of righteousness" stands opposed to the "law of righteousness" which Israel followed after but did not attain (compare Rom. ix. 30, 31). They were inexperienced in that wisdom which knows daily feeding upon Jesus by faith to be the secret of all practical righteousness and spiritual well-being.

There is a distinction, which the Spirit owns approvingly, between "little ones"² and "full-grown" men in Christ.³ For the difference is thus expressed between the first perception of true Christian blessedness in the knowledge of the *Father*, and the firm stability of a faith grown strong in truth through a patient digestion of the word of God. Again, there is a sense in which all saints are looked upon and spoken to as "new-born babes."⁴ As such they are commended to the breasts of scripture, to be nurtured on the endless consolations which are given them in Christ—growing on still, both in the grace and knowledge of the Son of God, until all partial knowledge vanishes away before the presence of the perfect Truth.⁵ But a word so fitly used elsewhere, to express the gracious endearments of Divine compassion,⁶ is now applied to these remiss believers as a searching and severe reproach. No keener censure can attach to one who knows the Lord than that which is provoked by an habitual negligence of spiritual things. To be infants still,⁷ after so long a time—to babble inarticulately of Christ, when as men they should be holding forth the word of life, in clear and bold confession of their blessedness as partakers of the heavenly calling—indicated an habitual indolence of spirit, which boded no prosperity to their souls. For whenever a *heavenly* Christ ceases to occupy the heart and its

² Παῖδια.³ 1 John ii.⁴ Ἀπριγεννητα βρέφη.⁵ 1 Pet. ii. 2; 2 Pet. iii. 18.⁶ Matt. xi. 25.⁷ Νήπιοι. The "full aged" of verse 14, are the "perfect" of 1 Cor. ii. 6; τέλειος being the word used in both passages. Compare also 1 Cor. xiv. 20; Phil. iii. 15. As to the nature and meaning of Christian perfection, see further *infra*, chapter x. 1, 14.

desires, the spring of true spiritual activity is gone. The soul has lost its right position as a stranger in a Christless world, when, through lack of diligence, a Christian's faith sees Jesus indistinctly in His present place at God's right hand.

The danger to which this spiritual inertness exposed them was such as to justify the strongest language of exhortation and reproof. Apostasy from Christ was a step more easy and natural to a Jewish than to a Gentile believer; because the way was always open and inviting to them as men, to return to those associations which had once carried with them the outward sanction of Jehovah's name, and which only the *power* of God's kingdom had enabled them to renounce. When heavenly realities became inoperative in their souls, the visible image was before them still, and near was the danger of their giving it the homage of their souls. If there were not an habitual exercise of their spiritual senses (verse 14,) their power of discernment would not long remain. They would call evil good, and good evil. For the ignorance which flows from spiritual negligence brings its own punishment of apathetic dulness on the once clear mind, and robs the spirit of its power to detect and baffle the wily methods of the devil.

It is in the presence of God alone, that a Christian can exert his spiritual energies with effect. Abiding in Christ maintains us in that presence. A more unhappy error cannot befall a believer than to separate, in the habit of his mind, acquired knowledge from the living Christ. Faith dies at once when separated from its object. Knowledge indeed

is precious ; but the knowledge of God is a progressive thing, whose end is not attainable on this side glory: "If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth *nothing* yet as he ought to know."⁸ The true experience of an advancing saint is that of continual initiation. With a prospect ever widening, he has a daily deepening appreciation of the fundamental grace in which he stands, and in which he is more and more established by the "word of righteousness." There is a sense in which the cross may be said to be the sum of Christian knowledge. It is so when it is regarded not only as the stay of personal trust, because it is the clear and ever blessed enunciation of abounding grace, but when its infinite *results* are pondered as the Comforter reveals them in the word of Christ. The world is then a crucified and abandoned thing.⁹ God is the occupation and the study of His children. And it is in Jesus only that He may be learned.

⁸ 1 Cor. viii. 2.

⁹ Gal. vi. 14.

CHAPTER VI.

AT the outset of his new and heavenly topic, the apostle had been constrained reluctantly to pause. For it was necessary to disclose to those whom he addressed their spiritual poverty and littleness of growth; and in tones of keen, though affectionate, expostulation he had done this, as we have seen. That they were babes in knowledge, was their shame as well as danger. They ought to have been men. And now, having convinced them of this blame, he is ready to resume his happier task of opening more richly to their view the blessedness and glory of the Son's eternal priesthood. For Christ is evermore the Spirit's natural theme. To have therefore to speak of *them*—unless it were to cheer their patience, or to praise their faith and love in Jesus—though needful for their sakes, was a jarring and unwelcome digression from his proper subject.

Verses 1–3. With God's permission, then, he would lead them onward in the way of light. But first, an exercise of spiritual discrimination is demanded. The rudiments of truth must be distinguished from the living Truth Himself. Some truths are no longer objects of inquiring faith. They have ful-

filled their purpose, and may be left behind by those whose calling is to know all knowledge in the Son of God. They are to be assumed as *principles*, whose ultimate intention and significance become increasingly apparent as the soul advances in its study of perfection. God has laid Christ, as His elect foundation, on a ground prepared aforetime in His earlier testimonies. The rudimental truths which formed the stock of a believer's knowledge, while the darkness lasted, were sufficient to produce, as their result, a radical conviction of personal unprofitableness and ruin, together with a hope to God-ward, which held as yet no surer token of its validity than the word of promise, and the sacrificial signs which spake of better things. But now that the true light shone, and better promises had become a *present truth*, they were to leave the initiatory word of Christ¹ for Christ Himself. This they might safely do. For truths, whose office was to teach their need of Christ, are honoured best by those who, by their light, pressed onward to perfection,² by bestowing all thoughts on Him.

The things which the partakers of the heavenly calling are exhorted thus to leave behind are severally stated, and are classed, in common, as fundamental or established principles. At the head of these we find "repentance from dead works,"³ close

¹ Τὸν τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ λόγον. "Die anfängliche Lehre Christi." DE WETTE. This expression is more precise in its meaning than the somewhat similar one in chapter v. 12. The ancient testimonies were, in a general sense, the oracles of God. *Specially*, they are rudimental preliminaries to Christ, the perfect Truth.

² The "perfection" here spoken of, is contrasted with the spiritual infancy or nonage mentioned at the close of the preceding chapter.

³ By "dead works" are to be understood, not only acts of sin, but

joined with its correlative, "faith towards God." From the first entrance of sin into the world these things had been known and acted on by the elect of God. The unprofitableness of the flesh, and the necessity of faith in God as a Saviour, were maxims of the Father's wisdom from the earliest times.⁴ Distinctly recorded from the first in the living oracles of God,⁵ these truths had in the scriptures of the prophets been emphatically stated as the word of saving doctrine. They were held fast as such by every quickened Israelite, although the spirit of bondage kept the children still in fear, until the work of their emancipation had been fully wrought.⁶

The doctrine of baptisms⁷ comes next, and is in close connexion with that of the imposition of hands. These, although morally related in their spirit to the former, and faintly traceable as practical observances from the beginning, are yet, as positive institutions, of no earlier antiquity than the giving of the Law. For it can scarcely be questioned that the lustral ordinances, and sacrificial solemnities of the Levitical institute, are here intended. In what manner these once all-important ordinances were to be "left" by the true circumcision for the living fulness and perfection of Christ,

that vain reliance upon works of a religious pretension which is a snare of destruction to the man whose heart is willingly estranged from God. The prophetic scriptures abound in denunciatory passages, which might be quoted in proof of this. (Compare Isa. i. lvii. lviii.; Jer. xvii.; Hab. ii. 4, &c.)

⁴ Ps. xxii. 4; *Infra*, chap. xi.

⁵ Gen. vi. 5; xv. 6.

⁶ Gal. iv.

⁷ βαπτισμῶν. This word is never used to express the rite of baptism. In chapter ix. 10 of this Epistle it is more justly rendered "washings." In two other places only it occurs, in both which it receives the same translation as in the passage just referred to. (Compare Mark vii. 4, 8.)

is shewn at length in chapters ix. and x. We have in the meanwhile to remember that it was by means of these significant observances that the necessity of personal purification, and of substitutional atonement, was impressed upon the earliest mind of every Israelite. For in the ceaseless recurrence of these ordinances there was a continual recognition, by priest and worshipper alike, of man's natural unfitness for the Divine presence, and of the need of some mediate power of atonement to bring him there. Lastly, both resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment, are enumerated as a part of the foundation which had long been laid. These truths have a commensurate force and relative correspondence with the two first mentioned. The "resurrection of the dead" being the hope and reward of "faith toward God;" while on the other hand a recognition in the sinner's conscience of the judicial holiness of the eternal God, cannot but convince him of the prime necessity of a "repentance from dead works." With more or less distinctness, therefore, these rudiments of God have been held by all who from the beginning feared the Judge of all the world, and knew that death was hopeful only to the righteous man.⁸

These were the old foundations. They had been confirmed and re-asserted by the Lord's forerunner, the finisher of legal and prophetic testimony, who, coming in the way of righteousness, had spoken of

⁸ Eccles. xi. 9; xii. 14; Prov. xiv. 32; Ps. xc. 11. That resurrection was the national belief of Israel is quite clear, from the Gospels. Like other ancient verities, it was challenged and derided by the freethinking liberalism of the day. See further, Acts xxiv. 15; and xxvi. 7.

the wrath to come; who had preached repentance, and baptized with water, preparing thus the advent of that Light in whom the perfect wisdom of the just should be revealed. Upon these foundations, and as the completion of these rudiments, the Holy Ghost establishes the doctrine of the Christ.⁹ For in His Person are presented God's true vindication and fulfilment of the former things. To the repentant sinner who discards the filthy rags of his own works He is given, freely and without condition, as the everlasting Righteousness of God. To him who trusted, darkly once though hopefully, in God, He is now become, as the manifested Object of a justifying faith, the Light (whose brightness grows not dim) of life, and peace, and never-ending joy. The washings oft repeated, and the laying on of hands, are now to be forgotten in the setting forth of Jesus as the eternal Redemption of His people. Not only is He in His *Person* both the Resurrection and the Life; the *doctrine* also of the resurrection has received its mighty and decisive confirmation in the raising of the *Man* Christ Jesus to become the first-fruits, unto Him that raised Him, of the multitude who sleep through Him.¹ By the same token like-

⁹ The Lord had in His earthly ministry authenticated all these principles, as the Asserter and Fulfiller of the truth of God, while He continually sought to set before the blinded eyes of Israel the Divine realization in His own Person of all that Moses and the prophets taught. (Comp. Matt. xxiii. 1-3.) He preached both repentance from dead works, and faith towards God. He taught distinctly both the resurrection and eternal judgment; while by the surrender of Himself to die the sinner's death, He justified the ancient sacrificial witness, which ceased not from its mute though expressive testimony until the Lamb was found on whom God once for all might lay His people's sins, and in whose precious blood pure cleansing might be found of heart and conscience in His sight.

¹ 1 Cor. xv.

wise is He openly announced to men as the appointed Lord and Judge, both of the living and the dead.²

The believing Hebrews had already heard and known these things, and had begun their saving acquaintance with the Son of God. To grow onward in that knowledge unto perfect manhood, till the measure of the stature of His fulness be attained, is the calling of the saints of God.³ They are renewed for that knowledge, being called, in the unity of His body, the Church, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God.⁴ The end and measure of the Spirit's operation as the Comforter, is the edifying of that body to its completion, in the unity of the faith, even as already each several member is complete before God in His exalted Head. Progress in this direction is the sure effect of spiritual growth. On the other hand, to stop short of perfection was to expose themselves to the direct action of influences which (but for the faithfulness of God as the preserver of His own) might move them to apostasy from Christ. To deter them, therefore, more effectually from remissness in their pursuit of heavenly things, from looking backward or standing still, instead of pressing on toward the mark, until the prize of God's high calling in Christ Jesus should be attained in rest, he adds now a word of fearful warning touching the nature and effects of a deliberate abandonment of Christ.

Verses 4-8. The present passage consists, first, of a categorical statement of Christian apostasy and its effects (verses 4-6), and secondly of a figurative

² Acts xi. 40-42; Rom. xiv. 9.

³ Eph. iv. 13.

⁴ Col. ii. iii.

illustration of the moral condition of the apostate in the sight of God (verses 7, 8). As to the former of these, the persons described are such as *fall away*.⁵ What they fall from is largely intimated in the descriptive terms which are applied to them before their fall. They relinquish and despise the light of life, the heavenly gift, the Holy Ghost, the good word or promise of God, and the powers of the world to come. Having been conversant with all these things, they give them up. They fall back to what they were before the light of God shone on them in the Gospel. After trial made of grace, they return advisedly to the way of nature, preferring thus themselves to Christ. To renew such again unto repentance is pronounced to be impossible. The reason of this hopelessness of ruin is explained: "they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame." This last expression is sufficiently decisive of the nature of this irremediable sin. It is no paroxysm of personal depravity, nor frequent repetition of unfaithfulness, which the guilty and self-condemned abuser of the grace which saves him may have to mourn in secret before God, that is thus denounced. Nor is it such a momentary dereliction of the Saviour as may be won fraudulently, or by force extorted, from the weakness of the flesh, in some dark hour of too great temptation. For all these there is hope. The righteous advocacy of Jesus with the Father is abidingly at hand to meet the sins of such as know them, and confess them in His name. To them that own Him as their great High Priest, He is the

⁵ Τοὺς παραπεσόντας.

minister of a grace and mercy to which God has set no limits. It is when the heart which once received the word with joy, departing gradually from the living God, becomes hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and willingly resumes the things which it forsook for Christ—when, through the lust of other things, the exceeding great and precious promises of God fall vapidly upon the ear, and are willingly forgotten in the heart;—or, when the faith of God's elect, which for a while has been professed, is counted fabulous or foolish through proud high-mindedness and self-deceit; and the precious work of Jesus is a mockery, and His name, which once was a desire, is now become a weariness;—it is when thus the work which seemed for a while to be of God, turns out in its result to be no better than the creature of that natural will which never heartily consents to God, that the seared and blinded conscience sinks below the reach of all relief. For the only name which God has given under heaven for salvation, is the object of the sinner's proud contempt. In his own person he has crucified a second time the Son of God; deriding the Lord whom he had once confessed, and putting Jesus to an open shame.

None were so liable to this dreadful and incurable apostasy, as they who, having lived from infancy in a religion which, while it had the outward sanction of God's name, was such as men might glory in who had no faith in God, had abandoned it in favour of a profession based entirely on things heavenly and invisible. To a very small minority of believing Israelites, the spectacle of the mass of their country-

men (whose distinctive boast it was that they, and they alone, were God's true people), remaining steadfast in their ancient worship, must have presented a continual temptation to return to that which they had left. When to this there is added the required abandonment of all superior claim, and the perfect community of hope and privilege which Jew and Gentile shared alike in the new fellowship of Christ's one body, it is apparent that a clear and growing faith in heavenly things was needed to preserve the Jewish Christian from relapse. But to return to Judaism was to give up Christ—to fall from grace, and place themselves anew beneath not only the general curse of the Law, but that special imprecation which had bound the guilt of Jesus' blood to the reprobate and blinded nation of His murderers. They had confessed already to the fruitlessness of the former things—the vain conversation received by tradition from the fathers. They had made public avowal of the impotency of all other means of blessing, when they made confession of the cross of Christ. To fall away from that—to return again to mere external religiousness by a departure from the living faith of the Gospel, would be to give up God. For God is in the living Person of His Christ, and can be found no longer among the shadows of the former times.

At all times during the progress of the dispensation, apostasy from Christ is contemplated.⁶ Antichrists sprang up from the beginning, who, in various forms, opposed the truth, and drew men into their pernicious ways. But it is reserved for the

⁶ 1 John ii. 18; 2 Tim. iii. 13.

“last times” to exhibit this awful form of evil in its ripe perfection. The man who by evil pre-eminence is called *The Antichrist*,⁷ will be greeted and applauded by those who have finally denied the Christ. And surely no thoughtful Christian can fail to notice, as one of the signs of the present time, a strange and facile readiness on the part of many, who once seemed to know the power of the gospel, to renounce the faith of God’s elect. Under whatever form (and they are indeed many!) apostasy may present itself, its essential principle is *unbelief*. The special characteristic, however, of latter-day infidelity is its professed reverence for “truth and nobleness” wherever they are found, and its hypocritical regret at the alleged discovery of the untrustworthiness of what has hitherto been accepted as an inspired Record. To deny, not God avowedly, but that He has *spoken*, and while continuing to pay an empty reverence to the Scriptures, to disallow them as the *Word of God*, is the most fatal symptom of anti-christian evil in the present day. But truth will assert its own claims in judgment upon those who refuse to bow to it, when it speaks (as now) in grace. God will send it forth to victory in the day when, according to the written promise, He reveals His Christ in glory. Meanwhile, let those whose hearts are sometimes weakened by the plausible fallacies and “great swelling words” of modern nationalism, remember that all that now is passing has been already scanned and designated by that Spirit of prophecy which is the testimony of Jesus,⁸ and that stability of soul is the effect, not of hearken-

⁷ Ὁ ἀντί χριστος.

⁸ Rev. xix. 10.

ing to the ever-changeful voice of human doctrine, but of sticking to the testimonies of the Holy Ghost. The words which nourished and fashioned the soul of God's incarnate Son, and armed Him for the battle of our deliverance,⁹ will also be the joy and strength of those, who, through grace, find Him to be the end of the commandment, and the beginning of their hope. Great is the promised reward of those who still have "kept the word of His patience" amid the seductions and gainsayings of a Christ-denying world.¹

To return; it is not wonderful that the minds of many weak believers should have felt painfully exercised while pondering this solemn passage. For the language used to specify the former state of those whose apostasy is here supposed, is such as seems scarcely applicable to any soul not really alive to God.² Where this impression is received, an inference will naturally suggest itself of personal insecurity so long as this our present life remains, and with it our liability to fall away from Christ.

⁹ Ps. xl. 6-8; Is. l. 4, 5; Matt. iv. 4.

¹ Rev. iii. 10.

² I do not feel disposed to enter at large on an examination of these several expressions. Their general drift is not to be mistaken. A carnal professor is (until by a renunciation of his creed, he proves the contrary), a Christian; one therefore of whom a Christian status and experience may be assumed. God alone knows how near an approach may be made by nature to the kingdom of God. But *entrance* thither must be through a second birth by means of the living and ever-abiding word. It is the children's privilege to know that what they have they have received from Him—that what He gives in Christ is not to be revoked—that by His own will He has given *life eternal* to His people through the word. They know that in themselves there dwelleth no good thing; that neither constancy, nor strength, nor holiness, nor aught besides that makes for their salvation, is their own. Their life is Jesus. Their security is God, who changeth not. None such can fall away. They may sin. In many things they all offend. But to be happy without Christ—to fall away from grace, and feel no loss, is as impossible for one who has eaten of that living Bread, as it is that one who has deliberately cast Him off should ever put a saving faith in Him again.

Such a misuse of Scripture is a common artifice of Satan, and one which finds too ready an acceptance in the natural heart, where suspicion and mistrust of God dwell side by side with unbelief and pride. When once, through grace, the truth of nature's *ruin* has been thoroughly perceived, and Christ has been laid hold of—not in His doctrine by a hasty impulse of mental conviction merely, but (through the Spirit's application of the doctrine) by a believing acceptance of His *Person*—as the Saviour whose redeeming love is appreciated and adored, because the need of such a love is known in secret in the sight of God, the main-spring of the tempter's power is destroyed. For while the self-judging believer knows full well that deceit and treachery are in the very core of his own heart, and that the countless wanderings of thought from Jesus, which daily are remembered and confessed by him in secret, are tokens of a will within him all whose tendencies are far away from God, yet he knows these things without alarm. The same indwelling Spirit of truth, who shows him thus hatefully the proper features of his flesh, is the Revealer also of Jesus to his soul. The faithfulness and power of the Shepherd to preserve His own are the confidence and reassuring comfort of the sheep that hear His voice. If ensnared or drawn aside from Jesus, the believer's happiness is gone. Contentment is at an end, until restoring grace has brought him back again, in contrite and trustful acknowledgment to God.³ The inward distresses of a Christian, who, when mournfully reviewing the unworthy tenor of his way, may

³ 1 John i. 9.

bitterly arraign himself before the Lord, whose love he feels he has so wretchedly requited, bear no resemblance to the sentiments of an apostate, who has willingly renounced the Saviour. The hopelessness of the latter case consists in an obduracy of heart on which the word of God takes no effect. Repentance is impossible, because truth has been intentionally put away.

A well-meant but inconsiderate desire of removing all doctrinal impediments from the path of feeble-minded Christians, has sometimes led true teachers of Christ to mitigate, in their expositions of this passage, the simple and obvious meaning of the Spirit's words. Such tampering with Scripture is neither wise nor safe; nor would godly men have been seduced into so serious a fault, but through the very erroneous notion of the incompatibility of such passages of Scripture with the perfect security which is assured by grace to the real believer.⁴ But it has not been sufficiently kept in view that a believer's blessing, although absolute in Christ, is conditional for its present enjoyment, on the exercise of his *faith*. The method of Divine teaching is not simply to satisfy the mind by clear and positive statements of doctrine, but to nourish the heart and exercise the conscience by communion with the Living Truth. Now that Truth is Christ. So long, therefore, as our hearts are cleaving to Him by simple faith in the word of God, we are both confident and safe. But neither the peace of God, nor any other spiritual blessing, is attached to a

⁴ The foolish and irreverent language attributed to Luther in reference to the epistle of James, is a well-known instance in point.

mere mental acquiescence in evangelical doctrine. Spiritual peace must necessarily wax or wane in exact proportion to the activity or inactivity of our faith.

Moreover, we must remember that to deal carelessly with Gospel truth, is to trifle with the grace of God, a thing of all others the most impious and perilous, as well as the most foolish. Because, therefore, this wretched tendency exists in every heart, and is assiduously acted on by Satan in a multitude of ways, the Spirit of God sees fit to shew us a just and faithful picture of Christian apostasy; letting us thus see clearly what it is that men renounce when they depart from Christ, in order that by the words of His lips, we may be kept from the paths of the destroyer.⁵ It is thus that He acted as the Comforter. "Warning every man, and teaching every man, in all wisdom; that He may present every man perfect *in Christ Jesus*."⁶

The just effect then of such a warning as the one before us is to stir up watchfulness, and stimulate communion with the Lord. Like other monitory passages of Scripture, it describes a class who really answer to the description. But they whom it so faithfully portrays are exactly those on whom *as a warning* it takes no effect. The man that always fears is always safe. He dreads himself and Satan; and cleaves savingly to Jesus in the discernment of His ever-blessed grace. Deliberate hypocrisy, or open denial of the Son of God, are doubtless desperate things. God saves by truth alone. To mock Him in His holiness, or deny Him in His grace,

⁵ Ps. xvii. 4.

⁶ Col. ii. 28.

is ruinous alike to the sin-deceived vessels of His wrath.

The figurative illustration which is appended to this warning (verses 7, 8), shows plainly that the falling away in question is but the natural result of the uncongenial, and therefore fruitless contact of Gospel truth with man in an unregenerate state. Truth may be received by such. It may be absorbed into the mind, and become a part of its familiar knowledge. *But it does not penetrate the seat of his affections and desires.* Because there is no faith, GOD is not really discovered in His word.⁷ No acceptable fruit of praise and holy conversation responds to the free ministration of the name of Jesus. The seed sown is not suited to the soil on which it falls. The dew of God, which drops the fatness of abounding grace, with happy increase of pure peace and joy, upon the broken surface of a heart made thirsty for salvation through the deep upturning of its secret wretchedness beneath the eye of Truth, sinks wastefully among the stony places of man's natural selfishness. The fruits are like the soil. They savour of himself, and not of Christ. Religious pretension may be among them. But if not of faith, it is the sharpest and most barren brier of them all. God gathers nothing grateful to Himself but from a heart which, bowed beneath the weight of His abounding

⁷ To "taste the good word of God," may be the portion of those who yet in time of temptation fall away. As it fared with Jesus when many who, in the fervour of a first impression, had declared themselves disciples, left Him when He began to teach distinctly the great doctrine of eternal life (John vi. 66), so is it often with the gospel when its flesh-withering power is clearly understood. That some receive with joy a testimony which yet takes no root within their souls, is sure upon the Lord's own word. (Matt. xiii. 20, 21.)

mercies, has no desire (though the flesh be weak) but to walk worthy of Him who died for us, and rose again. When Gospel truth falls plentifully on a still unbroken spirit, and all the return which God receives in answer to the ministration of His grace, is the insane presumption of self-righteousness—that most offensive of all provocations to the pure and Holy One,⁸ or when, under cover of a sound profession, the heart, unweaned from sin, because not really alive to God, esteems the liberty of Christ no other than a special license of iniquity—this solemn word receives its dreary illustration. The branch that does not tarry in the vine can bear no fruit. The soul which does not cleave to Jesus bears no life within itself. Its fruits are bitter as the grapes of Sodom to the soul of him who finds refreshment only in the true and living Vine.⁹

Verses 9, 10. Having traced spiritual declension in its downward course to final apostasy and hopeless reprobation, he hastens to anticipate and to forbid such a construction of his language as might justify in the hearts of those whom he addressed the worst misgivings on their own account. It was not *their* condition that had furnished the materials of the mournful picture he had drawn. Though he spake thus in faithful warning, yet he was persuaded better things of them. When he contemplated both their past and present state, more cheering signs were visible. “Things that accompany salvation” had abounded in their way, since first they made profession of the Saviour. They had witnessed, and did witness, by their work and labour of love, to

⁸ Isa. lxy. 5.

⁹ Deut. xxxii. 32; John xv.

the sincerity of their professed subjection to the Gospel. In ministering to God's saints, who suffered the reproach of Christ, they had evinced the genuineness of their zeal for God—that it was according to knowledge, and therefore not in vain. God knew this, and was *not unrighteous* to forget it.¹ It was not, then, for any visible decay of outward diligence that they stood in need of present exhortation. Yet something still was lacking in their *faith*. There was an inward feebleness and lowness of spiritual tone, which he earnestly desired to invigorate and elevate, that they might be more effectually secured against the wiles of the enemy, as well as for the more abundant increase of their joy.

Verses 11, 12. They had laboured unitedly in outward testimony to God. The desire of the apostle's heart is, that *every one* of them should show the same diligence *to the full assurance of hope unto the end*. There was a definite hope of their calling. That hope was Christ in heaven. The God and

¹ The method here adopted by the apostle in his endeavour to re-assure the Hebrew saints, is well worth our attention. *Truth* must ever be the instrument of the Comforter, who is Himself the Spirit of truth; but in its application He has respect to the moral condition of those whom He addresses. Acts of responsive devotedness, such as those to which reference is made in the text, though ever precious in the sight of God, are less frequently (perhaps we might say *less willingly*) dwelt on by Him whose office is to glorify Jesus, and by presenting truth in its higher and richer manifestation in His blessed Person and work, to invite the believer to the all-absorbing contemplation of a love which passeth knowledge, and in the presence and enjoyment of which ourselves and our works are alike forgotten, or remembered only in the tender and heart-humbling consciousness of the *grace* wherein we stand. Hence we find that references to the retributive fidelity of God, are rarely introduced, except either to cheer and animate those who are under the active pressure of affliction for the truth's sake, as in 2 Thess. i. 5, 6; or, as in the present instance, to stimulate or encourage a languid and diminished faith.

Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is the God of His people's hope. They must severally have to do with Him by the continual exercise of simple faith, or their strength will waste away and turn to lassitude and faintness of heart, beneath the pressure of their day of trial. There is a burden for each one to bear, a work for every man to prove.² By individual faith alone can personal communion be maintained, and with it happiness and peace. Being already justified, and blessed with free deliverance through the faith of Jesus *crucified*, they are not to relax in their pursuit of heavenly things, but rather to give diligence that the brightness of His *glory* may be continually before them as the immediate object of their hope. The chief impediment to this in every Christian is the ceaseless variance of flesh with spirit. But in the case of the believing Hebrew there was an especial obstacle presented by national associations of a character distinctly sensuous and earthly, in the midst of which they bore the reproach of an invisible and heavenly Christ.

It is with reference to this that their attention is now drawn to the examples of an earlier time. They are warned against the danger of spiritual slothfulness, and exhorted to be followers of them, who, *through faith and patience*, had lived on earth a life of unaccomplished hope.³ For expectant heirship was the standing character of their own position, until

² Gal. vi.

³ Τῶν διὰ πίστεως καὶ μακροθυμίας κληρονομοῦντων τὰς ἐπαγγ. The force of the present participle should be noticed. They are not described as *having inherited* the promises, but as sustaining throughout the present life the character of expectant heirship, dying as well as living in the faith. (*Infra*, chap. xi.)

Jesus should again return to put them in possession of the promised rest. The model, therefore, of their imitation must be sought for among those who had lived and died while the *earthly* Canaan was as yet an unfulfilled desire; when the sure promises of God made pilgrimage a willing choice to men who, in their trustful knowledge of His truth and power, dwelt safely and with rich contentment (though in tents of changeful sojourn), in a land which was not theirs.⁴ In its main features, patriarchal faith presents a close moral likeness to the proper experience of those, who, as partakers of the heavenly calling, are pilgrims, not by force of outward circumstance, but because of the exceeding great and precious promises of God.⁵ Accordingly, the case of Abraham is now brought forward, partly as an example of the rule of faith and patience by which the heirs of promise are at all times called to walk, and partly to disclose more evidently to their feeble minds the depth and strength of those foundations upon which they are encouraged to build all their hope.

Verses 13–15. “For after God had made promise to Abraham, He swore by Himself,”⁶ &c. The patience of Abraham commenced from the date of the original promise. The birth of Isaac in due time fulfilled his hope, as touching the true seed of his inheritance. But its final confirmation and

⁴ Ps. cv. 9–14.

⁵ 2 Peter i. 4.

⁶ Τῷ γὰρ Ἀβραὰμ ἐπαγγελάμενος ὁ Θεός. κ. λ. Not when he made promise. The intention of the Spirit is, evidently, to distinguish what the E. V. tends rather to confound. DE WETTE has given the aorist participle its just force: “Als Gott aber verheissen hatte.” u. s. w.

security was the oath of God, pronounced when the decisive trial of his faith was past, and he had received the child of promise (in a figure) from the dead.⁷ It was after long patience, and by new and wonderful endurance that he thus obtained the promise.⁸ In the return of Isaac from the altar of appointed sacrifice, and in the confirmation of the oath of God, Abraham had found a sure pledge and distinct foreshadowing of the day of his desire. For it was not simply an additional reiteration of the word already more than once repeated. The oath which God spake out of heaven had respect, indeed, to what had gone before, and was a confirmation of the earlier promise. But it was more than this. It was a new and solemn obligation, founded immediately on a transaction which mystically involved, and presented to the faith of Abraham, the manner in which his promised hope was to be realized. It was *through an acceptable offering* that the gifts of Him who justifies the ungodly were to be secured, in holiness, to the receivers of His grace.⁹ It was *in the resurrection* that the hoped-for blessings could alone be perfectly enjoyed. The promise, many times repeated, was thus *established* on its final resting-place, no more to be disturbed or tried. The trial was now past, and all the human doubts and

⁷ Gen. xxii.

⁸ Ἐπέτυχε τῆς ἐπαγγελίας. It was the specific promise of the seed that Abraham thus obtained. With respect to "the promises" in their wider sense, both he and his fellow-heirs, of whom God makes a good report, died, *not* having received them (μὴ λαβόντες). The expression μακροθυμήσας appears to involve the whole period of Abraham's pilgrim course, but with especial reference to his obedient surrender of Isaac at the last great trial of his faith.

⁹ Distinct allusion is made to this in Isaiah xxix. 22: "the Lord who redeemed Abraham," &c.

strong misgivings, which might from time to time have roused sore conflict in the heart of Abraham, were stilled into the full assurance of a hope which rested on the oath of Him who cannot lie. That oath was now to Abraham as a *possessed inheritance*. For in the light of it he saw the day of Christ. He saw it, and was glad.¹

Verses 16–18. But not for Abraham's sake were these things written; but for the more abundant consolation of God's many heirs of promise. Nothing can exceed the tender and gracious cogency of the Spirit's reasoning in the present passage, in which an appeal is made to the established habits of mankind, and the interest of our common nature,² in order to encourage the faint-hearted Christian to a more thorough and unreserved appropriation of the hope which is by grace. An oath is the resting-place of natural confidence. Men, in their conscious infirmity of purpose, are wont (in ignorance of their own intrinsic powerlessness)³ to bind their will to a performance of their words by an extraneous sanction. They swear, therefore, by one greater than themselves, and the citing of this mightier Arbiter is an immediate stilling of all strife. Peace thus established rests unbroken while the covenant is kept⁴ (verse 16). And God, who knows man's heart, would use this means to still the gainsaying of his

¹ John viii.

² Compare, as to the principle and method of the Spirit's teaching in this passage, Matt. vii. 11.

³ Matt. v. 34–36.

⁴ How fallacious such a security has often proved in a world which bestows its homage without a blush upon *successful* perjury, is but too well known to all. The Apostle's analogy is drawn from the rule, and not from its occasional breach.

natural unbelief. For it is His will that all strife and question should be set at rest within His people's hearts. He, too, would swear, that they might better understand the plain speech of His ever-blessed promise. For though He be Love itself, and only truth is in His word, yet He takes knowledge of His children's case, in whom, while here below, suspicion and misgiving, spite of themselves, are hard to be kept wholly down, because they still remain deep-lodged within the natural heart. An oath, moreover, might be fitly made by Him who has *power* to perform. He could swear, indeed, by no greater than Himself, but by the intervention of an oath which should be as His own equal, He would lay to everlasting rest all question of debate between His people and Himself.

Two reasons are expressed for this interposition of God's oath. First, it was to make distinctly manifest⁵ to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel. Secondly, and as the result of the former, it was that we who see it thus displayed might have *strong* consolation. To Abraham, his recovered child of promise was the hopeful figure of a sure though far distant performance of the oath which he had heard. To those who in the faith of God are Abraham's children,⁶ its sure accomplishment is now disclosed in the death and resurrection of the Son of God. For in Him are all the promises of God made sure.⁷ The faith which now sees Jesus crowned with glory and honour, as the First-born from the dead, perceives in Him the triumphant confirmation of God's counsel.

⁵ Ἐπιδείξαι.⁶ Gal. iii.⁷ 2 Cor. i. 20.

Its riches of eternal blessedness are thus pledged to the believer in the person of an ever-living Security.⁸ The Man Christ Jesus is the mediate Covenant of peace between the heirs of promise and the invisible God of their salvation. By the demonstration of the Spirit this is now made known in the plain speech of gospel testimony. It is *shown* thus to the holy brethren of Jesus how firm-set and immutable are the strong foundations of their hope. For we who have fled for refuge to lay hold on Jesus as the Hope of life eternal, have a *double* assurance that our trust is not in vain. The ancient promise was no lie, nor could be. For it was the echo of God's purpose which He had purposed in Himself; and it is not possible for Him to mock Himself. The word, then, upon which the children feed is an immutable thing. But the living Christ in heaven is the ratification and security of all God's counsel, and of every word of promise. HE is the Truth of God. The Spirit, who, as the Revealer of Jesus, anoints the children with the unction of salvation, is no lie.⁹ It was not possible for God to lie. Yet He has *spoken*, and His word is CHRIST. His secret counsel has thus become, to the believing sinner, a manifest as well as solid resting-place of saving truth. All that God is, is pledged for the fulfilment of their expectation, who, as fugitives from the wrath revealed from heaven against human sin, have laid firm hold upon the hope which is set before them in the gospel of His grace.

⁸ The marginal translation of verse 17 is, of course, to be preferred, though not exactly literal. The words *ἡμεσίτευσεν ὄρκῳ* are simply "mediated by an oath." "*Mit einem Eide Bürgschaft leistete.*"—DE WETTE.

⁹ 1 John ii. 27.

In setting Jesus forth as the living immutability of His counsel, God has consulted glory to Himself, while ministering to the heirs of promise a strong consolation. And let the weak-hearted Christian ponder well the meaning of these simple yet most blessed words. The strength of our comfort is derived from the discovery thus made to us of the infinite extent of the obligation under which the God of all grace has bound Himself in Christ for our sakes. A Christian's question is no longer with himself and his ability to keep his own soul safely for the day of hope; he has to do with the power, and faithfulness, and truth of Him who has said, "Blessing I will bless." He is invited to stay himself on God with full and joyful affiance, seeing that what was once only promise, is now both a present Testimony, and a never-failing Hope. For He who *will* bless, *hath* already blessed. God, who uttered from heaven His promissory oath to Abraham, from the same heaven now announces its fulfilment, in speaking to us by His Son. He preaches peace by Him. He has already blessed the children of His counsel in heavenly places with all spiritual blessings in Christ.¹ In revealing Jesus at His own right hand, God aims at settling His people on the firm and solid footing of a complete intelligence with Himself. To doubt the fulness and endurance of His love, when thus commended on the double evidence of word and oath, is to grieve the gracious Spirit of His truth. Our consciousness of inward evil and weakness is a natural suggestion of these doubts. Looking at Jesus in His perfection as our

¹ Eph. i. 3, 4.

Great High Priest, alone suffices to dispel them, and to bring back confidence and joy.

Verses 19, 20: "Which hope," &c. We have, then, in the hope of the Gospel, that which is as an anchor of the soul. By it the buffeted believer may ride out every tempest of affliction, and endure the stress of all that sea of tribulation which is the appointed portion of the children here below. The entrance of Jesus as our Forerunner, has settled fast this anchor of the soul, *within the vail*. An assurance of the unceasing and effectual intercession which is there being made for us can alone sustain the soul in peace, while sensible, by daily experience, of its own intrinsic wretchedness. Despair, which is the natural result of any excursion of the thought in contemplation of God's holiness within the vail, is turned to hope by seeing *Jesus there*. In the full glory of the Melchisedec title He is there *for us*, not in figure or in promise, but as the End of promise, in living Truth and Power. The Resurrection and the Life is the efficient minister of consolation to our troubled souls. Amid the sorest trials of spirit, and the fiercest opposition of the things which are against us, we have in Him a stay for our souls which does not move. That anchor neither yields to adverse pressure, nor is ever shifted from its place by Him whose love has cast it so deep and abidingly for our sakes.² The victory therefore of the believer over the world, as well as over his own flesh, is, to be habitually in spirit where his anchor is.³ Chris-

² Such appears to me to be the moral force of the epithets, ἀσφαλις, τε καὶ βεβαίαν which are applied to the believer's anchor of hope.

³ John v. 4.

tians are worshippers within the veil. The force of the figure here employed is not only to assure us of our eventual security as believers, but to show us where that safety lies—to remind us that our faith is not concerned with truth remotely, but by near and present contact. Our calling is to have to do with God. We learn Him without dread in Jesus. The glory of the Son of God, so distant as it yet remains from sight, is expounded to us by the Spirit as a present verity, and revealed to us distinctly as the corner of our hope. The knowledge of the Son is the enjoyment of the Father. The *blessed* God⁴ shines, steadily and without cloud, in love upon His children, from the face of Jesus Christ. He blesses them according to His riches in glory by His Son. The comfort of the Father's countenance is not withheld from *any* heir of promise; but to find our blessings we must seek them.⁵ Our enjoyment therefore of the filial standing will be as the measure of our knowledge of the Forerunner, who is for us entered into that within the veil, to be our everlasting Minister of grace and truth.

⁴ 1 Tim. i. 11.

⁵ Matt. vii. 7.

CHAPTER VII.

THAT the High-priesthood of Jesus is "after the order of Melchisedec," has already been three times emphatically affirmed. In this character He has just been presented to the believer as the strength and security of that bold but certain hope which entereth into that within the vail. And now, to justify the stress laid on this title, and, by declaring its significance, to wed the souls of his Hebrew brethren more closely to the substance of their hope, he proceeds, in the present chapter, to expound the special characteristics of this new and more excellent "order" in comparison with that of Aaron.

And first, Melchisedec, the pattern of the Son of God,¹ is described both in his person and his office (verses 1-3). His name, with its adjunctive title of royalty, is expressive of those intrinsic personal qualities upon which, in the case of the Divine Antitype, the honour of its priestly office rests as its

¹ In the language of this chapter, the type is with difficulty to be distinguished from its Eternal reality. It is in vain to speculate as to the proper identity of Melchisedec, king of Salem. That such a personage existed is certain. That the receiver of Abraham's tithes was the Son of God in person, I do not believe. In verse 3 he is said to be "made like unto the Son of God," while at verse 15, it is said, that there ariseth another Priest *after the similitude* of Melchisedec.

foundation. He is Melchisedec, or by interpretation, king of Salem, which is "king of righteousness." After that, he is also king of peace. For peace is the natural domain of righteousness. The manner and effect of his dominion is according to the character of His person. He is, then, a king,—the possessor and administrator, both of peace and righteousness. He is, further, "priest of the Most High God"—a title paramount to any strictly Jewish relation. For Aaron's ministry never transcended the narrow limits of the nation for which he acted. He was the priest of Jehovah as the God of *Israel*. Melchisedec is priest of the same Jehovah under His fuller title of the Most High God, Possessor of heaven and earth.² According to the fulness of the Divine sovereignty is the range and efficacy of his priestly function. This royal priest appeared but on one occasion, and performed but a single act of office. He met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him.

Both the juncture and the action are expressive, prophetically, of far mightier things. For a day of decision must come, when righteousness will be arrayed in power against iniquity. A day of great slaughter, and of falling to the towers of human confidence, is appointed, when a short work will be made in righteous judgment in the earth—when the power of confederated wickedness will be laid low before the avenging presence of Him who judges and makes war in righteousness—when the sceptre of the wilful king will depart for ever from his grasp, that the true Heir of the world may enter openly

² Gen. xiv.

upon His reign.³ It is upon a preparation of effective judgment that the Light and Desire of the creature will shine forth, and the reign of blessing will commence in the manifested kingdom of the Possessor of heaven and earth. The true Melchisedec will then, as a Priest upon His throne,⁴ pronounce a blessing which shall not remove. But the present chapter is intended to illustrate the personal glory of the Melchisedec Priest, rather than to describe the manner of his eventual administration. For, though clothed with all the majesty of this title now, and shown thus to the Church, whose calling is to inherit a blessing, it is not now, but in the coming dispensation of the fulness of times, that Christ's high-priestly office will be magnified in the effective display of all its glory.⁵ Let us here only remember, that whilst *Aaronic* ministry (according to which type the Lord now acts for us in heavenly intercession) was, characteristically, the gracious expression of Divine forbearance to the covenant people of God, who stood in the enjoyment of His favour by virtue of the priestly ordinance; that of *Melchisedec* is immediately associated with the manifestation of Jehovah's glory as the Judge and Governor of all the earth.

It was upon the friend and servant of the Most High God that Melchisedec pronounced his benediction. To the believer in the God of gracious promise, he was the witness and security of blessing; for he was the mediate expression of that righteousness and peace which Abraham reckoned on in God,

³ Isa. xxviii. 17, xxx. 25-33; Rev. xvi. xix.

⁴ Zech. vi. 13. ⁵ Eph. i. 10. See *Notes on the Ephesians*, in loc.

and did not look for in himself. Against the unbelieving enemies of Abraham, he was an approving witness of the judgment of the Most High God. Blessing had been the burden of God's word to Abraham since first He called him from his country, and took him from his natural associations to be the chosen vessel of His favour. The appearing of Melchisedec was as a disclosure to him of the effective channel through which alone the promises of God can reach, and eventually rest in blessing on their object. In presenting tithes to Melchisedec, Abraham recognized, discerningly, the principle of *mediation*. God blessed His favoured and accepted servant through His own mysterious and abiding priest. There was, moreover, in this act of Abraham, an emphatic ascription of his victory to the grace and power of God. By the gratulations of Melchisedec, he had been reminded of Him to whom the battle really appertained. The spoils which faith may win are gotten by no strength of man. The believer's warfare is in the Name and against the enemies of *God*.

In considering the language of verse 3, in which the mysterious individuality of Melchisedec is so strikingly presented to our view, it is necessary to bear in mind that what is described is the shadow and similitude of an Eternal Person. Hence expressions are employed which, though true and exact in their application to the shadow, are incorrect and insufficient exponents of the nature of the Person.⁶

⁶ *E. g.* Melchisedec is said to be ἀπάτωρ, ἀμήτωρ, and ἀγενεαλόγητος; neither of which are strictly true of Jesus. From everlasting to everlasting He is the Father's Son. He is, moreover, and will not cease to be, the woman's seed. He is the man Christ Jesus,

For the Person must be regarded with reference to relationships which are characteristic of Himself, and which, because the Person is Divine, admit only of a very imperfect typical reflection—yet is the type both suited and sufficient in its place. The abrupt and singular presentation of Melchisedec in the book of Genesis—one mightier than Abram, yet of no declared descent—known to no man in his origin, and traced by no man to his end—appearing and disappearing under the same character, as priest of the Most High God—affords an apt similitude of Him whose goings forth have been from everlasting, and who, as the God of truth, has lifted up His hand and said, “I live for ever!” Accordingly, he is said to be “*made like* unto the Son of God.” The principal sentence, the expanded complement of which fills the remainder of the first three verses is: “This Melchisedec abideth a priest for ever.” *Continuance* is the essential peculiarity of the order after which the Son of God receives His consecration. The priestly title, as we have already seen, attaches first to Jesus at His resurrection from the dead. But He who is thus entitled is the eternal Son of God. The perpetuity of His office, in all its varied ministrations, is according to the essential nature of His Person, and is the truth which, by an accumulated demonstration, is asserted in the sequel of this chapter for the more effectual stablishing of the believer in his new and better hope.

whose genealogy as touching the flesh, the Holy Ghost has carefully recorded. It is true, that in resurrection He is “the *beginning*, the first-born from the dead,” &c. But all the above expressions are amiss in a real description of His Person. What is rather presented in verse 3 is an abstract figure of the proper *αὐράκεια* of God’s true and acceptable Priest.

Verses 4-7. "Now consider how great was this man," &c. To degrade the Levitical priesthood, and the covenant which it accompanied, from the excellency which the mind of every Jew so naturally ascribed to them; and to show that Aaron was but a secondary and partial type of God's true priest—exemplifying a portion of His gracious office, but no true pattern of his proper dignity and glory—was a difficult though necessary task to one who laboured for the advancement of his brethren in the perfect way of God; a task which he now endeavours to accomplish by means of an appeal to the former testimony of Scripture respecting Melchisedec, and a comparison (drawn from the same authority) of the Aaronic order, in its principal features, with that earlier and far higher, although much-forgotten office. They are called on to consider the *greatness* of Melchisedec, to whom the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. Leading their minds back to the very root and fountain of the nation, he shows them its founder, in whose name was all the nation's boast, in the attitude of homage to the priest of the Most High God. By the reception of the blessing, as well as in the offered tithing of the spoils, the father of the nation had confessed subjection to this greater priest. For, as is presently added, "without all controversy, the less is blessed of the greater" (verse 7).

But this admitted fact has its own consequences; the first of which is immediately stated in what follows. The priests of the Levitical family are honoured in their place, according to the sanction of the legal ordinance, by their *brethren*; albeit

these last are not less children of Abraham than themselves (verse 5). Levitical priesthood, then, is an exalted office by this witness and token, that it tithes the seed of Abraham. Now the father is before the children, and the possessor is greater than the heir. But Abraham himself gave tithes to one who, though a priest of God, held office by virtue of no Levitical pedigree (verse 6). The possessor of the promises which Israel claimed as their inheritance, because the nation sprang from him, had accepted blessing from another priest. By plainest reasoning, therefore, this earlier order was of greater honour than the priesthood of the sons of Levi.

The honour of the priest is as the dignity of the worshipper. On this principle the pre-eminence of Melchisedec has been already shown. But (verse 8) these separate orders of priesthood are now compared together in another balance. *Dying* men take tithes from Israel. But the receiver of Abraham's offering knows no end of life. "It is witnessed that he *liveth*." By how much, therefore, life is better than mortality, and continuance greater than decease, by so much does Melchisedec, and He whose priesthood is according to that order, excel the anointed ministers of Levi's house.

Nor is this all (verses 9, 10). By the very token which attests his priestly dignity (the reception of tithes), Levi is himself a witness of the superior honour of that former priest. For Abraham, the patriarchal fountain of the race, carried all his unborn seed within him when he met Melchisedec. Levi, then, did homage also when his father bowed. And

so the very taker of his brethren's tithes paid earlier tribute to one greater than himself.

"If therefore perfection," &c. (verses 11, 12.) Having demonstrated, as above, the intrinsic inferiority of Levi to Melchisedec, the subject is now re-examined from a different point of view. The Law itself had prophesied of another priest who should arise after the order of Melchisedec, and who should not be called after the order of Aaron. Now this, the apostle argues, was the strongest imaginable proof of the imperfection of the Levitical priesthood. For had perfection been found there, no need would have existed for a change. But the Levitical priesthood cannot be considered now in the abstract. It had been given to the nation with special relation to the Mosaic covenant. "For the people had been placed under law with reference to it."⁷ The priesthood was the sustaining medium by which alone the people, who broke the commandment in its chiefest point ere it was well delivered,⁸ could be tolerated as Jehovah's nation. It was, in all its ordinances, the witness of imperfection, while it spake in figure of good things to come. If, then, the Holy Ghost had spoken in David of another priest, and, passing Aaron and his order by, had chosen Melchisedec as the type of Him who should abide for ever, there

⁷ Ὁ λαὸς γὰρ ἐπ' αὐτῇ νομοθεήτω. Some confusion is apt to arise in the reader's mind in considering this part of the chapter (verses 11-16), from the different senses in which the term "law" appears to be employed. In verse 11, I understand it to signify the Mosaic economy in general. In verse 16, it seems rather to be confined to the limited and technical meaning of priestly appointment and consecration. The law of consecration is also included in the general thesis contained in the twelfth verse, though much more is intended, as is stated above.

⁸ Exod. xxxii.

was involved in this prophecy a prospective change, too, of the Law. The people were not always to be under Moses. With the cessation of the priestly ordinance which he had framed at the commandment of Jehovah, there would likewise terminate that covenant to which alone the ministry of Levi's sons belonged. The Giver of the Law would likewise, by fulfilment, take it from the people's necks.⁹ The connexion between priesthood and covenant will be made more manifest as we proceed. Meanwhile,

(Verses 13, 14,) the words of prophetic testimony had been spoken of "our Lord." But it is evident that He proceeded from a tribe of which Moses had said nothing concerning priesthood. For He sprang out of Juda. Nevertheless, the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh, and therefore the advent of Him of whom these things are spoken has removed from Levi his hereditary honour. Priesthood is thenceforth annexed to royalty, and Juda is the royal tribe, the stock of God's Messiah as touching the flesh. This transfer of the priestly honour to another tribe is quite at variance with the former law. But that the law must change with the priesthood is made still more evident (verses 15-17) by a consideration of the terms of the prophetic testimony. For it is after the order of Melchisedec that there arises another priest, "who is made not after the *law* of a carnal commandment, but after the *power* of an endless life." Now Melchisedec was unknown to Moses as the legal mediator, and was no priest of the tabernacle which man had pitched. Nor can the carnal commandment which ordained the Aaronic

⁹ Col. ii. 14; Acts xv. 10.

priests abide in force when once that other Priest has come, whose official title is held in the power of an endless life. For the Levitical institution was a thing of time and change. It was to endure, therefore, only until the establishment of a new and changeless order, at the arising of that other Priest. And He has now arisen. The exalted Son of God is greeted in heaven, and witnessed by the Spirit upon earth, as "a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." The priesthood, therefore, has been changed. So, likewise, has the law, in each and every sense. It is totally new in form and character. By all the difference that subsists between the King of righteousness and the servant of sin, there has been a change effected in the law. The law or principle of *faith* has now succeeded to the law of works. The Pronouncer of blessing, as the King of peace, now stands in the stead of the annual remembrancer of unremoved transgressions. But more of this hereafter.

Verses 18–19. The conclusion and general result of the foregoing reasoning are now declared: "For there is, verily, a disannulling of the commandment going before, for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof (for the Law made nothing perfect); but there is the bringing in of a better hope, by the which we draw nigh unto God."¹ The former com-

¹ Ἀθέτησις μὲν γάρ ἐπεισαγωγή δέ. κ. λ. The English version of this passage is peculiarly unhappy. The margin is by all means to be preferred. Compare DE WETTE. "*Die Aufhebung des vorigen gebotes geschiehet. die einföhrung dagegen einer bessern Hoffnung.*" u. s. w. It is wonderful that, perceiving, as they seem to have done, the true construction of the passage, the authorized translators should have placed its obvious rendering in the margin, instead of in the text.

mandment has been disannulled because it could not work the work of God. *Perfection* is God's end. *But the Law made nothing perfect.* It was weak and unprofitable for the final purposes of God; though mighty, as a minister of holiness, to crush all human hope, and drive the sinner far away from peace. But God had desired to bring His children nigh. The Law could not do this. It made the enjoyment of His presence an impossible thing, because it only dealt with that which intrinsically is unfit for God. It spoke with the natural man in righteousness, and thus forbade all hope to those who understood its language. If hope, therefore, existed in a subject of that covenant, it was either owing to his being a partaker of the faith of Abraham, or else it was a fallacious hope, fed only upon ignorance of what the law required. It fled away before the light of knowledge, leaving terror and confusion in its place.² But God has Himself wrought that perfection which the Law could not effect. In the person of His blessed Son, He has supplanted the weak and profitless commandment by the mighty Strength of His salvation. In the anointing of the true Melchisedec, there is the bringing in of a better hope. For He who is thus entitled was first delivered for our offences, and has been raised again for our justification. This is a hope which maketh not ashamed. By this we now draw nigh unto God, having access with boldness by the faith of Him.

“And inasmuch as not without an oath,” &c. (verses 20–22.) A priest is, by his office, a mediator also. He owes his official existence to the covenant

² Rom. vii.

which ascertains the respective relations of God and the people for whom he acts, in things pertaining to God. Hence, priest and covenant must stand or fall together. This has already been intimated in general terms (verse 12). The weak and unprofitable commandment had been accompanied by its appropriate priesthood. The new and changeless order of eternal priesthood has brought in a better hope, because the holder of that office is the Surety of a better covenant.³ The value of the covenant is determined in this passage by the presence or absence of the oath of God. Now the Levitical priests were made without an oath, for they attended a transitory office of imperfection and decay. The law which made them was itself a feeble and unprofitable thing (verse 18). But an oath is something final and determinative in its nature. God would not therefore bind it to an ordinance of vanity. It is when He attains *perfection* that the God of truth confirms it by an oath. In the preceding chapter we have had an exemplification of this.⁴ So, also, now. In *Jesus* God has won the end of all His counsel. His oath is uttered to inaugurate the *Saviour* as the everlasting Priest of our profession. And, therefore, by all the value of that oath of God, is the covenant which is now administered by His Son, of greater sanction and of better trust than that which Aaron served. *Salvation*⁵ is God's perfect truth. This is the faithful

³ Διαθήκης. I prefer translating this word "covenant" in the present passage, though I by no means accept this as a universally appropriate rendering. *Infra*, chap. ix.

⁴ *Ante*, chap. vi. 16-18.

⁵ Which word expresses, not only deliverance from wrath, but the

and most blessed assurance which the priestly unction of the Son of God has thus made doubly sure. The oath of God sets fast in Jesus Christ for ever the effected counsels of His love.

Lastly, and to close the present process of comparison, we have in verses 23, 24, the long and ever vain succession of a mortal priesthood contrasted with the intransferable honour⁶ of Him who is alive for ever and ever. The former priests were many. For among them all not one was found superior to death. Aaron was mortal when he stood to minister before the Lord, although arrayed in vestments of glory and of beauty. Death made and unmade his successors in the priestly office. Each dying minister of that first tabernacle bare witness in his place to the weakness and insufficiency of a ministry which ended in the grave. Decked outwardly with garments of salvation, they possessed in themselves no ability to save. No man might rest in such, and be at peace. For, though officially separate from sinners, they must *personally* take the lead in every national acknowledgment of sin. Their own condition was as that of the people for whose sake they served. In their *office* only, as a witness of some better thing to come, might faith discern encouragement and hope. But Jesus, because *He is* eternal life, remains; and, because He remains, His priestly title never can remove. It rests on Him abidingly in token of the personal perfection of its wearer. Death, which displaced the former priests, has no

eternal blessings which the saved are to enjoy. *Ante*, i. 14. Compare 1 Pet. i. 4, 5; Rev. vii. 10-17.

⁶ Ἀπαράβατον ἔχει τὴν ἱερωσύνην.

dominion over him who has arisen from the dead. He dieth no more.⁷ His everlasting priesthood is a portion of His crown as the victorious destroyer of both sin and death.

“Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him,” &c. (verse 25.) Power resides in Jesus. It belongs to Him who is, by personal description, both the wisdom and the power of God;⁸ and the manner of its exercise towards His people is salvation. The doctrine of acceptable sacrifice will presently be stated in its close and deeply interesting connexion with this subject; we are here engaged only with the very important truth, that an essential part of that work of God which the Scripture calls “Salvation” is effected through the ministry, in heaven, of God’s great High Priest. His presence at the right hand of the Father is a continual intercession for the brethren whom He is not ashamed to own. For as He once died, so also does He *live* for ever for His people’s weal. Always, and to the utmost end,⁹ He is their *Saviour*. According to His own appreciation of the priestly honour, He fulfils its gracious and holy ministry for our sakes. He does this to the glory and eternal praise of Him who has confirmed Him in His office by an oath; thus anew glorifying the Father who has first glorified the Son.¹ God is now fitly represented by His Priest to those whose holy calling is to know Him, and to have to do with Him. The Priest is, moreover, suited to the worshippers. And so it is added,

⁷ Rom. vi. 9.

⁸ 1 Cor. i. 24.

⁹ Εἰς τὸ παντελές. “*Gänzlich*.”—DE WETTE.

¹ John xvii. 1, &c.

(Verse 26,) "For such a High Priest *became us*," &c. The calling of believers is perfection. They are "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling." Moreover, "to bring many sons to glory," is the purpose of Him who has called them. A fitness, therefore, must be found in them to dwell unblameably and joyfully with God; and we have already seen that it is the grace of Divine redemption that thus brings them nigh. But according to the holy nature of the people's calling must be the personal qualities of Him who is their Priest. For in Him they stand and are accepted in the sight of God. The manner, therefore, of their blessing must consist with the value of His mediate ministry on their behalf. But nothing which is below the standard of His own perfections can find personal acceptance in the presence of the Father of Lights. His Priest must be, in person and in station, the exact reflection of Himself. This Jesus is intrinsically. He is "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." As it respects His official dignity, He is "made higher than the heavens." By virtue of His personal perfection, He has obtained that peerless excellence of place. He thus becomes a suited and sufficient Mediator for the people who are called to a hope of *heavenly* inheritance.

IN this enumeration of the virtues and paramount glory of the true High Priest, the simple-minded saint may view with wonder and with joy the moral portraiture of his own imputed place and acceptation in the sight of God. For Jesus is the Forerunner and Exemplar of His brethren. If the believer reflects on his own natural character, he finds him-

self a perfect contrast to his Priest. But faith's triumph is to know that God *will not* regard him as he sees himself. God loves His children in His own Beloved. He views and estimates His people in their everliving Priest. As He is in heaven in the presence of the Father, so are we even in this world.² Oppressed in conflict, often overcome by enemies too strong for our weakness, or too vigilant for our faulty carelessness and sloth, we are yet sustained, and shall be to the end, by Him who is the sleepless Intercessor for His people in the efficacy of His all-prevailing Name.³

"Who needeth not daily," &c. In verse 27 (which stands in connexion with chap. v. 1), we have special mention made of sacrifice, a subject which receives a very full elucidation in the sequel, but which is here introduced as a natural and requisite accessory to the foregoing portraiture of sacerdotal perfection, inasmuch as it is upon a sacrificial basis that the varied priestly functions of active, sympathetic grace proceed. Nor is the force of contrast less strikingly displayed in a comparison of the sacrificial work of the acceptable High Priest with that of His carnal and shadowy predecessors, than has already been shewn in relation to His Person. The High Priest who so becomes His brethren, has no need to do frequent sacrifice for sins. The ministers who served the earthly tabernacle, because they were but mortal men, must offer daily, for them-

² John iv. 17.

³ For His people's sakes it is that He has sanctified Himself and gone on high, that they also might be sanctified by the truth, when by faith they see Jesus thus in priestly intercession on the throne. (John xvii. 19.)

selves as for the people. They could not bring the people nearer than they stood themselves. But their natural standing was afar from God. They might not see His face and live. Once, and once only in the year, with blood of others, they might pass within the veil. But sin never could be thus removed. There was, therefore, no foundation laid on which a ministry of saving grace could be established. But Jesus, by the giving of Himself, has made acceptable offering for His people's sins. He has done this once for all. He needed not to offer for Himself, being Himself the righteousness of God; but by willing grace He gave Himself for our sins, that we might thus be made God's righteousness in Him. We have need of such a Priest, and of the gracious services which He now fulfils for us! For in many things we all offend. God knows this; and it is to comfort and sustain the contrite heart that He reveals His perfected High Priest. He is presented by the Spirit to our faith for the establishing of our confidence, and the holding fast of our joy in Him.

The conclusion of the whole matter is summed up in the verse which ends the present chapter. The Law makes *men* high priests who have infirmity. But the weak and unprofitable commandment was not God's final truth. It must pass away, together with the fading shadows which it made. In contrast to this, the word of the oath, which is *since* that Law, establishes the *Son* who is perfected⁴ (or consecrated) for evermore. To the weakness of natural humanity there has succeeded the Lord of all power

⁴ Τετελειωμένον.

and might. Instead of the necessary and impassable distance between the sinful creature and the Creator in His holiness, there is, in the second Priest, the necessary nearness of essential relationship. The appointed Minister of things pertaining to God performs that service with the perfect zeal of filial affection and delight. And this He does *for us*. In all His grace and power He is the devoted and unfailing Helper of our need.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE foregoing chapter has demonstrated the personal perfection and official glory of the High Priest after the order of Melchisedec. In the brightness of that glory the lesser dignity of Levi's house has vanished as a shadow. Having thus treated of the Priest and His *position*, he prepares now to take in hand the subject of His *ministry*. In connexion with this subject, we have unfolded to us, in this and the two following chapters, a full view of the nature and extent of that "change of the law," which has already been declared to be necessarily involved in the change of the high-priestly order.¹ But consistently with his method hitherto, the doctrines now to be examined, whether of the new covenant as the recognized basis of the people's blessing, or of the sacrificial and intercessory ministrations of the priestly function, are viewed in their immediate relation to the Person of Him who is both the mediator of the one, and the effectual accomplisher of the other.

Accordingly, the present chapter opens with a *resumé* of the doctrine just before laid down, in

¹ Chap. vii. 12.

which especial stress is laid upon the present heavenly ministry of Jesus for our sakes. "*We have such an High Priest,*" &c. (verses 1, 2.) This was the very point and emphasis² of what he had been saying. For in handling the subject of priesthood, he was not defining an abstraction, but disclosing to the hearts and consciences of his Hebrew brethren the fulness of God's "great salvation." His desire and endeavour was to give a right direction to their present faith. He would have them know, that if by their confession of the crucified Messiah, they were outcasts from the commonwealth of Israel, and no longer worshippers within the earthly courts, they were not without present access to the living God. The great High Priest of their confession is the Minister of a sanctuary which is worthy of the "order" after which He has been called.

To draw, therefore, their minds and their affections *thither*, and to fix them upon Jesus as the proper refuge and desire of their souls is henceforth the chief aim of the Spirit. "The throne of the majesty in the heavens," is now to be contemplated no longer from a distance, and in the spirit of a servile dread, but in the conscious nearness of filial interest. For He who is not ashamed to call them brethren, finds now His exalted place of honour on that throne. Yet, not to rest there only in the personal enjoyment of His glory, but to fulfil, for their sakes still, the gracious work of priestly mediation. His exaltation,

² Κεφάλαιον δὲ ἐπὶ τοῖς λεγομένοις. κ. λ. "Sum" is an inadequate expression of what appears to me the writer's meaning. DE WETTE seems to have caught his spirit better: "*Hauptsache aber, bei dem was wir sagen, ist.*" u. s. w.

no less than His previous humiliation, is "for our sakes."³ To sustain true Christian worship at its just pitch of heavenly elevation, is a constant labour of the Spirit in the Church.

The descriptive quality and position of the sanctuary of our worship are stated in verse 2. First, it is the *true* Tabernacle. Secondly, it was pitched not by men, but by the Lord. Thirdly, its place is heaven, and not earth. There has been a tabernacle upon earth. God walked in it, when He went about to lead His people to the land of promise. Moses prepared that tabernacle to receive Jehovah as a gracious Visitor from heaven. In the order of the former dispensation, God descended to abide with that one people which He had taken as His own among the nations upon earth. While, therefore, faith could never measure its eventual hope in God by a visible and perishable work of human hands, but remembered always that the end of promise was to be attained with Him in heaven, the *national* distinction and glory of Israel was that God was among them upon *earth*. Their worship, therefore, was essentially an earthly worship, though in the pattern of its service it might testify of heavenly things. The Aaronic priesthood was the effective medium and instrument of national and earthly worship; but that priesthood has been changed. Another priest, and of a different order, has been consecrated. The great High Priest of our profession is set down on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. There he remains throughout the fixed, but unknown period of His Church's patience

³ 2 Cor. iv. 15.

upon earth. But where the Priest ministers, the people worship. The earthly people *saw* the tabernacle which contained the presence of Jehovah. Their eyes beheld the sacrificial ordinance, and they were personally present in the courts of God, until the high priest, who presented their oblations in the holy place, came forth again to bless them in His name.⁴ In like manner, but in another power, the Christian is a worshipper of God. *Faith* brings him in spirit to the shrine of living and Eternal Truth. Instead of descending by a visible token to abide with men, God raises now His children to the place of His abode. He has, indeed, descended first to bring them hither, and by the Spirit He inhabits, even here below, the Church of His redemption.⁵ But it is by that Spirit also, that the children now have access through their Mediator to the Father. The true worshippers worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. The hour which the Son of God announced to be at hand, when Jerusalem should be no longer the resort of God's true worshippers⁶ has now arrived.

The Apostle of our profession has pitched in heaven another and an abiding Tabernacle.⁷ In that Tabernacle He fulfils for us to God-ward the faithful and perfect ministry of holy things, and thither, consequently, by the Spirit which is given them, are

⁴ I am drawing here a general comparison merely. The particular import of the Levitical observances, and their spiritual analogies, will be considered farther on.

⁵ Eph. ii. 20-22.

⁶ John iv.

⁷ A *tabernacle*, rather than a temple, because, as has been well observed, it is during the wilderness experience of the Church that Jesus acts for them according to the Aaronic type of intercessional ministry.

God's believing worshippers invited to repair. The practical effects which flow from this transfer of the scene of worship from earth to heaven will be stated more fully as we proceed ; meanwhile, let the Christian reader note carefully and keep in lasting remembrance, the principle involved in this doctrine of our Lord's Melchisedec priesthood, which is this: *The fundamental and essential contrast between the former and the latter things is, that the discernment, by faith, of things invisible is now the alone condition of true worship.* Believers in Jesus can have no terrestrial sanctuary, because He whose presence *makes* the sanctuary, is bodily and specifically in heaven.⁸ To attribute, therefore, especial sanctity to any earthly place, is to dishonour that true tabernacle wherein alone the Father's glory shines. To attach, moreover, to Christian ministry a sacerdotal character and value, is to disallow the exclusive glory of the anointed Son of God.⁹ To present ourselves now as worshippers of God, in the performance of a ritual of human institution, and in reliance on the efficacy of external acts, is to grieve the Holy Spirit who is given to the children as the witness of that better hope by which they now by *faith* draw nigh to Him.

⁸ That believers *are*, in another sense, a temple or sanctuary of God, is a truth not to be confounded with the apostle's doctrine in this epistle. See further on this point, *Notes on the Ephesians*, chap. ii. *ad fin.*

⁹ In another point of view, believers are all priests. The Church of God is a royal priesthood. They are priests to God, offering in Jesu's name an acceptable offering of unceasing praise. But as alike *brought nigh* by the blood of Jesus, none occupies an intermediate place betwixt his brethren and the Object of their worship. Gifts of the Spirit, bestowed in His sovereign distribution, for the nurture and edifying of the body in the unity of a faith which sets that body in heavenly places, in living union with its Head, bear no sort of analogy to that priestly office, the holder of which is severed by his consecration from the worshippers for whom he acts.

Verse 3. "For every high priest," &c. The titles conferred upon our heavenly intercessor are not an empty sound. There is a *ministry* of ever-active and all-gracious energy attached thereto. Of *necessity* God's perfect Priest must bring an offering. As we have had Him already commended to our faith as the common depository of His brethren's griefs, and the sole medium of all their worship, so are we presently to contemplate Him as the effective contrast, in the presentation of His one acceptable oblation to His shadowy precursors. It is the very law of His appointment to make an acceptable presentation for the people's sakes. What the Levitical and earthly minister assayed to do for Israel, as the rectifier of the people's errors, and the restorer of their ways, is now performed effectually by the Son of God, who stands between His people and their sins. The following chapters will treat more distinctly of the nature and value of what He has to offer. At present it is asserted only that the consecrated Son of God is for us, with an offering, in the true and heavenly Tabernacle. There, and there only, does He act in His high-priestly character.

"For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest in any sense"² (verses 4, 5). This passage is doubly interesting and important. First, it was to those to whom this epistle was immediately addressed, a forcible demonstration of the irreconcilable contrariety of carnal ordinances to saving faith. For as yet the priests of Levi's house remained. They

² Οὐδ' ἂν ἦν ἱερεὺς. "He would not even be a priest." "So wäre er nicht einmal Priester."—DE WETTE. He would be no priest at all. The E. V. is feeble, rather than faulty, in this place.

continued to perform their daily office in the temple at Jerusalem,³ which, though doomed of God, had not yet fallen. But in the clear brightness of the Son's Melchisedec glory, these hereditary and ostensible ministers of holy things, together with the place and ritual of their service, are perceived to be but an obsolete and empty shade. For the God whom they professed to honour, had gone back from earth to heaven, and had there set up the eternal Sanctuary of His presence. Yet though in themselves both vain and lifeless, these old familiar ordinances had their value still as patterns and examples of the heavenly things. Thus he would turn them to account. He would show his brethren, that in the heavenly ministry, which Jesus now performs, the substantial antitype and living reality of each and every act in the mimetic ritual was fulfilled for them abidingly with God.

But, secondly, the doctrine of these verses has an application of a wider and more enduring value. The subject of earthly priesthood is regarded, in verse 5, from a new and important point of view. Not only is the Levitical order shown to be the only priesthood which God sanctioned upon earth, since Moses appeared as the servant and witness of Him that was to come, but we are reminded that the entire fabric and appointment of that former tabernacle was the faithful copy in all its details of a celestial archetype. The normal truth was shown to Moses in the Mount, and a reflection of

³ This I understand to be the shadow and example especially meant in the expression: *Οἱ τινες ὑποδείγματι καὶ σκιᾷ λατρεύουσιν.* κ. λ. "They serve the example and shadow of heavenly things." They perform their service there.

that glory was to be presented to the earthly worshippers. The Mosaic tabernacle was consequently an imitative work. Man was its builder, though under a Divine direction, and according to a pattern which the Lord had shown. And legal priesthood was the effective ministry of that tabernacle. Thus the earthly sanctuary and its ministry were cast as a shadow before the coming and (by faith) expected Truth. It had, therefore, no essential continuance; at the revelation of the Substance, it must fade away and vanish. All its meaning and its temporary efficacies cease on the disclosure of the spiritual and perfect Reality from which its name and figure had been borrowed. It follows, therefore, of necessity, that if God's earthly priesthood be confined to Levi, and if that Levitical honour was but a type and figure of His Christ, then, by the extinction of the legal priesthood in the consecration of the Son of God, *all* priestly title is (for the present dispensation, while Jesus sits in heaven alone), exploded and dismissed from earth. All the requirements of God's true holiness are met approvingly by His anointed Son. All the necessities of those who are, by faith, the people of God, are effectually undertaken by that same High Priest, as the unfailing Minister of grace and mercy. Any assumption, therefore, *now* by men, of priestly place⁴ or title upon earth, is seen to be at boldest variance with the truth of God. To assimilate the order of Christian worship to the ancient Jewish model, betrays an entire ignorance or forgetfulness of the

⁴ Except as all Christians are priests. As to this, see the note at p. 189, and the remarks relating to worship on *vv.* 19-22 of chap. x.

leading doctrines of this epistle. A Christian priesthood upon earth is a vain but presumptuous attempt to re-establish that which God has set aside. It is a bold but insane device of man. Satan, not God, has furnished the pattern of this fatal counterfeit of truth. In its essence it is a nonentity—the shadow of a shade. For the revelation of the Son of God in heavenly and eternal priesthood has dissolved the shadow, which God once *did* sanction, from the view of the believer. But in its *pretension* it is a most haughty sin. For it exalts itself against the peculiar glory of the Son of God. It is a delusion suggested by the father of lies, who seeks thereby to spoil the souls of men of saving knowledge, while their conscience is beguiled by names to unsuspecting sleep.

Verse 6. “But now hath He obtained a more excellent ministry,” &c. The mediator of the legal covenant had constructed the earthly tabernacle by Divine injunction, as a type of heavenly things. The ministry of Aaron and his sons must be estimated, therefore, according to the value of the covenant to which it was attached. But imperfection has been shown to be characteristic of that former covenant. The Law made *nothing* perfect. We are called now to a consideration of the new and altogether different covenant by which the Law has been succeeded and supplanted. The excellency of the priestly ministry of Jesus is to be asserted, therefore, with reference to the quality of the covenant of which He is the Mediator. It is affirmed to be, first, a *better* covenant intrinsically; and, secondly, it excels the former in the stability of its endurance.

It is founded on better promises. It is preferable to the former covenant by all the superiority of grace to law, of promise to exaction, of righteousness to sin, of blessing to cursing, and of life to death. It was delivered upon *better* promises, inasmuch as the benefits which it secures are independent of conditional stipulations, and rest solely on the pledged assurance of the God of grace. The former covenant was established on the people's word. It could not be ordained without their free consent. It was a compact of agreement in which they were a contracting party. They made promise of obedience, and Jehovah's blessing was their assured possession only upon their fulfilment of that word. Their breach of promise, by one act of disobedience destroyed for ever all hope of reaching that conditional good of which the covenant was the security. It vacated all the blessing, and established hopelessly the curse.⁵ But *Jesus* was not the Mediator of that covenant. There is no salvation in a bond of human works. Christ never was, and is not now, "the Minister of sin."⁶ It was administered through a mediation

⁵ Gal. iii. 10; Jas. ii. 10.

⁶ Gal. ii. 17. As the expression above quoted is not always clearly understood, it is worth while to add a word of explanation. Peter, who at Jerusalem had filled the honoured place of a bold and uncompromising assertor of pure gospel truth, against the vain pretensions of the flesh, is nevertheless betrayed at Antioch, through the fear of man, into dissimulation of the most unworthy and perilous kind. As an apostle of Christ, he dishonours his office by sanctioning those very claims of self-righteous legalism which he had so recently rejected and denounced. Paul, who by the grace bestowed upon him, was aware of the devices of Satan, and saw clearly that the gospel was destroyed, if Peter's sinful weakness became the standard of conformity, instead of the sure testimonies of the Spirit, withstands him to the face. But not content with blaming the *act* of tergiversation (the effect of which had already been to involve many others in the like condemnation, verse 13), he goes on to show that

worthy of itself as an imperfect thing. Both sin and death were in its mediator and its priest. It slew the very servant by whose hand it was ordained. It was a covenant of death, and not of life.

But such a covenant, though holy, just, and good, was inadequate to meet the ends of *Love*. It was not *faultless* in the sight of God (verse 7). This description is applied to the first covenant, with reference, not to its essential quality as an exponent of Divine holiness, but to its fitness for the accomplishment of God's ulterior purpose. It was wholly inadequate to this, since, by making sinful man a party, it stood as an obstruction in the way of the fulfilment of Divine *promise*. The blessing which was in the purposes of God must necessarily be deferred, so long as the Law, once imposed, continued unfulfilled. For, from its very nature, law must

the true source of all such dissimulation is a shallow and insufficient apprehension of the very nature of the gospel. For their sakes, therefore, and for ours, he sets forth anew the contrasted principles of law and grace, shewing that a return on the part of a Christian to circumcision in any shape, was a return from liberty to bondage, and from righteousness to sin. For the law knows man only as a transgressor. It is characteristically (in its operation upon fallen nature) "the ministration of condemnation." (2 Cor. iii. 9.) If a believer, therefore, replaces its yoke upon his conscience, he is (though nominally seeking to be justified by Christ) "found to be a sinner" still (verse 17); because by the law is the knowledge, not of righteousness, but of sin; a legal conscience is a defiled conscience necessarily. (Comp. Rom. vii. 7-24.) But if so, he proceeds, "Is therefore Christ the minister of sin?" A startling question, put for the very purpose of showing, in more glaring colours, the grossness of the fallacy with which the devil seeks to mock and impoverish the sheep of Christ, when he practises his devices against them under the semblance of an angel of light. (2 Cor. xi. 13-15.) Then, after justifying his question in verse 18, he goes on to re-establish the shaken foundation of true Christian trust, by demonstrating the total cessation of legal bondage for the believer, through the exhaustion of the law's judicial powers in the cross of Christ. "I, *through the law*, am dead to the law," &c. &c. Henceforth, therefore, it is no longer *I*, but *Christ* (verses 20, 21).

deal with men on their own merits, and could only, therefore, curse them as a damnatory witness of their sin. Another covenant must, therefore, be devised, which should supplant the first. The Law had done its work, indeed, in demonstrating to the full the moral wretchedness of man. God had been glorified by its administration as the Just and Holy One. But it drew thick clouds around the face of God. The perfection of His character could not be thus expressed. If rays of grace and mercy broke through that cloudy vail at times, to light up hope in the believer's heart, it was by means of the prophetic word of promise, which by anticipation disallowed the former things, and showed Salvation in the light of coming Truth.

God was dissatisfied with a covenant which was no complete exponent of Himself. By necessity of His holiness, He is the Censor of His people's ways. In the desires of His mercy, He finds fault with that which only proves their sin⁷ (verse 8). He will make, therefore, a New Covenant, which shall be unlike the old (verses 9-12). The first thing to be remarked in considering this passage is, that the specified objects of the latter Covenant, as well as of the former, are the house of Israel and the house

⁷ Μεμψόμενος γὰρ, αὐτοῖς λέγει. "*Denn tadelnd sagt Er zu ihnen.*"—DE WETTE. Just above, the first covenant is declared not to have been faultless (ἄμειπτος). Although the arrangement of the words seems rather in favour of the usual rendering (finding fault with *them*), yet, considering the general drift of the context, I prefer to take διαθήκην as the suppressed object of the participle, placing a comma after γὰρ. "For finding fault [with it], he saith to them," &c. It should be observed, however, that for αὐτοῖς Tischendorf reads αὐτούς. But this can hardly be taken as conclusive. That Jehovah *did* find fault with His people, and with too much reason, is most sure; the question here only is as to the drift of the Spirit's meaning in this place.

of Judah. The *covenants*—of promise, even as of debt—are *theirs*.⁸ They had broken the first compact by their sin. God would establish the second for their sakes in pardoning mercy. Days will come, in which the ancient hope of Israel will be realized. Meanwhile, by the death of Jesus for that nation, the blessings of the second Covenant are abidingly secured to Jacob, though he knows it not. They are preserved in Him who is the Shepherd and the Stone of Israel, in readiness for application to their destined objects at the time appointed of the Father.⁹ But while Israel, as concerning the Gospel, is an alien to the *election* both of Jew and Gentile, the riches of the better Covenant are now laid freely open. For all the promises of God in Christ are yea, and in Him amen, unto the glory of God *by us*.¹ Let us, therefore, while watchfully avoiding that dangerous wisdom of self-conceit which has led the Gentile branch to vaunt itself in high-minded forgetfulness of God's still unrepented purpose towards Israel, claim boldly as our own, and examine diligently as the inestimable bond of all our hope,—the warranty of all our confidence and rejoicing in the Lord—this new and better Covenant thus founded for us upon better promises.

The general description of the New Covenant is, that it does not resemble the Old. But the first covenant was not faultless; the second is, therefore,

⁸ Rom. ix. 4. Let the reader who doubts this read attentively Jer. xxx.-xxxiii., and then consider whether any other than hereditary Israel is meant in the promises there expressed. It is by special election that the remnant will be saved which will afterwards become a mighty nation. But that remnant is of Abraham's natural lineage. (Micah iv. 7; v. 7, 8; Isaiah xxvii. 6.)

⁹ Acts i.; Rom. xi.

¹ 2 Cor. i. 20.

perfect. The first was of temporary validity, being made with reference to another which was to come. The second, being come, stands fast for ever. It is the lasting memorial of the only wise God—the perfect and enduring expression of the grace and power of the Lord Almighty. It is this that forms the leading feature of distinction between the New Covenant and the Old. In both alike the *will* of God was manifested. But in the covenant of works, that will looked for its fulfilment to the creature. In the better Covenant, God is bound by word and oath to the doing of His own good pleasure in accomplishing the *whole work* of His people's peace. All the conditions of their blessing God has taken on Himself for ever. He is the sole Contractor in this bond; the obligation of His promise makes the risk and burden of salvation exclusively His own. The emphatic words which gave its tone to that first covenant were, "*thou shalt*," and "*thou shalt not*." The life and power of the better bond is in the words "*I will*," and "*I will not*." All men are naturally liars, because nature, though ever willing to promise what is good, is powerless to *do*. And so the Law, which was established on the people's promise, was presently vacated by their sin. As an instrument of blessing, all its power was destroyed. But if to be a "covenant-breaker" is a part of that stigma of repudiation which the Spirit of truth has fixed indelibly on fallen humanity, to be a "keeper of covenant" is, on the other hand, one of the distinctive glories of Him with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning. The Covenant which Jesus mediates, being the undertaking of the righteous

God of Truth, makes all its promises of blessing good in the sufficiency of perfect and almighty Love.

Looking more closely at the specialties of this New Covenant, we find that they are but an amplification, in detail, of God's purpose of electing grace. He would have a people who should know Him as their God, and His people should be worthy of Himself. By an abundance of grace, and through the gift of righteousness, He would *make* Himself a people of whom He would not be ashamed.² The laws which He had once engraven upon stones, that Israel might outwardly perceive His holiness and learn His fear, shall now be put within His people's mind, and written on their hearts (verse 10). The letter written upon stones declared, to him that read it rightly, how far and hopeless was the distance which divided him from God. By now revealing Christ within His people's hearts, as the end of all His laws for righteousness, God has filled their mind with wondering delight, to find themselves brought nigh in Him.³ Nothing but perfect holiness can fit God's people for His presence. He has wrought for them that fitness, in making His own Son their sanctification.⁴ By the Spirit of the living God there is impressed indelibly on each believer's heart the lineaments of life and righteousness. For Christ is there. By faith He dwells there;—richly or feebly, as the measure of the faith which apprehends Him,—yet there He is, and there He will abide. The heart which once has truly opened to receive Him can never let Him go. For the faith of a believer is the gift of God; it is the prime instinct and essential

² Rom. v. 17.

³ Eph. ii. 13.

⁴ 1 Cor. i. 30.

quality of that second and *eternal* life which God bestows upon His people, through His quickening word of truth. Love is the end of all commandment; and love has its resting-place in the believer's heart. *God's* love is shed abroad there by the Holy Ghost; and in the knowledge and enjoyment of that love the soul's true love to God-ward has its birth.⁵ And obedience is the natural effect of love. If Christ be in us, there is in us an unfailing spring of both godly desire and obedient purpose. Grievous obstructions may, indeed, oppose themselves to every gracious affection of the inner man. But holiness is the desire of each quickened soul. Because the truth of God is in His people's minds, His fear is likewise there. The intentions of the sinner saved by grace, are to live no longer to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. If for a season driven or enticed from the pure way of righteousness, his sense of peace will surely wane, and may for a season entirely forsake him, until restoring grace has brought him back to God. But the man that is conscious of no wretchedness, when practically far from God, or who has never found the knowledge of the name of Christ to excite desires of holiness in his heart, may assure himself that, though acquainted with the form and letter of the New Covenant, he has never yet been brought within its bond.

As a preface to the covenant of works, Jehovah announced Himself as Israel's God.⁶ The fruit of that covenant was the nation's disherison, and the turning of His wrathful curse upon a sinful and rebellious house. The better promise of the second

⁵ 1 John iv. 16-19.

⁶ Exod. xx. 2.

Covenant is, "*I will be their God.*" But this once-prophetic (and, to its natural objects, yet unfinished) word of grace, has now become to the believer an established and eternal truth. The beginning of that perfect law of liberty which God has put into His people's minds, is the knowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord. But where the heart believes unto righteousness, confession is likewise made unto salvation. And this confession of the name of Jesus is to the glory of God the Father. *God acknowledges His people by this token.* Thus, also, is He *known* of them, who see the brightness of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ. God has a people now, though Israel be not gathered; and Jehovah-Jesus is that people's God. He is their Lord and their God.⁷ Viewed, however, in His special relation to the better Covenant, He is its ever-blessed Mediator. Characteristically, therefore, it is not *Jehovah* that is to us the peculiar memorial of God as the Author and Fulfiller of the Covenant of promise.⁸ "*To us there is one God, the FATHER.*"⁹ Our God is He who has brought His people, not out of bondage for an earthly Canaan, but out of darkness into His marvellous light;¹—delivering us from the power of darkness, and translating us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.² The hope of a believer is the birthright which belongs to him as begotten again by the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.³

⁷ John xx. 28.

⁸ Although it is Jehovah-Shaddai whose sons and daughters are now brought to joy in Him by Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. vii. 16–18.) His titles are eternal. He does not divest Himself of those formerly revealed, when making new and still more wondrous manifestations of Himself.

⁹ 1 Cor. viii. 6.

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

² Col. i. 13.

³ 1 Pet. i.

In the fellowship of a Divine adoption, we are called by the Spirit to the knowledge of the Father's love. We have Him in the Son. The fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Him who, as the Surety of this better Covenant, has based for us, on that foundation, the sanctuary of eternal peace.

We see thus how Jesus the Lord, who is also the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, has pitched the tabernacle of His heavenly ministry upon the settled ground of finished and established promise. There can be no repudiation of a people thus brought nigh. For never can the God of truth deny *Himself*. He could not *continue* to be Israel's God, because they broke His covenant, and forsook His truth. He cannot *cease* to be the God of His believing people; for by an infrangible Covenant of life and righteousness He has built up truth for ever in His Christ. He has bound His people to Himself in Him. He is the God of the believing sinner; to justify, to sanctify, to glorify him; to keep him safely all his journey through, and to present him faultless before His presence with exceeding joy. This He is, according to the unfaltering purpose of His *mercy*, which made Christ the sure Holder of His people's life before the world began.⁴ Believing sinners are His acceptable people; to continue such for ever, to the praise of the glory of His grace, who has appointed their inheritance. They are His in the life below, to prove the exceeding riches of that faithfulness and mercy which sustains them day by day; to learn His holiness, and to glory in His grace. They are His worshippers, His servants, and

⁴ 2 Tim. i. 9, 10.

His sons. God will dwell among His people ; and, with the Lamb who has redeemed them, He will be their Light and their unending praise, in the place which He has built in heaven for His everlasting Rest.⁵

In verse 11, another emphatic point of dissimilarity to the former covenant is mentioned. Ignorance of God was a continual reproach of the natural people. "Israel doth *not* know, my people doth *not* consider," is the pregnant conclusion of Jehovah, when in grateful intelligence of the hand that fed them, He finds the children of that covenant below the beasts that perish.⁶ Light shined within the hearts of that small remnant which the Lord of hosts reserved ; but from Egypt downwards the *nation* was a foolish and a sinful nation. God gave them up as such⁷ from the hour when they gave His glory to the gods of Egypt. That they knew Him not really, was as manifest to Him who tries the hearts, when they multiplied their outward sacrifices and waited sedulously in His courts, as when they openly avowed their shame, and gave their sons and daughters unto devils. This national ignorance attained its lowest deep, when, not knowing what they did, they crucified the Son of God, and made their own Messiah die a felon's death. For the same reason is the Holy Spirit of grace and truth, who glorifies by His testimony that worthy name, a liar and deceiver in their eyes. Mistaking sin for righteousness, they remain till now in ignorance of God. Yet for the house of Israel and the house of Judah is it promised and provided, for the days which are

⁵ Rev. xxi. 22, 23.

⁶ Isa. i.

⁷ Acts vii. 42.

to come, that all that nation, from the smallest to the greatest, shall truly know the Lord.⁸

In the meanwhile, this verse has an important moral bearing on God's *now* professing people. For it expresses the discerning test which distinguishes and severs the true people of God's covenant from those who only have a name to live. God is the Teacher of all who truly know Him in His Son.⁹ Such knowledge is, to its possessor, everlasting life.¹ But *all* who have *faith* know God; for the Son of God who came into the world for their redemption, has also given them an understanding to know Him.² The babe just born, through the reception of the word, already knows the Father. For the Gospel of His grace declares His love in Jesus; and, to the believing sinner, that report is both the light of knowledge, and the seed of life. With a maturer knowledge, the man who has grown old in Christ, full well aware what hand has led him through the long journey of his faith and patience, abides triumphantly in that which first shed joy and peace within his soul.³ Nature may learn God's sayings in the letter, and may lay presumptuous hands upon the children's portion as its own. Thinking the Holy One to be even as themselves, men whom God's Spirit never quickened may *say* they know Him, while delighting still in sin. But the believing sinner *tastes* that He is *gracious*. This nature never does. For nature is ignorant of its real condition, and therefore cannot know the grace of God in truth.

⁸ This subject has been examined at length in my *Notes on the Romans*, chap. xi.

⁹ John vi. 45.

² 1 John v. 20.

¹ John xvii. 3.

³ 1 John ii. 13.

God's depths are only searchable by God's own Spirit; but the natural man sees nothing and knows nothing of the Spirit's things.⁴ Christ is the fulness of God's perfect love. None know Him thus but they who first have known themselves as wanderers amid that darkness into which the Gospel sheds its Light. The children of the Covenant are conscious of a change, not in the natural qualities of their flesh, but in their estimate of God and of His things. They love Him, while they hate themselves. Who and what God is, is discovered to them, not by the vain and fruitless efforts of the intellect, but in the foolish preaching of the Cross. They learn Him there in the perfection of His holiness, and the matchless glory of His grace. They begin a knowledge from the day of their believing, which only in eternity will reach its perfect growth. They may have conflicts; and, through Satan's wiles, may often be deceived and harmed. But though feebleness of faith may suffer doubts to spring and grow within their hearts, and though they may testify the smallness of their knowledge of the Father by the scanty measure of their present joy, yet never can they know another in the stead of their own Rock. They know that grace, and grace alone, can save them; and they know that only through the manifested love of Jesus, the true Shepherd, does that saving grace bring peace into their souls.

The means of this knowledge is the Spirit's demonstration of Redemption. For it is in saving mercy that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has revealed Himself to the receivers of His

⁴ 1 Cor. ii.

truth. Accordingly, this recital of the new and better Covenant is closed by an unqualified promise of entire forgiveness (verse 12). "*For* I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." The performance of God's perfect work of truth and mercy is thus laid as the basis of His people's knowledge of Himself. How this exceeding great and precious promise has been brought to pass, will be demonstrated fully in the tenth chapter of this epistle. We must here contemplate it simply in its force and intention as a chief article of this our better Covenant. Two things are promised; first, mercy to unrighteousness;⁵ and, secondly, an eternal oblivion of iniquities and sins. In both its clauses it is equally absolute. Viewing His people in themselves, God saw unrighteousness to be their born condition, and their natural estate. If *their works* are valued in His sanctuary, they are found to be iniquities and sins. In the riches of His mercy, He has met their personal unrighteousness by an unupbraiding and complete forgiveness. In His remembrance of the one obedience of Jesus for their sakes, He has clean forgotten their iniquities and sins. In the truth and sufficiency of His own eternal righteousness, He has glorified the pure desires of His love. He set His love on an unworthy people; and, by the work of their redemption, He has made them worthy of Himself. They are *His righteousness* for ever in Him who was once

⁵ Strictly, to their *unrighteousnesses* ταῖς ἀδικίαις αὐτῶν. A man's actions are but a multiplied expression of himself; but, that there is "none righteous," is the opportunity of God's abounding grace.

made sin on their behalf.⁶ If God therefore be truly known in Covenant, it is as the sovereign Forgiver and Forgetter of His people's sins. Peace must result from such a knowledge—that peace of God which passeth knowledge. For all that might challenge peace *God* takes away, and banishes from His remembrance. When Christians are deficient in this peace, it arises from an imperfect appreciation, either of their own personal condition, or of the absoluteness of the Divine mercy in this new and better Covenant. With a shallow perception of indwelling sin, there must be a slight and inadequate intelligence of mercy. When the Holy Ghost is heartily justified in those strong sayings of unsparing truth which take away from nature *all* its comeliness, and leave no furniture but sin within the leprous chambers of the human heart, that blessed Spirit can show freely forth the riches of the grace of God. We must have ceased from our own vain works, before we can appreciate the perfect work of God. When Israel shall be brought within the bond of this New Covenant, it will be in answer to an unreserved confession that *themselves* are as an unclean thing, and that all their *righteousnesses* are as filthy rags.⁷ So is it with the Christian now. Christ is worthily enjoyed as God's unspeakable gift, only when self is seen quite through, and reckoned at its proper estimation, in the bruised and contrite heart of faith.

God has provided thus for Israel and Judah a covenant of better promise. By calling it a New Covenant, He has already antiquated the former and

⁶ 2 Cor. v. 21.

⁷ Isa. lxiv. 6.

imperfect bond. The making of the new has cured, for faith, the mischief of the old. For that very purpose it was made; and therefore are its terms so unlike those of its precursor; it is in all respects its ever-blessed and prevailing opposite. Faultless in all its parts, it is no more to be questioned or annulled. Resting for its fulfilment solely on the will of God, and not of man, it remains an eternal security to the believer of all that God in grace can give, and the favoured objects of pure mercy can enjoy. As an instrument of efficacious grace, it fills His people's hearts with holiness, and their lips with truth; even as the former covenant, as the instrument of sin, had filled their mouths with falsehood, and their hearts with guile.⁸ The Holy Ghost had given utterance to this promise in the prophetic word which God spake to the fathers, and already to the believing Israelites to whom He writes, the Son of God was the Fulfiller and fulfilment of that word. The former bond was cancelled at the cross. It had expired. It was to be forgotten, therefore, with the sins which it had brought to light. It is said, at the close of this chapter, to be "ready to vanish away."⁹ There is, perhaps, in this expression, some allusion to the approaching destruction of the temple at Jerusalem, and the consequent cessation of legitimate Jewish ritual. But its proper reference is rather to the coming time for the removal of the vail of unbelief, and the discovery to Israel of the better Covenant,

⁸ Isa. lix.; Rom. iii.

⁹ Ἐγγύς ἀφανισμοῦ. To the Church, the old things have already passed away. All is become new to them that are in Christ. (2 Cor. v.) The Light, which faith alone now sees, is ready to be revealed to every eye.

in the apparent glory of Messiah. Until that time, the former covenant must be the law of them who walk in darkness, and are blinded still, amid the shining of the day. The shades of night will not remove from Israel's rugged path until the Sun of Righteousness arise on them with healing in His wings.¹

¹ Mal. iv. It is clear, that they who in the near prospect of the day of recompenses sustain their souls upon prophetic promise, stand fast in the Mosaic ordinance until the appearing of the nation's hope. The moral condition of the remnant who awaited the first advent of Messiah, resembles that of those who, in the true fear of Jehovah's name, will be found expecting Him, when, as the Deliverer of promise, He shall come again to Zion, the administrator of both judgment and mercy, according to the glory of His power. (Mal. iii. iv.; Isa. lix. 18-20, &c.)

CHAPTER IX.

IN the early part of the chapter which we have just quitted, the presence of Jesus, in the perfection of His Melchisedec glory, at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, was affirmed to have a direct ministerial relation to His believing people here below. Having in the remainder of that chapter reminded us of the connexion which subsisted always between priesthood and covenant, and declared the nature and tenor of that new and better Covenant to which the *everlasting* priesthood is attached, the way has been thus prepared for entering specifically on the subject of Christ's ministry for His brethren in the heavenly courts. This is accordingly done in the present chapter, which, like its predecessors, is pervaded by comparisons, and exhibits contrasts of the strongest kind. The last of those which have been already presented to us, was the essential contrariety of Law to Promise; the difference between the vanity of that which looked for its accomplishment to the natural man, and the abiding glory of that which has been built by mercy on the finished will of God. The description of the *Sunc-*

tuary, and its ministry, follows naturally the recital of the Covenant on which that ministry is based.

Verse 1. "Then verily," &c. The former covenant had its appointed ordinances of Divine service, and its appropriate sanctuary.¹ That tabernacle was a material and visible erection. In its structure and appurtenance it was characteristic of the relation which subsisted between Jehovah and the earthly nation, in the midst of which His presence dwelt. In the verses immediately following, the building and its internal furniture are described, with just such minuteness of detail as may enable the apostle to present in more effective contrast the heavenly realities, of which they are the type. We may notice briefly this description before passing to the main subject of the chapter.

Verses 2-5. The tabernacle was the place of Jehovah's earthly dwelling as the God of Israel's covenant.² He would meet His people there, through His appointed medium of priestly ministry. The glory of His presence should be enshrined there in the midst of the nation which He had redeemed as an inheritance for Himself.³ But while the tabernacle was in itself a gracious token of Jehovah's presence with His people, it was in its form and service a continual witness of the moral disparity which existed

¹ Τό τε ἄγιον κοσμικόν. "A worldly sanctuary." E. V. "*Das irdische Heiligthum*."—DE WETTE. This translation (as to the soundness of which I hesitated in the first edition) is, I now feel assured, the true one. It is a worldly sanctuary, for a people whose place of supremacy was on the earth, in contrast to the heavenly courts now opened to the "holy brethren." The critical reader may find some good remarks on the language of this passage in Alford's Greek Testament, *in loc*.

² Exod. xxv. 8.

³ Exod. xxix. 43-46.

between the people and their God. The broken covenant had already determined the character of the nation among whom the Holy One consented thus to dwell. It was amidst "a stiff-necked people" that Moses raised the tabernacle of Jehovah's presence at His word.⁴ But His coming into immediate contact with such a people must have made His glory known, not as a Saviour, but as a Destroyer and Avenger of unrighteousness; for, by their breach of covenant, they had already forfeited all claim to blessing, and exposed themselves to the cursings of the Law. It was, therefore, only by the ordered system of mediate priestly service that the nation's standing could possibly be preserved, consistently with the unchanging holiness of God. But, in addition to this, the tabernacle and its furniture was, to the eye of faith, a dawning indication of God's marvellous, but yet unrisen Light. It was an adumbration of the manner of that grace whereby God's holiness might rest in perfect blessing on a creature thoroughly renewed. Named, appropriately, according to its double purport, "The Tabernacle of Witness,"⁵ it gave in all its details, expressive intimation, not only of a holiness in the Divine presence, which was intolerable to man in his born condition of natural sinfulness, but also of the purpose of the Holy One to compass, in His own sufficiency, the means of uniting His people in effectual blessing to Himself.

The holy place and the most holy, contained each its characteristic furniture. The latter, which was

⁴ Exod. xxxiv. 9.

⁵ Acts vii. 44.

separated from the former by the vail,⁶ was the especial sanctuary where Jehovah's glory dwelt. In its furniture are symbolized the varied attributes of the Divine Perfection. The ark of the covenant was there, containing within it the tables of the covenant. This, with its covering mercy-seat, and the overshadowing cherubim of glory, speak wondrously of God to the believer, who reviews them in the steady light of Gospel truth. To these were added, besides the censer which once a-year bore incense (when the vail was passed by Aaron ~~to~~ present within the holiest the memorials of atonement), the golden pot, wherein the bread which fed the people in the desert was laid up, and lastly, Aaron's budding rod, an emblem both of judgment and of the patient mercy which should eventually prosper through the acceptable priesthood of Jehovah's choice.⁷ All these things, so rich in spiritual meaning to the Christian, are here regarded in their simple and primary character, as appurtenances of the first and perishable tabernacle. What was intended by these holy and beautiful, though shadowy symbols, will in part appear as we proceed. But a particular interpretation of them is not the Spirit's object in this place (verse 5).

⁶ Called, in versè 5, "the second vail," to distinguish it from the hanging at the door of the tabernacle, which bore some resemblance to it in its materials and general pattern. (Exod. xxviii. 31, 36.)

⁷ The difficulty (of which a most extravagant estimate appears to have been formed in some quarters) arising from an apparent incongruity between verse 3, and what we read elsewhere, as to the furniture of the Holy of Holies, disappears entirely when the true force of the apostle's language is perceived. For it is not affirmed of all or even *any* of these things, that the sanctuary *contained* them, but that it *had* them (ἔχουσα); *i. e.* that they attached in a special sense to that part of the Tabernacle. The whole question has been fairly discussed by Alford *in loc.*

Verses 6, 7. "Now when these things were thus ordained," &c. In the tabernacle thus prepared and finished, the priests accomplished their appointed service. A sacrificial ministry of daily repetition was performed at the altar of burnt-offering, and in the holy place there was a corresponding offering of incense. But no simple priest could ever pass the vail. Once only in the year the *high priest* went alone within the holiest place. The occasion of his entrance was the annual day of atonement. His pass-port of admittance was the blood of the sin-offering which on that great day was brought within the secret of God's presence. He who brought it thither, and sprinkled it upon the mercy-seat and before the mercy-seat, did so not only for the people's sake, but likewise in solemn acknowledgment of his own transgressions.⁸ It was offered by him "for himself and for the errors⁹ of the people." The value and effect of this sacrificial ministry as a means of purification are more fully discussed in the next chapter, which treats the subject of sacrifice in its practical relation to the standing of the worshipper in the sight of God. The *order* of the

⁸ Levit. xvi. *passim*.

⁹ Ἀγνοήματα. "Sins of ignorance," or "oversight," such is the general term which the Spirit of God here uses to describe all that multitude of unheeded or unconscious derelictions from the literal standard of legal perfection, which had accumulated on the nation since the day of atonement in the year preceding. But when these "errors" are examined in the holy light of the Divine presence, they are judged according to the estimate formed *there* of the natural will of man, which is the parent of all sin. Hence, in the ordered ritual of the day of atonement, the same Spirit specifies the national necessities which that ordinance was framed to meet under a varied description, indicative of the true condition of a fleshly people in the sight of God. Uncleanness, transgressions, iniquities, and sins, are things provided against in that great Harbinger of better things. (Levit. xvi.)

imperfect ministry, in its significant but ineffective ritual, is here presented with a view to its comparison with the more excellent and heavenly Antitype.

Verses 8-10. "The Holy Ghost this signifying," &c. We have now the Spirit's explanatory comment on this ancient structure of His own device.¹ While to every eye, but that of a prophetic seer, the future destinies of Israel were covered by a cloud, which baffled search, one thing was made plainly evident to all through the ministry of the Levitical tabernacle; the moral distance, namely, of the people from the object of their worship. The way into the holiest was not yet manifested while that tabernacle stood. It was a figure for the time then present, and spoke forcibly, to the enlightened worshipper, of the means by which alone Divine acceptance must be sought. But the blood of annual atonement made no man fit for fellowship with God. Whatever help a Jewish worshipper might find to true communion through these ordinances was by virtue of a faith which kept its hold of earlier promise, and therefore turned to their true use the figurative tokens of a hope to come. Faith is the essential condition of Divine communion. But the Law is not of faith; and the visible tabernacle corresponded to the covenant to which it was attached. As that covenant was with the natural man, so was the sanctuary, with its furniture, a thing of sight and touch. Its ministry was not spiritual, but was accomplished by the literal performance of external rites. The tabernacle and its ordered services thus became a standing

¹ Exod. xxxi.

witness, first, of the unapproachable holiness of God—His presence being accessible to His people only through a sacrificial medium; and secondly, of the permanent insufficiency of Levitical sacrifice to furnish such a medium. No lasting joy or satisfying blessing could come through an iterative ordinance, which bore continual witness to the moral insolvency of those whose souls were pledged to the performance of Jehovah's will. God, as He really is, could never be enjoyed while distance from His presence was an imperious necessity of His people's covenant-standing. Rest for the conscience was impossible to the worshipper who, with a consciousness of his liabilities as under Law, possessed no better knowledge of the God whom he desired to approach, than was presented to his senses in the ritual established by the hand of Moses.

The peculiar structure of the tabernacle, as well as the prescribed order of the Levitical ministration, alike enforced these leading truths. But although exclusion from God's presence was expressed so sternly, as a present necessity of His people's condition,² yet the tabernacle was essentially expressive of the *grace of God*. As a companion to the covenant of works, it indicated how that deep distress was to be effectually met, which it was the office of that covenant to bring to light. To the eyes which saw it, it was presented as a parable of promise, as well as a present medium of national blessing³ (verse 9). The glory and magnificence of its internal furniture, as well as its varied and emblematic forms,

² Levit. xvi. 2.

³ ἡτις παραβολὴ εἰς τὸν καιρὸν τὸν ἐνεστηκότα. κ. λ.

all spake, with more or less distinctness, of the richness of that portion which was to be one day enjoyed by worshippers who, with consciences clean purged from all defilement, might attain the holy liberty of God's own presence. For the time then present there was, indeed, an efficacy in the gift and sacrifices which were offered there. They met, that is, the requirements of God's ostensive relations with His people. But it was wholly a *factitious* efficacy. They were altogether powerless to remove the burden which an enlightened conscience felt beneath the obligations of the Law. Blood might be sprinkled on the mercy-seat, and God might act from thence in national blessing towards His people. But no worshipper might see that presence, or know that he was morally brought nigh to God. He remained a *sinner*, though externally sanctified according to the manner of the carnal rite. The very priest who did the service in the holiest place, lost no particle of personal defilement through the exactest fulfilment of his trust.

It is clear that a system of ordinances originally framed for a temporary purpose, must absolutely cease with the period and circumstances for which it was designed. Nor is there anything imaginable more empty and insignificant than an obsolete ritual. This is strikingly expressed in the language of verse 10. Things which were weighty once with all the sanction of Jehovah's name, are in the retrospect but impotent and empty vanities. The services of that first tabernacle were, "*only* meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances." In all that solemn ritual and those difficult observances,

there was nothing intrinsically worthy of God's name. None of these things commended any man to Him. He had imposed them on the fleshly nation, while the time of pupilage endured.⁴ They riveted the yoke of bondage which the former covenant had forged. They were at once its temporary and practical mitigation, and a continuing witness of the unimpaired validity of all its claims. But when once the time of reformation has arrived, and Truth, no longer hidden under figures, is disclosed in its essential glory and vitality, the former things not only are no longer truth, but are no more even truth's resemblance. From the place they once held lawfully, they have been removed for ever. The promised Reformer has been manifested, and has brought to perfection His appointed work. A visible and ordered ceremonial of worship, now that the Son has entered on His heavenly priesthood, is a lie, and has no tincture of the truth of God.⁵ For God's set time for the endurance of the carnal rite has passed. To approach Him now through such a medium, is to come before His presence with a contradiction of the glory of His Christ.

Verses 11, 12. "But Christ being come," &c. To the former covenant and its dishonoured sanctuary are now *opposed the blessed realities of eternal things*. These verses contain a general affirmation, first, of the accession of Christ to the High-priest-

⁴ Gal. iv.

⁵ I speak of the present dispensation and of the partakers of the heavenly calling. Our access is now by the Spirit into heavenly places. The true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and in truth. In the coming millennial age, it is not improbable that sacrifices, commemorative of the one great work of atonement, may be offered in the earthly courts. (Ps. li. 18, 19; Ezek. xliii. xli. &c.)

hood of promise, and secondly, of His complete fulfilment in His own Person of an acceptable sacrificial atonement. He is come,⁶ an High Priest of good things no longer to be waited for, but declared to the believer as a present truth.⁷ Through a greater and more perfect tabernacle, He has entered the true Oracle. By passing through all heavens, He has reached the throne of God. The former and imperfect tabernacle, therefore, ceases. But the earthly building had contained God's *only* institution of outward ritual and work-worship. Being now supplanted by that which is not made with hands, the shadowy creation disappears. Nothing remains discernible to natural sense, while faith sees the beauty of Jehovah in the heavenly and greater Sanctuary. Thus a positive antagonism in principle is declared between ritualism and spiritual worship. *The only performer of acceptable rites is Jesus.* The only material of acceptable worship is the faith which discerns Him within the eternal Sanctuary as the effective Propitiator of the Divine holiness. He has fulfilled the High Priest's most momentous charge by entering into the holiest place. Like the Levitical shadow, He has entered in *with blood*. His finished sacrifice is the warrant of His access in this character. By *His own* blood He has gone in to see God's face for us. What Aaron did repeatedly—

⁶ Παραγενόμενος. This word refers, not to His personal advent, but to His objective presentation to our faith as the great High Priest of our profession.

⁷ Instead of τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν, Tischendorf edits in v. 11, τῶν γενομένων ἀγαθῶν. This is possibly the true reading. But no stress need be laid upon it; the advent of the Minister of promised blessing turns, of course, the prospective 'good things' of the Law into present realities and accomplished truths.

bringing annual proof of ineffectual sacrifice within the vail—Christ has done *once for all*.⁸ For in the precious blood of His own sacrifice He has found⁹ for his people an eternal quittance of all sin. That blood being recognized of God at its intrinsic value, there is a cessation for ever of propitiatory oblation. The vail of God's secresy has been, therefore, done away. From thenceforth He is known and understood of them that draw nigh by faith in Jesus to the throne of grace. Accordingly, the next two verses declare the results comparatively of the former and the latter sacrifice, in their bearing on the standing of the worshipper.

Verses 13, 14. "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer.....sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh," &c. Under the single word "purifying," there are here contained the two distinct ideas, first, of sacrificial atonement, and, secondly, of personal and practical sanctification. The sanctification of the Israelite through the offering on the day of atonement was but *inceptive*. It had to be followed up and virtually renewed by the application of the lustral water of purification, as often as any external defilement was contracted¹ Nothing is more expressive of the holy nature of Divine communion than the ordinance of special purification. Nothing, likewise, indicates more strikingly man's natural helplessness, and his impotency to maintain himself in an acceptable position before God, through the mere force of the circumstances in the midst of which he lives. Among the numerous rites of the Levitical institute, these two only (the

⁸ Ἐφάπαξ.⁹ Αἰωνίαν λύτρωσιν εὐράμενος.¹ Numb. xix.

day of atonement and the lustration by the ashes of the heifer) are here mentioned, because it is by them that the complete process of sanctification was effected. There is thus a broad and clear distinction to be observed between the two parts of this sanctification which, as a whole, is described as a "purifying of the flesh." "There is, first, that is, the original cleansing of the *person* of the worshipper by the acceptable offering on the day of atonement. By the annual remission of his iniquities, he was annually restored to an acceptable standing before God. He is sanctified, secondly, according to the exigencies of his ordinary life, by the after provision of the water of purification. He needed this practical preservation and renewal of his way, as one called of Jehovah to be *holy*.

But the sanctification thus acquired and maintained was purely external; it was absolutely inoperative as it respected the *conscience*. There was a purifying of the flesh, without any necessary reference to the inward man. Hence, these ordinances were adequate to the occasion, only because the manner of God's present dispensation was external and according to the natural condition of the fleshly nation with which He dealt. To a godly Israelite they had a significance beyond themselves. Meanwhile, they possessed a definite, present value. They sanctified to the purifying of the flesh. But if so,

"*How much more* shall the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God?" (verse 14.) The Law had

impressively declared the necessity of sanctification, and, by its unavailing ordinances, had pointed to the means of its attainment. Blood flowed, and did not cease to flow, because the deep necessities of human sin, and the requirements of perfect holiness, demanded other blood than that of bulls and goats. But that which was but outward and ceremonial, when performed by Aaron's hands, is, in Christ, a perfect and essential reality. *He* is our sanctification. His one offering has produced that precious blood, which, because it has already met and satisfied the holiness of God, is estimated in the secret of His presence as an *eternal redemption*. The eternal Spirit, through whom He offered Himself thus acceptably² to the Father, comes forth now from the true sanctuary of Jehovah's presence, to declare *to us* the value of that blood. It is very important, as it respects the stability of the believer's peace, to remember that, in the gospel of the grace of God, the Holy Ghost bears testimony as *God's* witness to the perfectness of the propitiation which the blood of Christ has wrought. It is God Himself who thus bears record of His Son.³ The believing sinner finds, to his astonishment as well as his delight, that the entire question of his sins and his iniquities has been settled in the heavenly Sanctuary before ever he is called to listen to the good report. Perfect peace is the result of our conscience being brought by faith

² In the reference to the Spirit in this verse we have not only presented to us the concurrent operation of the Godhead in its tri-personal fulness, in the mighty work of our redemption, but it intimates specially the *obedience* of Jesus unto death. The same Spirit who led Him into the wilderness also led Him as a willing victim to the cross.

³ 1 John v. 9, 10.

into immediate contact with that which has already been presented for us acceptably before God.

But this perfect offering and its effects demand some further consideration. As to its nature and description, it is the life of Christ. Through the Eternal Spirit that oblation was once made. It was offered with entire acceptance to the Father, who had fore-ordained it in His counsel, and both expected and received this last token of His Son's devoted love. The point kept before us in the present passage is the superlative validity of such an offering, in comparison with the former unavailing sacrifices. All, therefore, is referred to the intrinsic excellency of the Sufferer, who appears, therefore, not only as the passively consenting victim of Jehovah's pleasure, but as the voluntary accomplisher, in His own conscious sufficiency, of the work of sacrificial atonement. The ever-blessed Person whose blood is thus provided for the purging of our conscience, offered HIMSELF without spot to God. Both parts of the "mystery of godliness" are thus brought into equal prominence and distinction. The Giver of His people's ransom was the Son of man. Led unresisting to the slaughter, He was, as the Lamb of God, in willing substitution for His own. His sacrifice was human, but the human victim was the Word made flesh. It was the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, who thus gave Himself to death. While, therefore, it was a human life-giving, a human blood-shedding, a sacrificial atonement, thus, of life for life—of man for man—and therefore an exact substitution, in the manner of it, for the thing to be redeemed, yet how much more than this! Had

He been perfect man alone, that pure, unspotted life was not His own to give. God is the owner of His creatures' lives; and human perfection cannot overstep itself, and be for others that which in itself it is to God. The true humanity of Jesus was indeed a meet and necessary sacrificial substitute for men—one which in its perfectness the just God might accept. But all the effective virtue of that sacrifice proceeds from the essential Divinity of Him who, having such a life of perfectness to manifest among men to the Father's praise, could present it without wrong to God for sinners' sakes, since for them He had assumed it, when He changed His outward glory to the fashion of a man. In perfect grace He had begun that human life; in full obedience He had glorified it.⁴ In perfect fulness, both of grace and obedience, He had laid it down in our stead. He laid it down with power of resumption. The Just One's life was at His own disposal; for it was the Son of God who died. No man might touch it but at His own will.⁵ And having compassed by His death the purpose of His life below, He now displays in His ascended glory the efficacious tokens of that finished work.

The general assertion of the Holy Ghost upon these blessed facts is, that the knowledge of them ought to purge the conscience of believers. Having been personally privy to the work, He is competent to reason on its value. Moreover, He is the authentic Witness of the Father to the same effect. His estimation of the carnal ordinance is, that it makes the outside clean, and goes no further. His testi-

⁴ John xiii. 31.

⁵ John x. 17, 18.

mony to the living Truth is, that it purifies the *conscience* in the sight of *God*. *Sin* is the defilement of the human conscience. This is no accidental taint, but an inborn corruption, extended and aggravated in effect by means of transgression, but not to be confounded with it. The only Judge of sin is God, and He also is the Light by which its presence and true nature are discerned. According to the measure in which a man is made to feel the searching power of the *word* of God, is his apprehension of his personal defilement; and it is by the Holy Spirit of truth that the word is thus made to do its faithful office. Our knowledge of sin, therefore, as that which disqualifies us for God's presence, is not an intuitive perception, but is imparted to us by the Holy Ghost. Natural conscience is cognizant more or less extensively of sin, and dreads its consequences as a provocation of Divine judgment. But because the mind of nature is alien from God, and the *desire* of His holiness is a stranger to the heart of unregenerate men, the bitter sense of distance from His presence as the only place of blessedness and joy, as well as safety, is never tasted, *in this life*, but by a soul already quickened by the Spirit. A sense of thorough personal unworthiness is only wrought within the soul by Him. The conscious privy of God, as a Judge in His holiness, to the inmost working of the heart's native evil, is a necessary extinction of all peace within the soul. Conscience, which acknowledges the just requirements of holiness, confesses sin to be the triumphant ruler of the natural will.⁶ It is to the believer, in this

⁶ On the subject of indwelling sin and its effects, see further in chap. vii. of *Notes on the Romans*.

truthful state of conscience, that the Comforter addresses the heart-assuring words of this most blessed and decisive appeal. By a statement of the intrinsic value of the Sacrifice, He demonstrates the removal of the sin. Defilement, therefore, of conscience is removed, and changed to perfect purity, the moment the reality of Christ's atonement is perceived by faith. In guilty remembrance, and in the present *consciousness* of indwelling sin, the believer continues as he was before. But in the blessed certainty that God's own Son has borne the sinner's curse, and made an end of sin in death, he overrules sensation by Divine conviction, and gladly submits himself to the righteousness of God. Conscience, which in ignorance of that atonement could only bear mournful witness of nature's leprous uncleanness, is now become the faithful echo of His voice, who preaches peace by Jesus Christ. No longer the mirror to the soul of its own wretchedness and helpless ruin, it reflects upon it the pure light of God in Christ.

The conscience thus made free from sin, and filled with everlasting righteousness, is to the believing sinner the sanction and witness of abiding peace. By the blood of Jesus he is sanctified to God. But this purgation of his conscience is, for the Christian, not only a removal of the former sentiment of guilt and distance; it is an emancipation likewise from the old responsibilities, and therefore from the grievous yoke of legal service. The just effect of the blood of Christ on the believing worshipper is here said to be "to purge his conscience from *dead works* to serve the living God." This is

a highly characteristic expression. By the works in question we are not to understand acts of sin merely. "The works of the flesh," elsewhere enumerated,⁷ come doubtless within the general language here employed. But in addition to the guilty experience which is found in all men whose conscience is awakened to a knowledge of themselves, there was in the Jewish worshipper a religious sentiment which was not immediately connected with his personal necessities as a sinner. As a confessor of the Law, he was professedly a servant of God. The rule of his obedience was the written precept. The statutes, the judgments, and the ordinances, which gave minute expression to the will of God, were to be laid up within the people's memories, and hallowed, for exact observance, in their hearts. The presence of true faith in God's⁷ elect, while it stayed the child of Abraham upon the father's Hope, and showed him coming goodness in the present figure, so far from diminishing the sense of legal obligation, served rather to stimulate them to a more scrupulous obedience to the literal tradition. Works were the fruit of this obedience. These works were a punctilious compliance with precise injunction. Thus only could they honour Him to whose obedience they were sanctified, so long as the first covenant endured. Debt, and not grace, was the tenor of their relation to Jehovah. The Jewish conscience, as the depository of legal truth, was a necessary witness of this standing obligation.

But the claims thus owned were hard to satisfy. It was a weighty yoke that pressed upon the zealous

⁷ Gal. v. 19-21.

servant of the Law. Still, it was a practicable thing to honour the precept with an outward obedience. A scrupulous and painful vigilance might entitle a man to hold himself "blameless as touching the righteousness which is in the Law."⁸ To the man yet unenlightened by the Light of life, this rigid and successful conformity to the letter might seem a gainful burden. His works were, to his ignorance, a steady though gradual liquidation of his bond. The entrance into life might seem to such to grow nearer and more accessible, as he fulfilled his toilsome days of legal servitude;⁹ yet this approximative process never brought the legal worker out of bondage. But with the change of covenant, there is also a change in the *manner* of the worshipper's obedience. The Christian conscience is no more a register of personal responsibilities, but a reporter of full deliverance from all that former debt. By Another's obedience, he is just with God.¹ His sanctification is "unto obedience" as before. But it is to be rendered in a different spirit, and after another manner than the former bondage. From every jot and tittle of the ordinance which Christ has nailed in triumph to His cross, the believer's blood-cleansed conscience may regard itself as freed.

As works are a certain token of vitality in faith,² so works which are not of faith are *dead works* ever. But the Law is not of faith; nor are its works, though faithful men might strive to do them. Intrinsicly they are dead and ineffective things, when referred to a doer whose natural condition is ungod-

⁸ Phil. iii. 6.

¹ Rom. v. 19.

⁹ Luke xviii. 18, 19.

² Jas. ii. 26.

liness and sin. Since neither life nor goodness is inherent in the flesh, neither merit nor vitality belong to works of human debt. Moreover, the attempted discharge of legal duties is a confession of servile obligation. But *freedom* is the born condition of the child of God. In the liberty of Christ he is made free indeed.³ Repentance from dead works and faith toward God have already been enumerated among the principles of the doctrine of Christ.⁴ The complete purgation of the believer's conscience, both from the defilement of sin and the burden of carnal ordinances is now pronounced to be the effect of his acknowledgment of the once-shed blood of his Redeemer.

Sanctification and purification are different descriptions of the same effect. This has been already indicated in verse 13. The former affirms the fitness of the worshipper for the Divine presence. The latter expresses his conscious freedom from defilement. Both these things result immediately from the same effective cause; from the performance, that is, of a sacrificial work which meets in equal completeness the exigencies of the sinner's need, and the inflexible requirements of Divine holiness. From the nature of the case, the former blood-shedding was, as we have seen, but inceptive in its effect upon the worshipper. Sanctification was the general effect of both blood-shedding and lustral sprinkling. The combination of these ordinances effected a *complete* sanctification, of an external and fleshly kind. The blood of Christ is opposed in its results to all the former ordinances. *Absolute* sanctification is its

³ John viii. 36.

⁴ *Infra*, chap. vi. 1.

immediate effect on the believer in the sight of God. For Christ is made to us of God, not only Redemption and Righteousness, but also *Sanctification*. To be reconciled to God by the death of His Son, is to be sanctified as acceptable worshippers by His precious blood. It is well for the believer to remember that this sanctification is as lasting as the virtue of the blood which has accomplished it. A Christian is a saint for ever in the sight of God. For his sanctification is the blood of an *eternal* redemption. He stands within the holiest in the acceptable Person of his Forerunner and great High Priest. On the other hand, his sense of personal *purification* may be and must be indefinitely influenced by his actual conduct here below, and by the strength or weakness of his faith. Defilement may be contracted by a Christian in a thousand ways. To keep a conscience void of offence is to be the watchful aim of him whose redemption is with that which is of richer price than gold or silver.⁵ Where defilement is acknowledged, the resort of the believer is to no new ordinance, but to the once-shed blood of Jesus.⁶ That cleanseth from *all* sin. The lustral water had no virtue save as an accessory to the annual atonement, while the latter was efficacious only within the term of its prescribed validity. There is a similar analogy in the Divine realities. The daily recurrence of the Christian to the blood which gives refreshment to his spirit,⁷ is on the basis of that one atonement whose validity is not for one year only, but for ever.

The moral end of this completed personal sanctifi-

⁵ 1 Pet. i. 17, 18.

⁶ 1 John i.

⁷ John vi.

cation is unreserved devotedness to God. "To serve the living God" is the declared calling and privilege of the believer, whose conscience has been purged from dead works by the blood of Christ. It is thus that justifying faith converts a sinner into a pure and willing worshipper. The *living* God can take no pleasure in dead works. But "newness of life" is the order of a Christian's walk.⁸ Being settled in unimpeachable blessedness as a partaker of Christ, he is to know the service of the God of peace. Grace, and not debt, being the tenor of the covenant in which he stands, he serves no longer an exactor, but a Giver. The object of his service is the God of his delight.⁹ That a son should serve his father is a principle of natural piety acknowledged even among men,¹ and it is to filial obedience that the saint is called. His worship is rendered to the Father, whom he loves according to his perception of the manner of *His* love.² Personal devotedness is a reasonable service to those who are set free from dread, and compassed for ever by the love of God in Christ, through a demonstration of the riches of completed grace.³

Faith only works by love.⁴ As self-interest was the governing principle of legal service, so the delighted consciousness of eternal safety and imputed holiness, as well as of all blessedness in God through Jesus Christ, is the beginning of true spiritual worship. He whom the quickened soul had thirsted for, even while most conscious of its wretchedness, as under sin, is now become the tasted portion of its

⁸ Rom. vi. *passim*.

² 1 John iii.

⁹ Rom. v. 11.

³ Rom. xii. 1.

¹ Mal. iii. 17.

⁴ Gal. v. 6.

cup of blessing. The moving power of that obedience for which the believer has been sanctified to God, is the Holy Ghost who dwells within him as the Spirit of adoption. Freedom from sin is the beginning of service to God.⁵ While Christians remain unsettled in the faith, and unestablished in the grace of God, their religious duties are of the nature of *dead works*. For a spotless conscience is a needful prerequisite for the service of the living God. Good works have been before ordained of Him to be the way of them that are *newly created* in Christ Jesus. It is with feet which, through faith, are shod with the preparation of the gospel of *peace* that we alone can keep that way.⁶ True Christian service in this present world (how faulty and defective soever, through the weakness of the flesh) is, in its essential character, identical with that which is to be the never-ending joy of those who see the face of God.⁷

Verse 15. We reach at this point the opening of a new branch of our general subject. The work of Christ and its effects have lately been considered in their relation to the greater and more perfect tabernacle. He has been seen in His high-priestly character within the holiest for His people's sakes. With the price of an eternal redemption, He has passed, with full acceptance, into the presence of the living God. The just effect of this on our faith has also been declared (verses 11–14). The same subject has now to be reviewed in its connexion with the title of Mediator of the new or better Covenant, already ascribed to Him.⁸ Accord-

⁵ 1 Pet. ii. 16; iv. 1, 2.

⁷ Rev. xxii. 3, 4.

⁶ Eph. ii. 10; vi. 15.

⁸ *Supra*, vii. 22, and viii. 6.

dingly he proceeds: "And for this cause He is the Mediator of the New Testament," &c. That they which are *called* might receive the promise of eternal inheritance, is here made the reason of the Lord's assumption of this character. But to effect this purpose He must die. For thus only might the transgressions of the former compact be redeemed. The scope of the present verse is, therefore, very wide. In its moral bearing, in which the Law may be looked at in its lawful use as the discoverer of human sin,¹ it will comprise within its meaning the entire fruits of redemption. It is, however, rather to be considered here in its stricter application to God's believing remnant of the circumcision. "The called," therefore, would include, in the first place, the Hebrews immediately addressed, although the word applies in its present connexion more especially to those who had both lived and died within the bond of the former covenant. It is, in fact, a similar though more limited expression of the retrospective virtue of the Cross, to that which the apostle has elsewhere given, when arguing at large the great question of justification.² The possession of the promise, in the hope of which the fathers had lived as strangers on the earth, could be assured to them only by the death of Christ. The just men of old, who died in faith, are only thus made perfect. Though *under* Law, they passed their lives *in faith*. And so the Law which condemned them by its letter, had cheered them by its shadowy prophecy of better things. Their desire was to see the day of Christ—to see *Him* who was all their salvation, as

¹ 1 Tim. i. 9.² Rom. iii. 25.

well as all their desire.³ And now the Spirit is the witness to the value of their good confession, who writes them down as heirs of God's sure promise, through the death of Jesus, albeit in their earthly days they lived as servants, not as heirs.

This moral necessity of the *Mediator's* death, which arose from the natural hopelessness of His people's condition as transgressors, having been stated, the same blessed event is now referred to that more absolute necessity by which His death as a *Testator* was essential to the active validity of that gracious disposition of His wealth which He had made while yet remaining in the world (verses 16, 17).⁴ Availing himself of the well-known double meaning of the word which he employs, which, in its literal force is simply "a disposition," and which was in commonest use to signify a "will;" the apostle employs a maxim of universal recognition in human affairs, in order to illustrate and to commend to our faith one of the most striking features in the

³ 2 Sam. xxiii.

⁴ It would be quite inconsistent with the objects of the present work to enter upon a critical discussion of the language of this remarkable passage. Much has been written in a purely critical spirit both in favour of and against the common version. The ablest advocates, however, of the latter view are constrained to acknowledge the presence of difficulties which admit of little, if any, alleviation on the ordinary principles of Greek construction. As to the legitimacy of the authorized version in a grammatical point of view, there can be no question. The grounds on which my own full assent is given to it are principally the three facts following. First, *διαθήκη* is at least as common in the sense of "testamentary disposition" as in that of "Covenant." Secondly, the expression *ἐπὶ νεκροῖς* cannot, I think, justly be referred to animal sacrifice, since, although in the later Greek, *νεκρός* is sometimes used as an adjective, it is never, I believe, applied to sacrificial victims. Lastly, and in my judgment decisively, the participle *ὁ διαθήμενος* cannot, without plain violence, be made to mean anything else than the *disposer* of that which is the subject of the transaction in question. To understand it in the sense of "mediating sacrifice" appears to me quite inadmissible.

mystery of the love of God. For the Son of God is not only the mediator of the New Covenant. He is also the testator of His own gift. As Mediator, He stands between the people and their God; His humanity is prominently visible in this character. As it is said, "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, that *Man* Christ Jesus."⁵ He mediates the covenant of *God*; His work of death was at the Father's will. But as the alone Heir of promise, Himself the rightful Lord and Possessor both of life and glory, He could dispose of *His own things*. This He did, when in the days of His flesh He spake the word of life to His disciples. Of His own sheep He could say, "*I give* unto them eternal life."⁶ Upon the chosen objects of His love He could bestow the treasures of the Father's house.⁷ He gave them, and avouched the Father as the Witness of His gifts. To the companions of His temptations He could say, "*I appoint*⁸ unto you a kingdom, even as my Father hath appointed me."⁹ But none of these sure sayings were of active force while Jesus lived. His death was absolutely necessary to give effect to His appointment. Dying for His people's sakes and in their stead, He confirms to the heirs of promise the sure title of their hope. His *own* title becomes thus vested in them whom He has made as Himself in the presence of the Father. Thus Jesus died to give effect to His own word of grace and promise. In His resurrection He becomes, through the Spirit, the active administrator of His own testament. In Himself He is the crown and

⁵ 1 Tim. ii. 5.⁶ John x. 28.⁷ John xiv.-xvii.⁸ Διὰ τὴν θείαν ἐξουσίαν.⁹ Luke xxii. 28, 29.

fulness of all that blessing which by His death He has secured for ever to His own.

But God was in Christ. The love which has thus willed gifts unspeakable, and of an eternal enjoyment, was Divine. As the Testator, therefore, of the New Testament, the Son of God stands in a peculiarly striking light as the God, as well as Saviour, of His people.¹ Nor had this mighty mystery of love been brought to its accomplishment without a previous foreshadowing in the word of truth. From the beginning, a testamentary character had been impressed upon God's covenants of promise. The burning lamp, which passed in Abram's vision between the pieces of his sacrifice, had indicated in whose Person the death by which alone God's promises could reach their sinful object must take place.² The blood of the Divine pronouncer of the promise could alone substantiate, in finished mercy, the sure covenant of truth. The following verses, in which reference is made to the ratification of the Mosaic covenant by blood, set the same principle in a stronger and still clearer light.

Verses 18-20. "Whence not even the first [covenant] was dedicated without blood,"³ &c. In the former covenant the people were contracting parties. The blood, therefore, which was sprinkled, was a witness against *them* that life was forfeited by the slightest failure on their parts to fulfil its obligations.

¹ Titus ii. 13.

² Gen. xv.

³ "Ὅθεν οὐδὲ ἡ πρώτη χωρὶς αἵματος ἐγκεκαίνισται. In this, and the following verse, I prefer "covenant" to "testament," because, although the Spirit enables us, in the brightness of the true Light, to perceive retrospectively its testamentary character, yet it never was thus presented to the people.

The sprinkling here referred to is that which was performed by Moses immediately after the first promulgation of the covenant, and previously to the reception of the tables, or the erection of the tabernacle.⁴ Its import, as it respected the people, was declared to them by the words of the Lawgiver, who had just before rehearsed in their audience the commandments of Jehovah. "This is the blood of the covenant which God *hath enjoined* unto you." It was the solemn and significant adjustment of that yoke of bondage, from which the blood of human life alone might set them free. But it implied much more than this. The God who had invited Israel to this compact was the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. By promise He had long before bound Himself to Israel for his eventual blessing; and it was after a partial fulfilment of His earlier promise,⁵ that He had enjoined upon them this fresh covenant of debt. The intervention, therefore, of the legal covenant, although its effect was to postpone the completion of the older word of promise, was in no way to detract from its validity. The covenant of Moses was, as we have seen, a preparation for a better and eternal bond. In the very ceremonial, therefore, of its ratification, there was an act performed which gave typical expression to the manner of His grace who, having enclosed the objects of His promise in a covenant of death, would yet make life and everlasting peace their sure possession through *His own assumption* of the debtor's place. In the historical record of this transaction, mention is only made of sacrificial blood,

⁴ Exod. xxiv.

⁵ Gen. xv. 14.

as that which Moses sprinkled.⁶ In the present passage there are enumerated, in addition to the blood of calves and goats, "water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop." These things, the use of which in the purification of the leper⁷ is well known, point not indistinctly to the personal excellency and marvellous grace of Him, whose precious blood-shedding should one day cause the Law of condemnation to become a consenting witness to His people's freedom from all sin.

This sprinkling of the book and of the people by the Mediator of the former covenant had thus a two-fold signification. It firmly established the validity of Jehovah's utmost claim upon the obedience of His earthly people; the fatal penalty of Law attaching, by this solemn witness, to the nation on its first departure from the commandment. On the other hand, it was a token of assurance that the obedience which could alone attract the blessings of the Law should not be always sought in vain. God's words, indeed, must stand; and so that covenant must still abide, until fulfilled to the minutest tittle of its terms. But He who desired *blessing* for His people would in due time remove, by a strange yet absolute fulfilment, the covenant which bound their souls beneath a curse. He would make the Law a joy, and not a terror, when, through the blood of Him who is Jehovah, and yet Man, its cursing should be turned to blessing, because its end of righteousness had been attained.⁸ Thus even to the Law of works a testamentary character may be said to have attached, although its meaning might be hid from

⁶ Exod. xxiv. 5, 8.

⁷ Levit. xiv.

⁸ Rom. x.; Gal. iii.

those to whom the *end* of the existing revelation was a hidden thing.⁹

Still more apparent was this mystery to the eye which read aright the prophetic semblance of good things to come, which was presented by the earthly sanctuary—and its ministry. Upon the tabernacle, and on all the vessels of the ministry, there was a similar sprinkling of sacrificial blood (verse 21). But before this second sprinkling took place, the first great national transgression had occurred.¹ The tabernacle was itself established, as an ordinance of mercy, in the midst of a people whom the Law already had condemned. And blood was sprinkled upon this. It was not hallowed for its destined use and purpose as the shrine of Jehovah's presence, until it had received a purification which gave intimation of Divine redemption, as that only basis upon which the creature's fellowship with the Creator could enduringly subsist. Consistently with this inauguration of the Aaronic tabernacle, we find that blood was in constant requisition in the lustral ordinances of the Law (verse 22). Its use, as the great legal purifier, was a witness to the people of the pervading presence of sin. Wherever it flowed, it was a memorial of atonement. That without shedding of blood there is no remission, was a maxim not only recognized annually at the great national assembly on the day of atonement, but the force of which was continually revived in every man's remembrance who had respect to the established ritual of the tabernacle. For the Levitical ceremonies in their detail were but an extended

⁹ 2 Cor. iii. 13.

¹ Exod. xxxii.

application of that fundamental principle. The value of this maxim, and its present bearing on the conscience of the Christian, will be noticed more fully in the chapter which follows. It is enough that we here attentively observe the close connexion which subsists between the two ideas of purification and remission. *Blood* is the sole effectuating means of both. Fitness for God, as well as deliverance from sin, are results of acceptable blood-shedding alone.

Verses 23, 24. "It was therefore necessary," &c. A sanctuary ordained for human worshippers could be owned of Jehovah only through a bloody purification. The places and the things with which the name and condition of sinful man were associated, must thus be sanctioned in the sight of God. For the cleansing of the earthly tabernacle there was a sufficient virtue in the blood of bulls and goats, because merely *representative* oblations were suited to an institution which, in its nature and design, was only temporary and external. But what was visibly presented to the eyes of Israel was in all its parts a pattern of the heavenly things. Not only, therefore, must the holy places made with hands be cleansed, but the lasting reality which the figure represented must undergo a corresponding preparation. The better sacrifice, which works for the believer an eternal redemption, must also be the purification of the heavenly things themselves. That God may receive His worshippers with peace, the sanctuary of His presence must be pervaded by the savour of Redemption. Heaven therefore, itself, must be purified by blood (verse 24.) For creation, which was

God's first work, had undergone no partial pollution through the first transgressor's sin.² In heaven, as well as upon earth, the taint of sin was felt. Judgment had cast forth from thence the angels who kept not their first estate, and this expulsion of the offenders left, it may be supposed, no remaining trace of the offence. But the corruption and fall of God's created image, whom His Maker had destined for dominion as well as honour, was felt in its effects in heaven as well as upon earth. The last of God's works was the beginning of His counsel; and his fall affected, more or less, the entire range of creation. It is by virtue, therefore, only of Divine Redemption that the heavenly places are made fit to be God's meeting-place with man. The entrance thither by the great High Priest dispels and obliterates all traces of their former taint. The heavens now *are* clean, through Jesus' blood;³ although they were not always so.

² "The devil sinneth from the beginning." (1 John iii. 8.) The Spirit of God, while declining to adjust the word of revelation to the cravings of the intellect, declares with plainness the original source of evil. *Sin* begins with Satan, because evil is in him. He *is* the evil one. To enquire beyond this, is only to waste and desecrate the mental faculties in fruitless and forbidden speculations. But if sin had a beginning, judgment is *eternal*, and the first act of sin is committed against the Majesty of Him, who already is its Judge. Moreover, though angels are "greater in power and might" than natural men, it is man for whom the place of supremacy has been ordained. The judgment of the great day, for which the apostate angels are reserved, will be administered by those whose union with the only Lord confers on them the participation of His throne. (1 Cor. vi. 3, 17.) Meanwhile, the blood of redemption has purified those heavens, which were eternally fore-ordained to be the dwelling place of God's sons, and which were unclean in the estimation of the Holy One, so long as their destined inheritors continued "under sin." It is in this full and more abundant sense, that the remainder of the verse quoted at the beginning of this note, receives its accomplishment: "for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might *destroy the works of the devil.*"

³ Compare Job xv. 15.

But it is in immediate connexion with the believer, as a partaker of the heavenly calling, that this purification of the heavens is now declared. It is *for us* that Jesus has entered into heaven itself. As a counterpart of the work of personal sanctification, which qualifies the Christian for the service of the living God, the preparation of the heavenly places for the welcome access of the children is referred to the same precious blood. Heaven is made ready for God's many sons through the same sacrifice which makes them meet for heaven. God always meant it for His people's rest. His light should shine for ever there upon His holy heirs of blessing.⁴ But until Jesus died, man could not be dissociated, in God's present estimate, from sin. Defilement may be said thus to have intruded itself within the destined habitation of the children. God's purposes of blessing were obstructed in their course until that blood was shed, by means of which they who are naturally only sin, are made, in Christ, the righteousness of God. The appearance of Jesus in the presence of God *for us*, is the admission of the First-born to the inheritance, as the Forerunner of His many brethren.

Verses 25, 26. "Nor yet that He should offer Himself often," &c. Having once entered in by blood, Christ's sacrificial work is finally complete. The annual repetition of the former sacrifices was because of imperfection both in the priest and his oblation. Men having infirmity can do no perfect work; by frequent iteration they confess the inefficacy of their ministry. What God does once, is

⁴ Col. i. 5, 12.

done for ever. There can be neither repetition nor amendment of His perfect work. The import of the conclusion stated in verse 26 is plain. It has been shown that nothing is effectual to work atonement but the blood of Christ. That the shedding of that blood procures remission is manifest, since it is by His own blood that the great High Priest has entered acceptably within the holiest place. But if remission were a limited effect, of virtue only for a generation or a life, then must the blood which can alone procure it have been often shed from the foundation of the world. For God has had His people from the first, and to cleanse His people from their sins has been His declared intent ever since sin entered and defiled His former work. But it was not thus that God would deal with sin. Sustaining His people's souls, not by successive acts of efficacy, but by repeated promise of good things to come, He reserved the doing of the *one* work of redemption for the set time of His own appointment. Jehovah's arm should be revealed in saving power in His time. Accordingly, the Christ who long had hid Himself in type and figure, has now, once for all, at the conclusion of the ages, been manifested for the abolishing of sin by the sacrifice of Himself.⁵

The point to be regarded chiefly in this passage, is the statement, which is so precisely declared, of the end and purpose of the first manifestation of the

⁵ Νυνὶ δὲ ἅπαξ ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων εἰς ἀθέρησιν ἁμαρτίας διὰ τῆς θυσίας αὐτοῦ πεφανερωται. The English version, "now once in the end of the world," &c., is too loose and general. With respect to the moral force of the expression "end," or "conclusion of the ages," the reader is referred to the remarks already offered on the somewhat similar phrase which occurs in the opening verses of this epistle.

Son. He appeared "for the putting away of sin." The intention of His coming was definitive. The means of its accomplishment was the sacrifice of Himself. By being *made* sin,⁶ He has abolished sin. By becoming, once for all, a sacrificial substitute for sinners, He has, once for all, annihilated all the guilt of those who acknowledge sin to be their natural condition, and look with a believing heart upon the Lamb of God. Let the timid Christian think of this. Faith sees in Christ the *Abolisher of sin*. For the believer, it has no more place with God; for Christ is there who has displaced it, after having obliterated its remembrance by the sacrifice of Himself. With a retrospective efficacy, that decisive act annuls the long arrears which God's poor prisoners of hope had left unpaid, while the knowledge of it, as a "present truth," convinces the living saint that the only thing he hates and dreads is no longer a reality for him.⁷ It is an expiated and forgotten thing. Truth, which once overwhelmed him by its evidence of sin, now announces its complete removal from the sight of God. Full of all evil in himself, and groaning much because of the vile body of his flesh, he knows that search may be made in vain for sin in Jesus, and that in *Him* he stands unblamable before the face of God.⁸

The breadth and absoluteness of the language of this verse, wherein Christ is said to have abolished SIN, is easily distinguishable from that of the following chapter, in which the subject treated is the putting away of *sins*. His work is here reviewed

⁶ 2 Cor. v. 21.

⁷ Rom. iii. 25, 26.

⁸ 1 John iii. 5; Col. i. 22.

with reference to *Himself*, and His sufficiency as the Abolisher of sin. It is well for the believer to regard the Cross in this its wider aspect. Placed near to God, *within the Rock of life*,⁹ the forgiven sinner forms thus a new and far more comprehensive judgment of the work of God. To look upwards to the cross from the low place of our daily need, which nothing but the flesh and blood of the uplifted Son of man can meet,¹ is as it were the *natural instinct* of the quickened soul. To look downwards on it from the place where the same Son of man now sits in glory, is to view it, not only as the eternal security of our personal salvation, but as the consummation of God's holy purposes of love,—the attainment of His vast designs of blessing—the basis and the satisfying fountain of creation's promised joy.

Verses 27, 28. "And, as it is appointed," &c. The doctrine so broadly stated in the foregoing verse is now narrowed to the limits of its effective operation in the way of faith. The former manifestation of the Son of God was for the putting away of sin. But sin had wrought death, as its effect upon the creature. *God's people*, therefore, were amenable to death. But by the abolition of the cause, the dread result is also done away. That looking for of judgment, which is the sinner's natural prospect, is changed for the believer to the blessed expectation of complete salvation, when the Saviour shall a second time appear. Such is the conclusion of the general argument of this remarkable chapter. The language of these closing verses well deserves our close attention.

⁹ Exod. xxxiii. 22.

¹ John vi.

Death is here viewed in immediate connexion with its procuring cause. "*It is appointed* unto men to die." That mankind who knew nothing subjectively of their own nature, but in its fallen and ruined state, should speak of death as a *natural* event, is consistent with the easy forgetfulness of man's true origin and history, which is characteristic of a mind alienated from God. But if it be natural, it is because the course of that life which it extinguishes is at variance with the will of Him who first bestowed it on His own created image. Life, and not death, is the normal condition of unfallen humanity. Man's death is a judicial ordinance of God. It entered at His bidding, as the unwelcome consequent of sin. Yet it is not in this natural decease of life that God declares His judgment on the *ways* of men. For death is the term and limit of corrupted human life, without all reference to *personal* transgressions. Mankind are born to die, because of sinful origin and birth. By a general appointment men die *once*. Judgment comes *after* this. Death to the natural mind is but the closing of an earthly career, the quality and ultimate results of which have yet to be determined. *Eternal* judgment will award, in righteousness, a worthy sentence to the man who meets death's stroke with no acknowledgment of Him who has appointed it, and who turns away his ear, while mortal breath remains, from the word of reconciliation and eternal life. To such as close their earthly days in willing ignorance of Jesus, there remains another death,² to be encountered in that day of fear when Christ shall

² Rev. xx.

search the pages of the book of life, and find no names there, but of those who knew Him, and confessed Him, ere their former life was passed.

But, for the believer, the appointed certainties of death and judgment are changed in Christ to the Divine realities of salvation and eternal life. Not yet exempted from the operation of the sentence upon his mortal body, he is enabled, while waiting for the adoption,³ to rejoice in the assurance of complete deliverance in the person of the great High Priest of his profession. Accordingly the finished work of Christ, and its results, are here contrasted by the Spirit of God to the original appointment of the God of judgment. To the natural death of sinners unabsolved by grace, is opposed the sacrificial death of Jesus, the believing sinner's substitute. He has been offered to bear the sins of *many*. God's sons are many, and by this one offering have all their sins been purged. There is a necessary limitation when sacrifice is spoken of with reference to its effective results. It is not said that Christ has borne the sins of *all*.⁴ For that precious offering is barren of effect, notwithstanding its intrinsic adequacy to the removal of all sin, where it is not appropriated on the sinner's part. *Believers* only can affirm of Jesus that "His own self bare *our* sins in His own body on the tree."⁵ Sovereign grace alone puts faith into a sinner's heart to venture all

³ Rom. viii. 23.

⁴ For a further illustration of the Spirit's method of limitation in the practical application of the general doctrine of grace, see *Notes on the Romans*, chap. v. 16-19.

⁵ 1 Pet. ii. 24. The force of the expression "many" is commensurate with the election of God, without reference to dispensational differences of any kind.

on Jesus. All, therefore, have not faith. But to the unbeliever there is no sacrificial virtue in the cross. The blood of Christ is a token, not of salvation, but of perdition, to the man who will not trust it as the needed ransom of his soul. Where it is not sprinkled on the conscience through the faith of God's elect, it remains a crowning evidence of the world's inextinguishable guilt.⁶ For the disowning of Jesus, as the *Lamb* of God, attaches to the despisers of His grace the charge of having crucified the *Lord* of glory. God sees no iniquity upon His people, because their sins already have been borne by Jesus. His people know this, and rejoice in Him. God is to them more visible than man, in that strange work where only man and Satan seemed to be. For it was by the Father's appointment that Jesus died—the Just in place of the unjust. God would thus bring His people to Himself.⁷ Wrath is the natural heritage of sinful man; but to *His children*, God has not appointed wrath, but mercy and salvation. To His own eternal glory, He has called, through Jesus Christ, the chosen vessels of His grace.⁸

Death, therefore, is no longer the believer's prospect, as judgment is no more his fear.⁹ For there is neither death nor sin in Him who is His people's life as well as righteousness. In Christ His brethren

⁶ John xvi. 8-11.

⁷ 1 Pet. iii. 18.

⁸ 1 Thess. v. 9; 2 Thess. ii. 13-17; 1 Pet. v. 10, &c.

⁹ There is a judgment-seat where Christ will sit to estimate the works of those who are confessedly His servants here below. Salvation, as by fire, may be the experience of the careless Christian, who beholds his unprofitable works go up as smoke before that searching light. But no Christian can ever again come into judgment as a *man*. I have examined this subject more at length in my *Notes on the Epistle to the Romans*, chap. xiv.

have already passed from death to life. A Christian's natural decease is now no more a preparation for the judgment; for judgment has, for him, already done its work. The curse which holiness awards to sin has met its object in the stricken Lamb of God.¹ The life eternal, which is the reward of righteousness, has already been bestowed upon the believing sinner by the God of grace.² Death is no longer, then, to such, the king of terrors. He is Christ's welcome messenger of peace, whenever sent to close the saint's rough pilgrimage in quiet sleep. To loose from mortal life³ and be with Christ, is better far than to continue in the flesh.

But dying in the Lord, though preferable to remaining here, is not the proper hope of the believer. To be clothed upon from heaven, and to have mortality absorbed in life, is better than to be unclothed.⁴ God, who has wrought us for this self-same thing, has set before His people the glorious appearing of the Saviour as their "blessed hope." To wait, therefore, for the Son of God from heaven, is presented by the Spirit as the natural and commendable attitude of them whom Jesus has delivered from the wrath to come.⁵ To those whose faith discerns the Saviour, while now invisible within the vail, assurance of His certain re-appearance is given in the present verse. "To them that look for Him, *He shall appear*⁶ the second time, without sin, unto salvation." As Aaron disappeared within the tabernacle from the people's sight, when entering to make

¹ Gal. iii.³ Ἀναλῦσαι. Phil. i. 23.⁵ 1 Thess. i.² Rom. vi. 23; 1 John v. 11.⁴ 2 Cor. v.⁶ Ὁφθίσεται.

annual atonement for their sins, and showed himself again in robes of glory and of beauty, in token of atonement made, so Jesus now is hid in heaven from His people's view, although by faith they see Him still. But He has not retired thither never to return. He will come forth again in like manner as He went from earth.⁷ His presence there, meanwhile, is sure salvation to the many whose iniquities He once has borne. They are saved, but saved *by hope*; until, by His appearing, He shall make salvation visible in glory.⁸

He has been seen by few as yet, since first His precious blood found acceptable entrance to the holiest.⁹ Since His visible ascension into heaven, the brightness of His glory has been openly beheld by three only of those who waited still upon the earth. To His dying martyr, Stephen; to the elect vessel of His grace, the last, and in one sense, chiefest of apostles; and to John, the beloved disciple, He has already shown Himself, as He will presently be seen by all who look for His appearing. His last words to the last of these were, "Surely, I come quickly."¹ They who believe His words will wait for Him. To them His second coming will not be to cancel sin, but to fulfil salvation. The hope which God now keeps alive within His people's hearts through faith, will then be justified. For He will come to be *glorified* in His saints, and to be *admired* in all them that now believe. It will then be manifested to the most incredulous, that the precious promises which nourish in the day of patience

⁷ Acts i. 11.

⁹ John xx.; 1 Cor. xv. 5-8.

⁸ Rom. viii.; 1 Pet. i. 5.

¹ Rev. xxii. 20.

the hearts of those who look for Jesus, are no wild fable, but the faithful word of God. The world knows nothing of these things. His second coming is no hope to those who do not now rejoice in God by Him. He will come, indeed, to such; not as a Saviour, but as a Destroyer. *Because of sin*, He will do judgment on the unbelieving world, even as *without sin* He will come to give a crown of righteousness to all who look for His appearing.²

² 2 Tim. iv. 8. The Son of God will come forth to bless, in the full results of His one offering for sin, those who now hope in Him as the High Priest of their profession. The entire dispensation is presented in this epistle as an antitype, to the believer, of the Levitical day of atonement. But it is not for the Church alone that Christ is now within the holiest. He died for Israel. (John xi. 51.) His precious blood is, moreover, the effectual security of all the promises to the creation, whether in heaven or in earth, which is to be united, in the age to come, beneath the Headship of the King and Priest. (Eph. i. 10.) His re-appearance, therefore, will not only be the consummating of the joy of those who now with patience wait for Him, as partakers of the heavenly calling, though it is to them that He will first appear. The Holy Ghost has framed, prophetically, in words of yearning importunity, the strong desire of the remnant of His earthly nation, who, in the bitter day of Jacob's trouble, will urge Jehovah to appear. They will entreat the Hope of Israel to rend the heavens and come down. (Isa. lxiv.) Nor will He disregard their cry. The Redeemer will return to Zion, and purge away ungodliness from Jacob. (Rom. xi.) With joyful acclamations, mixed with poignant and repentant grief, He will yet be greeted by the city which has once refused His gracious love. (Ps. cxviii.; Matt. xxiii. 39; Zech. xii.) His manifestation to Jerusalem is in immediate connection with His judgment of the Beast, and the apostate nations whom he leads to their destruction. (Rev. xix.) Not till the fearful work of judgment has been done, will Jesus stretch the sceptre of full Melchisedec blessing and dominion over all the nations of the earth. The government will then be manifestly on the shoulder of Him who is already born to be the Hope of Israel. (Isaiah ix. 6, 7; Rev. xii.) All these results connect themselves with the revelation of the Lord from heaven. But in the text above, the subject is presented in its special application to the "holy brethren" who now discern His ministry within the veil.

CHAPTER X.

THE earthly tabernacle and its ordinances have now been contrasted with the heavenly things of which they spake. By an exhaustive process of comparison, the manifold details of Jewish ritualism have been dispelled as empty shades before the light and power of the Lord of life. In the foregoing chapter, we have had the eternal reality of Divine atonement declared both in its intrinsic excellency, and with reference to its moral effects upon the believing worshippers of God. Having shown them the complete acceptance of the offering within the vail, and testified the re-appearing of the Saviour as a present and joyful expectation to His waiting people, the apostle now resumes the subject of sacrificial purification in its immediate bearing on the conscious position of the Christian. The effectual settlement of the believer in his standing and privileges as a purified and acceptable worshipper within the heavenly courts, while waiting for the revelation of the Blessed Hope from thence, is the main intention of the present chapter. Already he had shown to the believing Hebrew, that in abandoning the shadow for the Substance, his apparent loss was his immeasurable gain. For he possesses now in reality what

he only seemed to have before. Both Priesthood and Covenant remain, but of a *better* order, and of everlasting force. The heavenly places were already purified, and atonement was completely made, when Jesus passed for us within the holiest. But for the full enjoyment of these better things, it is needful that the emancipated worshipper should consciously possess a perfect fitness for the presence of God. The purifying virtue of the Sacrifice must be understood in its effect upon *himself*, that he may cease to regret the visible rite which gave him annual renovation, and fresh liberty of access to the earthly courts, through a just discernment of that one Atonement which sets the true children of the covenant at everlasting peace with God.

To assert the children's perfect and unalterable fitness for the Father's presence, and to strengthen thus the fainting heart of the believer, and embolden him to an experimental access to the grace wherein he stands, is the present object of the Spirit. Unqualified purity and everlasting perfection are shown demonstratively to attach to the once purged worshipper through the sacrificial worthiness of Christ. By righteous necessity of *truth*, the believing confessor of the name of Jesus is eternally absolved of God. It is for this reason that the weak and hesitating Christian has so often been stablished and comforted by a recurrence to this chapter. For the doctrine of accepted Sacrifice, when justly apprehended in simplicity of faith, is a termination of all personal misgivings, and a dismissal of all secret fear. We are thereby made to know assuredly that the eye of God is fixed no longer on our sins, but, in

willing forgetfulness of them, rests now, with full delight upon the Lamb of our propitiation, and that in Christ the heaven of His holy presence is become the home and eternal refuge of our souls. Let us now endeavour to follow the general argument of the chapter.

Verse 1. "The Law having a shadow of good things to come, but not the very image of the things,"¹ &c. This was a part of its use and intention, as he has before explained. But a shadow cannot balance a reality. The reality of man's natural state is sin; and for this reason his conscience, when alive to truth, is a defiled and unhappy conscience. Nothing, therefore, which did not *thoroughly extinguish* sin could give perfect peace of conscience to a worshipper who acknowledged his condition according to the truth of God. The annual sacrifice on the day of atonement conferred on the believing Israelite a momentary ease. As an ordinance of God, there was a blessing in its observance; for it brought to the worshipper, who marked its meaning, an external witness of Divine forgiveness. But it could not free him from the burden of an evil conscience. He could not, that is, place those sacrifices betwixt his soul and God in truth. There was nothing in their nature that could give him an assurance that through them he was made personally fit for God. The very manner

¹ Οὐκ αὐτὴν τὴν εἰκόνα τῶν πραγμάτων. The Levitical sacrifice was not only not the substance of the good things. It was not even an exact similitude. Animal sacrifice is no fac-simile of true atonement. *Human* and more than human sacrifice was requisite for this. *Εἰκών*, however, is here equivalent to reality: "not the actual presentation of the things." (Compare, for this use of the word, Col. i. 15.)

also of the ordinance declared its insufficiency; for repetition is an argument of imperfection in the work. These, then, were no perfect sacrifices, because they did not adequately represent those for whose sakes they were devoted to the altar. Had they been intrinsically acceptable, *one* would have sufficed to free the offerer from a sinful conscience. And so he proceeds :

Verse 2. "For would they not have ceased to be offered?" &c. The doctrine involved in this question is as important as it is obvious. The purging of the worshipper is the removal of *his sins*. It is his person and his conscience which have become defiled by sin. *Number* is not here of any account. What is met by sacrifice is the personal need of the sinner. What sacrificial blood atones for is the *soul itself*.² Such is the manner of God's estimate. Accordingly, the inefficacy of Levitical sacrifice is demonstrated in the present verse by the circumstance of its annual repetition. For a genuine atonement would have been commensurate in its effect with the utmost limit of the worshipper's need as a sinner. "The worshipper, purged once for all, would have no more conscience of sins." It is well for the Christian to attend to this statement of God's law of sacrifice. Atonement once effected respects the *person*, and cancels the entire multitude of all his sins.

So far was the shadowy atonement from setting the conscience permanently free, that it was in itself an annual remembrancer of unforgiven sins (verse 3). The assembling of Israel on the tenth day of

² Levit. xvii. 11.

the seventh month was expressly intended as a yearly recognition on the people's part of defilement, and personal unfitness for Jehovah's presence. While, therefore, the Law exhibited a shadow of good things to come, it bore witness of a substantial and never-ceasing reality of unremoved and ever-growing sin. The necessary reason of this is stated in the following verse.

Verse 4. "For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." The impossibility of the benefit results from the inadequacy of the work. Animal sacrifice, as an atonement for human sin, is both unequal and untrue. There could be nothing acceptable to the God of judgment in the blood of beasts, for the human obedience of which He had been defrauded must have a different compensation than the life of a creature by nature incapable of knowing His will. The pouring out in death of such a life was therefore of no power to redeem from sin. God had no controversy with the beasts that perish; the law of His commandments had been enjoined upon His *people*. Its curse could never fall, in their stead, on an unconscious animal that never knew the voice of truth.

Nevertheless, sacrificial atonement was in the eternal counsels of the God of grace. He had ordained for Himself a Lamb before the foundation of the world. The incarnation of the Son of God was the preparation of an offering which should not be in vain. This is expressed in verse 5: "Wherefore, when He cometh into the world," &c. It was *for death* that Jesus came into the world. His Spirit, which revealed Him as the Lamb of God to

His forerunner, when first His eyes were opened to behold the Hope of Israel,³ had rehearsed prophetically the wondrous part which, when time was ripe, He should accomplish in His own most blessed Person. Accordingly, the Lord is represented in this passage as announcing at His incarnation the fulfilment of the prophecy which spake beforehand of an acceptable Doer of the will of God: "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, *but a body hast thou prepared me.*"⁴ God was ill-pleased with sacrifices and burnt-offerings (verse 6). For while the blood thus shed could never purge the sinner, the sacrifices might be offered as a show and semblance of contrition and repentance, while the heart remained far off from Him. From the provocations of the wilderness to the times of Caiaphas, Jehovah found no acceptable savour from the offerings which by the law of carnal commandment were offered to His name.⁵ No faith was needed for the presenta-

³ John i. 29-31.

⁴ Σῶμα δι' καρποῦ μου. It is thus that the LXX. have rendered the original of Ps. xl. 6, which is אָזְנִים כָּרִיתָ לִי "thou hast digged ears for me," as the marginal translation literally renders. The ancient translators, justly appreciating the expression as a metaphor of personal devotedness (comp. Exod. xxi. 1-6), unwittingly furnished, in their very free version of this passage, the exactest expression of a truth far hidden from their sight. The Holy Ghost, accordingly, adopts it here as a fit interpretation of His own prophetic words. For sacrificial death was the consummation of the willing devotedness of the obedient One. He might have gone forth free from every claim. But He loved the Father; and would perfect all His will. (John xiv. 31.) He loved, too, the wife and children which were given Him of God. (Eph. v. 25-27; Heb. ii. 13.) The yoke which He had taken He would wear for ever in His still abiding love.

⁵ Acts vii. 42, 43. The cloud might fill, first the tabernacle in the wilderness, and afterwards the temple of Solomon; for God had respect to His own ordinances of better promise, but He soon forsook His sanctuary, and refused to dwell among a people who were only sanctified externally, but whose hearts were still unwashed from their iniquities.

tion of those offerings. God, who read diligently all His people's thoughts, soon found that the ordinances which were meant to school them in a deeper knowledge of their own unworthiness, and make them more athirst for saving truth, were mistaken by the nation for realities, and rested on securely as an availing composition with the Holy One for sins which nature loved too well to leave. Hence the praises of Israel, which once had been the worthy habitation of the Rock of their salvation, were as a loathing and a weariness when with costly sacrifices they approached His courts, in a spirit of vain and self-satisfied confidence which made them think Jehovah even as themselves.⁶

God has no pleasure in iniquity. He could therefore take no rest in a ceremonial which annually brought His people's sins to mind. But forgiveness and reconciliation were in His purpose. His will was peace, but peace can only be the effect of righteousness. That he might, therefore, take away His people's sin, and make full demonstration of His own righteousness, He prepared a body for His Son; and when the time was fully come, He sent Him forth. And Jesus came, the Son of God, indeed, but made of a woman, and born under Law.⁷ His coming and its purpose are here announced in immediate conjunction with His testimony to the disallowing of the former sacrifice (verse 7). "*Lo, I come* (in the volume of the book it is written of me) *to do thy will, O God.*" The two verses immediately following are an explanatory comment on the prophetic quotation just before adduced.

⁶ Ps. l.; Prophets, *passim*.

⁷ Gal. iv.

The leading feature in this passage is the opposition of the former sacrifices to *the will of God* (verse 9). Levitical offering could never satisfy the will of Him who had ordained it. His will was holiness, and mercy His delight. Redemption was His purposed way of blessing. But none of these things were found within the compass of the Law. It was too weak to bless. It spoke angrily and with mortal threatenings, because it took notice only of sinners and their righteous liabilities; while, as a detector of human evil, it must condemn the sin which it revealed. When Jesus, therefore, thus appears, He puts Himself in contrast with the former things. Knowing the Father, He understands his will. Full well aware of what that will involved, He undertakes its full accomplishment. Of old it had been written of Him in the volume of God's counsel. By an ancient bond He had consented to fulfil all truth, that God's full thoughts of blessedness might be perfected to endless joy. And *man* was the object of those precious thoughts. In the form, therefore, of man, and with the Law within His heart, the Saviour now comes forth to be the only Doer of the will of God. He attracts all God's attention to Himself—"Lo, *I* come," is His fair challenge, who, being man, steps forth to work the work of God. "Behold my servant," is Jehovah's recognition of the Perfect One, in whom His soul alone could find delight.⁸ "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," was the Father's attestation that in Jesus He had found One who was both willing and able to fulfil His word. He had

⁸ Isa. xlii.

no pleasure in burnt-offerings of beasts. His soul was *satisfied* by the obedience of Jesus unto death.

Two things were effected by the first coming of the Son of God. The carnal ordinance was set aside, and the will of God was settled in its place. "He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second" (verse 9). The removal of the former was on account of its inadequacy to give to the worshipper a perfect conscience. The establishment of the second is the witness to the believer of complete deliverance from sin. That man should do the will of God, was the accepted proposal of the Law of works. Its acceptance was to demonstrate, in its result, the perfect ruin of corrupted nature. The Law of God was holy, just, and good. It exacted from the creature no unreasonable service to the Creator. But because it was imposed on man, already fallen, it was a ministration, not of life, but of death. It made *sin* the permanent condition of the people. For no conscience can be truly pure with a remembrance that the will of God remains in any point undone.⁹ On the other hand, the knowledge that His will is fully met, relieves the conscience from all sense of sin. For sin is the dereliction of God's holy will. A defective measure of obedience, through the weakness of the flesh, is not less fatal to the claim of legal perfectness than the wilful transgression of some plain command. 'Thou shalt not covet' gives a death-wound to all hope within the heart that truly estimates the spiritual power of the Law.¹

But our Captain of salvation has fulfilled the will of God. Having invested Himself by incarnation

⁹ Jas. ii. 10.

¹ Rom. vii.

with human responsibilities, *He has triumphantly discharged them all.* God's rights as the one Law-giver have been fully satisfied by the unsullied and complete obedience of Jesus. He magnified the Law which man had broken and dishonoured. Having fulfilled it in His life, He gave Himself to death, that He might silence for ever its demand of the believing sinner's life. By man and for man the will of God has been fulfilled. In the life and death of Jesus the entire measure of both grace and truth has been attained. God's will was the redemption of His people. But that His grace might triumph, His perfect holiness must first be satisfied; and the cross of Jesus has effected this. God's will, when finished, is thus found to be *atonement*. Blood has been shed, in obedience to His commandment, which is of virtue to remove all sin. It pleased *Himself* to bruise His Son for sinners. *He* has laid upon His chosen Lamb the whole iniquity of all His people.² By making Him an offering for sin, He has finished His intention of salvation; He has established grace in perfect righteousness. Through that propitiation He has made Himself accessible in ready and unbounded mercy to the soul that comes to Him by Jesus Christ.

Verse 10. The effect upon the believer of this finished will of God is now declared. "By the which will we are *sanctified*." God is the Sanctifier of His people. That they should be *holy* and unblamable before Himself in love, was His eternal purpose, the righteous attainment of which was "through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ

² Isa. liii.

once for all." As is elsewhere said, it is "in the body of His flesh through death," that Jesus has done for the believing sinner the effectual work of reconciliation.³ What the legal worshipper endeavoured vainly to *acquire* by a diligent performance of the carnal ordinance, the believer now *receives* on his confession that the will of God is done. Christ, as the Doer of that will, is Sanctification to the willing receiver of the grace of God. There is, therefore, a complete reversal of the former things. Whereas it was not possible that sin should leave the conscience of the former worshipper, who brought no better offering for sin than bulls and goats, so now it is impossible that the worshipper, once purged by Jesus' blood, should bear the burden of a sinful conscience any more. Faith recognizes in the cross of Jesus a competent atonement for the human soul. By the equality of perfect justice the believer finds himself absolved (verse 2). The very consciousness of personal worthlessness is to the Christian an assurance of his sacrificial peace. He is his *own* witness of the need of an atonement. *God* is his witness, in the Gospel of His truth, that He has willed and compassed that atonement in His Son.

Under the former covenant the worshipper, in spite of the Levitical oblation, remained a sinner still. With an unpurged conscience, he could not be truly sanctified.⁴ But the believing sinner is characteris-

³ Col. i. 21, 22.

⁴ In another, and altogether lower sense, a sanctity attached to Israel. Legal ordinances sanctified to the purifying of the flesh. They were kept thus *nationally* in nearness to God, in contradistinction to the Gentiles, who were far off. I speak of the effect of sacrifice, not of the standing which the children of promise occupied *by faith*. The latter came to *God*, and not only to the

tically *a saint*. He is such by necessary consequence of the finished work of Christ. For, according to the value of the sacrifice is the condition of the worshipper in the sight of God. The Holy Ghost, accordingly, the Witness and Announcer of completed sacrifice, addresses Christians *universally* as saints. He reckons a believing sinner holy, because of that precious blood which once for all has purged his sins. Men commonly attach the saintly title to pre-eminence in real or seeming *personal* attainment. The title, that is, is conferred by suffrage of the human judgment, on what *man* estimates as worthy. But *God* puts honour only upon JESUS. He calls His people saints because He sees His people in His Son. Because of the blood of their redemption, they are holy in His sight. To flatter the creature on his own account is the subtle policy of Satan; who, as the prince of this world, strives to strengthen his dominion by disguising his deceptions with a counterfeit of truth. To crown the vessels of His mercy with fair names of sanctity and glory, is the righteous pleasure of the God of truth, who honours thus the Doer of His will, by presenting to Him in His own pure likeness the fruits of the bitter travail of His soul. Far different, indeed, from that fair estimate of gracious truth, is the believer's judgment of himself, when, looking away from Jesus, he turns to analyse the complex vanity that fills his natural heart. Miraculous, yet most real and ever-blessed

visible sacrifice (chap. xi. 6). . They never looked for Him in sacrificial shadows. Esteeming the visible oblation at its true value, they looked with hope towards the better things which were to come. Meanwhile, the Law was a minister of *sin* (compare Gal. ii. 15-18).

truth! That a man should at the self-same time be conscious of being personally *only sin*, while by the faith of Jesus he lifts up his face to God, accepted and unblamed of Him who will not look on sin!

Verses 11–13. “And every priest standeth daily ministering,” &c. The yearly sacrifice has been displaced, and is succeeded by the finished will of God. By the resurrection of the once-slain Lamb, the believer has the answer of a good conscience toward God. The general assertion already made of the efficacy of the one accepted oblation, is now sustained and corroborated by a reference to the position of Jesus, now *resting* on the throne of God in heaven, in comparison with the ceaseless sacrificial labour of the earthly priests. There were daily as well as yearly sacrifices. There was a continued ministration which, while its aim was the removal of transgression, could never really take away a single stain. It seemed to give a momentary remedy, but sin, meanwhile, grew on unchecked. The priest must, therefore, labour daily at his profitless vocation, attesting evermore the victory of sin, until some mightier work of cleansing should be done. But Jesus had done this, offering in His own Person the one sacrifice for sins. Because that offering was holy and complete, it compassed the intent for which it had been made; needing no repetition, since by its intrinsic virtue, it maintains perennial effect. Jesus had risen from His ancient seat of glory to make that offering for sin. Having accomplished it, He has resumed the glory which He laid aside, and now sits in heaven in perpetual rest from that once-

finished labour of Redemption.⁵ The Father has awarded Him that seat, which He will occupy until His enemies become His footstool (verse 13). The addition of this limitation in the present passage should be attentively observed. At the close of chapter ix., after affirming the purpose of Christ's first coming, he had declared His re-appearance unto salvation as the present hope of them that wait for Him. So likewise now, having settled and assured the brethren's hearts, by showing them the Sponsor of their peace upon the throne of God, he adds this prophetic remembrancer of His second coming to fulfil the residue of those predictions, whose accomplishment had been postponed, in the order of Divine counsel, to the completion of His sacrificial work. The *glories* which His Spirit has foretold become the proper object of their hope who know His *sufferings* to be complete. The results of that amazing work must needs be the near interest of those who, by grace, are called to be partakers of His glory. While their *immediate* expectation is to be fetched in person by the First-born, who will come to take His brethren to the promised preparation of His

⁵ According to the punctuation adopted in verse 12, the phrase εἰς τὸ διηνεκές will be construed with ἐκάθισεν or with θυσίαν. Usage (in this epistle, where alone it occurs in N. T.), suggests the latter construction. On the other hand, "for ever sat down," seems to present a juster antithesis to the "daily standing" of the former priests. † It is an *apparent* contradiction only that is involved in this expression to the doctrine of His second coming. He has ceased for ever from His priestly work of oblation. He will never arise again *for such a purpose*. But He has other characters to fill beside that of the Maker of atonement. When the heavens opened on the dying gaze of Stephen, he saw the Son of Man *standing* at God's right hand. (Acts vii.) As He stood there, as if to welcome His martyr to his crown of life, so will He return, at the appointed time, in full investment of the kingdom which He has departed to receive. (Luke xix.)

love,⁶ they are warned continually that the world in which they tarry still is peopled by His enemies, whose daily provocations will at length bring into sight the Judge of all the earth, who is represented as standing even now before the door. Meanwhile, until that secret time shall come which God has not thought needful to disclose to them that look for Jesus,⁷ the Son of God remains upon the Father's throne, the blessed Witness to His people that the work of their salvation is complete. For,

Verse 14. "By one offering He hath perfected⁸ for ever them that are sanctified." We have seen in a former verse (10), that by the finished will of God, the believing sinner is sanctified. *Eternal perfection* is now declared to be the moral standing of the worshipper once purged. This joyful assurance is a necessary conclusion to the preceding argument. Standing in God's sight *exclusively* upon the merits of the perfect Sacrifice, the believer has attributed to him, morally and by imputation, the perfection which is the native quality of the substituted Atonement. As is the Saviour in His own most blessed Person, so are the saved with God who has accepted them in Him.⁹ Perfection is God's will. Its attainment is Christ—in His Person, in His work, and in His people. In affirming here the

⁶ John xiv.; 1 Thess. iv.

⁷ 1 Thess. v.

⁸ *Τετελείωκεν*. The two ideas of personal acceptableness and official consecration, are equally conveyed by this word. At the close of chap. vii., it is applied to the Son of God, in relation to His high-priestly perfection as the antitype of Melchisedec, while here it is used as descriptive of the standing of the once purged worshipper. Priestly consecration is an inseparable adjunct of the filial place which we receive as having been made by faith "partakers of Christ." *Ante*, chap. iii. 14; compare also 1 Pet. ii. 5, and Rev. xx. 6.

⁹ 1 John iv. 17.

abiding perfection of them that are sanctified by the faith of Christ, the apostle completes the series of contrasts in which he has compared the earthly and the heavenly things. That which was wanting in Moses, is now found in Jesus. In the more perfect tabernacle, and through its perfected High Priest, there is now presented unto God a perfect worshipper. By faith we now draw nigh by reason of the better hope. It is in the conscious completeness of His victory, who is their Captain of salvation, that God's ransomed people are exhorted by the Spirit to move onward to their rest.

But the most obvious deductions from the clearest truths are of slow reception in our hearts, when they tend to the confirmation of the doctrine of unqualified and perfect *grace*. The apostle well knew this. And, therefore, although he had so largely proved to the believer his immunity from sin, by expounding the doctrine of the perfect sacrifice, he turns again to seek another witness to the same astonishing and soul-reviving truth. Recurring to the language of the better Covenant which he had already cited in chap. viii., he solemnly avouches as his witness the Holy Ghost who drew that covenant of promise, and who now, as the Spirit of *grace*, as well as truth, is the ready witness to the efficacy of that one offering whereby His former promises are now become, to the believer, finished and eternal truths. Accordingly, the three verses immediately following (15-17,) contain a partial recital of the covenant, in which emphatic stress is laid on its concluding clause. "For after that He had said," &c. He adds, "and their sins and their iniquities I will remember

no more." Words no less natural in their connexion than precious in their effect. For how should He who has built His own glory, as a Saviour, upon the tried foundation of His crucified Son, continue to keep in memory the very sins for which the fore-ordained sacrifice had once for all been made?

The necessary conclusion is then stated (verse 18). "Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin." The same principle which made repetition indispensable in the former sacrifice, forbids it in the latter. Remission follows upon the shedding of acceptable blood. The worshippers having once for all been purged,¹ have no more conscience of their sins.²

Thus, by considering the doctrine of the better sacrifice, we are enabled to perceive the efficient justification of that wondrous promise which closes the new Covenant of grace. God will no more remember sins or iniquities which the blood of Christ has washed away. Although a steady contemplation of the cross makes this no longer a hard saying to one who has already brought to God the sacrifice of a broken spirit, and has learned, through grace, that real contrition which leaves no bone of human confidence entire,³ yet many a Christian fails to derive from it such an assurance of completed peace as it is meant to convey to the believing soul. The consciousness of still indwelling sin may seem to the unestablished saint an irrefragable protest against the assertion in *his* case of a standing of unspotted purity with God. He knows himself a sinner, and will not rate God's estimate of sin below his own.

¹ Ἀπαξ κεκαθάρμενοι.

² Chap. ix. 22, x. 2.

³ Ps. li.

This is quite natural as an experimental feeling, but it leads to a conclusion exactly opposite to truth. For while the heart is busied with itself, and infers its standing in the sight of God from its own consciousness of evil, *God*, having seen and judged that evil long before the sinner's birth, and pre-ordained His Lamb to be its full propitiation, is thinking of him under the *new name* which attaches to him as a believing confessor of His Christ. Because of the blood of His atonement, He has forgotten him as a sinner.⁴ He has him in everlasting remembrance as a *saint*. Faith, which obeys the truth of God, consents to this, and is at peace with God through Jesus Christ. It is because of the perfect worthlessness of nature that we are called to walk by faith, and not by sense. "*Their* sins and *their* iniquities," says God. What else does He behold in flesh? But in righteous appreciation of the blood of Jesus, he can say of that for which that offering was made, "I will remember it no more." It were an injury to Jesus to account them sinners still whom *He* has cleansed from sin.

The inward conflict between faith and natural experience is sometimes very hard. The reason in most cases is, that the two distinct characters of Saviour and Master, which equally belong to Jesus, are confounded in the weak believer's mind. He is the *Saviour* of ruined sinners. He is the *Teacher*

⁴ This doctrinal position is in no way inconsistent with another doctrine of very great practical importance, *viz.*, that the dealings of the Father with His children here below are according to their actual condition. He judgeth according to every man's work. (1 Pet. i. 17.) But His chastenings are in themselves but tokens of His love. (*Infra*, chap. xii.)

and *Exemplar* of the saved. It is He who suffered *for* us, to redeem us from all sin, who has left us an example that we should follow His steps.⁵ But this is sometimes overlooked. It is not perceived (and to the natural pride of our hearts it is a grateful oversight), that before the question of obedient service can be rightly entertained, the previous question of personal *standing* must be definitively set at rest. For natural obedience is but a presumptuous dream. God in the balance of His holiness has weighed the world, and found no grain of goodness in the mass. By nature, therefore, we are children, not of favour, but of wrath. The test of true obedience is submission to the righteousness of God—the obedience of *faith*. God measures every man with reference to Jesus. Hence, of all who hear the word of life, the character and standing is according to their love or hatred of the truth. Clean, or unclean; washed, or unwashed; saints, or sinners; sons, or strangers; reconciled, or enemies; in a word, alive, or dead—it is thus that men are viewed of God, and estimated in His word, according as they believe or disbelieve the Gospel of His grace. But that Gospel is the ministry of *mercy*. The beginning of its message is “remission of sins” to the believing sinner. God preaches peace by Jesus Christ. Through the blood of His one offering of atonement, He proclaims to the ungodly who will trust His sayings rather than their own surmisings,⁶ both full forgiveness and eternal amnesty of sins.

It is from the worshipper once purged that God

⁵ 1 Pet. ii.

⁶ Rom. iv.

expects devotion, and it is by the grateful receiver of unqualified forgiveness that genuine service is performed. To live the residue of his allotted days no longer to the lusts of men, but to the will of God, is the vocation of that sinner who, by faith, has seen an end of sin in the vicarious suffering of Christ.⁷ Uncleanness cannot serve the living God. But nothing is clean save that which Christ has purged, nor does any trace of defilement remain in those who, by faith, are presented without spot in Him. *The only alternative of personal uncleanness is eternal purity in Christ.* It is by faith alone that God is pleased. But faith never casts its eye upon the natural man, except to quicken in us a just sense of self-abhorrence. It turns for peace to Jesus. The first object that real faith discerns, when guided by the holy word of grace, is Christ the Lamb of God; and thus to look on Him is to be *clean*. It is the sense of perfect cleanness that makes the thought of God a joy, and not a dread, to the believer. His commandments, therefore, are no longer grievous to the soul that learns Him in the Gospel of His Son. Either defective teaching is to blame, or else there lurks still in the secret of the heart some hard, unbroken core of natural self-righteousness, whenever one who seeks for settled and abiding peace has not yet found it in the Doer of God's perfect will.

It is a good and necessary thing that a believer should judge himself. But his ability to do this rightly, arises from his having been, through grace, eternally separated from the things that he is called

⁷ 1 Pet. iv. 1, 2.

to judge. His former self is, in the estimate of God (and therefore of faith), a dead and buried thing.⁸ Again, a saint may sin, and so defile his conscience. But the Propitiation of our sins is likewise our Advocate with *the Father*. To confess sin therefore to the Father, is to receive renewed assurance of forgiveness and restoration, because the unalterable standing of the justified believer is not sin, but righteousness. He is known of God as a *saint*, and dealt with accordingly. In the twelfth chapter we are reminded of the manner and object of the Father's discipline. Meanwhile, the children have passed from His memory as *sinner*s. A Christian's folly may dim, it is true, or even obliterate, for a time, this blessed conviction from his mind. Having more and more neglected Christ, he may have at last forgotten that he once was purged from his old sins.⁹ But does *God* forget? He is not, indeed, unmindful of His people's ways; and may employ a cruel messenger to fetch an infatuated soul from paths of frowardness. But it is as possible for God to forget the presence of the Christ, who rests with Him upon His throne, as it is that He should recall to His remembrance the sins which have been once forgiven for His sake.

Verses 19–22. “Having therefore, brethren,” &c. Having completely demonstrated the perfection of the believing sinner, by virtue of the finished Sacrifice, he turns now to address the brethren, who have been thus sanctified and brought nigh to God, with exhortations suited to their new position as accepted worshippers. The nature of their standing having

⁸ Rom. vi.; Gal. v. 24.

⁹ 2 Pet. i.

been defined, a due assertion of its attendant privileges on their parts would be the only worthy recognition of the grace and mercy which had abounded so amazingly on their behalf. That the Sanctifier and the sanctified are all of one, had been affirmed in an earlier part of this epistle, when, in presenting Jesus as their Captain of salvation, he had shown them that their characteristic title of "brethren" expressed a relationship, not only to each other, but to Him who had redeemed them all to God.¹ With a common title there is allotted to God's "many sons" a common place. Both priesthood and royalty attach to the peculiar people of His choice.²

It is to embolden the believer to draw nigh to God within the holiest, that the intermediate chapters have been written. For conscious perfection is the needful pre-requisite for an entrance to that presence, that the Father may be worshipped worthily in spirit and in truth.

Accordingly, the exhortation to draw near is strengthened by a recapitulation of the doctrine upon which this liberty is based. We have boldness to enter within the holiest, first, because the blood of Jesus, which has once for all been shed for sin, has been presented for us in the power of eternal redemption before God. God is thus prepared to greet His worshippers with blessing, because of the perfect fulfilment of His will. Secondly, the way of access, which the Holy Ghost had once signified to be fast closed against the carnal worshippers,³ is now declared by the same Spirit to be for ever

¹ Chapter ii. 11.² 1 Pet. ii. 9.³ Chapter ix. 8.

free to the once-purged brethren of Jesus. A new and living way has now been opened for us. It is by Him who liveth, and *was dead*, that we have boldness to draw nigh. While Jesus lived on earth, He was no *open* way to God. In His blessed Person He was indeed both the way of access, and the door of safety, to His elect; but the mystic names by which He gave expression to the varied fulness of the grace and truth which were within Him, became an appreciable joy to His disciples only when the mighty work was finished, which was to give effect to all the gracious words which He had said. If He had power as the Son of man to forgive sins upon earth, it was because He had come into the world *to die*. For without blood-shedding there is no remission. As the only Righteous One, He was, in the perfection of His obedience, a living witness of exclusion against those who walked still in the ways of disobedience. He was a witness of what man should be, in His devoted and unceasing service of Jehovah's will; but His advent as the Light was the disclosure of the darkness which, without exception, filled man's natural heart. Exempt from death, He must abide *alone*;⁴ for never might holiness and sin be fellows. But His flesh was as the vail of God. It stood awhile unbroken, while the glory of the God who thus had hid Himself shone brightly, for the eye that knew him, in the words and works of Jesus;⁵ but when He gave that spotless body to the cross for sin, the vail was done away. Instead of a vail of separation, the Lamb is now the manifested mercy-seat. God hides Himself no longer from the

⁴ John xii. 24.⁵ John i. 14.

gaze of those who, *in* Christ and by His precious blood, are once for all brought nigh.

A third inducement to this experimental access is contained in verse 21: "And having an High Priest over the house of God." Without this all the rest would be in vain; for never should we feel at ease in God's most holy presence, did we not know that He who is the living way of our access thither, is there continually to sustain us in our hope by the power of a constant and effectual intercession. It is by thus contemplating Jesus in the Sanctuary as the great High Priest of our profession, that our faith gains strength to enter boldly where the sense of our personal infirmities would otherwise forbid us to approach. But the consecration of the Son of God was *for our sakes*, that preparation might be fully made for God's true worshippers to come within His courts with boldness and with joy.

All then is ready in the heavenly places whither Christ is gone. But the worshipper is also fitted for the sanctuary, as we have seen, by the perfection of the one Sin-offering. The *subjective* condition of one from whom God will receive acceptable homage is expressed in verse 22. He is invited to draw nigh with a *true* heart, and with a *full assurance* of faith.⁶ Neither of these qualifications could be really possessed by the worshipper under the former Covenant. Sincerity of purpose and fervency of godly desire might be found, and surely were in all

⁶ Ἐν πληροφορίᾳ πίστεως. "Mit volligem Glauben." — DE WETTE. With simple and unhesitating faith, a faith which fills the soul to the exclusion of all doubt, seeing that its object and resting-place is God, who cannot lie.

the godly of the circumcision; but being destitute of that faith, which alone has power to purify the heart,⁷ truth could not have its dwelling in their souls. A true heart is a heart in which Christ dwells. For nothing frees the heart from guile but the discovery that God is entirely the sinner's friend; and in Jesus this is seen and felt. The heart that has been emptied of itself, and filled with Christ, is fit to worship God. That worshipper only has full assurance of *faith*, who has entirely relinquished every thought of fitness in *himself*. The personal condition of those who are encouraged to draw nigh is further expressed in the words which follow: "Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." This figurative language expresses the effect upon the true believer's conscience, of the gospel which he has received. It is as a man both dead and risen with Christ, that he has access to the heavenly courts. Knowing, by faith, the value of the blood upon the mercy-seat, he is as if personally sprinkled by that blood, by the Spirit who demonstrates to his conscience the completion of the sacrificial work. Nor is he only enabled thus in heart and understanding to pass within the vail; his *body* also is, by virtue of the same great work of propitiation, effectually purified. Once the mere slave and instrument of sin, it has now become yielded as an instrument of righteousness unto God. While "divers washings" left the carnal worshipper impure, the work of grace, whereby the laver of regeneration is effectively applied, has cleansed entirely the person of

⁷ Acts xv. 9; 1 Pet. i. 22.

the saint. His body has been sanctified for use to God; though, as yet, unchanged into the fashion which it is to bear. The price of its redemption has been paid. Its transformation to the glorious similitude of Christ is near at hand. Meanwhile, it is to be kept watchfully from all defilement as the pure companion of the blood-cleansed conscience, the full-lighted dwelling of the Holy Spirit of adoption.⁸

The four verses last examined contain, as their great moral principle, that for Christian worship to be *real*, faith must be in immediate and active exercise. A Christian in a slumbering state is incapable of acceptable worship while that state remains. For Christian worship is a matter, not of form and visible observance, but of communion with its Objects. Our *fellowship* is with the Father, and with Jesus Christ His Son.⁹ The pure affections and desires of the heart are therefore called into activity, whenever God is worshipped truly through the Spirit of adoption. But if watchfulness and constant exercise of faith are needful to preserve true Christian worship from degenerating into lifeless form, still more apparent is it, that to call on men indiscriminately to worship God, by virtue simply of external profession, and to make the semblance of such worship possible by framing ordinances of religion which exact no faith for their most punctual observance, is to depart entirely from the doctrine of worship contained in this epistle. For they who are thus exhorted are "holy brethren,

⁸ Eph. v. 26; Tit. iii. 5; 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20; Rom. vi. &c.

⁹ 1 John i.

partakers of the heavenly calling." By faith they have already become sanctified to God. They have professed a hope, and enjoyed a confidence in Jesus, which they are exhorted to hold fast. In a word, they are living members of the house of God. The very ground of all the Spirit's exhortations to them is their actual standing of true faith and knowledge (verse 34), which qualified them to appreciate the things of Jesus as their own true portion by the grace of God.

God is not worshipped by the will of man. The possession of a faultless creed is not enough to change a sinner to a saint. Nothing but living faith can work this change, a faith which is itself the gift of God. A Christian is the workmanship of God, who quickened him, and called him by His grace. But to the believer there is one *Spirit* and one *body*, as well as one faith, one baptism, one Lord, one Father, and one God.¹ The presence of the Spirit is the animation of the body. Where there is no true recognition of His Person, there can, of course, be no perception of His presence. Where again the doctrine of His Person is viewed rather as a theological abstraction, than as a reality enjoyed by faith, although His gracious energy may work abundantly in individual souls, His active sovereignty, as the vicarious Keeper of the Church,² until the re-appearing of the Saviour, is practically disallowed.³ Until there is a clear discernment, not merely of a certain indefinite influence, which is allowed, in general, to be exerted upon Christians by the Spirit, but of the *doctrine of His living presence*, both as the *Unction of*

¹ Eph. iv.² John xvi.³ 1 Cor. xii.

each several member of Christ's body, and as the effective Guide and Ruler of the body in its unity, it is impossible that just ideas as to Christian worship should prevail. Yet nothing surely is of a more practical importance to the Christian, than a right perception and a frank confession of the capital distinction by which the living Church is separated from the dead, though perhaps professing, world.⁴ The present day is one of unbounded pretension, and of enormous evil. The systematic debasement of the truth of God is the most fatal feature of the times. But nothing can *alter* truth. God keeps it in His precious record still. And the Spirit, who alone applies its power to the soul, remains in the fulness of Divine sufficiency to the believing receiver of the things of Christ.

To remind the Christian reader of the rent and spoiled condition of the Church below, may be the necessary duty of a steward who desires to be faithful. To call attention to the still unbroken word of truth, is a happier and more cheering task; for it is to direct the fainting spirit to the pure springs both of comfort and joy. That such confusion as already reigns in the professing body, must be, has been foretold from the beginning;⁵ while that a darker and more hopeless apostasy will yet set in, is the express though mournful witness of the Holy Ghost, when testifying of the latter days.⁶ But Satan's power, although mighty, is yet limited. All the mischief which the worker of all evil can effect is insufficient to destroy the work of God. The evil

⁴ John xiv. 17; 1 Cor. ii.

⁵ Matt. xviii.; 1 Cor. xi. 19.

⁶ 2 Thess. ii.; 2 Tim. iii.

which in so many varied forms afflicts and dishonours the professing Church is suffered to exist, that the precious faith of God's dear children may be tried. It is a painful thing to feel, while writing these remarks, that the assertion of neglected truth will seem to many whom God loves like controversy, rather than a simple exposition of sound doctrine. But it is better to be misjudged of men, than to corrupt the word of God. *Love* is of God; and when it speaks, it needs must speak, according to its measure, as a confessor of God's truth. What men at large call *charity*, is not of God. It is a sentiment which springs from selfishness, and claims a hearing, not for God, but man. Its aim is not the glory of the Lord, but the assertion of men's equal rights. But truth alone will stand, and be commended in the day of God. May the light and glory of their blessed Hope shine more and more distinctly on the path of those who gird their loins to wait for Jesus, with the girdle of God's perfect truth.⁷ To return to our more immediate subject.

Verse 23. "Let us hold fast the profession of our hope,"⁸ &c. The hope of the believer is according to the promises of God. The ground and reason upon which his future hope is based, is his acceptance of the gospel as the *present truth* of God. It is the consciousness of justification that makes glory a near and certain prospect to the saint. The Hebrew believers had professed a hope of entrance into the rest which had been opened to them by the blood of Jesus. They are exhorted now to hold it fast. For

⁷ Eph. vi. 14; 1 Pet. i. 13.

⁸ Τῆς ἐλπίδος. It is hard to account for the mistranslation of this word in the E. V.

God, who had promised, was both faithful and able to perform. The Lamb, who had redeemed them, would shortly be revealed in glory to fulfil the pledged assurance which He gave while yet on earth. In confessing Jesus as the Son of God, they became partakers of a hope which would not make ashamed. For its fruition was dependent, not on *their* faithfulness, but on that of God. He would not deny Himself, although their faith might be but weak. Moreover, it was no new expectation that they now professed, although it might have lately dawned on some of them. God had designed it for His people, and had promised it in Christ before the world began.⁹ In the knowledge of the finished sacrifice, they had a certain evidence that He had verified His word. In Christ they knew that all His promises were yea and amen, that the God of promise might be glorified in *them*.

Faith is the warranty of hope. According to the strength and simplicity of the former, will be the steadiness and near distinctness of the last. But faith is an active principle; and, when in exercise, produces works which God accepts as *good*. Faith, as a special gift, may lift a mountain, while fervent charity is a stranger to the heart.¹ Yet the natural offspring of *that* faith which looks upon the love of God in Christ, is love. We love Him who has first loved us. And if we love the Father, we cannot hate the children that are born of Him.² Brotherly love, as a living principle, is but another name for the new life which is in every believer.³ But it is

⁹ Tit. i. 2; 2 Tim. i. 9.

² 1 John v. 1.

¹ 1 Cor. xiii.

³ 1 John iii. 14.

not without watchfulness and self-denial that this most excellent⁴ way is kept. Having therefore, been exhorted to consider the Apostle and High Priest of their profession, that their faith and hope may stand, the holy brethren are now called on to consider *one another* in the fellowship of their common hope, with a view to their mutual provocation both to love and to good works (verse 24). Having put off carnal emulation in the blessed realization of their new and heavenly calling, they are in its place to put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. They are encouraged now to vie with one another in furthering the common interests and happiness of that house, which is the Lord's. They belonged to one another, and they were to exemplify that truth, not grudgingly, but with a real appreciation of its blessedness. They were fellow-servants also of the same most gracious Lord. Their devotedness to Him would be best shown by their endeavouring to imitate, in their communications with each other, the manner of the love with which the Master loved them all.⁵

Nor were the gracious activities of personal charity to be their only care. It is in the *assemblies* of His saints that God is more abundantly glorified, when the once-purged worshippers present, with unity of mind and voice, their adoration to the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁶ By assembling together, they acknowledged openly their common hope before the world, as well as to each other. A

⁴ Καὶ ἔτι καὶ θ' ὁ π ε ρ β ο λ ῆ ν ὁ δὸν ὑμῶν δείκνυμι. (1 Cor. xii. 31.)

⁵ John xv. 12; Phil. ii. 1-5.

⁶ Rom. xv. 6.

sense of personal weakness, or unworthiness, is no just obstruction to such meetings; for not only is the Lord the Spirit present with His people to the end, but in the priestly ministry of Jesus there exists a gracious and adequate provision for the faultiness and poverty of corporate, no less than private worship. As the Minister of God's true sanctuary, He delights to offer, in the acceptable fragrance of His own perfections, the prayers and praises of His people here below. He bears the iniquity of their holy things. But from the beginning of the Gospel, impediments to genuine social worship have abounded. Satan abhors it, and has not ceased to labour for the hindrance, and, if possible, the prevention, of a practice which, when faithfully observed, affords the most effective testimony to the truth which he desires to destroy.⁷ The chief practical obstacle to Christian fellowship is natural selfishness. While our thoughts are upon heavenly things, and our hearts are filled with Him who is the substance of our promised hope, we are disposed instinctively for fellowship with those who are partakers of like precious faith. But because spiritual worship is a thing of faith alone, the counteractive working of the natural will is at all times ready to weaken and degrade it. A true sense of common danger, as well as of common blessing, draws together those whose desire is toward the living God. A right estimation of their personal nothingness, as well as of their practical faultiness, when combined with simple trust in Jesus, impels the sheep who know His voice to flow together to

⁷ John xvii. 21; 1 Cor. xiv. 23-25.

their appointed place of safety and refreshment.^s But when faith, through lack of exercise, becomes enfeebled, and human motives, as a natural consequence, begin again to govern the believer in his ways, he will have less interest in these demonstrative expressions of the common joy. Pretexts might easily suggest themselves to one who only looked to Jesus as his ultimate escape from wrath, or thought only of his individual blessing as an heir of grace, of weight enough to justify him in a more private and exclusive walk. This was early exemplified in the Church of God. Already a systematic absence from all social worship was the manner of some (verse 25).

Nothing, however, but danger to themselves, as well as dishonour to the Lord, could come of this. It was an evil thing to sever practically what God had joined, in wisdom as well as mercy. They needed one another. The hope which lived within them as a new-born thing, amid the inveterate and hostile tendencies of their old nature, had need of nourishment and cheer. The path of pilgrimage was dangerous, and they were committed to each other's keeping by the way. The feeble-minded had a brother's claim upon the stronger and more settled saint, who, in his turn, where God was duly owned, might derive fresh vigour from a seasonable word of doctrine. *All* stood in need of helpful exhortation. None more so than they who, from what motive soever, proved habitually wanting to the social assemblies of the saints. Those who kept in memory the nature of their calling, and saw in

^s Matt. xviii. 20.

each succeeding sun a token of the coming day, would feel *increasingly*, as that day drew on, the need of wakening each other's expectation, and of preparing one another to behold the Saviour's face without one feeling of regret. To please Him was their present opportunity. To be found of Him in peace, should be their one desire.⁹

It is worthy of remark, that the most emphatic exhortations to Christian fellowship are always found in immediate connexion with the doctrine of the second advent. The present verse is an example of this. In the epistles to the Thessalonians, which abound with exhortations to mutual edification, the same characteristic feature is strikingly apparent. In Jude's brief but pregnant letter to the saints, when already that apostasy, whose moral features and whose ready doom he so vividly describes, had begun to discover itself within the professing body, we find the same connexion. They who looked with longing for the mercy of the Lord Jesus unto eternal life, are urged to build up one another upon their most holy faith, &c. This last instance is one of especial comfort, as it seems to indicate that, let Satan rage as he will, and seem to triumph as he may, there never can arrive a time, till Christ Himself returns, when Christians will find themselves unable, if obedient, to assemble for acceptable worship in His name.

Verses 26-31. "For if we sin wilfully," &c. Christian fellowship is one of God's instrumental preservatives against relapse from Christ. The connexion, therefore, is obvious between the exhortation

⁹ 2 Pet. iii. 14.

delivered in the foregoing verses, and the solemn word of warning which is here presented. For a voluntary discontinuance of social worship is a renunciation practically, of one of the appointed means of spiritual growth and progress. Forsaking *one another* is a step towards forsaking *Jesus*. The foundation of the present warning is the very full statement and demonstration of gospel grace which has been previously delivered, nor is their connexion difficult to apprehend. The condition of a purged worshipper is purity and sanctification in the sight of God. It is by the faith of the Son of God that this condition is attained. The believing sinner is become the righteousness of God in Christ. On the other hand, a departure from the faith is a return to the former state of sin, with the additional and irremediable condemnation of deliberate apostasy from Christ. The wilful sin which is here so fearfully denounced, is a dereliction of that doctrine which alone is our deliverance from sin. If, after receiving the knowledge of the truth, the grace of God is turned advisedly to lasciviousness; if inspired truth is given up for fables, and the wisdom of the just abandoned finally in favour of philosophy and vain deceit; or if, by a gradual hardening of heart, that grace, becoming daily less esteemed, is ultimately disallowed; and human works are, after trial made of Christ, preferred by the self-righteous dreamer to the blood which makes atonement for the soul,—the case is hopeless: for if the Lamb of God is disallowed, “there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin.”

Through the craft of Satan men may, for the

moment, be deceived and lured away from truth. Through the witchery of specious, though most false persuasion, they may gradually lose the conscious liberty of Christ. Instead of speaking of their blessedness in Him, they may be biting and devouring one another in the madness of a carnal emulation. They may thus have practically fallen from grace, until the faithful hand of the Restorer is put forth to break the snare, and lead them back again to the enjoyment of a blessing which they never wittingly abandoned, but from which they were enticed away.¹ But when truth is preached, to turn away from truth—to choose a fable rather than the word of grace—no longer desiring the will of God, to seek their teachers at the bidding of their lusts, because sound doctrine is become intolerable,—is to give evidence of a *willing* preference of sin to Christ. To such, salvation is no prospect. For they shut out hope when they give up the Lord. There remains no other gospel, if the Spirit's witness be refused. There is no other *Jesus*² than the Son of God. There remains no further sacrifice for sins (verse 26). But in place of this there is a present condemnation by the word of holiness, and an execution of that judgment, when the Lord shall come, which is declared to be the fearful alternative of justifying faith.³ When He shall presently appear

¹ Gal. *passim*.

² Matt. i. 21.

³ Ἐκδοχή. "Looking for," does not well express the apostle's meaning; indeed, as Alford has justly noticed, it is hardly an admissible translation of the term, which rather signifies "reception." It is not the subjective consciousness of an apostate that he is here intimating, nor even the solemn anticipations of those who, themselves secure in Christ, yet regard with a wondering and compassionate abhorrence the infatuation of the wicked (Ps. cxix. 53;

without sin to salvation, to them who in the day of patience have fed their souls upon His flesh and blood, He will be known in righteous and unsparing vengeance by the sinners who forsake their own mercies for the love of lying vanities. Fiery indignation is reserved for them, who, because they will not be the friends of Jesus now, must meet Him as an adversary in the day of wrath (verse 27).

In the two following verses (28, 29), we have a plain elucidation of the nature of this wilful sin. It is the characteristic sin of the dispensation, and is contrasted in its nature and results with what was exemplified under the former covenant of works. Merciless death was the immediate recompence of the transgressor who despised the law of Moses.⁴ A *sorer* punishment than man's hand can inflict is reserved among the treasures of God's wrath for the despiser of His Christ. There is a resurrection of *judgment* to the man who in his lifetime treads upon the Son of God. Two or three witnesses sufficed for the conviction of the rebellious breaker of the Law. The name which he had once confessed; the blood which, having for a while esteemed it precious, he has treated as a common thing, no more discerning in it the holy sanction of God's Covenant of peace; and the Spirit, whom, as the patient Messenger of boundless grace, he has insulted and disowned, when space was given to repent—will overwhelm, by their decisive testimony, the man

2 Cor. v. 11), but rather the solemn assurance that God's threatenings of judgment are no empty sound, that what men have voluntarily earned by a repudiation of His grace, they will assuredly receive in that fearful and decisive day.

⁴ See the remarks already made on chap. ii. 2, 3.

who, in the present day of mercy, forsakes the Gospel of the grace of God, to find a more congenial portion in the world.

It is certain that no soul that God has quickened unto life eternal, can ever abdicate its title of salvation by a deliberate repudiation of the cross. The power which *begets* the children is pledged also to their eternal *preservation*. No sheep of Christ will ever perish, because *He* is competent to save His flock. Nor is it possible that one alive to God should ever heartily despise His grace. Yet is it well that warning should be added to instruction; for it is thus that our feet keep practically the sure ways of life. No Christian is exempt from the danger of a large departure from the truth of God, although he is kept from drawing back unto perdition by the faithfulness of Him who has appointed him to obtain salvation by Jesus Christ.⁴ If faith and patience be not kept in exercise by a continual minding of the things of Christ, it will soon be forgotten by the negligent believer, that the friendship of the world is enmity with God. God's Holy Spirit will be grieved in those whom He has sealed, if He be not hearkened to with diligence as the alone safe Conductor of the children through the present evil world.

This passage, therefore, like the one of similar drift already noticed,⁵ is a word of stern yet necessary warning to the saint. Like that, too, it is a prophetic protraiture of the conduct and eventual destiny of those whose knowledge of the truth is not in power, but in word alone. Departure from

⁴ 1 Thess. v. 9.

⁵ Chap. vi. 4-8.

the faith, and, therefore, enmity against the cross of Christ,⁶ may reach a fatal and irremediable pitch, while outwardly His name is not denied. Nay, the most bitter execration of God's saving truth has proceeded from the very men who claimed to be the keepers of the faith of God's elect.⁷ In our own eventful times, two opposite phases of the same apostasy are manifest. We see men, on the one hand, giving up sound doctrine to return to the lying delusions of a former age, and seeking with ostentatious pretensions of authority to impose mere human traditions upon the flock of God. On the other hand, there is a far-prevailing spirit of natural presumption which derides the fundamental doctrines of salvation, while the sanction of the name of Christ is claimed without misgiving for the ways and works of an unregenerate world. Christ's precious blood is desecrated indeed, when all that men discover in the Gospel of God's grace is a freer and safer license for the human mind and will. Christian profession, if it be not coupled with the love of Jesus, is but a "swelling word" which prefaces the sure destruction of those who dream of concord between Christ and Belial, and strive to make the Spirit's things a nourishment and comfort to the flesh.⁸

The peculiar application of such warnings as

⁶ Phil. iii. 18, 19.

⁷ Most readers are acquainted with the canons of the Council of Trent relating to justification. Nor is the philosophising form of infidelity at all more tolerant of truth than that which has already drunk so deeply of the blood of God's saints, under the falsely assumed title of the Holy Catholic Church. The Beast that hates the whore becomes the final adversary of the Lamb. (Rev. xvii. 14-16.)

⁸ 2 Pet. ii.; Jude *passim*.

the present to believing *Hebrews* has been already noticed at an earlier page. It bears with equal urgency upon *us* at the present day, when the true heirs of the kingdom are but an exceptive remnant, variously dispersed among those masses of external profession which, within the sphere of modern civilization, constitute *the world*. There is no terror in such passages for those who judge themselves, and with a consciousness of utter personal unworthiness rejoice in Jesus as their sure salvation. When Christians feel alarmed at the perusal of such words, it is a proof that, in their case at least, the word of warning is no empty sound. It is not upon them that tremble at the Word of God that the weight of coming wrath will fall. For the heart that mourns with sore amazement at the contemplation of its own unprofitableness, is in no mood to spurn the ministry of grace, or count the blood of Christ a common thing; none but the impenitent scorers of mercy will experience the fearful alternative of unsparing judgment. With respect to the difficulty which may be felt in comparing verse 29 with the earlier part of the chapter, in which sanctification by the blood of Christ is affirmed to be of an eternal efficacy, it is the common habit of the Spirit of God to describe apostates according to their *primary pretensions*. It is thus that their guilt is so fearfully aggravated. A Christian really, that is, a *believer*, is sanctified eternally in Christ. A false professor claims to be the same, by his profession. But the Lord, who reads the heart, knows well the people that are His. He is not mocked by words. But He is a Tower of eternal refuge to the believing

sinner, who esteems His name a better treasure than the riches of the world.

Two quotations are added from the book of Deuteronomy⁹ in confirmation of the doctrine of a special judgment on the gainsayer and the apostate (verse 30).¹ The Lord will judge *His people*. He stands already before the door in readiness to visit the "great house" of His profession² and deal with it in uprightness according to its state. To fall into the hands of the living God, when He comes armed for vengeance to destroy His adversaries, is, indeed, a fearful thing (verse 31). It will not be thus with them who now, with a full sense of their own weakness, know by faith the power of that hand to keep them fast for ever.³ The living God is the desire of His children. Their faces are towards His tabernacles. There may be fainting, and many a harmful digression by the way. But every one of those whom He has taught to build their souls on Jesus will surely see His face in rest with everlasting joy.⁴

Verses 32-34. This repetition, in the course of one epistle, of such searching admonitions, is a plain indication that the brethren whom he addressed had lost a portion of their early love. As in the case of the bewitched Galatians, they had become unlike their former selves. Highly probable it is, that in both these instances a common evil was at work; that legalism, namely, had been gradually regaining

⁹ Chapter xxxii. 35, 36.

¹ It is an interesting fact, (in its bearing on the question of authorship) that, the words *ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκησις, ἐγὼ ἀνταποδώσω*, although not strictly representing either the Hebrew text nor the LXX., are identical with the similar quotation by the apostle in Rom. xii. 19.

² 2 Tim. ii. 20. ³ John x. 28, 29; 1 Pet. i. 5. ⁴ Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

an ascendancy, and, as a necessary consequence, the efficient springs of personal blessedness and of holy service were fast becoming dry. It was needful, then, to waken them from this their dream, and, by leading them to view again the goodly blessings of their heavenly inheritance, to restore them to themselves. They were no traitors to the Lord, though one who watched for their souls' peace might deem loud warnings needful when an enemy both powerful and crafty was at hand. They had proved themselves true soldiers, both by personal endurance of the afflictions of the Gospel, and by willing fellowship with them who bore reproaches for the name of Christ. They had not shunned the Lord's poor prisoners⁵ (verse 34), but had tenderly remembered them, and sought them out. They had moreover lost without a murmur, nay, with joy, many of the things which men most dearly prize, for the firm and rich persuasion that the love of Christ had won for them in heaven a better and a more enduring substance.

Their former conversation had been worthy of the gospel. In all they did and suffered *then*, the moving spirit was hopeful confidence in Jesus. They are exhorted now to continue in that trust (verse 35). For Jesus does not change. If, on comparing their first love and its effects with the diminished zeal which since had made the heart of the apostle sad, they felt disposed to call their own sincerity in question, they were wrong. What they

⁵ There seems but little authority for the E. V., "Ye had compassion on *me* in my bonds." All the modern recensions of any weight read *τοῖς δεσμοῖς* instead of *τοῖς δεσμοῖς μου*.

did formerly was *rightly* done; and God was not unrighteous to forget their work. Self-judgment, which destroys all false and hollow confidences, is a work of the same Spirit who, as the Comforter, builds up the contrite soul in Jesus. They must not, therefore, cast away their confidence; because the trust which they had once reposed in their Redeemer He was faithful to preserve. They did not doubt His love when at the first they boldly took His name. They *knew* then that the heavenly inheritance was no delusion. Still less should they relinquish *now* that blessed hope. Their confidence, held firmly fast, would bring them soon great recompence of reward.

Verse 36. Still they had need of patience. For the time was not yet come for God to put them in possession of the promise. They would bear away⁶ triumphantly the prize of their high calling when once the Master should appear. Meanwhile, their calling was to do the will of God. Jesus had done it once, and perfectly, on their behalf; and now, in the confession of His name, they were to seek to follow in His steps. They were partakers of the *heavenly* calling. They had, therefore, done with earthly prospects, and the vain pursuits of men; their calling was to "occupy" for Christ till He should come. Moreover, the close of their brief day of patience was at hand. It might be difficult, while looking on the living scene of actual human progress, to realize the distance from the former things

⁶ *Ἰνα . . . κομισήσθαι τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν.* The promises are already the believer's inheritance. What is here intended is the eventual attainment of that glory which is "the hope of righteousness," at the second coming of the Saviour. (Comp. Gal. v. 5.)

to which they were transported by the resurrection of the Lord. But a single glance toward the cross of the rejected One, would make them feel that strangership and pilgrimage must needs be their experience while remaining in a world of sin from which that cross alone had set them free.⁷

Nor are His people always to desire His appearing. He *will* come. It is but yet a very little while, and He whose present title is "the Comer," will arrive⁸ (verse 37). Let the reader carefully remark the frequent recurrence of this promise. Its non-fulfilment had begun (even so early as the date of this epistle) to tell injuriously on the minds of some. For faintness comes naturally, when hope is long deferred. From the first announcement of the message of salvation, the Comforter had spoken to the Churches of the Lord's return; and while truth was freshly tasted in their hearts, believers looked for Jesus daily, as the certain, though indefinite fulfilment of their hope. But a delay had been experienced which, while it served to try both faith and patience, gave opportunity of revival to

⁷ Gal. i. 4.

⁸ Ἐτι γὰρ μικρὸν ὅσον ὅσον, ὃ ἐρχόμενος ἔξει. κ. λ. This passage, though not an exact quotation from any part of Scripture, is evidently an accommodation of Habak. ii. 3, to which, in the LXX. it bears a near resemblance. And it is interesting to notice the change in the tone of the same Spirit's testimony, while speaking through an apostle of Christ, when compared with His previous utterance as the Spirit of prophecy. What to Habakkuk was a vision, is to Paul a living Person, the beloved and wished-for object of his saving faith. The force of the former words is peculiar. "*Noch ein klein wenig*," says DE WETTE. It is the way of the Spirit always to place the second coming of the Saviour as an *immediate* object before our hope, though the extension of His long-suffering may cause departure to be with Christ, to be the portion of many who had hoped to greet Him in their living bodies when He came. They who thus sleep in Jesus will not be behind their living brethren in that day. (1 Thess. iv. 14-16.)

natural feelings and propensities. They found, by experience, that Jesus tarried still. The certain effect of a prolonged continuance of this experience would be to tempt them gradually to cease to look for His appearing, as a *present* hope. The ordinary term of human life would naturally be regarded as the set time of their earthly patience, if, instead of looking at the things which are eternal and unseen, they once began to walk by sight. But the power of their outward testimony, as well as the spiritual well-being of their own souls, would suffer grievously from such a change in their confessed position in the world. Not to become entangled in the common course of human things when the absence of the Lord began to be *reckoned* on indefinitely, was impossible. They would *walk* as men in proportion as they *thought* as men.

How far the operation of this principle has tended to the debasement and spiritual ruin of the professing body is an inquiry which, by God's great mercy, has awakened some attention among Christians in these latter times. With an unexampled progress in the works of man, and amid still bolder anticipations of securing, by means of human effort, that peace and safety which are truly attainable in Christ alone, there has arisen, among the generation of God's children, some faint revival of the true hope of the Church. The wrath of the enemy has raged, and rages still, against the assertion of a doctrine which refuses all foundation to the magnificent delusions of a Christless hope. That brighter and better times are setting in upon the world, and that human energies are destined to effect the ultimate diffusion

of a general happiness, is the presumptuous imagination of those, who, while professing to believe the Scriptures, remain still in willing ignorance that "the end of all things is at hand." On the other hand, the father of deceit has not been forgetful, that the surest way to damp a faithful testimony is to make its own witnesses appear as its destroyers. This has been largely instanced in the present day. Men who have looked for events, and noted times and seasons, in ignorance or forgetfulness that the brethren of Jesus have no need of these to guide them in their expectation of the Lord,⁹ have been continually (often, doubtless, with far different aim) weakening the moral effect of the Spirit's testimony on the conscience, by venturous predictions, which the event has never failed to falsify. *The coming of Jesus for His saints is not determinable by human computations.* It is not by such methods that the Spirit brings the children nearer to their hope. Resting in One who cannot lie, they are taught to wait patiently for *Him*; remembering that the fit time for His appearing is avowedly reserved among the secrets not yet published in the word.¹ It is a *living* Hope to which the abundant mercy of the Father hath begotten us, and it is by *faith*, and not by mental effort, that our hearts are kept in conscious proximity to the end of their desire.² The sad effect upon the public conscience of rash and unscriptural declarations, in connexion with this doctrine, is easily perceived. A few more false alarms, and *scoffers* only will appear to speak the words of truth and soberness, when they chide the

⁹ 1 Thess. iv. v.¹ Mark xiii. 32; Acts i. 7.² 1 Pet. i. 3, 21.

world's misgivings by appealing to that ancient steadfastness of nature, which cannot be shaken by prophetic words.³

That "God has forgotten," is an expression of men's wishes⁴ rather than of their convictions. To put them in remembrance of His unchanged purpose, and to advise the sinner of a nearer interruption to his guilty ease than that last "day of judgment," which the incredulous world has learned to esteem as little better than a metaphor of endless postponement, is the responsibility of those whose shining in the world is in the power of a faithful confession of the truth.⁵ But the urgency of Gospel testimony will much depend on the habitual condition of the soul's affections. Men, who are looking for the Saviour as an instant hope, are likely to give yet more diligence to gather in the residue of those who are to see His face with joy at His appearing. Moreover, the immediate prospect of the Lord will surely stir up charity within the house. But as a doctrine, it is powerless, without activity of faith. When merely added to the list of other "views," which a lethargic Christian may have indolently added to his saving faith in Jesus, while his heart is still entangled in the world, the doctrine of the second advent is but a badge of shame. To be looking truly for the Saviour can never be compatible with the pursuit of earthly things. The world is well aware of this, and bitterly derides

³ 2 Pet. iii. 4.

⁴ Ps. x. 11. Such language may be also found, sometimes as an expression of weak and faulty surmising on the lips of God's own people under trial. (Ps. lxxvii. 9.)

⁵ Phil. ii. 15, 16.

the inconsistency which glares, alas! so strikingly through our outward protestations. Of all the things of Jesus which the Comforter reveals to us, none is more precious than the promise of His swift return; yet none is more easily let slip. Undoubtedly, our keenness of desire will be according to our readiness of conscious access to the things within the veil. But it is by faith alone that this can be maintained; and so his present exhortation closes with a remembrancer to this effect.

Verses 38, 39. "Now the just shall live by faith," &c. It is by faith that sinners consciously become alive to God as righteous men. The former part of this quotation⁶ is more than once elsewhere cited by the Spirit as a conclusive witness to the doctrine of justification by faith alone.⁷ But its present application is to the believer's course and conduct in the day of patience. The just man lives his daily life by the faith of the Son of God.⁸ God's pleasure is in those who realize, as the apostle did, that they are crucified indeed with Christ; that if they live now in the flesh, it is no longer they, but Christ. But while we are called upon to emulate his faith, how far behind in that fair race may we have dropped? There is a day at hand when every saint who has wittingly drawn back and shunned the cross will have his recompence. The Lord will take no pleasure in the ways or service of a double-

⁶ The passage in the text is a quotation, in inverted order, of the Septuagint translation of Hab. ii. 4. The object of the Spirit in here transposing the clauses of this verse seems to have been to add still greater force to the strong practical exhortation which He thus concludes. Profession of faith was no security against subsequent apostasy. Faith, that was really such, because it looked to Jesus, saved the soul.

⁷ Rom. i. 17; Gal. iii. 11.

⁸ Gal. ii. 20.

mind man. But while many a Christian may draw back through faintness, in the day of battle, and forfeit thus the special honour which the Trier of His servants' hearts will only give to such as He approves, no saint, whatever his degree of weakness or unfaithfulness, can ever heartily renounce the Lord, or fail to inherit that salvation which is God's free gift by Him.

While, therefore, he stirs up their diligence, and warns their natural selfishness, by reminding them that it is only in the willing servant that the Master finds His joy, he adds, immediately, a general assurance of their common salvation, in which he joins his hope with theirs. "*We are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.*" There was that within their hearts which would attest his words. They did believe. And, although their trial might appear protracted, and they had need of patience, since time seems to move on leaden wings when danger and temptation are on every side, yet they would cleave still to Jesus. The Spirit who had measured well the interval which kept Him from their sight, had called it but a very little space. Believing now on Him who had gone into heaven for their sakes, they would await the moment when He shall be seen of them that look for Him, without sin, to fulfil salvation to the utmost promise of His truth. May we, for whom "these last times" are so near run out, be found, not among them that draw back from the yoke, but watching, with girded loins, until He come!

CHAPTER XI.

AT the close of the preceding chapter, to be "of faith," has been affirmed to be a vital distinction of the heirs of salvation in the world which God has judged. By faith the Hebrew election knew that they were "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling." The blessings which belong to such a calling have been largely reviewed in the former part of this Epistle. God's peace was theirs by Jesus Christ. His presence was thrown open to the freest access of their hearts. For all the personal disabilities which distressed them here, they knew a more abundant compensation in the faithful ministry of God's High Priest. With a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory, the hearts which He had sprinkled from an evil conscience are now invited to rejoice in Him. Before them there is set in present view their Blessed Hope. Not knowing at what moment the brightness of Christ's glory may appear, they are exhorted patiently to do the will of God until He come. To strengthen them to run on patiently towards the goal of promise, by reminding them of those who had gone before them in that race, is the gracious purpose of the

Spirit in the richly-varied portraiture of active faith which fills the present chapter. For, as believers, they were morally a part of that unbroken family which God has always had and owned.¹ In their actual standing, indeed, they widely differed from the fathers who obtained a good report. But the truth whose riper glory now displays itself in finished blessedness to the partakers of the heavenly calling, was the real though distant object of the former faith. Because of God's unaccomplished promises, the fathers walked with God. In the power of those exceeding great and precious promises which already are our own in Christ, *we* now are to be made partakers of His nature who has called us out of darkness into His own most wondrous light.²

That faith alone exemplifies obedience, and reaps eternal life as its reward, is the moral principle which here receives so manifold an illustration. The chapter opens with a sort of definition of this sole effective instrument of human blessing, which puts it in a lively contrast to mere credence or assent. It is "a solid assurance of things hoped for, a proof or conviction of invisible things"³ (verse 1). Faith is exactly contrary to natural perception, even as its objects are beyond the pale of human experience. They are defined as realities only by the word of God. The specifications of Divine promise picture forth to the believer an exact expression of the

¹ Rom. ix. 8.

² 2 Pet. i.; 2 Cor. vii. 1.

³ ἑλπιζομένων ὑπόστασις, πραγμάτων ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων. I do not think the English word "substance" a just representation of the apostle's meaning. The substance of a hope is its ultimate enjoyment. DE WETTE's translation is good. "*Glaube aber ist Zuversicht dess, was man hoffet, Ueberzeugung von Dingen, die man nicht siehet.*"

blessings (whatever may be their descriptive character) which he is eventually to enjoy. The effect, therefore, of faith is to remove its possessor in spirit from the sphere of natural experiences; because God speaks to the believer from another place, and of a different subject, from this present world. It is thus that "the path of the just" is gradually shaped, and opened day by day; Divine promise being not less the qualifying measure and sustaining power of an acceptable walk, than it is the warranty and assurance of our ultimate inheritance. God's saints are severed by this means from those who do not share their hope. Remaining in the world, and moving in and out among its people, the faithful holder of God's promises is always in a place of *testimony*. For conduct which is avowedly referred to expectations resting on especial promise, assures the world convincingly of its own distance from the source of blessing. God's anointed ones have always been His prophets. Faith is thus seen to be an active, operative principle. As it invests the believer with peculiar privilege, so its practical effect is to render him a willing servant of the God who blesses him. His way, therefore, will be pleasing to the Lord in proportion to the strength and clearness of His faith. This is forcibly expressed in verse 2. "*For* by it the elders obtained a good report." Their faith was no weak, irresolute acknowledgment of truths beyond their present reach. It was a willing reception of the word of God, which dated for them new and paramount assurances of personal blessedness from the sovereign pleasure of His goodness. The way of nature was the way

of sin; but God had opened, in His promissory word of life, another way. The elders acted on the faith of His assurances. They took Him at His word, and did what *naturally* they would not have done. Thus they glorified the God of promise. And He has borne them witness in the faithful record of His truth.

Before, however, the series of personal instances begins, we have in verse 3 a general assertion, on behalf of all believers, of the power and Godhead of the alone Creator: "Through *faith* we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God," &c. Man, in his progressive, practical deterioration, from the first corruption of his nature, gradually but willingly forgot this truth. Things visible, instead of being wisely considered as the expressive interpreters of Him who had produced them, became themselves the objects of men's homage. Creation was to their unbelief a screen that hid the Maker from their view.⁴ On the contrary, faith *understands* the creature in the light of the Creator. While philosophy seeks vainly⁵ among the multitudinous diversities of natural phenomena for some intelligible reason of their existence, and proves experimentally its own inability to raise itself above the objects of its contemplation, a simple testimony of the Holy Ghost connects at once, for the *believer*, the

⁴ Rom. i.

⁵ The wide difference which exists between knowledge (more or less exact) of *facts* or even of the laws which regulate them, and an intelligent appreciation of "the reason of things" is felt most distinctly in the most enlightened minds. (Comp. Eccles. vii. 23-25.) It may indeed be said as truly of natural things as of spiritual, that "if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet, as he ought to know." (1 Cor. viii. 2.)

manifest existence which surrounds him with the eternal Framer of the worlds. As a thing visible to the eye and appreciable by the senses, creation, in all its varied beauty, is but an unmeaning wonder, oppressive from its very vastness, and evermore incomprehensible in its details, if contemplated as a self-existent thing. Nor is it in the power of "natural theology" to teach effectively the doctrine of creation, because the human reason is altogether unequal to the task of finding out God.⁶

⁶ The latent cause, it is to be feared, of much of the labour which has been bestowed with such unsatisfactory results by modern theological writers on the attempt to harmonize scripture and modern science, is a defective apprehension of the great principle stated in this verse. When geologists, for instance, allow themselves to infer, from admitted phenomena, a theory of pre-Adamite earthly existence, &c.; they are clearly in the region, not of faith, but of sentient perception and rational deduction. But even in natural things, to judge "according to the appearance," is not always safe. Facts may, and do exist, in all departments of nature, which may be noted and reasoned on, but by no means *understood*. But it is the Christian's privilege to see things only in the light of God, and it is the entrance of His *word* that alone gives light (in the true sense of the word) on *any* subject. A simple believer, then, will cheerfully admit the facts and phenomena which form the "stock" of scepticism, while absolutely refusing any inference which plainly controverts the word of God. The Copernican theory only *seemed* to do this, for it taught no principle which militates against the truth of Scripture, and men continue still to express themselves with reference to the heavenly bodies in the self-same style as the Creator saw fit to use, when describing to mankind the operation of His hands. But modern geology commits itself sometimes to statements irreconcilable with the precise testimony of the Spirit. To attempt to make these doctrines harmonize with Scripture, by putting new and unnatural constructions upon the words of Moses, is in reality to flatter human presumption at the expense of Divine wisdom. No doubt the *motive* of such apologists is often praiseworthy; but it is sad to think of the dishonour indirectly done to Christ by such attempts. For it was not thus that *Jesus* used the written word—"Have ye not read, that He which made them at the beginning," &c.?⁷ is a question which seems to condemn, by anticipation, all such tamperings with that Scripture, which "cannot be broken." "In *six days* God created," &c. Such is the express testimony of the Holy Ghost. It would be only too easy to shew that the Power and Godhead of the Creator shine but dimly and mistily indeed, through the laboured pages of

The eternal Creator has His dwelling far above the wonders that He shows to men. Faith knows His hiding-place, and in its enjoyment of the word, which has declared to it yet richer blessings, sees in the visible creation but a mediate disclosure of the wisdom and power of the invisible God. It should be remarked, that not only original creation, but also the formative adaptation of its parts, are here ascribed to the agency of the word of God. Both order and existence are of God. The believer in Jesus knows to whom the riches of creative glory are to be ascribed.⁷

Verse 4. Faith's rest is always ultimately God Himself; but with this unity of object, its form and expression may vary almost infinitely. Its *language* will be according to the manner of God's present revelation, for its hope is ever based on a confession of "the present truth."⁸ Its active energy exerts itself in doing or in suffering, according to the will of God. Its native qualities appear with a distinctness and intensity proportioned to the trial which is suffered to elicit them and call them into exercise.

the modern "priests of science," in comparison with the grand though simple words of an inspired pen. But it will be more to the purpose, to remind any Christian reader of these notes who may have become entangled in such theories, that the cause which lies at the bottom of *all* merely intellectual speculations upon this subject, is a willing forgetfulness, that "Creation," as an act of Divine power, is a truth, the intellectual appreciation of which is absolutely above the measure of a finite understanding. The creature cannot, even in imagination, be its own originator. The most painful and widely extended study of things as they are, will only prepare a *candid* mind for a more emphatic confession, that of creation, in its strict and proper acceptation, he knows, fundamentally, exactly *nothing*. It is by *faith* only that we *understand*.

⁷ Col. i. 15. The subject of the Son's effective power and eternal glory as the Creator has been already treated in chap. i.

⁸ 2 Pet. i. 12.

The manifold varieties of natural circumstance, as well as the immediate (though limited) assaults of Satan, are means whereby God tests the value of His own most precious gift. Each of the personal examples which the present chapter contains will be found to present its own distinctive expression, while the diverse qualities which are thus displayed are inherent in the faith which is the *common* portion of the saints. The oldest of God's witnesses is Abel. "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice⁹ than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous," &c.

Abel is the first example of sacrificial justification. Through the offering which he brought, he obtained God's witness that he was righteous. But his justification is to be referred, not to the quality of the offering (in itself of no intrinsic value), but to the faith by which he brought it acceptably unto God. Sacrifice, while it declares a living hope on the part of the offerer, is in itself a confession of personal forfeiture. This Abel made, and honoured thus the God of judgment who had driven Adam out of paradise to die. But the act of Abel was not merely a submissive recognition of his outcast place. He trusted to the *promises* of God. He thirsted for redemption. God was all to Abel, because truth, which had dried up every spring of hope in a creation which sin had subjected to vanity and death,

⁹ Πλείονα θυσίαν. Perhaps we are to combine in this expression the two ideas of value and abundance. Abel gave life, while Cain brought only that which is life's support. It was a larger gift. On the other hand, what *justified* such a gift, and at the same time constituted its moral excellency, was the sacrificial intent with which the blood was shed.

had spoken of another hope. Man and his works had been disallowed of God; and the faith of Abel countersigned the word of truth, although the early beauty of a world which showed as yet few tokens of the curse might seem to nature no unsuited rest. But God, without whom neither happiness nor safety can be felt by the believer, had ceased to take pleasure in a spoiled creation; yet was He still unchanged in goodness, and had left for those who desired to approach Him, a clue by which He might infallibly be reached. Abel's desires were allured by truth to unseen things. His faith, which grasped the promise, made him strange to his own flesh, who followed earthly things. For a contrary reason, God was to the unawakened heart of Cain no refuge nor desire, although he brought Him, in the spirit of a blind self-confidence, that which he esteemed to be His due. Abel and Cain divide mankind. They are the standing types, respectively, of the obedience of faith, and the frowardness of natural incredulity. "The way of Cain"¹ is that broad and open road down which the world goes willingly, in the spirit of reckless self-pleasing, only to find destruction at the end.² The faith of Abel was the self-same principle which now, through grace, enables here and there some poor believing vessel of God's mercy to reckon other things but dross for Christ.

It is the sacrifice of Abel which is here specified as the decisive witness of his faith. Characteristically, he is "righteous Abel." Such is his memorial in the lips of Jesus, when summing up His fearful denunciation of blood-guiltiness against the

¹ Jude 11.

² Matt. vii. 13.

generation which would fill the measure of their sin by numbering Himself among transgressors.³ "His deeds were righteous" is the Spirit's testimony in another place, when contrasting, generally, his way with that of Cain.⁴ For faith, that hopes in God, must ever aim to work His will. But the change from sin to righteousness was in his turning (at whatever season of his life it may have been) from himself to God in the faith of a redemption yet to come. It is, therefore, through the sacrifice, which God regarded, that he speaks intelligibly still to us.⁵ He is the primal example both of that remission which can be by blood alone, and of acceptable worship from a worshipper once purged.⁶

Verses 5, 6. "By faith, Enoch," &c. As the list of God's acceptable witnesses is headed by a specimen of sacrificial justification, so the next example gives us a view of that sure immortality which is to crown in glory the believer's hope. The faith of Enoch rapt him above death. God, whom he trusted, took him by translation to Himself. His witness, while upon the earth, was that he walked with God. He *pleased* God. But it was in his faith that God took pleasure. Without faith, He who is invisible cannot be either known or served on earth. For both His being and His disposition are inscrutable to natural sense. That creative power exists some-

³ Matt. xxiii. 35.

⁴ 1 John iii. 12.

⁵ *Λαλεῖ* is preferred by modern editors to *λαλεῖται*. It will be seen that I refer *δὲ ἀντὶς*, through the relative in the preceding clause, to *θυσίαν*. The sense is but little affected, whether we refer to the faith, or to the sacrifice which is its monument, as the power of Abel's present testimony. But the latter appears to me the plainer construction of the passage.

⁶ *Ante*, chap. ix. 22, and x. 2.

where, is an inference within man's easy reach. That *God* is, though hidden from our sight, and that He is a sure Rewarder of the soul that seeks Him out, is the fundamental doctrine of that wisdom which descendeth from above. The clue which guides faith in its patient search, is the testimony once delivered among men. There had been such from the beginning. For the love of it, the second son of Eve obtained a good report. But ages had intervened between the death of Abel and the birth of Enoch. He grew up in the midst of a fast-filling world. Men lived long lives amid God's plenteous mercies, but their way was waxing worse and worse. Ungodliness in word and deed prevailed. Hard speeches against God, whose testimonies warned the sinner in his ways, were spoken openly by men who took no comfort in His gracious promise. The path of Enoch was a path of voluntary separateness. While others followed their own lusts, he walked with God. By faith he saw invisible realities, and tasted holiness in love. He stuck fast to the words of God, and found no pleasure in the creature apart from the Creator, who alone can bless.

Yet Enoch was no eremite. He lived a man among men, but for God. A husband and a father, he resembled, in his circumstances and his natural condition, other men. But truth was to Enoch something paramount to sense. Nine hundred or a thousand years of prosperous earthly life, was a thing of no account with one who knew that his mortal flesh must one day be "sown in dishonour" on account of sin, and that all earthly comeliness must vanish in corruption. But he looked for *im-*

mortality from God. Convinced experimentally of the truth of that judicial sentence which had spread the pall of mortality over the generations of mankind, he gave glory to the God of promise by confiding simply in His word. Thus, in heart, he clave to his Creator as his hope, and speaking from the fulness of his heart, he spake of Him to others. God gave prophetic power to the faithful confessor of His name. Standing aloof from the corruptions of his day, he warned men of a judgment which should surely come.⁷ By the force of truth he was a stranger in the world. His way was contrary to that of other men, because his heart was set upon another object. Their manner was to please themselves, while he cared only to please Him who had created him, and from whom he looked for a sure and lasting recompence of reward. Thus he lived and wrought, cleaving with patience to a better hope than that of far-extending earthly days, until he ceased upon the noontide of his natural life.⁸ He was not found. Men sought him; but his hiding-place was far above the knowledge or desire of those who walked by sense, and not by faith. He was *with God*, whom they neither enquired for, nor cared to know.

Enoch presents to us a very lively type, both in his earthly walk and in his heavenly change, of the

⁷ I do not doubt that Enoch's testimony had immediate reference to the evil of his own times, although its ultimate vindication is reserved for the crisis which shall terminate the era of abused long-suffering, even as the deluge swept away the unthankful corrupters of the former world. The "fulness of all evil," is, alas! to be the close of a dispensation in which God in Christ shows forth the riches of His unupbraiding grace. (Jude 14, 15.)

⁸ Gen. v. 23.

elect Church of God. Faith separates from natural things, and sanctifies to God, the partakers of the heavenly calling; while a truthful confession of the cross announces to the world the certainty of its reprobation, and the speedy advent of its Judge. Meanwhile, the gospel is the free disclosure of eternal refuge to the soul that hath an ear to hear. God's saints are taught to live a godly life amid this present world by the same grace that saves them,⁹ while they look with patient expectation for the coming of His Son. They are not all to die. But all are to be changed, as in a moment. Like Enoch, they will cease amid their earthly days. They will be caught up to meet the Saviour, as He comes to take them to Himself. The time is *short* until that day. May its brief residue be given to the will of God!

Verse 7. The days of Noah fell upon the close of God's forbearance with the former world. The rapture of Enoch had been succeeded by long centuries of human progress; during which the voice of Divine truth had waxed continually feebler in its effect upon men's hearts, until the more recent prophetic denunciations had become, together with God's former acts and promises, no better than an empty tradition, which no man heeded save the vessel of His grace, whose ear was opened to receive the warning, that judgment, long before denounced, was in a little while to be inflicted. The effect of faith in Noah was to fill his soul with godly fear. For God had announced the certainty of coming wrath, and indicated the sole

⁹ Tit. ii. 11-14.

means of preservation. Noah's personal character could secure him no exemption from the threatened flood. His life and safety were dependent solely upon his obedience to the warning voice of God. Because he believed in God, he hearkened to this special revelation. Humbling himself beneath His mighty hand, he entered on a new and unexampled kind of testimony, whereby, as a preacher of righteousness, in act as well as word, he strove to turn the world to God. He preached for many days; for the ark was long preparing, and God's long-suffering endured till the predicted time was come. And then, because none believed what all had heard, wrath came without a remedy. Noah was shut into the ark before God brought His word to pass. *God* shut him in. He made secure His own work of salvation, before He laid His judgment on the works of men.

Three results are traced to Noah's faith. 1. By the preparation of the ark, he wrought out his own salvation and the safety of his house. With nothing visible to justify his apprehensions, he made wise provision for the coming dread.¹ 2. He condemned the world by his obedience to the word of God. His testimony was a witness of their madness, as they went on heedlessly, exactly in their former way. There is no reason to suppose that Noah suffered injury from those who disbelieved his testimony. Profound contempt was, probably, the strongest feeling which possessed the minds of those who never thought to feel a deadlier torrent than the flow of warning words.² 3. He became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. Accept-

¹ Prov. xxii. 3.

² Matt. xxiv. 37, 38.

ing, with gladness, the conditions of escape, he thus confessed himself a *sinner* before God. He was as others when God judged all flesh. By faith he cast himself on God as on a Saviour; and to do this, is *to be just* with God, who justifies the sinner that believes His grace.

Noah typifies the believer, generally, as one who flees to Christ for refuge from the wrath to come. *Especially*, he represents that part of God's election which will stand at the last close of this long day of mercy. There is a sense in which the entire dispensation of gospel witness corresponds to Noah's days. For from the first, the Spirit has borne witness that the end of all things is at hand.³ But there are "last days," when the words of warning will be no more listened to, nor feared. It was the long continuance of undisturbed prosperity that made the builder of the ark appear a fool to them whose day was nearly done. They built and planted; they married, and were given in marriage, like men who had nothing more to do with fear. In like manner are we warned, that it shall be when men begin to think that peace and safety are about to crown the ripe age of a world whose earlier generations have beheld such strange vicissitudes, that the Destroyer shall appear.⁴ "They knew not," although Noah warned, until the flood came and destroyed them all. Nor will the coming of the Son of man be more expected when His glory shall be suddenly revealed.⁵ It is a solemn thing to live in times when even the reluctant heed which once the world afforded to the warning of its coming doom, is beginning steadily

³ 1 Pet. iv. 7.

⁴ 1 Thess. v.

⁵ Luke xvii.

to be withheld. Never was the word of God so widely spread as now, yet never have the world's anticipations of continuance been so lively or so firm! Happy they who, moved with fear, find refuge from the things not seen as yet, in the blessed gospel of God's present truth.⁶

Verse 8. Faith saved a remnant from the former world: but while nature freely propagates itself, the power which savingly unites the soul to God is incapable of hereditary transmission. This principle is strikingly exemplified in the story of the call of Abraham. The first of the new race, of whom God witnesses, is the man whom He selected, as a special object of His mercy, and as the appointed depositary of His truth, from out of an already godless generation.⁷ By faith, Abraham obeyed the call of God, whose promise severed him from all he naturally loved. We perceive, immediately, a marked characteristic difference which distinguishes the case of Abraham from the antediluvian instances which have been noticed. *Their* faith was exercised upon a general promise. Grace enabled them to appropriate a blessing which was accessible to all who would believe. But the call of Abram was after quite another sort. God addressed Himself to him alone, after mankind in general had already become openly idolatrous. He would separate him to Himself by a peculiar choice. And thus the positive call of one was an emphatic rejection of the rest. Abram received a special summons to vacate the place which nature had assigned him, that he might become the

⁶ 2 Pet. i. 12-19; 1 Thess. i. 10.

⁷ The reader is referred on this point to the Introductory Essay.

possessor of an inheritance which none could show him but the God who thus announced Himself as the Creator of his blessing. God showed *Himself* to Abram, and spoke of an inheritance. Abram, believing God, went forth, not knowing where he went. True faith acts only on the spoken word, leaving with confidence the results of its obedience to the God whom it obeys. The land which had been promised was a lesser object to the faith of Abram, than the God of glory who had promised. His faith reposed in *Him*. In his voluntary abandonment of his native land, the father of the faithful is a pattern of that single-eyed renunciation of self for Christ, which is the beginning of true Christian pilgrimage. But personal devotedness, although connected with justification, and its healthful and natural result, is not, of necessity, identical with that. For while many taste the saving grace of Jesus, how few there are who know complete estrangement from the former things for the excellency of that better hope!⁸ Still, active faith will seek the things of Christ. The back of the believer is towards the country of his birth, although his steps towards the new inheritance may be but faint and slow.

Verses 9, 10. The faith which separated Abraham from natural ties, and led him to a new and distant land, was to have its protracted exercise in the patience of a life-long pilgrimage. In the land of promise he was still a stranger. It was his own, but not in his possession. He had no

⁸ Nor was even the faith of Abraham perfectly exhibited at first. His separation to God was not complete until Terah had been removed by death. Compare the narrative in Gen. xi. 27-32 with Acts vii. 1-4.

settled habitation there, but dwelt as a sojourner in a moving tent. To Isaac and Jacob the same title of inheritance descended, accompanied by the same conditions of strangership; and to each of these in succession it was specially confirmed of God. He formed the heir for the inheritance in either case. For nature can prefer no title to the gifts of God.⁹ The eye of Abraham wandered over all the length and breadth of Canaan, and hopefully anticipated the day when his seed should possess their promised inheritance; but his *faith* looked thence toward a portion far above his sight. God, who was not only his shield, but his exceeding great reward, had built a city of foundation; and it was for that city that he looked. Faith's rest is never in things visible or things corruptible. Abraham was heir of the world by promise; but it was not in the life that now is, that he looked for his inheritance; his desires were upon a heavenly rest. God's promises, meanwhile, were as a wall of separation, which kept him from fellowship with those who held the land in which he dwelt.¹ It is thus,

⁹ See *Notes on the Romans*, chap. ix.

¹ Amorites might have commerce with him, or even become his temporary associates. (Gen. xiv. 13.) But his separate character was still maintained. He was a man of other hopes and interests, a worshipper at another altar, from the Canaanite who occupied the land. The reader will have often noticed that no good report is given of the faith of Lot. He did *not* sojourn in the land of promise as a stranger. He sought his own; and found, first, captivity, and afterwards, a bare escape from wrath. Lot was a righteous man, a partaker of the faith which drew forth Abraham from his native land. But his heart was more on earthly than on heavenly things; more on God's blessings than on God Himself. The grace which originally quickened him, preserved him personally pure, amid the wickedness which vexed his soul. But self-seeking took him far away from the true place of strength and blessing. God saved him, as by fire, from the city of destruction. He is a

also, that the heirs of God are now called to be, while awaiting the fulfilment of their blessed hope. All things are ours. The earth, as well as heaven, is the heritage of Jesus; and His title, as the Heir of all things, is imparted freely to His own. We are the people of the Lord Almighty, in separateness from the present evil world, if our faith is resting on the promises which make us strangers in the place of our birth.²

Verse 11. "Through faith also, Sara herself," &c. In the personal histories which the Spirit has given of the elders in the Old Testament, we meet with many notices of blame. For their life was a conflict, like that of the believer now, between the opposing principles of faith and sense. But God keeps a record of pure praise, where all that faith has wrought *in Him* is carefully preserved.³ The mention of Sarah's faith is a striking instance of this gracious jealousy of God over that which He accounts so precious. If we refer to the narrative in Gen. xviii. we shall find that the faith which is here so honourably mentioned was stimulated into activity by a censure of her unbelief. She was rebuked by the Lord for her incredulous reception of that word of promise which rejoiced the heart of Abraham. It was thus that Sarah learned experimentally what it is to have to do with God. She feared before the presence of the Searcher of her thoughts, and out of that fear there sprang a confidence which

warning to the worldly-minded Christian. God takes no pleasure in a course which leads His children in pursuit of earthly ease. Yet He will know how to deliver from the coming wrath the souls that hope in Him.

² 2 Cor. vi. 14-vii. 1; 1 Pet. ii. 11, &c.

³ 1 Cor. iv. 5.

trusted God according to His name. Faith cannot act effectively until the counsels of the heart have first been disallowed. God, in His power and intent to bless, presents Himself to the believer as a nearer object than his own imaginations. Sarah judged Him faithful who had promised, when first her heart was emptied of herself.

Verse 12. From nature's last extreme of weakness, strength and abundant blessing are educed by faith. Abraham's hope received its crown through Sarah's participation in like precious faith. A multitude innumerable sprang from one as good as dead. The natural seed of Abraham, which, now minished and brought low, is yet again to blossom and to fill the land with fruit,⁴ dates from this strange beginning. It is to be remarked, that in this summary of faith's great trophies, the decisive crisis which is elsewhere cited⁵ as the formal justification of Abraham is passed by. It seems less the Spirit's aim to remind us of the common ancestry of all believers in the present reference to Abraham and his seed, than to cite for our encouragement examples of the wondrous efficacy of that principle which should be the *habitual order* of the just man's life.⁶

Verse 13. The fathers died as they had lived. According to the faith which made God's distant promise better to them than a present portion in the world, they rendered up their lives confidingly to Him. Accepting bodily dissolution as the appointed end of sinful and degraded humanity, they joyfully anticipated the triumphant contrast of the resurrection. The living God would not be over-

⁴ Isaiah xxvii. 6.

⁵ Rom. iv. 3.

⁶ Ante-page.

come of death. He was *their* God, and though they died as sinners by the sentence of His holiness, they should surely live to Him as abiding memorials of His grace. He had called them forth to be His witnesses in the confession of a hope which should not make ashamed. What gave the earthly course of the first patriarchs its character of strangership and pilgrimage, was the specific promises which were successively renewed to each. The tenure which enabled them to find those promises a present joy, was the faith by which they clave to God. For He who had revealed Himself in promise, was the final Hope which filled their hearts. They died, indeed, without receiving their immediate desire; but they saw the promises distinctly, in His light who calleth things that be not as though they were. They were persuaded of them, for they trusted in His word. They embraced them, for they deemed them worthy of their love. They were more to them than the delights of men. They confessed that they were strangers upon earth, because the God of heaven had revealed to them a better country, and a more enduring rest.

For they that voluntarily say that they are pilgrims, plainly show that they have done with earth (verse 14). Men tardily acknowledge, when constrained to die, that human life is but a changeful journey. They are reluctant confessors of a common lot of vanity. But God's anointed *never settled* on the earth. They wandered all their days, because they knew that flesh and blood could never enter where their hopes were placed. Their pilgrimage was an open and practical confession, that rest remained

for no man truly wise on this side of a mortal life.

Verse 15. "And truly, if they had been mindful," &c. They had left a settled house to dwell in tents. Upon no compulsion, but for the sake of a far distant hope, they had renounced a present good. And as their movement had been voluntary, so the way was open for them to return. Had they been thus minded, their fellow-men would have approved their choice; for the world is ill at ease when men profess to seek a hope beyond the limits of its own desire. All that could act upon their natural minds, and all that addressed the selfish feelings of their hearts, solicited them daily to become as other men. But what they had once abandoned, they no more remembered with regret. They had not been driven from the country they had quitted. They came out *deliberately*, upon a better venture. Faith never acts precipitately, but wisely counts the cost, assuring itself that the truth of God, which is its warranty, must ultimately stand. The object that allured the fathers was well worth the sacrifice which they had made. They would no more turn again to things which they had quitted for the *living God*. His blessing which attended them was more than an inheritance, to those who waited for His promise. They reckoned that the things which they had left were not to be compared with what they would receive, when God's salvation should at length be entered on as their reward.⁷

Verse 16. "But now they desire a better country," &c. A pilgrim's faith impels him to an end of

⁷ Gen. xlix. 18.

definite, as well as strong desire. The fathers looked for *heaven*, when they gave up earthly place. Their expectations rested only on the *word* of God. By believing Him, they honoured Him. They gave Him glory as Possessor both of heaven and of earth. Because He marked out by His word the land of Canaan as a possession for their seed, they built their altars only there. But Canaan was to themselves a land of pilgrimage, while heaven was their rest. The God of glory had prepared for them a city worthy of their hope, and of His Name. He was not ashamed of those who trusted Him for unseen things. The strong desire which preferred a better country than the land of their nativity was nurtured, as it had been planted, by Himself. Their faith was a response to His electing love. He was their God; and He would have the nations know that He was such. He suffered none to do His prophets harm.⁸ Because they set their hearts upon Himself, He has glorified their names for ever by adopting them as a distinctive title of His praise.⁹

The value of these recent instances to the partakers of the heavenly calling is very great. The leading principle which finds such happy illustration in these friends of God, is that conduct which is acceptable in His sight, can result only from a settled looking-for of things not seen. They *desired* fervently, because they *estimated* justly. Their faith was better evidence to guide their choice than what they saw. Like them, we also have our day of proof.

⁸ Ps. cv. 14, 15.

⁹ "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." (Exod. iii. 15.)

A Christian has the world on every side inviting his return. If he is not looking at the things which are not seen, he will think less of the exceeding and eternal weight of glory which remains, than of the burdens and privations of the way. But a drooping Christian soon becomes an earthly-minded Christian. For sorrow has no strength to keep us separate from natural things. *Joy in the Lord* is the alone preservative from lusting backward to the former things. It was the *excellency* of the knowledge of Christ that enabled the apostle to look with a sincere contempt upon every object of merely natural ambition. In Christ the lines are fallen to us in pleasant places. No longer far remote, but *present* in the earnest of the Spirit, the promises of God are sealed to us securely in His Son.¹ He is not ashamed of those who evermore rejoice in Him. His Spirit grieves when they whom He has blessed in heavenly places with all spiritual blessings, yet find it in their hearts to love this present world.²

Verses 17-19. The living constancy and dying triumphs of the father's faith having thus been generally attested, a special mention is now made of that particular crisis in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, respectively, in which their faith attained its culminating point. The first of these instances is Abraham's unrepining surrender of his only-begotten to the altar of sacrifice, in obedience to the word of God. By faith he did this. For, although he had received the earnest of the promises in Isaac, God having called him by a name before his birth, which might justly seem to Abra-

¹ 2 Cor. i. 20-22.

² Phil. iii. *passim*.

ham a sanction of secure delight in this Divinely-given heir,³ yet to him the God who had created and bestowed on him that blessing was the paramount object of entire trust. His will was Abraham's life and Abraham's blessing. As it respected the specific promise, he well knew that in His purposes, the God in whom he hoped was neither fickle nor infirm. He might have seemed to have repented of His gift. But it was not really so. That God should demand His own again, with the usury of Abraham's cheerful sacrifice, was indeed a strange request. By enjoining him to slay his son, He uttered a commandment not more grievous to his best affections, than it was repugnant to his reason as a natural man. By revoking thus His chiefest gift, He seemed to wither to the root the joy which He had made in Abraham's house. To flesh and blood, a willing compliance was in such a case impossible. Nor did the faith of Abraham vanquish Abraham himself without a struggle. He was *tried*. The secret of his victory was his remembrance of the truth and power of God. As a correlative to this, he practically knew his own entire nothingness. Dust and ashes was his estimate of himself, while he knew that He who had freely pronounced His gracious promises was the *Almighty* God. As it respected the *strangeness* of the commandment, he would impute no foolishness

³ יִצְחָק. The name of Isaac, as most readers are aware, is a Divine commemoration of the faith of Abraham, who laughed with joy to hear the promises of God. (Gen. xvii. 17-19.) In its typical significance, it tells the believer of that joy unspeakable and full of glory, which he tastes by the Spirit in the knowledge of the First-begotten from the dead.

to God. He would bow himself beneath His will. *The God of glory could not err.* He had spoken and fulfilled His word. *Isaac* was in very deed the heir, and though death itself should contradict his title, the heritage should yet be his. From him, and from no other, would the countless multitude of promise come. Death, which was God's appointment, could not frustrate or undo the work of God. Abraham expected, indeed, to become the shedder of his own child's blood; but he never gave up *Isaac*. He knew that the resurrection of the heir of promise was a thing no harder for the Lord than the revivifying of the womb which bare him. And so he did not spare to sacrifice what seemed his only hope, at the commandment of the *God of promise*.

The trial of Abraham was, we are elsewhere told, for the *perfecting* of his faith.⁴ It proved that there was in him something strong enough to overrule entirely his nature, to set it willingly at nought for God. This strange act of obedience was an exemplification in power, by the grace of God, of the righteousness which had already been imputed to him for the faith which he had before the seed was born.⁵ It was a *work* of righteousness that Abraham should thus obey implicitly the voice of God. His natural will was in strongest opposition to the will of God. But the energy of faith is always shown in contradicting and disallowing our wills, that His alone may stand. Nothing was more equitable than that God should rule. Yet His commandments are both grievous and impossible to that which seeks its own. Faith only can perform them. For faith,

⁴ Jas. ii. 21-23.

⁵ Gen. xv.

which comes from God, acquaints the heart wherein it dwells, with God, both in His goodness and His truth. He is eternally a BLESSER in the eyes of the believer. But the knowledge of His goodness turns the heart to love. Faith works thus always; and God knows well the secret of the heart that trusts Him. He called the patriarch *His friend*, because he kept not from Him this his dearest good. Such is His manner still. He gives to those whom grace has changed from enemies to friends like opportunity to testify their love.⁶

It was a parable of wondrous things that God presented to His friend in this ever-memorable scene. He had already taught him mystically, that through resurrection only would the promises of blessing be completely realized.⁷ He now shows to him in a figure how the establishment of all His promises could be effected only by surrendering to death the One true Heir of promise. The mighty work of self-denial which God suffered not His friend to finish, He would perfectly perform and undergo Himself. He would not spare *His Son*. His eternal Spirit should one day lead that Victim to a willing death. He would receive Him back in the reality of resurrection, when, by the exceeding greatness of His mighty power, He should have raised Him from the dead. His joy of victory should be complete, when He should have set before His face for ever the First-begotten of His many sons.

Verse 20. Isaac, like his father, was a stranger in the land. He passed his pilgrim days in the patience of a hope which, having been received by

⁶ John xv. 14.

⁷ Gen. xv. 12-18.

inheritance from Abraham, was afterwards confirmed to him immediately of God. The record elsewhere given of his life and its vicissitudes is full of instructive interest for the believer. Traversing, in his turn, the ground his father trod, the heir of promise proved experimentally the ability of God to bless his chosen in the midst of conflict; the hatred of the world serving only to magnify the riches of His grace. The Spirit here selects a single incident in order to commemorate his faith. By faith he gave his blessing to his sons. If we read carefully the story of the birthright, we see distinctly that in the primary bestowment of his blessing on his younger son, he exercised no faith. He knew not what he did, till Esau really came, whom he had vainly willed to bless. Throughout the life of Isaac there had been a struggle between faith and nature with respect to the direction of the inheritance. Jacob, he knew, was loved of God, and called to be his heir of blessing. But Isaac loved Esau; and with a willing forgetfulness of the unchanging character of Him with whom he had to do, he indulged his natural bias. He meant to bless his first-born as his heir. But God's counsel always contradicts the purposes of nature. He allows the guilty trickery of Jacob and Rebecca to rebuke the fleshly partiality of Isaac, and by means of this restores him to himself. It is in Gen. xxvii. 33, that we find the first true recognition of God's presence in this strange plot of selfish interests. The discovery of Jacob's fraud reveals to Isaac his own folly, and apprises him of One who is the sole Selector of the vessels of His blessing. With ex-

ceeding fear his soul receives this late discovery of his variance from God's will. But, as in Sarah's case, his fear is a reviver of his faith. In the light of God, he now sees things distinctly. Jacob is now confessedly *his* heir. With a broken spirit, and a will now thoroughly subdued, he ratifies, advisedly, the choice of God. This is expressed strikingly in the repetition of the blessing, "Yea, and he *shall* be blessed."

But God is pitiful as well as holy. He would not repent Him of His own election; yet He strengthens Isaac to pronounce a second blessing upon Esau. By faith he blessed *him* also, touching things to come. A rich and ample promise was the portion of the eldest born. But it was a material blessing only, and left its possessor still in a subordinate place. If strength should come one day to break his brother's yoke, the Lord was still the Avenger of His own.⁸

Verse 21. Jacob's faith is only visible in few and far-divided instances. The tenor of his life in general was crooked policy and timid selfishness. Disaster followed him continually on his pilgrim course, because his faith was feeble, though his heart was at bottom right with God. In a comparison of *natural* character, he holds a far less estimable place than Esau. He is, perhaps, the most instructive instance anywhere presented to us in the Scriptures, of the grace and wisdom of the God who chose him, for no comeliness of his, to be His heir of promise. It is this that makes his personal history, in all the varied situations and

⁸ Obadiah, *passim*.

most strange vicissitudes which marked the progress of his "few and evil days," so peculiarly precious to the Christian. Goodness and mercy follow him through all the turnings of his devious way. God's faithfulness and truth are round about him, though He suffers him to taste the bitter vanity of fleshly counsel. The Spirit, in the present chapter, passes by the feeble struggles of his faith, to celebrate the brightness of its setting glory, as it beautified the death scene of this vessel of God's choice. By faith he blessed the sons of Joseph. Led by no natural instinct, he wittingly directs his hands, with right discernment of the greater from the lesser of the two joint-heirs of blessing.⁹ Then, having charged his other sons, and made an end of uttering the blessings given him for each, he died, with staff in hand, a pilgrim worshipper as he had lived. His death was in a foreign land, but he expected a salvation whose full joy should not be had in Canaan, but in heaven.

Verse 22. "By faith, Joseph," &c. Jacob begat twelve sons, but only one of them obtains a good report by faith. The object of his brethren's envy is distinguished from them in his death as in his life. His was indeed a comely life, and faith in God was its one moving spring. But in his *death* it was that he declared, with special emphasis, his faith in God's peculiar promise to His people. He had lived from boyhood in the land of Egypt, and God had greatly magnified him there. Under his shadow both his father and his brethren had been gathered, while his honour filled the country which his wis-

⁹ Gen. xlviii.

dom had made prosperous above the nations of the earth. At his end his thoughts are with the future exodus of Israel, from the place which he well knew was not the promised land. Egypt's honours had not weaned him from the hope of Israel. He was a pilgrim in desire, while receiving a whole nation's homage as the trusted and acknowledged stay of Pharaoh's throne. He dies the prophet and example of his people's faith, as he had been known and confessed to be their saviour in his life.

Verse 23. "By faith Moses," &c. Fulness of worldly honour had not stifled Joseph's faith. In the case of Moses' parents, the same blessed quality is nurtured to a venturous boldness by the hand of ruthless oppression. It is a most interesting example. Natural affection is, in their case, the vehicle and outward expression of that which has a deeper source than nature. They would save their *child*. But there was in their hearts an expectation of deliverance from the sore afflictions under which God's people groaned. Their faith was strong enough to see, in the rare beauty of their son, a sign that he was destined to some distinguished place among his people.¹ He might be their deliverer. For three months they kept close the secret of his birth, stilling their dread of Pharaoh by their trust in God. His promises were stronger than the king's commandment. Their faith, indeed, was sorely tried when, as the child grew on and gained a size which could no longer be concealed, they felt that they must trust their hope to other

¹ Moses is elsewhere said to have been ἀστέιος τῷ θεῷ. (Acts vii. 20.)

hands than theirs. Still they reckoned upon God. Although exposure seemed the way to certain death, they trusted that their child should live. They embarked him for a voyage they knew not whither, but they believed that God would meet with him, and save him for Himself.²

Verses 24–26. The faith which dwelt first in the parents, was in due time developed in their child. The case of Moses is a wondrous and blessed illustration of the working of Divine power in the production and nourishment of faith in the hearts of God's elect, under circumstances the most adverse to its existence. As he grew up to manhood, Moses, doubtless, learned the secret of his birth. His name would evermore remind him that, although among Egyptians he was known as the adopted child of Pharaoh's daughter, he was, in reality, a foundling of that family of foreign slaves who were never mentioned in the palace but as a despised and hated race. Nature, whose very marrow is the love of self, must have suggested to him, that an abandoned child of parents never known (for there is nothing in the word of God from which a likely inference may be derived, that his mother's nursing was continued longer than his earliest days,)³ would do small wrong to his countrymen by retaining all through life his fortunate disguise. For he had ripened to a full maturity of manhood, under influences little likely to awaken or to cherish any yearnings of desire towards his kindred. He was a full-aged man, of growth and culture exclusively Egyptian.⁴ Nor had he passed his early life in

² Exod. ii.

³ Exod. ii. 10.

⁴ Acts vii. 22.

silent inactivity; both by words and deeds he had obtained a renown which naturally tended to confirm his allegiance as an honoured and favoured ornament of Pharaoh's court. On the other hand, if patriot feeling overcame his private selfishness, and the mitigation of his brethren's grief was all his heart's desire, yet he would have found, in the commanding position which he occupied in Pharaoh's household, the most promising occasion of successful advocacy with the tyrant who oppressed them. To abdicate this vantage ground, in order to identify himself more openly with those he loved, might seem, to one who looked upon appearances, like a culpable renunciation of those means of usefulness which *Providence* had placed within his reach.

But faith cannot live and thrive in any other atmosphere than *truth*. To know God is to honour Him according to the name in which He has disclosed Himself. Now the heart of Moses had received a Divine conviction, both of sin and of righteousness. He saw the distance which divided Pharaoh's palace from the city of God's rest. He heard and understood the word of promise. We are left, indeed, to conjecture as it respects the means employed; but it is certain that God had imparted to him, not only a knowledge of His covenant relation to Israel as His people, but also an assurance that the day of their deliverance was near at hand, and a conviction that by his hand He would perform His word of promise.⁵ Moses was come of years. His election, then, must now be

⁵ Acts vii. 25.

made between the world and God, and a truth-enlightened conscience enabled him to estimate correctly this alternative. From the moment that his heart became completely awakened to the truth of God, he saw that Egypt and its multiplied allurements were utterly disowned of Him. God was not known in Pharaoh's house. His people were afflicted by a nation that served other gods. To remain, therefore, voluntarily at Pharaoh's court with this conviction in his soul, would be to despise the people of the living God. Moses was, indeed, well fitted, both by education and by habit, to appreciate the pleasant things of Egypt. The sacrifice he was solicited to make, by the word which only promised unseen things, was in appearance large. Afflictions and reproach would be no *naturally* welcome change from opulence and princely favour. But earthly grandeur and magnificence become a fear, instead of a desire, to the soul which God has taught. Egypt and all its confidence is *sin* with God. If enjoyed for a season in the present life, there is a judgment after death. Fear and desire act unitedly on Moses. He will no longer stay in Pharaoh's house, the place of sin and death. He earnestly desires to be with his brethren. By faith he gives up all his gain for Christ.

Faith gives up sin for righteousness, and death for life. Its energy of self-denial is the deliberate result of its triumphant calculations. Because he saw things in the light which shone upon him from above, the master of Egypt's wisdom chose the foolishness of God. For a hope, the very acknowledgment of which would only move derision and provoke

reproach, he gave up all that men most dearly prize. Yet did he count himself far richer than before. Christ, whom he saw remotely as his End and everlasting Rest, was more to him than treasures which could be no ransom of his soul from death.⁶ God's countenance was brighter sunshine than the favour of the king. Its light, indeed, might guide him through much tribulation and distress. But "he had respect unto the recompence of reward."⁷ God was before him as the sure close of his day of patience. His witnesses were, meanwhile, visibly within his view in the afflicted people of His name, and by faith he thus connected Israel with Israel's Hope.

The refusal of Moses to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter sounds loudly and impressively upon the ear which hearkens to the teachings of the Spirit. He stands before us in these verses as a noble type of that decisive severance from the world, and unabashed acknowledgment of Christ's dear brethren, in their lowest plight, no less than in their happiest estate, which is the genuine effect of a joyful and discerning faith in Him. What Egypt

⁶ The expression, "reproach of Christ," appears to embody the two distinct ideas; first, of suffering for the confession of a hope which the world disowned, but which *had fed the heart of faith from the beginning*; and, secondly, that which attached to Moses as the assertor of a title to be the deliverer of his brethren, (Acts vii. 25,) which, for a while, at least, would make him a figure of the despised and rejected Saviour.

⁷ Ἀπέβλεπε γὰρ εἰς τὴν μισθαποδοσίαν. The expressive significance of these words is strongly felt when the contrasted force of the two prepositions εἰς and ἀπό is observed. The treasures of Egypt might allure the natural eye of Moses; but he *looked quite away* from these, and fixed his gaze, by faith, upon the brighter and enduring glories of that kingdom which God has prepared for them that love Him.

was to Moses, the world is still to us. It is the place of sin and death. For a season it may be enjoyed. But none of its things are of the Father. The sentence long ago pronounced upon its evil, impends over its incredulous security, and presently will fall upon it in destructive vengeance. It is *already* judged, together with its prince.⁸ God warns His people out of it. Meanwhile, they are given to each other for companionship in the afflictions of the Gospel. If we love the brethren, we know that we have passed from death to life. We are fellows in tribulation, and in the kingdom and *patience* of Jesus Christ.⁹

Verse 27. Faith had separated Moses from the house of Pharaoh, and joined him in affection with his brethren. But their unbelief compels him to another act of faith, by which he would withdraw himself, not willingly, from those who knew him not in his strange character as their deliverer. That which, when narrated with its accompanying circumstances, might be mistaken for the hurried counsel of despondency,¹ is here applauded as a triumph of true faith. Fear fell on him, indeed, when, instead of welcome from his brethren, he found refusal. To be treated as an alien, where he naturally looked for love, and to be suspected as an enemy by those for whose deliverance he yearned, might well have damped an ordinary zeal. Nor was his disappointment unaccompanied by a natural feeling of alarm, at finding himself thus singly exposed to the consequences which might be expected to result from his abortive enterprize. But was not the way open for

⁸ John xii. 31.

⁹ Rev. i. 9.

¹ Exod. ii. 15.

him to return once more to the place he had so recently abandoned? A timely submission might easily have pacified the king, while the thankless rejection which he had experienced at the hands of his brethren, might seem to justify him in a refusal to identify himself any longer with a people who so heartlessly refused his love.

Tempting suggestions of this kind may probably have assailed him at this crisis of his life; but, if so, his faith soon rallied from the shock. To return to Pharaoh's palace would have been to deny the God whose word had led him forth. As a naturalized Egyptian, he could no longer tarry in that land with an undefiled conscience, while as a confessed *Israelite* his life was in jeopardy as an active rebel against the authority of the king. Since, therefore, his brethren's unbelief refused him the honour which he coveted as their deliver, he would seek elsewhere an asylum for himself; trusting in the faithfulness of Him who cannot lie, for the future direction of his steps. For though cast down, he did not despair; and so it is said, that "by *faith* he *forsook Egypt*." Well aware, as he must have been, that to take such a step was to invite pursuit, and to provoke a fatal anger, should the king, who kept his prisoners so jealously within the iron furnace, discover his retreat, yet he willingly incurred the hazard. The wrath of Pharaoh had less terror in his eyes than the disfavour of the God in whom he put his trust. He endured, as seeing Him who is invisible. But in thus forsaking Egypt, he did not renounce his brethren. He trusted still in God who had ordained him from the womb as their deliverer. That *His*

time was not yet ripe he had just had painful and disheartening experience. Yet he knew full well that God would be a sure Fulfiller of His word.

In his case, as in the examples which have gone before, desire must be tried by patience. God would fit His vessel for His work by a process which should make him better understand both the nature of his mission, and the immediate sources of the strength in which it was to be fulfilled. He disappoints the ardent zeal of Moses, who, with righteous purpose, but with the erroneous expectations of a novice in the ways of God, had thought to be transmuted instantly from a parasite of Pharaoh into the ruler and avenger of his brethren. He had *reckoned* on his brethren.² He had also reckoned somewhat on the zeal within himself, which he knew was no delusion, and which he thought to be quite pure from selfish ends. But God would show him a yet better way. Because He loved both Israel and His chosen servant, He would accomplish the deliverance of His people by a stronger arm than that of flesh. He would let His people find the bottom of their miseries, that they might know the work of their redemption to be wholly of the Lord. He begins, therefore, the preparation of His servant for his after work of victory, by making him a broken-hearted fugitive. His reckoning must no more be in any sort on *man*. For a period of equal duration to the years which he had lived, a stranger to his brethren, in the house of Pharaoh, he should be a stranger in another land.³ In the desert he must learn, as God alone can teach it, the lesson of

² Acts vii. 25.

³ Acts viii. 30.

his own entire nothingness. When time should have tamed his natural energy, and made his former hope appear a thing impossible to man, the God in whom he trusted would replenish him with grace and power from Himself, and by a revelation of His covenant NAME, would commission him to do the work of Israel's redemption as the apostle and effective agent of His will.

While Moses, therefore, fled from Egypt, he clung still to the sure promises of God. He endured, persisting in his confidence against past experience and all natural appearances. His heart was hopeful, because God was in his thoughts. What he suffered was for Him who is the Buckler of His own. The God of his father would protect him from the king of Egypt, and would also keep him to behold His promise. Moses had no thought to die in Midian. The name he gave his first-born son expressed an assurance that his sojourn in that country should one day be a grateful retrospect of praise;⁴ while on the second child he looked as on a living remembrancer of the faithful mercy of the God who saved him from the sword of Pharaoh. Because he reckoned on the truth of Him whose Covenant contained His *people*, he was not fearful on his own account. God's *standing promises* are always of first interest to the believer. They are the light and explanation of his *present mercies*. Moses endured, as seeing Him who is invisible.

Verse 28. "By faith he kept⁵ the passover," &c.

⁴ Exod. ii. 22; xviii. 3, 4. Gershom, "a stranger *there*," as rightly given in the margin of the latter passage. This prophetic expression of the exile's faith has been noticed by others.

⁵ Πειποίηκε. "*Veranstaltete*." — DE WETTE. He instituted, or

There was need of faith. The many and strong plagues which God had sent upon the land of Egypt had effected no deliverance for Israel, while the heart of Pharaoh was yet harder than before. In the exasperation of his unrepentant pride, he was prepared to shed the life-blood of Jehovah's messenger.⁶ The people for whose sakes the Lord had wrought such wonders, seemed only to have fared the worse for these indecisive tokens of Almighty power on the part of One who, while He claimed to be their God, still left them in the power of their oppressors. The yoke of bondage yet remained upon their neck, and galled them the more grievously because of the continual frustration of their hope. To suppose, then, that they would universally comply with such a new and strange injunction as the preparation of the paschal feast; and that on the word of one who had so often tried, with no success, to wring from Pharaoh a bare leave of absence for his brethren, they should be persuaded to expect presently a final and triumphant exit—going forth securely, laden with the spoils of their oppressors,—demanded a strong trust in God. For Moses could not reckon on the people for a true discernment of this ordinance of their redemption.

established it. As to the rite itself, it was the passover, and (not the sprinkling, but) "the pouring forth (*την πρόσχυσιν*) of blood." This word occurs here only in N. T.; but is of common use in LXX., where it is generally found as an equivalent *קָרַן*. It has been noticed, however, by Bengel, that it is not found in Exod. xii. Considered with reference to its typical force, it seems to express, when compared with *ῥαντισμός*, the decisive washing away of sins by the substitution of the Lamb of redemption for the people to be redeemed. The latter refers rather to a personal appreciation on the part of the believer of the work once done, in its sanctifying efficacy (chap. x. 22).

⁶ Exod. x. 28.

Their heart, he knew, was too little familiar with the God whom *he* obeyed, to make it seem to him a likely thing that they would respond, without exception, to such a call upon their faith. They had seen, indeed, the acts which God had done by Moses' hand. But they *understood* them not.⁷ His own words of encouragement had only drawn from them an expression of despondency. They were loath to change an evil which they knew, for one which, for lack of trust in God, they deemed far greater, though untried.⁸ As yet their eyes had always led their faith. They were now required to unite in an observance which respected things unseen. Would they do this? Moses might well have doubted their compliance while he only thought of *them*. And yet upon their strict obedience to this new command, the entire safety of his brethren must depend.

But the strength of Moses was not in the people, but in God. He trusted that Jehovah, who had given him this charge, would frame their wills to an unanimous consent. God did so; for salvation was His present purpose for His people. And when God means to show His power in redemption, He shapes His people's wills to meet the preparation of effective mercy. Faith only could discern the end of what was instituted on that great night of remembrance. The blood upon the door-posts spoke of something little understood by those, who, with the gods of Egypt in their hearts, now crowded eagerly to keep Jehovah's new and solemn feast.⁹

⁷ Ps. cvi. 7.

⁸ Exod. xiv. 12.

⁹ Ezek. xx. 6-8; Josh. xxiv. 14.

The faith of one man was to set a nation free. Perceiving from the terms of the commandment that the appointed crisis was at hand, he rehearses in the people's ears the notice of the time and manner of their sure deliverance. He ordains, moreover, a perpetual remembrance of a work not yet performed. He understood the counsel of Jehovah, who would date a new beginning for His people from the era of their actual redemption. God made them willing and obedient to his servant's word. He gave the people to be *his* to lead up out of Egypt, for the faith by which he thus had given glory to the faithful God of promise.¹

Verse 29. We have next exemplified an act of *national* faith. "By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land." Opposed to this is the catastrophe of the pursuing host of Egypt, who would turn God's power to their own account with no believing knowledge of His name. As it respects the *quality* of the faith here celebrated, it is of much importance to distinguish it from that rooted and abiding principle of the new life which we have seen exemplified in Moses and the patriarchs. The faith of Israel was a *seeing* faith. This is the national character throughout. They believed God's words when they beheld His acts.² On the very eve of their deliverance they provoked Him by their unbelief. For His name's sake only, and to make His mighty power known, He brought them through. Yet it was by faith they passed. For although they were destitute of that

¹ There seems a reference to this in Exod. xxxii. 7.

² Ps. cvi.; John vi. 30.

which is the evidence of things unseen, and which, therefore, contradicts appearances by the authoritative voice of God, yet when the words with which their leader sought to still their fear were accompanied by ocular appearances, which did indeed give token that Jehovah meant to be their Shield,³ their hearts revived. And when they saw that at the lifting of that rod which had so often bowed the haughtiness of Egypt's king, the sea, which just before had seemed their nearest death, began to yield, and presently a road both firm and dry invited their advance, they did not hesitate. Death was indeed their wall on either side, yet they were not afraid; the path of safety was beneath their feet. They saw clear through the danger by the shining of Jehovah's light, whose covering presence hid their enemies from sight. Steps which might falter as they first began to follow their conductor through that new and untried way, grew firmer as they neared the shore of hope. They *all* passed through. The feeble and the strong were equally emboldened to adventure on that way of God. They saw together His salvation. And when God removed the screen which hid from their view His sacred work of judgment, and showed His people in the light of natural day the dreaded host of Pharaoh scattered lifeless on the strand, they knew their Saviour, and believed the chosen shepherd of His flock.⁴

The faith which landed Israel in the wilderness forsook him there. Through *unbelief* that generation could not enter into Canaan. The nature of their failure, and the moral application of their

³ Exod. xiv. 19, 20.

⁴ Exod. xiv. 31.

history to the now professing Church, have been presented to us in the third and fourth chapters of this epistle. In the passage now before us, Israel, in the completeness of his temporal salvation, forms a type (well known and of great price to the believer) of the whole family of God's redemption. They represent the multitude of those who, by the cross of Jesus, find in death a passage to eternal life. But in its more especial bearing on the times of Gospel testimony, the entire scene stands as a parable, wherein the contrary effects of the same word of truth, on the believer and the unregenerate professor, are vividly displayed. It was the dread of coming vengeance, that made the sea a welcome passage of escape for Israel. It was the proud self-confidence of the Egyptians, that made them blind to the destruction which awaited them. God's own high road to Canaan seemed to promise to His enemies safe conduct to their lusts.⁵ They were drowned because they would not think, until too late, that God had put a difference between His people and themselves.

So is it with the countless multitudes who now ostensibly profess to tread the way of life. To the believing sinner, the cross of Christ is both an open way of refuge from the wrath to come, and an effectual deliverance from Satan's world. The world is *crucified* to those who, in the faith of Jesus risen, begin to taste the fruits of God's salvation by the Spirit.⁶ Their desire, when convinced as sinners by the power of the Spirit, was to be brought to God; to know Him as His people in the fulness of His

⁵ Exod. xv. 9.

⁶ Gal. vi. 14.

peace—and their faith has found these things in Jesus. They have come forth by the blood-shedding of remission,⁷ and in the right of an eternal redemption, from the house of bondage. They are passed, in Christ, from death to endless life. He who is their Hope has gone before them to the shore of safety, and awaits them there. His Name shall be the unobstructed way of their salvation, until all whom He acknowledges as His are clean passed over to His side. But others have ventured on that Name, with no discernment of it as the *way of holiness*. It has seemed to them a short and safe passage to their natural inclinations. Bent on a different pursuit from those who have the fear of God, and stimulated, not by any real dread of coming wrath, but by fallacious promise of an easier advancement to their own desires, they name the name of Christ without departing from iniquity. With heady high-mindedness, they confide in their discernment of the *doctrine*. What saves one sinner may suffice another, though he have no mind to quarrel with his sins. So they reason, in ignorance alike of sin and of salvation, in their true intent, because not knowing *God*. Nor if, instead of turning grace into licentiousness, men try the passage nominally by the living way, while really their trust is in their worthiness to pass because of *works*, are they less Egyptians still. Both alike despise and hate in heart the genuine believer. They are not crossing the dread sea of death by *faith*. They will surely be entangled by their own incumbrance till its waves flow in upon their souls for ever. The

⁷ *Ante*, ix. 22.

Lord who saves His people in Himself knows with what meaning we profess His name.⁸

Verse 30. Faith which had saved that generation when, as fugitives from the Egyptians, they passed securely through the sea, now makes their children more than conquerors in Canaan. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down." Human sagacity had planned those walls. They were built for long endurance on a firm foundation; and within their circuit peace and safety dwelt with wickedness, until the hour of God's judgment came. By faith the strength of God dissolved, as in a moment, those tall battlements of sin. But, as is usual when He puts His power forth, the means ostensibly employed were wholly inadequate to such an end. The men of Jericho, whose hearts had failed them at the rumour of their prowess, may have felt some reassurance as they watched what preparation Israel made to level the strong fortress of their trust. But they knew not the manner of the God who judged them. They must learn by fatal proof how much His foolishness excels the counsel of man's pride. A blast of rams' horns, blown by unarmed priests, should sound the note of sudden rasure to those walls. It was by God alone that Israel prevailed. By patient compliance with His word their faith should tread down strength. They had just been witnesses of what His might

⁸ The above remarks are general, and illustrate the broad, essential distinction of the believer from the world. As it respects the experimental application of Exod. xiv. to the individual believer, it typifies the victory which we have already through the knowledge of the resurrection. It is morally the starting-point at which our experience of the present world as a *wilderness* begins. We journey through it thus by faith in the power of the risen life. (Col. iii.)

could do, who had made the fulness of the Jordan dry, to give them entrance to His land. *Patience* must have her perfect work through trial of their faith. Not once nor twice, but seven times they must repeat the tedious circuit of the city. They must learn God's art of warfare. Their victory, as well as their salvation, was of Him.⁹

The fall of Jericho, the city of destruction, is a lively type of what is coming, swiftly but unexpectedly, upon a Christless world. God has devoted it. The warning note of coming ruin has been given many times; but disregarded warnings ever have a hardening effect. Divine long-suffering bears still with men's indifference; but when the full number of God's election is attained, and Christian faith has undergone the appointed measure of its trial, the moment of destruction will have come. Meanwhile, God disallows by testimony every confidence of man. Wrath is revealed from heaven, in His Gospel, against all that in which nature puts its trust. His coming day declares itself alike against the great and little things of men.¹ But truth, which compasses the world with warning, seems to utter but a feeble sound. Though mighty to abase strongholds, and bow the broken spirit to subjection, when, as the word of Christ, it works its gracious work among His people, God's truth is to the natural man an impotent and ineffective thing. It is, therefore, disregarded and despised. The world is not to be deterred from its intention by "vain words."² The end of all things, long ago pronounced to be at

⁹ Joshua vi.

¹ Isa. ii. 10, &c.; Matt. xii. 36.

² Isaiah xxxvi. 5.

hand, has lingered long enough to be forgotten as a fear. The report of God's past acts of judgment feebly stir the hearts of men, who day by day are growing wiser in their own conceits. *Every knowledge but that of God* is built into those walls of unbelief which shelter men in the pursuit of their own will, and shut out the Disturber of their peace. In order to neutralize the solemn truth of God, the prince of this world uses every device. By false interpretations he corrupts the word, and teaches men to wrest it to their own destruction. In varied tones he pours into the world's too ready ear his lying assurance that the Lord is *not* at hand. Yet He will surely come. At His appearing and His kingdom He will judge both quick and dead. And they who know Him must not spare to preach the word until He come. If they would clear their conscience of the blood of others, they must not keep back their testimony to that coming day. They are to remember that His long-suffering is salvation;³ that by the same word against which the unbeliever stops his ears, God severs for Himself some vessel of His mercy, whom He has appointed not to wrath, but to obtain salvation.

Verse 31. He acted thus when, at the fall of Jericho, "by faith *the harlot Rahab* perished not with them that disbelieved." All Jericho had heard the terror of the Lord. But none were moved by the report to seek Him as a *Saviour* but this harlot of God's good report. She is a wondrous specimen of His pure workmanship, who chooses base things of this world, and things despised, to make them

³ 2 Tim. iv.; 2 Pet. iii. 15.

beautiful with His salvation. The faith of Rahab was a *justifying* faith. Within the city and without, appearances forbid all hope. If Jericho must be destroyed for sin, none had more cause to dread the coming stroke than she. But she remembered that He who can destroy can also save. She justified Jehovah in His holy purposes of vengeance upon sin, bowing herself beneath His mighty hand, and giving Him glory as the only God; but she trusted that in Him with power there was likewise mercy. In the men of Jericho the fame of God wrought fear, but no repentance. They clung to their first confidences, and watched well their gates. They were intimidated, but still unsubdued. But Rahab knew the power of Jehovah's *Name*. In faith she set it as a covenant of peace between His army of destruction and herself. And thus taking hold upon the strength of His salvation, she made her peace with Him.⁴

Rahab received the messengers with peace, because her only expectation was from God. For the same reason she protected them, and sent them out another way. She risked her life for theirs. This was a *work* of faith.⁵ God's people were her people, from the moment that they gave her a true token of salvation. *Before* they gave it she was already on their side,⁶ for her faith regarded Him who sent them forth. And God accepts her work. His Spirit holds it up, with that of Abraham, for a perpetual ensample to His saints. Being thus justified by faith, while wrath was yet deferred, she perished not in the destruction of God's enemies. So will it be

⁴ Isa. xxvi. 5.⁵ Jas. ii. 25.⁶ Josh. ii. 3.

with that poor sinner, who, attesting all God's truth against himself, has found through faith true token of forgiveness in the blood of Jesus. In a Christless and gainsaying world, believing sinners know the shelter of His name, who is God's Covenant of peace. They have a secret understanding with the Minister of that destruction which is in readiness to fall upon the haters of the Lord. Having been justified already by His blood, they will be most surely saved from wrath through Him.⁷

Verse 32. The last example closes suitably this fair array of personal instances in proof of the unfailing efficacy of faith. For it speaks comfortably to the hearts of those who, in the last days of evil, when evidences of ripened apostasy are on every side, and the stroke of judgment is upon the eve of its descent, wait confidently for the *mercy* of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.⁸ And now he adds no more. A goodly list of witnesses had been already cited; enough to illustrate abundantly the thesis stated at the opening of this chapter. He would therefore pause. Not that his subject failed him, but his time. Far more remained unsaid than he had celebrated, for the Scripture teems with instances of faith. God has had many servants who have served Him in their generation, and of whose acts and sufferings the Spirit has borne approving witness in the word of truth. To recite these acts and sufferings would be to add new pages to the chronicle of *faith*. For if God tells of human goodness, He must speak of faith, which only makes men pleasing in His eyes.⁹

⁷ Rom. v. 9.

⁸ Jude 21.

⁹ *Ante*, verse 6.

Instead, then, of continuing his portraiture of personal example, he presents in the following verses (33-38) a general summary of the work of faith, as it had shown itself in those who, whether in a royal or private state ; judges, or kings, or prophets ; men or women, had earned a good report from God. It was well that they whose calling is to walk by faith, and not by sight, should be reminded of these things. Both in its active energy, and its passive endurance, the faith which marked them as God's people must be *exercised*. It is, indeed, no longer now with flesh and blood that we, whose present calling is a warfare, have to fight. That power by which earthly kingdoms once were won, has now to shew its efficacy in our struggle against "principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places." By faith the Christian has to force his way to the enjoyment of those things which God in Christ affirms to be his portion, and into which the Spirit of adoption seeks to lead him by the word of grace ; but against his entrance into which the adversary practises all methods of intimidation and beguilement.¹

Practical *righteousness* (verse 33), whether in the form of zealous devotedness in action, or of steadfast endurance under the pressure of temptation, is never maintainable except by faith. For only God can lead us and sustain us in the way of evenness and truth. By faith also His *promises* are now to be obtained, as then.² Without its active exercise the Christian is a poor and needy starveling, though all

¹ Eph. vi. 11-19.

² Mark xi. 22-24.

God's treasures are his own in Christ. Moreover, if Daniel's faith could close the mouths of lions, till after one long night of patience he came up uninjured from their den, this feat is told for our encouragement, who may meet at any turn of our pilgrimage the devil our adversary, as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. We must resist him, steadfast in the *faith*.³

Fire has yielded to a fervour stronger than itself (verse 34). The faith which, in three captive stripplings, braved the fury of the king for God, brought God Himself to bear His servants joyful companionship amid the burning flame.⁴ The Lord is likewise with His people *now*, who, walking in the faith of Him, think it not strange when fiery trial comes upon them for His sake.⁵ True faith has found, in modern as in ancient times, a refuge from the arm of violence in God. Both treachery and violence may be expected in a world where our calling is to be as sheep for slaughter.⁶ But He who hid His prophets, when it pleased Him, from the wrath of man, is the preserver, at His wise discretion, of His people's mortal lives.⁷ Weakness is ever the condition of the saint, until by faith he looks to Jesus as his strength. What made the fathers valiant in their conflicts, when huge hosts of aliens fled before a handful of brave men, was faith. They were God's soldiers, and He was the glory of their strength. Their valour and success were all of Him, who made them worthy of the Name which was their banner. So now, good soldiers of Jesus Christ are

³ 1 Pet. v.⁴ Dan. iii.⁵ 1 Pet. iv. 12.⁶ Rom. viii. 31, &c.⁷ Acts xviii. 9, 10; Rev. ii. 10.

fitted to bear hardness, by the faith which makes His grace their strength. A multitude of alien lusts are armed for strife against the will of God. Whether in the path of outward service, or in the secret of his way, the Christian has to find that by faith alone he can make head successfully against the things which set themselves in opposition to his title and his conduct, as a child and servant of the living God.

“Women received their dead,” &c. (verse 35.) Natural instinct or affection is a thing which God esteems, and He has often honoured its desires when preferred by simple and submissive faith. For where faith really works, its prayer will be according to the mind of God. Vehement urgency of personal desire may no doubt utter many prayers which are not heard of Him. On the other hand, there is no limit set to His compassions as the attentive Listener to every request sent up believingly from hearts which are subject to His will. As it respects the instances referred to in this verse, the difference of dispensation should not be overlooked. To live was better than to die, while God was dealing with an earthly people. But since faith has learned that to depart and be with Christ is now far better than to stay on earth, such demonstrations of its power are no more likely to be shown.⁸ The mourners will

⁸ The two cases of resuscitation recorded in the Acts (viii. and xx.) are not to be contemplated under the same point of view as those above referred to; nor, after the full development of the heavenly calling of the church, do we read of any similar manifestations of Divine power. But the exceptive instances just mentioned, occurring as they did “at the beginning of the gospel,” and before the saints had fully known the nature of their blessedness, as already united to the risen Christ in heaven, are full of gracious meaning and comfort.

receive their dead to life again, when God brings presently with Jesus those who have been laid to rest by Him.⁹

Besides the triumphs of faith's active energy as an aggressor against sin and death, God marks with equal pleasure its meek and resolute endurance of wrongful sorrow and affliction. "Others were tortured," &c. It was in the heart and power of the enemy to multiply their pains. Since Cain killed Abel for his righteous deeds, cruel and murderous counsels have been freely exercised against the lovers of God's truth. Jehovah has not always hid His prophets. He has honoured them sometimes by putting to their lips the cup which Jesus afterwards should fully drink. Its bitterness was sweetened by their certain though yet distant hope. They might have saved themselves from agonizing death, by consenting to take life and safety at the cost of truth. But by faith they saw before them better things than any which the world could either give or take away. And because they "counted the cost" thus wisely, they clave with confidence to Him who has power to maintain His glory against those who disallow it in His day of patience. Resurrection to eternal life was in the eye of God's afflicted ones, who, while they took death patiently in the persuasion of an immortality of glory, warned the murderer of a coming inquisition for their blood.¹

Ingenious devices have often been hit upon by men (who, although naturally incapable of finding out the way of peace, are acknowledged by the Spirit as "inventors of evil things"),² for varying

⁹ 1 Thess. iv. 14.

¹ 2 Chron. xxiv. 22.

² Rom. i. 30.

the miseries of such as move their anger and contempt by openly confessing God in Satan's world. Departure from evil makes a man a prey to those who tolerate no variance from the established usages of sin.³ That the flesh should be the persecutor of the Spirit, is according to its native instinct. It is a mocker, when too weak to torture or to kill.⁴ Meanwhile God notes minutely what is suffered for His sake. The tears of His prisoners are in His bottle, and *His* day is coming for the avenging of His own elect. But while He tarries, and until judgment is established in the earth, the place of testimony must be more or less the place of suffering. It is likely⁵ that the hand which God employed to write these verses had, in his days of ignorance, assisted at the slaughter and tormenting of God's saints; but by grace the persecutor had become the zealous preacher of the faith which he had once destroyed,⁶ and a chief partaker in the afflictions of the gospel.⁷ And as one who spake with an experimental knowledge of his subject, he would persuade his brethren to associate in their minds, habitually, the twin ideas of faithfulness and suffering. For the Gospel which had opened heaven to their faith, forbade them to expect esteem and favour from the world. A woe and not a blessing is addressed to such as, while outwardly professing Christ, yet suffer Him so little to appear, and chime in their conversation so harmoniously with the ways of men, as to become heartily acceptable to the world.⁸

³ Is. lix. 15.⁴ Gal. iv. 29.⁵ In my own judgment, *certain*. See the Preface.⁶ Gal. i. 23.⁷ 2 Cor. xii. 24-27.⁸ Luke vi. 26.

Blessings and more abundant joy are, on the contrary, the portion of the sufferers for Christ. The Spirit of glory and of God rests on them. A crown of life is ready in the hands of Jesus for bestowment on the patient lover of that name.⁹

The world was not worthy of God's martyrs (verse 38). For the world loved darkness, while they witnessed to the light. The world was not then, nor is it now, *of God*. Dens and caves of the earth have held His dearest servants, while His adversaries sat on thrones. But peace and joy dwelt rather in the cave than in the palace. The Holy Ghost brought forth from David's harp no bolder and no sweeter strains of joyful confidence, than when he wandered in the wilderness, or lurked in savage holds in peril of his life.¹ And it is well for us to remember that the sharpest torture and most frequent death that visited God's ancient witnesses, were inflicted by the hands of their apostate brethren.² Faith's most arduous trial and most signal triumphs are exemplified when God is known and joyfully confessed, in the midst of that which, while it claims to be of God, denies the *power* of His kingdom. The prophets who were slain as Christ's forerunners, are chosen by the Spirit as the models of our patience also, since, until the Lord return, we must not think ourselves exempt from bloody death.³ Apostate Christianity has many times been drunk to madness with the blood of Christ's elect. Torture has never been more diligently ministered,

⁹ Matt. v. 11, 12; 1 Pet. iv. 14; Jas. i. 12.

¹ Psalms xxxiv., lii., liv., lvi., lvii., lxiii. See their respective titles.

² Acts vii. 52.

³ Jas. v.

nor with more exquisite variety of pitiless appliance than to Christians in the name of Christ.⁴ And if the harlot who has sat as queen so long seems tottering to her fall, it is for God's people to remember that the beast that destroys her rises to yet loftier pride of wickedness. His war is openly against the Lamb.⁵ The Lord is *ready* to call suddenly His people to Himself; but while He tarries, faithfulness is *never* safe from persecution or the sword.⁶

Verses 39, 40. *All* those who suffered in their day for Christ, obtained their good report through *faith*. But none of them attained the promise.⁷ They lived, and suffered, and departed hence, before the fulness of the time was come. They joyed to see a coming Christ, but knew not the blessing of the Spirit of adoption. They died in the faith of better things to come. "God having foreseen some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

The language of this last verse is remarkable. The present portion of the Christian is affirmed to be "some better thing" than that which cheered the fathers in affliction and in death. Moreover, their perfection was not to be "apart from us."⁸ This stamps at once on the partakers of the heavenly calling an especial character. They differ from their predecessors in the faith, inasmuch as there is dis-

⁴ No one who has the slightest acquaintance with ecclesiastical history can require any instances in proof of this assertion.

⁵ Rev. xvii.

⁶ Rom. viii. 36.

⁷ Οὐκ ἐκομίσαντο τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν. They received it by the word of God, but they did not carry off its actual substance. The foundation of their distant joy was not yet laid in *fact*. Peace could not be published as a *testimony*, until the sacrifice of peace was made.

⁸ Χωρὶς ἡμῶν.

closed to them some better thing than they possessed. On the other hand, they are necessary to the fathers, since apart from them the latter could not see perfection.⁹ The standing, therefore, of the Christian in the present dispensation is advantageously distinguished from the place the fathers held, although these had obtained a good report through faith.

The main points of distinction have already had some notice in the progress of this work. They may here be summed up generally as follows:—The fathers waited for a Saviour yet to come. The Church rejoices in a finished Captain of salvation. God was *desired* rather than *possessed* by those who lived and suffered for His name of old, although His covenant of peace was theirs. He *dwells* now, by His Spirit, in the children whom He has begotten by the Gospel of His grace. The distant promises which they embraced from far, are to us a sure testimony of *present truth*.¹ It had never been announced to them of old that they were children of the Father, and joint-heirs with Christ. Their immediate calling was not heavenly but earthly. If God's prophets suffered, it was at the hands of those who had forsaken truth for falsehood, and not because the *natural* portion of a faithful Israelite was suffering and reproach. But tribulation is declared to us to be our *only* passage to the kingdom.² Faithful

⁹ Chap. xii. 23, throws light on this expression. The apostle, in there reciting the New Testament blessings of the believer, speaks of our being come to the spirits of "just men made perfect;" plainly implying, as he does in Rom. iii. 25, the retrospective efficacy of the cross as the sole means of perfecting those who, before the work was "finished," were necessarily in a state of hopeful expectation only, and not of conscious peace.

¹ 2 Pet. i. 12.

² Acts xiv. 22; 2 Tim. iii. 12.

confession of a heavenly calling and a world-rejected Christ, makes persecution in some shape inevitable to the godly Christian. How much our portion as true worshippers excels in conscious blessing the experience of those who, with true hearts but imperfect knowledge, served painfully beneath the yoke of bondage, has been already shown. There has always been a unity of faith to God's elect. But to us there is one manifested Lord and Saviour, whose special name was undeclared to them who looked to see His day. To us there is one body, and one Spirit, who forms and animates that body here below. The members of that body confess that they have died, and live again by faith, in union with the Head who is in heaven. Their blessings are according to the measure of the Son's perfections, and already they are sealed for the enjoyment of them in the heavenly places by the Holy Ghost, who is the earnest of their inheritance, until the expected revelation of the Saviour shall change the night of patience, now far spent, to the eternal day of glory.³ These things were never given to the fathers, though they stood in equal favour as the chosen vessels of His grace, who has bestowed the better things on us.

There is an order in the purposes of God. The just, who died in the faith of an unfinished promise, were not to see perfection till the first-born should have heard their calling to the fellowship of Christ. The Church is begotten of the will of God to be a kind of *first-fruits* of His creatures.⁴ What neither man nor angel had before conceived, is now revealed to those who taste the fellowship of God's rejected

³ Eph. i. 13, 14.

⁴ James i. 18.

Son.⁵ It is by the Church that God now makes the riches of His wisdom known to principalities and powers in heavenly places. The God of grace, who metes His favours at His own good pleasure, has seen good thus to cast the lot of their inheritance, who now by faith see Jesus crowned with glory and honour as the great High Priest of their profession. May the glory of that better portion be appreciated, and the blessed hope held fast by our faith. The Hebrew saints, because they were beginning to let slip the special doctrine of their calling, were in danger of entanglement again with fatal error. In our day, it is the lively exercise of faith in Christ, as our *risen Life*, and the discernment of heavenly things as our *present* portion through the Spirit, which alone can keep us in a state of godly separation from the world, and set us in the place of acceptable testimony until He come.

⁵ Eph. iii.

CHAPTER XII.

How the just man lives by faith, and what the common fare had been which they who please God best had met with in a world which knew Him not, has been strikingly exemplified in the chapter last examined. The *union*, moreover, of the family of faith throughout all time has been found to be compatible with marked and emphatic *differences* in the partakers respectively of the earthly and heavenly callings. But although, through the reception of the Spirit of adoption, the Christian tastes a richer portion than the fathers knew, he is an imitator of the *faith* whereby they saw invisible things. The possession of the Divine earnest of their inheritance does but render the partakers of the heavenly calling more emphatically *strangers upon earth*. Receiving already the end of their faith in the salvation of their souls,—of which the Spirit is the seal and witness,—they have to wait with patience for the perfecting of that salvation by the redemption of their bodies of corruption.¹ Till then they live but to contend. To work out their salvation in the energy of patient faith is their intermediate

¹ Rom. viii. 23.

occupation in the world. Their mortal life is to be spent in armour. Until the Rest of God be finally attained, a race of patience is before them still. There is a sense in which the saints still wait, as Jacob and the prophets did, for God's salvation.²

It was the earnest desire of the writer of this epistle to be a helper of his brethren's joy, and, by nourishing and strengthening their faith, to speed them on their way to God. Full of the spirit of power and of love, and of a sound mind, he labours to awaken in them a worthier appreciation of their present opportunity of pleasing God. Their calling was to adorn His doctrine, who had saved them for Himself. To provoke, therefore, their faith to more abundant exercise, he had passed in review the crowd of ancient instances which fills the foregoing chapter. They were as a cloud of witnesses,⁵ attesting, each in his own peculiar language, the rich sufficiency of God to save and bless the souls that trust in Him, and live upon His truth, while they gave united warning that the present world is not the portion of God's saints; that the promises which made them pilgrims where men naturally are at home, are to be realized with God in habitations not prepared by hands.

Verse 1. Joining then his name to theirs, as a

² Gen. xlix. 18; Isa. xxv. 9; 1 Pet. i. 5.

⁵ I do not doubt that this expression properly refers to the examples of faith and patience just before commemorated. There is another sense in which the Christian is encompassed daily by a cloud of no approving witnesses. The world takes eager note of those who, by professing to know God, invite the scrutiny of such as walk by sight, and not by faith. Happy, indeed, is that believer in whose way the world finds no inconsistencies to move contempt, and render powerless his *verbal* testimony, however plainly said.

partaker both of their travail and their hope, he cheers them on to steady perseverance in the ways of faith and patience. The race depended much, for the amount of honour to be won, upon themselves. It was a race of faith, and for a heavenly prize. To run it, therefore, with effect, they should divest themselves of *every* earthly weight,⁴ and shake off watchfully the sin which more than all the rest was ready always to obstruct their progress. Language is here employed by the apostle, to which a latitude of interpretation belongs, commensurate with the requirements of the Christian conscience. No man is weighted precisely as his neighbour, while the sinful propensities common to us all lead in different persons in the most various and often opposite directions. The standard of conformity being God Himself,⁵ whatever exercises our energies, or gratifies our inclinations, without reference to *Him*, must be a burden to the spirit, and, therefore, a hindrance to the heaven-bound pilgrim in his course.⁶

But, while the exhortation here addressed to the believing Hebrews is expressed in the broadest terms, it is easy to see that it is against one special form of sin, that they are more emphatically warned. Nothing would so retard them on their way, and so certainly diminish their eventual reward, as *unbelief*. They must daily endeavour to foreclose their hearts against the entrance of that easiest of sins. It is a

⁴ ὄγκον ἀποθέμενοι πάντα. They are probably right who apply these words *chiefly* to the yoke of Judaical ordinances. Doubtless an assertion of full spiritual liberty is the first essential to our entering on the Christian *race* in the proper sense of the expression. We run, not as sinners, but as saints. But the apostle's language is too broad to be satisfied by so limited an interpretation.

⁵ Matt. v. 1-8; Eph. v. 1, 2.

⁶ Luke vii. 14.

sin that easily besets us, because it is but the mind of nature acting, according to its instincts, against the will of God. And, therefore, while remaining in the body we cannot be relieved from the duty of watchfully repressing its advances. And so he labours to revive, and perpetuate in his brethren's hearts a worthy sense of their vocation, and to guard them against all that might seem likely to enfeeble or diminish their proper confidence and joy. By diligently pondering the word of promise, their faith would flourish in an active godliness. While heavenly objects were felt to be their present and exclusive aim, their lives on earth would pass both happily and well. In the light of better knowledge, they would be enabled, in the spirit of sound judgment,⁷ to free themselves voluntarily from many things which, though not sinful in themselves, they might find to be a cumbrance rather than an aid in their efforts to attain the prize of God's high calling in Christ Jesus.

A Christian is not under law. His practical denial of himself is very much at the discretion of his love for Christ. He is exhorted, and commanded, by a Master who expects obedience as a proof of love;⁸ but he is not compelled. Strength is always ready to be given him to lay aside, without exception, *every* weight; for God is Himself the strength of them that truly seek to do His will; the grace and power of Christ are all his own, to use for Him. But he may, instead of using these by faith, neglect or overlook them in his search for other things. He may make maxims of worldly prudence his counsellors

⁷ Phil. i. 9, 10.

⁸ John xiv. 13; 1 John v. 3.

instead of faith, and thus consult large damage to his soul. He may set his mind on riches, and attain them, to the grievous wounding of his better life.⁹ He may seek his own with busy preference to the things of Jesus. But he will suffer for his choice. He will not practically live *by faith*. His life will, therefore, not please God. He will be a grief and hindrance to his brethren, whom he should have helped. He will not be happy in his general experience, and will see his works go up as smoke when tried by fire in the day of God.¹

Verse 2. For running prosperously the race of faith, nothing is so essential as a single eye. Whatever tends to divert attention from the true end of the course must check the runner in his progress. Now Christ is the end of our race, as well as the beginning of our way.² Averting,³ therefore, all regard from other objects, the believer is exhorted to look evermore to *Jesus*, the beginner and completer of his faith. The Saviour of His people is also their chief exemplar in the race of faith and patience. Having considered Him as our Captain of salvation, the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, He is set before us now as our pattern of obedient endurance. With a parity of title, we are called to the fellowship of His experiences in the world. It was as the Son, and voluntary servant of the Father, that He entered on his race. Because

⁹ 1 Tim. vi. 9.

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 13-15.

² Phil. iii. 8.

³ Ὁ ὅς ἐστις εἰς τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν Ἰησοῦν. "The Author and Finisher of faith."—He is this in every sense. For He is the source and sustaining power of faith, as well as its object and its end. Perhaps it had been better had the English translators omitted the pronoun "our." As to the construction of the sentence and its specific form, see the note at p. 334.

we are by grace made sons in Him, the will of God, which guided Him to death for our sakes, becomes also the order of our way. For the joy which filled His prospect, Jesus underwent the cross. The shame to which men turned His glory He despised. For in the completion of His degradation, He expected the beginning of His endless joy. From the sepulchre He has come forth to sit upon the throne of God. He is happy there, in the enjoyment of a pleasure only to be known by the triumphant Winner of His people's full salvation. Having suffered in the flesh for the redemption of the creature, He will be forever the delighted witness of a joy which the fully blest creation will (when the promised hour of its gladness comes) ascribe to Him. His joy is full as the receiver and requiter of the Father's love. He will share that joy, to the utmost limit of their power to receive it, with the "holy brethren," whose present calling is to follow in His steps.

Joy in the Lord is the saint's true preparation for enduring the afflictions of the Gospel. The cross will drag painfully, instead of being lightly borne, if we are not already tasting the sweet fruits of victory, through faith. The sight of Jesus on the throne of God is speed and vigour to the soul that steadily regards Him there. Not to press forward at that sight is impossible to the believer, while faintness will not fail to steal upon him, if he suffers anything to intercept his conscious fellowship with His Forerunner. Moreover, while we rest by faith upon Him as our end and victory, and set the enemy at nought through the prevailing power of His Name, His matchless grace and patience are to be

the daily meditation of our hearts. We are called to walk as He walked, in the present world.

Verse 3. "For consider Him," &c. It is in the contemplation of the Sufferer's dignity that we learn correctly to estimate the grace of Him who thus endured. The contradiction of sinners was against *Himself*. He suffered, indeed, as the solitary witness, in obedience, to the truth of God. As the righteous Doer in a world of sinners, He bore reproaches from the enemies of God. But in the poverty of Jesus there remained the unchanged presence of Divinity. All that He encountered was directly aimed against Himself. It was the Christ, the Son of God, who suffered. *His* name, His titles, His words of grace and truth, His holy works of goodness and compassion, were rejected and denied, while Truth was disallowed in person by the gain-sayers of Jesus. They who began to feel the cross a weary burden to their flesh, were invited to consider this. They were to call to mind the difference between the dishonour of the Master, and the privileged endurance of the servant. None of the things which they had suffered in the Gospel were against *themselves*. It was the NAME which they confessed that had attracted to them the reproaches and afflictions which they bore. If they judged this rightly, they would count their trials not a grievance, but a joy. They had done so once when, earlier in the race, they had borne much for Jesus, and with much content (x. 34). While heaven was freshly in their thoughts, they did not grudge to suffer for that hope. They are now reminded that in these afflictions they are only passing through the common portion of the

children. To suffer first with Jesus, ere we reign with Him, is the lot which has been cast for those whom God is bringing thus to His eternal glory.⁴

Verse 4. Instead, therefore, of promising a mitigation of their present toil, he shows them how far short they still remained of what they might be called on to endure. "Ye have not yet resisted *unto blood*, striving against sin." The prophets *had*, who tasted first the cup which Jesus fully drank. Such, too, might be the honoured privilege of some of them. The wicked hands which slew the Prince of life, might pierce consistently His open and avowed disciples. Outward conformity to the death of Jesus is no unnatural close to a confession which sets out by an acknowledgment that we *are crucified* with Him. A knowledge, moreover, of the power of His resurrection would make mortal peril no alarming prospect to their minds. In a more especial sense, it was against the danger of *their own apostasy* that they must carry their resistance to the death.⁵

Verse 5. But in close connexion with the subject of devotedness to Christ, there was another which, though once well understood, and one which

⁴ Rom. viii. 17; 2 Tim. ii. 12; 1 Pet. v. 10.

⁵ It is not in the effort to maintain a morally upright walk by the avoidance of positive wickedness, that the resistance here contemplated is to be achieved. The "way of righteousness," in which the believer is called to walk, consists in a steady confession and assertion of the exclusive claims of Christ to the obedience of mankind. Sin, therefore, according to the breadth of meaning which the Spirit of Truth now attaches to that word, is a practical neglect or denial of these claims in any way. Unbelievers are emphatically *sinners* (not only on account of their inherent and personal evils, but) because of their refusal, through unbelief, to "submit themselves to the righteousness of God." On the same principle, the believer, though righteous and blameless, as seen in Christ, yields practically to sin as often as he forgets his true position as already risen with Christ, and moves on through life in willing conformity to the world.

bore materially on their spiritual well-being, had been allowed to pass almost from their remembrance through the gradual diminution of their faith. They no longer considered that one of the distinctive blessings of the better Covenant, in which they stood, was God's exercise of gracious discipline towards His people, by virtue of the filial relationship which now binds them to Himself in Christ. They had *forgotten* the exhortation which spoke to them as *children*. In the spirit of their minds they had vacated practically the familiar nearness of adoption, and, as a natural consequence of this, they misinterpreted the manner of God's present dealings with their souls. Estimating His visitations, not by the grace in which they really stood, but according to those feelings which an habitual distance from the Lord had fostered in their hearts, they received them quite amiss. Instead of the cheerful submission which results from an intelligent appreciation of the Father's ways, there was either faint-hearted despondency, or the worse alternative of a sullen or reckless indifference. Having lacked diligence to keep their conscious standing in the Father's presence, they took their burdens in a spirit of compulsory endurance, with the ignorant mislike of strangers, rather than the trustful discernment of beloved sons.

There was, as the apostle clearly saw, a radical mischief in this state of feeling. No present strength or blessing could be looked for, while a misunderstanding of so grave a kind remained. To disclose its cause was at the same time to effect its removal from the hearts of those of his brethren

who had diligently listened to his earlier exhortations. For it was through lack of faith that they had fallen into the serious error of judging God by His apparent dealings rather than His words. The test of *action* may indeed be wisely tried when men are the subject of our judgment. But God's *word* is to the wise believer the faithful exponent of His ways, which many times appear to nature inconsistent with His name. It is this all-important principle which is here so forcibly as well as touchingly commended to the Hebrew saints. They had suffered nothing which He had not led them to expect. It was by forgetting the gracious exhortations of the Spirit that they had found weariness and unproductive sorrow in the very things which were designed to make them richer in their knowledge of the Father's love.

Verses 6-8. "For whom the Lord loveth," &c. It was a family token that they had received, in being made acquainted with the rod of discipline. None were exempt from this but those who wrongfully assumed the filial title. For it is in the nature of a Father to control His children for their good. *Because* He loves them, He is not indifferent to their ways. *Because* He regards them as His own, His will must be their guide. *Because*, moreover, of the difference between childish inexperience and waywardness, and the ripeness of parental wisdom, an expression of the truest love might sometimes take, at first appearance, the form of an unkindness. But if God spoke roughly, He still spoke to them *as sons*. They ought not then to faint at His rebuke, as if He were discarding them from favour. Still

less should they despise a chastening which God never ministered at random. There were lessons of subjection which could only thus be learned. The things which they endured were accompaniments of their salvation. God scourgeth *every son* whom He receiveth. It was only because, through spiritual indolence, *they had dropped to a lower tone of practical communion*, that they were embarrassed and discouraged by their present experiences. They had as faulty an estimate of their own requirements, as they had of the grace and wisdom of the God with whom they had to do.

Verses 9, 10. "Furthermore, we have had fathers," &c. Nature itself was an admonisher of their ignorance, and upbraided their impatience. They had had fathers of their flesh, and to *them* due reverence had been given, when they brought them up at their discretion. The discipline which they enjoined had been implicitly observed, though regulated solely by their own will. For the brief period of their children's nonage they had trained them as they listed. Their corrections might have been dictated by caprice or passionate infirmity, yet they were obeyed. Their *name* was their indisputable title to the reverence of their children. But if this were rightly so, how much more readily should God's true children bow their wills to His! For He is the Father, not of our flesh, but our spirits. By an eternal relationship we are the children of His love. Subjection to Him is our life. As it is by the obedience of faith that we became aware of our sonship, through the grace of Him who has begotten us, so also the energies of

spiritual life are called into exercise by our watchful recognition of His will. To be "let alone" of Him, is to languish into deadly sickness of the spirit. Neglected by the Father, the child presently begins to err. And thus it is, that He whose name is "Faithful," has framed for His children a method of effective discipline, which He does not fail to apply to each, according to His perfect knowledge of their need. Strong pains of body or of mind, or both, may, by teaching more intelligibly to the soul its native impotency and unprofitableness, make Jesus more than ever precious as the balm of healing to the broken spirit, and the vigour of an undecaying life. Shipwreck of temporal advantage, or disappointment of strong natural desire, has often schooled the Christian to a riper enjoyment of his portion in the heavenly places. Instant dependence upon God is evermore the law of conscious blessing to His saints. They have found it thus in old and modern times; for all have tasted, in some sort, this proof of His fidelity who careth for His own. In His knowledge of our frame, the Father's dealings with His children are in tenderness and much compassion. But although He never willingly afflicts, He does not spare to chasten, when by so doing He may gain His dearer aim of bringing us, through suffering, to a better knowledge of Himself.

There is an end and special object which the Father sets before Him in the training of the children. Unlike an earthly parent, who is often governed by instinctive fondness, rather than sound love, or, when intending well, is baffled often by his own inherent selfishness, which in a thousand shapes

obstructs him in his work, God chastens us *for our profit*. This is His immediate and undivided object. As to the end and manner of our profiting, it is that we might be *partakers of His holiness*. God smites His enemies to make His power known, where it has foolishly been called in question. He visits His own children with His discipline, that He may make them better understand their blessedness in being called with a *holy* calling into fellowship with Himself. He that hath called us in His Son is holy. Our profit and the well-being of our souls is to be sought in an endeavour to resemble Him in our ways.⁶

Our calling is to seem and be in this world as the sons of God, even as by grace He has adopted us and made us such in the Beloved.⁷ By means of the exceeding great and precious promises which are given us, we become partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust.⁸ It is by glory and virtue,⁹ that we are called in Christ to the knowledge of our God and Saviour. The grace which saves us absolutely in the Son of God, becomes the instructor of the saved in godliness and righteousness.¹ If, through perverseness, we prefer some other way, God chastens us for our folly. If, by His grace, we watch, and, therefore, grow up more conformably to Him, He ceases not to teach us still. He will purge the

⁶ 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

⁷ Phil. ii. 15.

⁸ 2 Pet. i. 4.

⁹ *Διὰ δόξης καὶ ἀρετῆς* (2 Pet. i. 4). Tischendorf and others read in this passage, *ἰδίᾳ δόξῃ καὶ ἀρετῇ*, an important variation. It will then be "by His own glory and virtue." Still, morally the effect is the same. Effectual grace ever producing as its result, a proportionate conformity to God. (Comp. 2 Cor. iii. 18.)

¹ Tit. ii. 11, 12.

fruitful branch to make it yet more fruitful.² The range is almost infinite within which God may exercise His children's souls by needful discipline. Temporal death may, in His hands, be a method of deliverance from something worse. The Lord may chasten thus to save His people from the condemnation of the world.³ But in any and in every case His object is their profit. He will make them partakers of His holiness.

Let not the doctrine of this passage be misconstrued by the weak believer. As it respects our personal sanctification, it can receive no augmentation, nor be in any way affected by the chastisements of God. We are already sanctified in Christ *completely*. HE is made of God our Sanctification, before ever we are capable of being thus educated,⁴ by the Father of our spirits. It is to *sons* that He addresses those reproofs of instruction which are the way of life to the believer. Moral conformity to Jesus is the end to which the soul, whose afflictive experiences are working profitably, is continually tending. Meanwhile, the grand impediment to our becoming, practically, partakers of God's holiness, is the activity of our natural will. The effectual conquest, therefore, of this will, is what God seeks to compass by the varied modes of special treatment to which He subjects the believer in his progress. A word is sometimes found effectual to work correction, and bring abundant profit to the godly and attentive listener, while heavy and oft-

² John xv.

³ 1 Cor. xi. 32.

⁴ *Παιδεία* has, as is well known, a far more comprehensive meaning, than "chastisement." It is, however, in the latter sense that it is chiefly used in the present passage.

repeated blows may be employed to rouse a slothful, or admonish a self-seeking Christian. Nor are the natural ills which Christians share with other men distinguishable always in the eye of faith from the particular visitations of the Father's rod. For sickness and calamity are not, for the believer, things of chance. God's children have to do with God. His angels are their ministers. His hand is in all their circumstances, while He is Himself the patient Teacher of their way. Nothing in us delights Him but obedience to His will. As Jesus learned obedience through the things which He endured, whose will was always as the will of Him that sent Him, so, on the other hand, our wills, which naturally turn away from God, must many times be bruised and broken, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we may have our conversation in the world.⁵

Verse 11. "Now no chastening," &c. Nothing can exceed the gracious tenderness with which the Spirit here expresses His perfect sympathy with the afflicted Christian, who has been once brought to recognize his trial as a visitation from the Father's hand. As it is elsewhere said, it is needful that heaviness shall sometimes come on those whose calling, notwithstanding, is to rejoice evermore in the Lord.⁶ But the thorough sympathy of God accompanies these sorrows of His own infliction. He has made us sorry, for the more abundant increase of our after joy. Fretfulness, or indifference, or despondency are alike sin. *Sorrow* is not so. God expects that Christians should call bitter, bitter. If they do so,

⁵ 2 Cor. i. 12.

⁶ 1 Pet. i. 6.

and, by faith, discerning at whose hand the grief is ministered, accept the trial as a token from the Father, then tribulation will work patience, and patience, leading to a deeper exercise of soul with God, will work a more plenteous experience of Him and of His way. Conflict and painful searchings may be the immediate effect of active discipline. But to them *that are exercised thereby* its end is fruitful peace. Peace is the fruit of righteousness. The purpose of correction is to render the believer, not more righteous, intrinsically, than he was before. For *Christ* is his righteousness and his Perfection before God. But he is induced, by trial, to investigate his ways. A multitude of unsuspected depredators have, perhaps, been sucking out the life-springs of his once devoted service. Habit, or other men's example, or the yielding compliance of a natural amiability, may have had more to do with his apparent diligence than he was once aware. To reduce him, by a personal experiment, to a sense of his own nothingness, would be to fit him for a deeper and far fuller appreciation of the righteousness of God. On the other hand, a Christian may be really such, and yet, through lack of use, his spiritual senses may have been so thoroughly benumbed, as to leave no outward token of the life within. In such a case, God's chastenings may be the bitter introduction to a happier experience. By quickening thus the active principle of conscience, the Husbandman who tends the living vine, and takes account of every shoot that draws its life from Jesus, enables the lethargic Christian to cast off the dead leaves of a meaningless profession,

and in the fresher springing of a Christ revived within him, to speak again, as in the former days, of a blessedness which made him independent of the world's best goods.⁷ Sorrow and grief are quite compatible with unchanged confidence in God. The self-examinations of a thoughtful saint, who finds himself visited by some unlooked-for grief, are a certain prelude to the bolder song of gladness which will celebrate his emergence from the cloud of sorrow into a brightness never fitly known till then.

The clearest proof that chastening has been to profit, is a conscious augmentation of the sufferer's peace. But where God's dealings are not recognized by faith, this cannot be. Passive endurance, with no accompanying exercise of spirit, only hardens and debases the recipient of discipline. God knows the measure of His children's dispositions. He has means of managing the most refractory, while His joy is rather to guide, with no sensible restraint, the willing listeners to His word of grace.⁸ Meanwhile, that He is *jealous*, is the very safety of His children. He will not leave them to themselves. He is their sure Conductor, by the ways of faith and patience, to the glory which is their appointed rest.

Verse 12. "Wherefore, lift up," &c. They should not, therefore, faint because of sorrowful experiences, but should rather comfort and encourage one another. Because they were partakers in common of the children's portion, they should exercise a mutual sympathy as helpers of each other's joy; sustaining themselves and their brethren by God's faithful words of promise. Their hands must no more

⁷ Gal. v. 12-15.

⁸ Ps. xxxii. 8.

listlessly hang down, for the Lord was calling them to occupy until He should return. Their feeble knees would gain new strength, and bear them boldly on the race of patience, when their loins were freshly girded by the truth of their salvation.

Verse 13. That they might run their common race together, not only steadily, but safely, they should endeavour "to make straight paths" for one another's feet. This is a weighty and important exhortation. Its manifest reference is chiefly to the restoration and happier progress of those who, whether from deficiency of faith, or through paucity of knowledge, or, it might be, through culpable neglect, had, as it were, fallen lame, and were in danger of turning out of the right ways of the Lord. Two things are embodied in this counsel. First, a vigilant holding fast of the word of sound doctrine; and, secondly, the patient exercise of love and much spiritual tenderness towards the weaker of the flock. Christ's sheep are to be tended in the love of Christ. The strong are to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please themselves. The feeble-minded are not to be pressed beyond their strength. Souls that are driven further than their faith can carry them, presently fall lame. What is clear as daylight to the practised eye of one who has been nourished up and soundly taught in Christ, may be a stumbling to another who (it may be blamably),⁹ has need of milk, and cannot bear strong meat. But there is none occasion of stumbling, even to the weakest, where our walk is in the light and love of God.¹ Rebuke may be invoked by carnal listlessness, and

⁹ *Ante*, chap. v. 11-14.

¹ 1 John ii. 10.

warning must be ministered to the disorderly, but *patience* must be shown to all.² This epistle is, in all its parts, an exhortation. How the same meekness and gentleness of Christ may vary its expression between the far extremes of indignant reprehension, and endearing tenderness, we have had abundant opportunity of seeing. Not to know good from evil, is a low condition for a Christian's mind. To lift it up from thence, and, by pouring Christ's pure light upon the soul's enfeebled vision, to arouse it to a juster apprehension of its calling, is a labour which God's Spirit only can achieve. But He fain would work that work by means of the knowledge, the long-suffering and kindness, the love unfeigned, and the patient faith of those whom He exhorts to bear each other's burdens, and so to fulfil the law of Christ.³

Verse 14. They were to follow peace with *all men*. For while a Christian may have many enemies, he is himself a foe to none. Knowing the way of peace in Jesus, he is to walk therein. Grace, and not bitterness, is in the hearts which Christ has filled. Their mouths, which may have once been full of cursing, are taught to speak another language by the Spirit, who acquaints His people with the love of God. As the peace of God, which is His people's calling, should rule within their hearts,⁴ so, if they walked with Him, their constant aim would be to live peaceably with them that are without, as well as one toward the other. Peace is endangered when men seek their own. While Christians walk in love, and only follow what is good, the Lord of peace

² 1 Thess. v. 14.

³ Gal. vi. 2.

⁴ Col. iii. 15.

Himself is their Protector, and can make their fiercest enemies to cease from strife.⁵

But *holiness* must be pursued, as well as peace. For without holiness none shall see the Lord. Uncleaness, whether of the flesh or of the spirit, is the way of nature. Holiness is the way of God. We have been called by grace from one into the other. But, because the flesh remains still in the believer, and lusts continually against the Spirit, we have constant need of admonition as it respects our daily walk. The "holy brethren," therefore, are to shun the way of evil; to cleanse themselves with diligence from all that clashes with the holy promises of God.⁶ The Holiness which qualifies a man to see the Lord is Christ. To abide in Him, is to endeavour to pursue His way. The unholy are yet under law, which lawfully condemns the sinner in his ways.⁷ The grace of God instructs the children in a better way. It is by such clear and express responses to the conscience that God's oracles preserve the saint from the delusive speciousness of those "vain words," by means of which the children of disobedience prepare themselves but more effectually for the coming wrath of God.⁸ Grace is the true source of holiness in the believer. And grace is tasted, not by a mere assent to doctrine, but through the faith which looks to Jesus. Having found a Saviour in the stricken Lamb of God, the believer owns the Lord of his obedience in the trusted and beloved Redeemer of his soul.

Verse 15. While, therefore, practical holiness

⁵ 1 Pet. iii.

⁷ 1 Tim. i. 8, 9.

⁶ 2 Cor. iv. 14, vii. 1.

⁸ Eph. v. 6.

was earnestly to be pursued, they were to see carefully to its producing cause. They should look diligently that none among them *fell short of the grace of God*.⁹ Nothing was more essential to their common well-being than this. If anything that clashed with God's pure word of grace should come to be accepted by them for sound Christian doctrine, the Gospel was virtually gone. When a legal spirit, instead of being censured as a grave defect, should be recognized with honour in the Church, its true character, as the household of the Son, was lost. It had already quitted its first love. Christ was of no avail to any who, under an ostensible confession of His name, still counted other things than Christ essential to salvation. The evil here warned against is not more dangerous than subtle. It is by privy entrances, while men are slumbering, that Satan gains admittance for his spies upon the liberty of Christ.¹ Such a deadly mischief must, therefore if possible, be anticipated in its earliest workings. No man who failed to allege the grace of God as the sole reason of his hope in Christ, should be acknowledged as a genuine believer. Weakness of faith, or timid hesitation in appropriating to the full the amazing riches of the grace of God, because of a present conflict with one's personal corruptions, is not at all in question in this passage. They only are contemplated who,

⁹ Ἐπισκοποῦντες μή τις ὑστερῶν ἀπὸ τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ.
 "Indem ihr zusehet das nicht Jemand hinter der Gnade Gottes zurück-
 bleibe."—DE WETTE. ". . . che niuno scada dalla grazia di Dio."—
 DIOD. The use of the preposition seems rather to imply an apostasy
 from a once clear profession of grace.

¹ Gal. ii. 4.

with settled minds, and positive doctrinal views, are found, in their estimate of doctrine, to come short of Gospel truth. Where men maintained, for instance, that to keep the law was necessary to salvation, they were subverters of their brethren's souls.² The apostle knew full well that holiness could only flourish upon *grace*. But he was quite as well aware that such is not the natural thought of our hearts. More especially were *Hebrews*, accustomed from their infancy to associate together the ideas of personal righteousness and human effort, in danger of defilement from this deepest and most quickly-spreading root of bitterness. But although at its early entrance legalism was, in strictness, a Jewish corruption of the faith, yet the principle is one of readiest acceptance in the natural heart of every man. It was when works received an equal honour, in the professing Christian body, with the grace of God, that the spirit yielded to the flesh. Corruption grew on prosperously under such a sanction, until what was once betrothed as a chaste virgin to the Lord, has turned to be the harlot of the world, and the mysterious mother of abominations.³

While the communion of the Holy Ghost can *rest* on nothing but the finished grace of God, it can only be practically *maintained* and enjoyed by vigilance and active holiness. Systematic self-righteousness is, doubtless, fatally destructive to true spiritual fellowship. For by faith alone we stand. But there are other roots of bitterness whose springing must be as watchfully anticipated or repressed.

² Acts xv.

³ Rev. xvii.

Nothing is more forcibly insisted on by the Holy Spirit of God than the exclusion of evil from the Church, which is the habitation of His presence. The contagious power of neglected sin, is a topic of very frequent as well as solemn warning in the word of truth. That "one sinner destroyeth much good," is a standing maxim of Divine wisdom. The leaven of wickedness, if suffered through carelessness to lurk within the lump, will certainly infect it with a constantly-increasing energy. God is the true Detector of all evil. Where we walk with Him, His presence speedily discovers any practical variance from the holiness of His way. In contrast to the dereliction of the grace of God, there stands the opposite and not less deadly evil of its deliberate abuse. Both these extremes appear to be comprised within the general expression, "root of bitterness."

Verses 16, 17. They were to beware of such. For sanctification, body, soul, and spirit, was the will of God concerning them.⁴ They should know the natural man, in spite of his disguise, and shun with care all recognition of profaneness in the temple of the living God. The standing type of "a profane person"⁵ is Esau, the despiser of his birthright. In his sale of the birthright, we have an example of nature's estimate of heavenly things. His heart was never really on the birthright, because he had no true appreciation of the inheritance. As the apparent heir of the promises of God, he stood in an entirely false light. For he

⁴ 1 Thess. v. 22, 23.

⁵ Βέβηλος. "*Profanus*." It has in this passage its ordinary sense of unhallowed, "one uninitiated in the mystery of the Gospel."

was destitute of that faith which alone makes promise precious. When a crisis, therefore, comes, and the birthright, as a thing invisible, is compared with the smallest measure or the lowest quality of temporal advantage, there is a deliberate preference of the creature to the Creator. God, never having been enjoyed, while Esau held a title whose sole value was its expectance of His favour, was no strength to Esau in his day of trial. A little of the meat which perisheth was more to him than the living and eternal God. For his soul's desires were on this side death. When faint, and at the point to die, the birthright lost all value in his eyes. His heart was on it only while it ministered to the flesh. He valued his title as the chief of Isaac's house, but he never thought of it as something better than his life.⁶

In despising his birthright, Esau gave up God; but he by no means surrendered his expectations as the eldest-born of *Isaac*. He knew his father's natural partiality, and relied upon it for the ultimate attainment of the blessing which he desired to inherit. Having satisfied his hunger at this fearful cost, he went his way, and lived long years as he had lived before, a cunning hunter, ranging at his will the fields which pleased him best, without a feeling of regret, still less of repentant desire, in relation to his vacated birthright. Such is the impression conveyed to our minds by the scanty narrative which Scripture affords respecting Esau, previously to the decisive repudiation of his claim. His alliance by marriage with the Canaanite is the

⁶ Gen. xxv. 32-34.

solitary but highly characteristic incident related of him until the hour of his bitter undeceiving. With an exceeding great and bitter cry he received from Isaac the unlooked-for extinction of his hope. His former confidence is now the cause of his despair. He had trusted in his natural parent for things which only God could give, and of Isaac he is now *rejected*. With a reiterated blessing he bestowed on Jacob the inheritance.⁷ The tears of Esau could not move a revocation of the blessing once pronounced. It followed the birthright which the first-born had so long ago despised. He sought it carefully, but could not obtain it. There was no repentance, either in God's calling of the younger born to the inheritance, or in the heart of Esau towards the God whom he had formerly renounced.⁸

Even in the Apostle's days, the Esau character attached to many who yet bore the name of Christ. There were not a few who outwardly professed the faith, whose condition called for tears of anguish from one who knew the terror of the Lord, and saw men recklessly advancing to destruction under the infatuation of a carnal confidence.⁹ Wholly indifferent to that in which the child of God alone finds real enjoyment, they were minding *earthly* things. Instead of following the Lord, they were pursuing their own pleasure. They gloried in it. It was

⁷ Gen. xxvi. 33.

⁸ It is difficult to determine whether *αὐτήν*, the closing word of verse 17, is to be referred to *μετανοίας*, or to *ἐλλογίαν*. In my own judgment, it should be connected with the former. The unrepentant person is Isaac, not Esau, in this passage. On the other hand, that Esau *was* unrepentant toward God, notwithstanding the genuineness of his grief for the loss of the blessing, is plain, from the sequel of his history.

⁹ Phil. iii. 18, 19.

Christian liberty, they said, to act as they saw fit. They loved the *name*, but did not know the *power* of the liberty of Christ. Neither faith nor patience had their exercise in these false brethren. Exceeding great and precious promises were stored in Scripture for the comfort of God's saints. But they gave no relish to pursuits which took men far away from God. They were, therefore, disregarded and disused. Yet there was no lack felt of confidence and full assurance. Men who only served their bellies were without all fear in the assemblies of God's saints.¹ They sported with their own deceivings.² With no compunction, they kept on a steady course of sin.

Such was the case while Christian profession was a dangerous adventure, and none, it might be thought, would name the name of Christ who had not really known the power of God's kingdom. When nothing but reproach and trial, apparently, awaited those who joined themselves to such a new and hated profession, it was natural to expect that genuine conviction and conversion could alone embolden men to take the step. But nature is ever less deceiving than deceived.³ Guided by instincts of pure selfishness, men easily adopt what seems to promise them repose of conscience, without trenching on their natural liberty. Moreover, hypocrisy is such a deeply-rooted principle of human conduct, that wherever truth appears, its counterfeit is produced immediately. But if these things were so when God began His work of mercy on the earth, and even then there needed such strong exhortations

¹ Jude 12.² 2 Pet. ii. 13.³ Tit. iii. 3.

for the preservation of a pure confession of the name of Jesus; with what feelings must the thoughtful Christian read such passages, whose lot is cast in these our latter days? For, on contemplating the broad field of outward Christianity, he sees now a reversal of the former order. They who love the Lord have now to seek each other diligently among masses of profession without life. The world pursues its course more tranquilly and confidently since its prince has assumed the new and portentous character of a Christian philanthropist. The capital device which now deludes the multitude, is the blending of natural and spiritual liberty; of the will, that is, of God with that of man. *But Christ vanishes entirely in such a fusion.* The second Adam is a nonentity in much of the Christianity of the day. The claims, on the one hand, of the tyrannous blasphemy of Rome, and on the other, of the carnal liberalism of merely natural self-will, which veils itself extensively under the convenient watchword of Protestantism, leave but a narrow option for the true disciple of the Lord. Blessed be God, if the path be straight, it is also clear. To consider *Him*, and to run the race in which He leads us,⁴ is to find noon-day amid the darkness, and to know a joy which is unspeakable and full of glory, while perplexity and fear may be around that narrow way on every side.

Esau was at his ease till Isaac spake *from God*. In the same way, the careless world, which grounds its expectations on a fleshly confidence, and not on faith, and sleeps securely now upon a false pro-

⁴ John viii. 12.

fession, must, ere long, be awakened to a dread conviction of its error. Wailing, instead of gladness, will fill the tabernacles of unrighteousness at the appearing of the Judge. Meanwhile, to all who reverence the truth of God, these verses speak with an authoritative counsel still. God's *word* remains the guide of them that love Him, until He come IN PERSON to fulfil its precious promises in the eternal consummation of their hope.

Verses 18–24. “For ye are not come,” &c. This remarkable passage which is so richly declarative of the privileges and blessings which attach to the true heirs of promise, is in close moral connection with the foregoing warnings. It is because we are not come to the mount which might be touched—into immediate and ostensive contact, that is, with Divine holiness in its visibly judicial manifestation, but are come to another mount, where holiness and truth are taught us in the perfection of pure grace—that we are thus exhorted. For holiness becomes His house for ever. The children of His Covenant are “holy brethren.” It is in the knowledge of the exceeding riches of the great salvation that we are to find an efficacious motive to walk worthy of the Lord.

With respect to the striking contrast here presented between the former and the latter mounts, the outline is quite clear. There is a solemn recital of the terrors of the Law, that we may the better understand from what we have escaped. There is a rich and full enumeration of the blessings of the Gospel, that our hearts may more than ever burn within us with desire for the day of their entire

realization. The former things are once more set in their array of fear, that they may be removed for ever from the conscience of the justified partakers of the better Covenant. "We are *not come* unto the mount which might be touched," &c. The impression produced upon the souls of those who came to Sinai, and who there beheld a portion of God's terrible majesty, was one of distance and exceeding dread. What their eyes beheld appalled them. What was uttered in their ears from the tempestuous blackness which Jehovah chose at that time for His sanctuary, instead of reassuring them, completed their discomfiture. They fled away from God, when He began to communicate with His people as their Lawgiver and Judge.⁵ They entreated that they might not listen to a voice which seemed to speak of death, and not of life. For, although God spake but in His natural tone, and angels, who had not sinned, but kept their first estate, were ready ministers in setting forth the glory of that covenant, His voice is fatal to the sinner when He speaks from Sinai, though the commandment which he delivers be ordained to life.⁶ They could not endure God's necessary charge. Moses might speak to them, and they would bear the word, but God must cease, unless He would destroy His people.⁷ Such was the feeling of their hearts when under the immediate influence of God's outward dread. They knew not, until taught by sore experience, that the sights and sounds of terror which alarmed them were but the natural accompaniments of a covenant, which in effect excluded

⁵ Exod. xx. 18.⁶ Rom. vii. 10.⁷ Exod. xx. 19.

every knowledge of God, except as an Avenger, in holiness, of His broken and dishonoured Law.⁸

Precautions must be rigidly observed, in prospect of God's conference with Israel as their Lawgiver, which may well have chilled the people's hearts. They had known the glory of His power, when He led them forth from Egypt, and gave Pharaoh's host to utter ruin for their sakes. From heaven He had dropped down manna for their food, and had opened wells of water in the barren rock for their refreshment; although it was not faithful prayer, but thankless murmurings, that drew His attention to their need. But now their Saviour is their chief alarm. The common danger both of man and beast is God their Maker and Preserver (verse 20). The very mediator who was charged to manage for Jehovah this portentous meeting with His people, fell sick of dread at the discovery of God's majesty in this unwonted guise. Moses had communed face to face with Him in other shapes, and to look on God had always been an awful and a solemn thing. He

⁸ It was ignorance of themselves (although they had not been without experience, both of their weakness and unprofitableness, in their exodus from Egypt and their early journeys in the desert) that made the people bold to pledge themselves to do God's reasonable service in answer to His *first* proposal. (Exod. xix. 5-8.) It was blind and sinful infatuation—the self-deception of the evil heart of unbelief—that they *persisted* in such an undertaking, through the medium of Moses, after they had found that what *God* spake from Sinai filled their hearts with dread. (Deut. v. 27.) To suppose that God as a Lawgiver was less terrible at a distance than when near, and that through the ministry of merely human mediation to fulfil the covenant of debt was still a practical thing, betrayed a deficient understanding of the nature both of holiness and sin. What was in reality essential, was in their eyes only adventitious. They did not, that is, perceive that the terrors of Sinai are the natural expression of Divine holiness when contemplated from the level of sinful, and, therefore, *mortal* flesh.

hid his face while listening to the words of mercy, which announced to his delighted ears Jehovah's purpose of deliverance for His people.⁹ But now, instead of the quietness of reverential awe, his heart was overwhelmed by deadly fear. He gave utterance to his sensations. "I exceedingly fear and quake," was his acknowledgment of feelings which declared his participation in the common distance to which man finds himself repelled from God, when justice, and not mercy, is the platform upon which they meet.

We are not come a second time to Sinai. God, who then shrouded in His perfect glory by a vail of darkness, has now dispelled the former shadows by the light of life. He has changed the thunders, which expressed the majesty and power of a God whose holiness had yet to be appeased, into the kindly greeting of a Father's voice. The Gospel brings the children to no sight of terror. We can endure what is commanded as no grievous burden, when we find God's finished will in Christ to be the sure salvation of our souls.¹

Believers now enjoy a different access to their God. "We are come unto Mount Zion," &c. (verse 22.) God's *rest* is not on Sinai, but on Zion.² For it is the chosen seat of royal and triumphant grace. To Jewish faith, the place where David dwelt was venerated and desired as the destined centre of the blessings which the accession of Messiah to His earthly throne should establish, for Israel and for the nations, according to the ancient Covenant. Sion maintains, in the Old Testament, its literal meaning.

⁹ Exod. iii. 6.

¹ 1 John v. 3.

² Ps. cxxxii. 14.

For the prophecies addressed to Israel and to Judah have attached to them specific *local* certainties, as well as a general burden of prospective national blessing. But earthly blessings are but a shadow and reflection of heavenly originals. The security and substance of all blessing, heavenly or earthly, is Christ, the eternal Covenant of promise. What Israel is hereafter to obtain, to the glory of God's faithfulness and mercy, who is not a Man that He should repent what He has sworn,³ the Church now enters on in another and yet higher form of blessing. To the partakers, therefore, of the *heavenly* calling, the Spirit ministers their joy by means of names and tokens, which, because they are expressions of *truths* which are paramount to *any* special dispensation, suit equally the diverse branches of the one great family of grace.

In this enumeration of the blessings to which faith already brings the children, Mount Zion appears to be the first mentioned, not only as the proximate contrast which would naturally suggest itself to a believing Hebrew at the remembrance of the former mount, but likewise, in a generic and widely-comprehensive sense, as a symbolic expression of the grace to which we have access, and in which we stand.⁴

Next to the chosen seat of sovereign grace, is named "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." God has settled the lasting abodes of life and praise upon the sure foundations of His righteous mercy. This reference to the heavenly *Jerusalem* would be felt with an especial force by

³ Rom. xi. 29.

⁴ Rom. v. 2.

them to whom he wrote. For they well knew what it was that had made the earthly Jerusalem an object of such veneration and desire to the Jewish heart. It was the name and temple of Jehovah that had sanctioned in the distant but devoted Israelite a loving zeal, which chose the city of solemnities above his chiefest joy.⁵ For *there* only could the people's joy be full, when, at the Lord's appointed feasts, the entire family of Jacob was assembled to do homage to the God of their salvation, and to delight themselves in the abundance of His goodness. And now that, in the power of the new and heavenly calling, they are bidden to forget the former things, their hearts would gladly find the name of their hereditary joy preserved as an abiding token of a yet more excellent desire. Their faith already brought them to the heavenly courts. *We are come* to the city of the living God. The fathers saw it afar off.⁶ By faith the Christian is already there. That city is the *heavenly* Jerusalem. The earthly Jerusalem, indeed, is not forgotten of Jehovah. She shall be built again upon her former heap. The Lord, who has forsaken her, will yet return to her again. The bill of her divorcement shall be annulled in the relentings of that mercy which rejoices against judgment. She will again be known and honoured as a wife of youth.⁷ But *our* mother is Jerusalem above.⁸ The bright interior of that home of blessed-

⁵ Ps. cxxxvii.

⁶ Chap. xi. 13-16.

⁷ Isa. liv.

⁸ Gal. iv. 26. It is interesting to find that all the recent editors, whose authority is most regarded, concur in rejecting πάντων from this verse. "Jerusalem above," the apostle says, "which is our mother, is free." Then follows a quotation from Isaiah liv., in which the coming liberty and blessing of the earthly city, when brought within the bond of the better covenant, are described. But that this

ness is now opened by the Spirit to the view of those who have, through grace, good hope to dwell there in the light of God and of the Lamb.⁹ Our citizenship is now in heaven. We are strangers here. We sit in heavenly places, by the faith of our risen and exalted Head. Our worship and our joys are there.

We are come, moreover, to the myriads which form the general assembly of God's angel host.¹ Angels are always mentioned as attendant witnesses of the Divine majesty. In many thousands they descended upon Sinai when Jehovah gave His covenant from thence.² They then were objects of the people's dread, when, as a flame of fire, they shone brightly, yet terribly, amid the blackness that was gathered round that mount. They are now known to the believer as the ready ministers of Jesus, sent forth to succour at their need His brethren and fellow-heirs.³ For they are all His worshippers, and the doers of His bidding. They are gathered by myriads and by thousands round the throne in heaven, to give glory and full worship to the Lamb.⁴ They have been seen on earth at intervals, when, in vision, or by an open revelation, God disclosed in ancient times the nearness of His sure protection to

is but a partial adaptation of the prophecy to a distinct subject, for the purpose of illustrating the principle of grace on which the Church, as well as ransomed Israel, can only stand, is evident from the tenor of the prophecy referred to. God never *forsook* or was *wroth* with the heavenly city of His rest.

⁹ Rev. xxi.

¹ Καὶ μυριάσιν, ἀγγέλων πανηγύρει, κ. λ. Few, perhaps, are agreed as to the true punctuation of this passage. For my own part, I cannot condemn the common English version, though, on the whole, πανήγυρις seems to stand better with the angels, than the first-born, respect being had to its strict signification, which indicates a national and general assembly, as opposed to a family re-union.

² Psa. lxxviii. 17.

³ *Ante*, chap. i. 13, 14.

⁴ Rev. v. 11.

the chosen vessels of His favour.⁵ They will be seen again, ascending and descending on the Son of man, in the coming day of Israel's full blessing, when the national confession shall at length respond to the witness of eternal truth, and Israel shall be Israel indeed.⁶ They are now conversed with only by the faith which makes them known to us as fellow-servants of all those who keep the sayings written in the book of God.⁷

The object next presented, is the *Church* or assembly of the *first-born*, who are written or enrolled in heaven.⁸ In this passage only has the Spirit used this remarkable description of the Church. Most aptly is it found in an epistle, one great end of which is the instruction of the Christian in the characteristic blessings and glory of his calling. A title which is elsewhere only given to the Lord, is here conferred upon that Church which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.⁹ *Jesus*, as His blessed name implies, must ever be distinguished from the people whom He saves; but inasmuch as He has bestowed upon the Church of His election that glory which the Father has given to Him as the reward of His obedience, He is identified, in His risen and ascended Person, with the brethren whom He is not ashamed to call His own. In the language, therefore, of the Spirit, the Head and His mystic members form the perfect *Christ*.¹ Union with Him who is at God's right hand, is now the blessing of every believer. It was not always

⁵ Gen. xxviii. xxxii.

⁶ John i. 49-51, and Ps. cxlix. 1, 2.

⁷ Rev. xxii. 9.

⁸ Καὶ ἐκκλησίᾳ πρωτοτόκων ἐν οὐρανοῖς ἀπογεγραμμένων.

⁹ Eph. i. 23.

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 12; Eph. iv. 13.

thus. Until the Holy Ghost came down from heaven, to reveal the Saviour in His heavenly exaltation, this truth, though partly spoken by the Lord to His disciples, was a hidden and inoperative thing. The fathers, who embraced the promises from far, could not discern the future calling of the Church of the first-born. For God reserved it as a secret in Himself. It was not divulged to any of the sons of men, until, upon the final gainsaying of Israel, God reached His chosen opportunity for the revelation of the mystery of Christ.²

In strictness of dispensational limitation, the expression "Church of the first-born ones" seems properly to describe those who live and die in Jesus crucified, between His former and His latter advents. It is distinguished in the present passage from the "just men made perfect," of whom mention is afterwards made. The peculiar force of "first-born" as a relative title has been discussed in the earlier part of this book,³ when examining it in its immediate application to the Lord. As Jesus takes precedence of His many brethren, not only in all other things, but also as the First-begotten from the dead, so there appears to be assigned to the Church a corresponding relation to the multitude which must yet be born, and whose time of birth is postponed in Scripture to the second advent of the Lord. Nor, indeed, could anything mark more emphatically the distinctive position which grace has assigned to the confessors of Jesus Crucified than this application, to the individual members of the Church, of a title

² *Notes on the Ephesians*, chap. iii.

³ See the remarks on chap. i. 6.

which originally and properly belongs to Himself alone.⁴ The Church in her mystic union with Him who is the first-born from the dead, has been begotten by Divine power as a "kind of first-fruits" of God's creatures.⁵ The nation of Israel is hereafter to be born, as in a day, to life in Immanuel at His appearing, and through *them* the Gentiles will receive the full measure of their promised blessing.⁶ This subject has already been so frequently before us, in the progress of these Notes, that I am unwilling to dwell longer on it in this place.

We are come also "to God, the Judge of all." Judgment is an inseparable attribute of God. At Sinai He was not approachable, because the burden of his unperformed commandment was there imposed upon the people. In Christ we now draw nigh. There is no condemnation to be feared by them that are already passed, in Him, from death to life. The secret of the Christian's heart has been already judged. He has been made manifest *to God*⁷ in all his personal wretchedness and guilt; and, through the riches of His grace, he has obtained a plenary remission by the blood of Jesus. God's presence is become to the believer his sanctuary of eternal refuge and security. For by the decision of His holy judgment He has both absolved and justified him in the name of Jesus. He in Christ become the holy habitation of His children's peace. As has been remarked already, it is the proximity of Him who judgeth every man's work, that gives to Christian communion one of its strongest characteristic

⁶ *Notes on the Romans*, chap. xi.

⁴ Col. i. 15.

⁷ 2 Cor. v. 11.

⁵ Jas. i. 18.

features. We are to judge *ourselves*, because God dwelleth in us. We are commanded to judge that which is *within the Church*, because it is God's holy temple, which is not to be defiled.⁸ God is Himself the Judge of them that are without. The subject of His judgment in the coming day is unacknowledged sin. Meanwhile, He acts in this character among His own who fail to anticipate His visitation by self-judgment in their ways.⁹

In the pure light of God, the Judge of all, we see the spirits of those righteous men who now are perfected¹ as well as we, through the one offering of the Son of God.² They were justified by faith, although they could not know perfection until God openly declared His righteousness, as the just God and the Saviour, by the cross of Jesus.³ What they were always in God's counsels, they are now *declared* to be. The eleventh chapter has made clearly manifest by what means it was that these just men obtained their good report. The intervention of the name of God, the Judge of all, between them and the "Church of the first-born," in the present recital, is no accident. The Spirit purposely distinguishes two bodies, which, although, perhaps,⁴ eventually

⁸ 1 Cor. iii. v.

⁹ 1 Pet. i. 17; 1 Cor. xi. 31, 32.

¹ Καὶ πνεύμασι δικαίων τετελειωμένων. The English reader might easily refer the perfection spoken of to their *spirits* instead of to the just themselves.

² Chap. x.

³ Rom. iii. 25, 26.

⁴ Certainty on this interesting subject of enquiry is hardly to be looked for during a dispensation in which the most enlightened Christian knows but "in part." The symbolic presentation of New Jerusalem as the Bride, the Lamb's wife, appears, when considered in its details, to favour the conclusion suggested in the text, and which is no doubt the faith of the majority of Christ's disciples. On the other hand, there are numerous passages of Scripture which seem

found united in the glory, are called while on earth to a confession not at all identical, as has been shown sufficiently in the remarks on the preceding chapter. We are come to the spirits of departed saints, who having joyed to see remotely the fair days of promise, waited until death for God's salvation, and now partake with us perfection through the finished work of Christ. The better thing which we enjoy, instead of severing, unites us.⁵ While bowing our knees in grateful adoration and desire to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom every family⁶ in heaven and earth is named, and seeking a yet fuller knowledge of the proper hope of our

susceptible of a different interpretation, although not necessarily demanding it; *e.g.* the varied grouping and position of the redeemed as exhibited in the earlier chapters of the Revelation. Perhaps, the strongest scriptural support which can be furnished to the notion of perpetuity in these distinctions, is to be found in 2 Cor. iv. 18, a passage which has, accordingly, been already alleged by the upholders of that view. The "Church," and the "spirits of just men," &c., are as truly "unseen things," in the presentation here made of them to our faith, as are the other objects enumerated. Hence is inferred by some the eternity of the distinction here made. But this cannot be accepted as conclusive, since in this very passage we have both "the Church" and "the heavenly Jerusalem" mentioned separately, while in Rev. xxi., the latter is expressly described as the Bride, a special and well-known title of the Church. The subject is one capable of extensive discussion, but is clearly not a point of *faith*. To accept the clear testimonies of the Spirit is our wisdom; and will, to those who seek meekness as well as truth, be as a girdle of strength, and an ornament of praise. To engage the mind extensively with secondary questions, however interesting in themselves, is to enfeeble our souls by withdrawing our contemplation from its proper object, which is Christ.

⁵ Chap. xi. 40.

⁶ Πᾶσα πατριά. Eph. iii. 15. "The whole family" does not accurately represent this phrase. God, who now knows and is known (through the Spirit of adoption) as the Father, is likewise, in a wider sense, the common Parent of all who, whether in heaven or on earth, will stand or be upheld by virtue of redemption. Angels are, by description, "sons of God." The Church, with her heavenly calling, and Israel in the enjoyment of millennial earthly blessing, stand equally though in different degrees, related thus to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

calling, who first hope in an exalted though still hidden Christ,⁷ it is our joy to taste by faith communion with their spirits who have gone before us in the path of pilgrimage and strangership on earth.

“And to Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant, or Testament.” Not to him who at the sight of God’s dread majesty was filled with weakness and affright, but to Him who, proceeding forth from God, with strength and will to perfect all His pleasure, has become the Mediator of another and better Covenant, by having first fulfilled and so annulled the old. We are come to a Saviour, and a surety of eternal peace, instead of a minister of sin and death.

Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant, is the answer of the God of grace to the instinctive desire of the human conscience, when brought openly within the searching light of truth. He was promised as a Prophet of salvation to His people, in answer to their natural though ignorant entreaty in the day of the assembly at the former mount of God.⁸ They had spoken well in that confession of their dread.⁹ They were, in truth, unable in themselves to have to do with God. But the honour which, in the selfish perturbation of alarm and ignorance, they would vainly thrust on Moses, should abide enduringly on One whose fitness to speak words of comfort to His people should be far beyond what they could either ask or think. He should be

⁷ Τοὺς προηλπικότας ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ. Eph. i. 12.

⁸ Deut. xviii. 16-39.

⁹ Although they erred in spirit when they reckoned upon human mediation as an adequate relief from the intolerable pressure of the Law. *Ante*, pp. 388, 389, Note.

like His predecessor in His office, but in His blessed Person, above all comparison. God would provide a Mediator, who should speak the words of God.¹ According to commandment He should speak, but life eternal should be in His words.² The voice which, while the Son of God remained on earth, spoke what appeared "hard sayings," even to His own, until the true Interpreter should come, now utters plainly all the counsel of the God of peace to the believing people of His name. Moses is mute while Jesus speaks. We have no more knowledge of the former mediator and his work of death. The *Saviour* is to us the sole Expounder of the God of truth. By such a Mediator we are made acquainted with that love of God, which casts out fear, and makes His holy light the consummation, of His people's joy.³

We are not come to many mediators, but to One, the Man Christ Jesus.⁴ Unlike His trembling predecessor, who delivered to the people a commandment which took at once all confidence and joy from those who knew no other way to God, Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for His people, is the delighted Minister of righteous and effectual grace. God, who is One, now speaks to us by *Him*. By the Man who is His Fellow, and in the Son, who is for ever as Himself,⁵ the Father now expresses to the children the full counsel of His peace. It is no longer, as in the former case, the negotiation of a covenant of parties, but an announcement of completed promise.⁶ Jesus declares with joy, as the

¹ John iii. 34.

⁴ 1 Tim. ii. 5.

² John xii. 50.

⁵ John x. 30.

³ 1 John i. 4, 5.

⁶ Gal. iii. 20.

Mediator of the New Covenant, the full name and emphatic blessing of the true and only God.⁷ It is God who speaks, but in the familiar presence and with the kindly accents of a Man. Jesus declares God's secret with the knowledge and authority of one who speaks of His own things. As God's Interpreter, He speaks to *all* who have an ear to hear. His words are addressed directly to His people's hearts. A fearful woe belongs to any who shall intercept those words, or seek to stand between the Shepherd and His sheep. He, and He only, is entitled to give audience in the name of God. All matters must be brought to Him. For He alone has power to declare the will of God. Because of His presence on the throne of grace, that throne is become, by Divine appointment, the sole "confessional" of the distressed believer.⁸ He claims the immediate confidence of our faith. To come, therefore, to Him, is to find certain and abiding peace; for by His lips God tells us of Himself, and of His way. He makes us know, through Him, the riches of His glory, and commends to us the endless consolations of His love. Since we are come to Him, let our watchful heed be that no stranger's voice entice us from His side. To abide in Him, is to abide in God. To turn from Him, is to do injury to our only Saviour, and (as far as lies in us), to put away the cup of life from our lips.

Lastly, and to close this summary of the believer's blessedness, we have mention of "the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than Abel."⁹ Abel's accepted offering speaks to the be-

⁷ John xvii. 3.

⁸ *Ante*, p. 122.

⁹ Παρὰ τὸν Ἀβελ.

liever as a witness of the righteousness which is by faith. His *blood* spoke only of a crime which called on God for vengeance; for it cried to Him in testimony of his brother's sin; confessing, moreover, by this mute appeal, the present victory of Him that hath the power of death. The blood of Jesus speaks to us of better things. It tells, indeed, of ruthless murder, and is a fearful witness of the guilt and condemnation of a world whose choice was darkness, and not light. But to God, and to His people, it declares, as the blood of sprinkling, better things. It speaks to God of full atonement made for sin, while it announces to the believer the complete annihilation of the oppressor's power. Thus it speaks to us of perfect and abiding peace with God. There was no sacrificial virtue in the blood of Abel to remove the wickedness which made it flow. It was upon the murderers of Jesus that the efficacy of the blood of sprinkling was first proved. As many in Jerusalem as gladly listened to the word of grace found, in that precious blood, a full remission of their sins.¹

But besides this general contrast between the tokens, respectively, of condemnation and forgiveness, there is a peculiar force in the expression, "blood of sprinkling," in its relation to the worshipper once purged. *We are come* to it, among the other blessings of that grace wherein we stand. It is not as sinners hitherto in ignorance of grace, but as *saints*, already perfected by Christ's one offering, but who find constant need of inward renovation, and of a continuous purgation from the defilement

¹ Acts ii. 36-41.

of our daily walk,² that we are come to this blood of better testimony. It is by a frequent and earnest recurrence to the general truth of our one remission that a sense of conscious purity is maintained within our hearts. We drink the blood of Jesus that our souls may live from day to day.³

Verse 25. "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh," &c. To all these things of Christ the believer is in spirit come; the means and power of his access being the one Spirit of adoption. And shall he refuse to hear the voice which speaketh of such things? Nay, the same Spirit has already answered on behalf of all the holy brethren: "We are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."⁴ Yet in the heart of every Christian there is a constant tendency to turn away. It is by warning, therefore, mixed with promise, that God keeps His children in the place of safety. They who had heard Him when He spake on earth, refused His word. Terrors, which turned their hearts to water, wrought no change upon their evil wills. For God did not speak to Israel at Sinai with a word of *life*. There was no quickening power in the letter of commandment. Nature could therefore only act on its own instinct, which refuses from its birth the will of God.⁵ To the transgressor of the former covenant, there was no way of escape from the Law's recorded sentence; nor will there be from a far sorer judgment to the despiser of the word of grace. God speaks to us no more on earth, but from heaven and of heavenly

² John xiii.

⁴ Chap. x. 39.

³ John vi. 53-57.

⁵ Ps. lviii. 3.

things. He speaks in Jesus. To turn away from Him is to renounce salvation, and to give up life and righteousness for condemnation and eternal death.

Verse 26. "Whose voice," &c. His voice then shook the earth. But He has given promise of another and yet greater shaking. He will shake not the earth only, but also heaven. This promise had been given through the prophets, who foretold the coming day of Israel's hope.⁶ With more or less distinctness, it had been announced by almost all by whom God spake. But the particular reference in the present verse is to the remarkable prophecy of Haggai,⁷ in which the advent of Messiah, as the desire of all nations, is communicated to the feeble remnant who had set their hearts once more to build again the temple of the Lord of hosts, their God.⁸ It was in connexion with that work, and its dispiriting result,⁹ that the promise was delivered. The latter glory of the house should far exceed the former. In that *place* Jehovah would give peace. It is unnecessary to insist at length upon the non-fulfilment of this promise. Jerusalem *above* is now the city of God's peace. The true worshippers no longer seek Him where Zerobabel, and his small remnant, wrought their acceptable work. God's Minister of peace is entered for His people, not into holy places made with hands, but into heaven itself. It is there that God has set His peace, having first made it by the blood of Him who suffered death without the gate. It is from thence that it is spoken now to us. Christ is in truth the desire of all

⁶ Joel iii. 16.

⁸ Hagg. i. 14.

⁷ Chap. ii. 6-9.

⁹ Hagg. ii. 3.

nations, and in the revelation of His kingdom He will be recognized and owned as such.¹ But at present He is an object of desire only to His Church, which looks with unveiled face upon His glory. His Gospel is a derision, or a stumbling, save to them who are effectually called of God. As yet creation groans, because the time of peace is still deferred.² It will not always be delayed. For He will come into the world a second time. As the Governor among the nations, He will fill the earth with equity and peace.³

Verse 27. But His advent will be announced by one great shaking, which will move from their foundations all things which are not settled in the power of redemption. Things not established by the *grace* of Christ will be surely shaken and removed at the revealing of His *power*.⁴ "Things which are *made*" must be displaced. The expression is a very comprehensive one. In its fullest meaning it extends to the eventual dismissal of the first creation, which is to be effected at some hour of the day of the Lord, though not at its commencement.⁵ In a nearer application, it respects the general arrangements of a world in which Satan is allowed to reign until He come whose right it is to take the kingdom and

¹ Ps. lxxii. 17-19.

² Rom. viii. 19-22.

³ Ps. lxvii.

⁴ Τὸ δὲ "Ἐτι ἀπαξ," δηλοῖ τῶν σαλευομένων τὴν μετάθεσιν. The marginal rendering, "may be shaken," is to be preferred. Perhaps "change" is better than "removal" as a translation of μεταθεσις. (Comp. chap. xi. 5.) "*Veränderung*."—DE WETTE. There will be a change, as well as a destruction. The structure of human pride and Satan's crafty power, will become as chaff upon the summer threshing-floors. (Dan. ii. 35.) The kingdoms of the world, so long deceived and wasted by the prince of darkness, will become the kingdoms of Jehovah and His Christ. (Rev. xi. 15.)

⁵ 2 Pet. iii.

dominion under the whole heaven, even as He sits already by inheritance upon the throne of God in heaven. There will be a final riddance of the heavenly places from the presence of the accuser of the brethren. Both the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth, await the visitation of the coming day.⁶ The Lord will shake terribly the earth at His arising. The maker and his work will be alike confounded in that day. Things lofty, which God's word now warns in vain, will be shaken into dust when He appears. He will establish the kingdom of His Christ upon the ruin of the former things. The Lord alone will be exalted in that day.

The apostle's purpose in this present reference to the prophecy seems to have been less to remind them of the coming performance of Israel's millennial promise, than to settle and establish—while he did not cease to *warn*—their souls, by showing them in what relation the partaker of the heavenly calling stands to these prospective terrors of the Lord. “But *now* hath He *promised*,” &c. The imminence of that great shaking, while it stirred up watchfulness, should give the children no alarm. For the dissolution of the present things is a part of the believer's hope in Christ. It is a promise that they shall not long remain unchanged. For their continuance is but a prolongation of the reign of evil. There is no rest for us in *that* tranquillity. Still, solemn feelings are expected to arise in our hearts at the near prospect of the day of God. It is true that when the Lord comes nigh with clouds,

⁶ Isa. xxiv. 21.

and shows Himself to every eye, His brethren will be with Him in that glory. But the promises of God will yield a present blessing only to the watchful Christian. If we are not habitually living in His presence, we shall find no precious treasure in His words.⁷

Verses 28, 29. While then such things are daily drawing nearer, we are exhorted to look well to our own peculiar portion. As the adopted brethren of Jehovah's Christ, we are receivers of a kingdom which cannot be moved. The *everlasting* kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is already made accessible to our faith, and presently we are to enter it in person, and to reign with Him. God's kingdom is His children's sure inheritance. Grace has thus settled us upon a hope which mocks all dread from outward change. The removal of all other things will be the demonstration of the enduring stability of the kingdom which we now receive. The glory which we wait to enter is above the sphere within which God will make His power known as a destroyer or a changer of existing things. We are already, and for an eternal safe-keeping, in the hands of Him who is to shake the kingdoms, and lay low the proud throne of iniquity. We belong to God. That we may worthily acknowledge the relationships in which we stand to Him, we must hold fast the grace which has established them. If by faith we joy in Him through Jesus Christ, our hearts will be the ready servants of His will.

The world, which is ready to be shaken, is without

⁷ Ps. cxix. 72.

the fear of God. The believer, on the other hand, confesses Him before the world, both, as a servant and a son. Honour is His due as our Father; and fear, as our God.⁸ We serve Him acceptably when, in true discernment of His mercies, we no longer are conformed to this world, but, by the renewing of our minds, are transformed into the moral semblance of the only One who did His will. To have (or hold fast⁹) *grace*, is insisted on as the one great essential to a truly holy walk, just as we have already seen¹ declension from that grace associated with practical evil and profaneness of life. We cannot serve God acceptably while our hearts are uninstructed in the grace wherein we stand. True reverence and godly fear belong to those alone who realize immediate dependence upon God. In Christ He is our staff of pilgrimage, and the full river of our present joy and peace. But He never loses His essential character of perfect and uncompromising holiness. "*Our God is a consuming fire.*" What He showed Himself to be at Sinai, when He crowned the mountain with devouring flame, and what in vision He disclosed of His appearance to His prophet,² is now known to us completely in the Gospel of salvation. It is in the sacrificial death of Jesus that the perfect brightness of that holy fire is perceived.

God is eternally against all sin. But we are naturally full of sin. We have, therefore, to conduct our warfare against evil by using the strength

⁸ Mal. i. 6.

⁹ ἔχωμεν χάριν. The marginal reading agrees better with the general drift of the subject.

¹ *Ante*, chap. v. 15.

² Ezek. i.

of God against ourselves. We do this when we walk by faith and in the power of His grace. To attempt to serve Him in our own strength, is to fail with ignominy. We are not stronger than ourselves. Meanwhile, let us remember that the Holy One, whom we are bidden thus to serve, is Himself the Supplier of our utmost need. It is the God of *all* grace whom we fear and reverence in the perfection of His holiness and truth. It is He who has called us unto His eternal glory, and who already has translated us into the kingdom of His well-beloved Son. May we then hold fast grace, and thus lay up a good foundation for the coming time. Knowing the numbered days of all things present, may we lay hold upon eternal life, not satisfied with having a good hope through grace, but in the power of that grace endeavouring, while yet the opportunity of choice is left to us, to walk in ways well pleasing in His sight. May it be His children's aim to live amid the world that cares not for the things of God, as those who know Him; and because they know Him, love Him, esteeming His glory more than the pursuits which nature follows in forgetfulness that God will surely come,¹ and will be known to all as a consuming fire. He is such. But He is also OUR God—to bless us, and to keep us now, and in a little while to present us before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

¹ Is. l. 3; Matt. iii. 12; 2 Thess. i. 8.

CHAPTER XIII.

VERSE 1. The sententious exhortation¹ with which the present chapter opens is quite in harmony with what immediately precedes it. To the reverence and godly fear which, when added to the faith which holds fast grace, give the true tone to spiritual worship, they are now exhorted to join brotherly kindness. The Spirit constantly observes this order in His teaching. The faith, which, through obedience to the truth, establishes the children in the sight of God, is also a preparation for their mutual love. God is Himself the sole effective Teacher of true brotherly love.² For to know God truly, is to love, not Him alone, but all those also who are born of Him. It is when He fills the children's hearts with the light of His own gracious presence, that

¹ It is remarkable, as a characteristic feature in this epistle, that each of the things to which they are exhorted in the earlier verses of this chapter, has been previously made a subject of their commendation. Their love, their sympathy, their disregard of earthly goods, &c., had been conspicuous in their happier state. While labouring to re-establish them in grace, he exhorts them to a renewal of the former works.

² 1 Thess. iv. 9. For a confirmation of the general principle of the Spirit's teaching just alleged, see 1 Pet. i. 21, 22; 1 John v. 1; 2 Pet. i. 7, &c.

their affection flows spontaneously toward each other in the constraining power of a mightier bond.

The Hebrew brethren had shown each other much affection. While their faith was firm, and they were joying in their heavenly portion, their love was strong.³ Even in their state of spiritual declension they had not ceased to minister to the saints,⁴ and they are now exhorted to continue in this mind. As they held fast grace, and kept themselves individually in the love of God, they would abound in love toward the brethren. For brotherly kindness is a sentiment which nothing rouses into practical activity but conscious communion in our hearts with Jesus.⁵ It must wax or wane within our souls, according to the degree of warmth and brightness in which the Light of life is there enjoyed.

Verse 2. Nor should their love confine itself within the house. The God of their worship is a lover of the stranger.⁶ In His gracious philanthropy,⁷ He had succoured *them* when strangers. He had clothed them in their nakedness, and had given them His Living Bread to eat. What they had freely received, therefore, they should be ready to distribute. Their temporal not less than their spiritual blessings were the gifts of God, who sometimes put His angels into the disguise of wayfarers, that He might know if they who bore His gracious Name before the world were like Him in the largeness of their hearts. They should remember this, not doubt-

³ Chap. x. 33, 34.

⁴ Chap. vi. 10.

⁵ John xiii. xv.

⁶ Deut. x. 18, 19.

⁷ God saved us in His kindness and His love to man, *φιλανθρωπία*. (Tit. iii. 4.) Faith is an imitator of God. It is the believer alone who is capable of showing true philanthropy.

ing that the God who gave them richly all things to enjoy, would bless them largely in requital of the kindness done to those whom He commended to their love.

Verse 3. "Remember them that are in bonds," &c. Debtors as they were in love to all God's children, there were among their brethren some who had urgent and peculiar claims upon their sympathy. There were prisoners, who wore their bonds for Christ and for the Gospel. There were also others, who were suffering largely from trials natural to man. The former they are taught to consider as their *fellow-prisoners*. For they were partakers of the afflictions of the Gospel, which is the common glory of the saints. They had themselves both borne reproaches and afflictions, and had comforted by their companionship their suffering brethren.⁸ If now they were enjoying outward peace, they would not cease to think of those who still pined on in chains as evil doers, the blameless prisoners of Jesus Christ. With respect to the others who were suffering adversity, they should regard their condition, not only with sympathizing interest, because the joys and griefs of every member of Christ's body are a common interest to all, but also with a grateful sense of special mercy in their present exemption from the like distress. For while in the body they were liable to drink of the same cup. They should then remember such. The prayer of faith might mitigate their sorrow. God had opened prison doors for some, and shamed the langour of His people's faith by granting suddenly what they desired.⁹ The

⁸ Chap. x. 35.

⁹ Acts xii.

prayer of faith had often healed the sick. And even if no outward change were wrought in the estate of their afflicted brethren, yet it would rejoice their hearts, and bring much increase of thanksgiving to the Lord, to know that they were thought of in the bowels of His love.¹

Verse 4. "Let marriage be honourable in all,"² &c. God's primal institution must be honoured by His worshippers. A Christian might renounce the privilege, if, by doing so, he thought to be more free to serve the Lord. It was even better to be single, where God's adjustment of His gifts made celibacy no hard burden to the flesh.³ But whoever married in the Lord assumed an honourable place. How this verse condemns beforehand the bold wickedness of that apostasy which wrongs God doubly, first, by its lying invention of clerical distinction, and then, by degrading emphatically what God pointedly extols, has been often noticed by the simple reader of the word. Those who, instead of honour, chose dishonour, God would judge.

Verses 5, 6. "Let your conversation be without covetousness," &c. They had once taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods. Yet they are not above the necessity of a warning against covetousness.

¹ With the doctrine of verses 2, 3, we may well compare the Lord's words to His disciples in Matt. xxv., "I was a stranger, and ye took me in," &c. It was *unawares* that godly men of old received angelic guests. Not less amazing will be the glad discovery in the coming day that acts of simple kindness done for Jesus' sake are owned with everlasting recompence by Him whom angels serve, and who is afflicted in all the afflictions of his brethren here below.

² "*Ehrenwerth sei die Ehe bei allen.*"—DE WETTE. As the order of the words is exactly the same as in the following verse, it seems preferable to assimilate their construction.

³ 1 Cor. vii.

For, as they declined in grace, they had grown in selfishness. Alms might be given to the saints, while yet an anxious and heart-engrossing diligence was being exercised to add to their own worldly goods. This had ever been a chief ground of Jehovah's controversy with His people. It was "for the iniquity of his covetousness" that He had smitten Jacob with a wrathful stroke;⁴ while in the formula of thanksgiving, "Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich," with which the Spirit elsewhere indignantly upbraids His people, we seem to have an average specimen of apostate Jewish godliness.⁵ The Hebrew saints had, therefore, need of warning; lest their fathers' iniquity should also be found cleaving to their hands.

Nor is such an exhortation at all less seasonable to the Gentile saint. For, as is elsewhere said,⁶ "The love of money is the root of *all* evil," a root which, latent or confessed, exists in the heart of every living man.⁷ The true antidote to this soul-corrupting evil, is trust in God, its exactly opposing principle. Where God is trusted, money can never become an object of desire on its own account. It is as our hearts remove from Jesus, that the master-passion of natural selfishness begins to gather strength. God is the competent Provider of His people. *He has said*, "I will never leave *thee* nor forsake *thee*," to each several pilgrim of His grace. For the words with which He comforted the fathers, when He spoke to them in vision as their

⁴ Isa. lvii. 17.

⁵ Zech. xi. 5.

⁶ 1 Tim. vi. 10.

⁷ For, as need hardly be said, it is not a miserly love of *coin* for its own sake, that is here condemned, but a heart-reliance upon money for what it can effect.

Saviour and their Blessers, have been written for the nourishment of *our* faith. That godliness with contentment is great gain, was a lesson that the Hebrew saints had but imperfectly acquired. They would prove its value and enjoy abundantly its blessings, if they took God simply at His word. They daily needed Him, and by His promise He anticipated all their need. For the God of the believer is the God of salvations,⁸ not one, but many. Having given His own Son for their redemption, He withholds no good thing from the cherished people of His blessing. And He would have this known and reckoned on by us. Because of His words of faithful promise, we may speak confidently amid circumstances of the most disheartening appearance. Each one may *boldly* say, "The Lord *is* my Helper." And if we say thus much in faith, we shall not spare to add with meekness, yet with all assurance, the remainder of the Spirit's words. For man is still and harmless before the power of the Lord, who numbers, for safe keeping, all the hairs of our heads. For his temporal weal, the man whom truth has made a pilgrim need feel no alarm. The earth and its fulness are the Lord's, who loves him. Enough is promised him to speed him on his way. God shows His children only kindness, when He traverses their foolish and injurious schemes of personal aggrandizement in the present world.⁹

Verse 7. They are next exhorted not to be unmindful of those who had spoken to them the word of God, and were thus their guides and leaders¹ in

⁸ הָאֵל לָנוּ אֵל לְמוֹשָׁעוֹת. (Ps. lxxviii. 20.)

⁹ 1 Tim. vi. 9.

¹ ἡγούμενοι. "Führer."—DE WETTE.

the path of faith. It ought not to be needful to exhort them thus; for where truth is heartily enjoyed, its ministers are cherished for its sake. If we are really growing in the grace of Christ, we shall not think coldly of the chosen channels which the Spirit uses to convey refreshment to our souls. In the present passage there seems to be an especial reference to those who, having laboured in the Gospel, had already closed their warfare by a confident departure in the faith of Christ.² Their *faith* was to be imitated, for their conversation while on earth was not in vain. They did not fight like men who beat the air. They had lived and died in Jesus and for Him. Their lives were passed in travail and in trials; but they had neither wrought nor suffered without recompence. According to the measure of the grace afforded them, they had severally laboured in the vineyard of the Lord. They had run on steadily the race of patience, and had found an end of peace. They had finished their career with joy, as happy witnesses of the surpassing grace of God. And now they rested from their toils. The better lot was theirs.³ They, therefore, who remained should think of their forerunners in the race. They should strive to follow, not the outward semblance of their conversation, but the effective principle of faith which had made them thus ensamples to the flock of God. In the shining of that word of God which they had spoken, they should seek the happy path of peace in which their guides had walked.

² Although the language of the apostle is general, there is most probably an allusion, which his readers would readily appreciate, to the earlier martyrs of Jewish blood. (Comp. Acts viii. and xii.)

³ Phil. i. 23.

Verse 8. "Jesus Christ, [is] the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."⁴ Although this verse is completely independent of its context, as a declarative expression of doctrine, yet it stands in closest moral connexion with what immediately precedes it, and, as we shall presently see, with the verses which follow next in order. To an exhortation to imitate the faith of those who had led them in the way, there naturally succeeds a statement of the fundamental doctrine on which all that they had taught was based. Accordingly, the name of Jesus Christ is here presented as the substance and entirety of all sound doctrine. He is the true God, and the eternal life. In His name and in His power He is evermore SALVATION. Yesterday, to-day, and for ever He abides the same. He was the eternal Resting-place of all God's counsel. He is the present Glory and Uplifter of His people's heads. He will be for ever the full portion of their perfect joy. By naming Him, believers vindicate the hope which they profess before the world. By trusting in Him, they obtain the warrant of their present peace. By hoping in Him, they anticipate their sure reward. He is crowned already with the glory which His people wait to share. Their heavenly inheritance is secured to them in Him who has entered as their Captain of salvation on the promised rest of God. Some of their guides and teachers had already passed away, and on those remaining, time and change

⁴ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς χθὲς καὶ σήμερον ὁ αὐτὸς, καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας. It is to be much regretted, that through an erroneous punctuation (a colon only being placed at the conclusion of v. 7) in the common editions of the English Bible, the unlearned reader is often entirely mistaken in his view of this passage.

would work their sure effects. But Jesus Christ, the Shepherd and the Bishop of His people's souls, would not remove. In His continuance they would find their steadfast confidence and joy.

Verse 9. This was God's sure foundation. They were to build their souls up steadfastly on Jesus Christ. There were other doctrines which men taught in manifold variety; but in the mind of the Spirit they all of them were *strange*. For Christ is the unity of all the truth of God. The Spirit only testifies of *Him*, and of the Father's glory as revealed in Him. Instability of soul and spiritual poverty would be the certain attendants of any deviation from the sound words of the Gospel. For the name of Jesus is the home and wealth of the believing soul. The *good thing* of the Spirit's choice is grace, not meats. For in the one there would be found a sure establishment of heart with God; while in the other there was nothing that could profit. There was promise, but no performance; there was ceaseless effort, reaping only disappointment. Meats were carnal ordinances. They were, therefore, of no spiritual value, and contained no saving efficacy. They had no living virtue, and could give assurance of no blessing. For they were held and observed in the fruitless impotency of that flesh which *profiteth nothing*.⁵

Meats had been tried, and the results were plainly visible to every discerning eye. Grace too had borne its fruits in part. By faith the elders had

⁵ John vi. 63. It is evident that under the single term "meats" the apostle here comprehends the whole series of Jewish ordinances. Chap. ix. *passim*.

obtained a good report. They also who had been the teachers of these Hebrew brethren in the word of grace, had had a joyful issue to their good conversation in Christ. They were, moreover, their own witnesses in both these things. It fared better with their souls, when, in their early love, they counted all things loss for Christ, than when, through lack of constancy in looking to the Apostle and High Priest of their profession, their manly vigour had shrunk back to childish ignorance and feebleness.⁶ Their own experience would add force to an admonition which persuaded them to cease entirely from man. God knows his people's hearts, and has consulted their stability by founding them, through faith, upon Himself. Spirit, and not flesh, is the reliance of His saints. *His* work, and not their own, procures their everlasting peace. The name of Christianity must not be suffered to mislead the sheep of Christ. The most fervent professions of devotedness to Him may easily be made by those whose doctrine, nevertheless, is error and deception, rather than the truth of God. To mingle works with grace is to spoil both.⁷ The Spirit knows of no such mixture; it is confusion and darkness, instead of light and peace. God only blesses us by means of His own truth. But truth divides itself into a double testimony; first, to the sin which has ruined us completely in ourselves, and then, to the perfect grace by which God stablishes His children's hearts in Christ.⁸

Verse 10. "We have an altar," &c. Meats did not profit; it is grace that establishes the heart.

⁶ *Supra*, chap. v. 11-14.

⁷ Rom. xi. 6.

⁸ 2 Cor. i. 21.

But the believer thus established is a worshipper. He is, moreover, a *priestly* worshipper. He is fed, therefore, upon that which has first been consecrated unto God. The servants of the tabernacle were partakers of the altar. By a perpetual statute God provided for His ministers from the meat of His people's acceptable sacrifices.⁹ We also have an altar, dressed acceptably with its precious offerings, but both hidden from the view and forbidden to the touch of those who serve the earthly tabernacle.

"For (verse 11) the bodies of those beasts," &c. The meat by which the soul of the believer is sustained is the flesh of Him whose blood has been presented for him in the holiest. But to the Levitical minister it was forbidden to eat the sin-offering of atonement.¹ The bodies of the national and priestly sin-offerings of Israel were burned without the camp. They were an avoidance both to priest and worshipper. They must be consumed by fire, not upon God's altar, but as a thing accursed, without the camp wherein His tabernacle stood. While atonement was a figure only, and not a reality, the worshipper had no communion with what furnished it. But *now* the deepest and richest springs of the believer's conscious blessing are found in his discernment of the *body* as well as the precious blood of Christ. He is, accordingly, presented in the following verse as the antitype of that part of the Levitical ordinance which was performed without the camp, just as in the ninth chapter we have seen His blood conveyed for us within the veil.

Verse 12. "Wherefore, Jesus also, that He might

⁹ Numb. xviii.

¹ Lev. vi. 30.

sanctify the people² with His own blood, suffered without the gate." It is under its judicial aspect that the cross is here displayed. We see Jesus made a curse for us, numbered among the transgressors, and laden with the grievous burden of His people's iniquities. It was from this death of bitterness that the blood of our sanctification must be furnished. For the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes it is that we are healed. His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree. Unlike the former ordinance, the broken body of the sinner's Substitute is the appointed nourishment of his soul.³ The believer now has fellowship with that which, while the figure lasted, was appreciable by God alone. In the judicial abandonment of Jesus to the power of darkness, he finds the truth which loosens all his bonds. In communion with the grace unspeakable which led the Saviour thus to suffer, he first learns to think and feel rightly as a worshipper of God. He is strengthened by that meat to offer the true sacrifice of praise.

Verse 13. "Let us go forth, therefore, unto Him," &c. The cross of Jesus is the earthly meeting-place of the partakers of the heavenly calling. The Spirit leads us forth from all that has a name or standing of natural pretension, to the place of nature's ignominy and decease. Judicial death is acknowledged by the Christian to have already acted upon him in the cross of Christ. His glory, therefore, as a man, is turned to shame. By faith in Jesus he has

² Τὸν λαόν, an expression of wide significance, comprising all for whom Christ died, and in a peculiar sense the nation of Israel. (John xi. 51.) Its immediate application is, of course, to the Church alone.

³ John vi.

“crucified the flesh.”⁴ Its comeliness, not less completely than its vileness, is condemned and set aside. The confession of this is the beginning of his glory as a saint. The reproach of Christ can be borne well by those who justly estimate, by faith, the difference between the honour which men give to one another, and the glory which the God of all grace has reserved for them who now have boldness to confess Him in His Son.

God and His true altar of worship are without the camp. They who would seek Him or His honour, must inquire for Him *there*. They must consent to the reproach of Jesus crucified. There is a peculiar force in the repetition here of the expression “without the camp.” In verses 11, 12, we have seen the precious analogy which exists, in the mind of the Spirit, between the Levitical sin-offering and the suffering of Jesus, without the gate. We have now, in close moral connexion with this, an evident allusion to that solemn moment in the history of Israel, when, after their great national defection from the living God, when they changed their glory into the likeness of the gods of Egypt,⁵ Moses took the tabernacle of His presence, and pitched it without the camp.⁶ By this action he had intimated, in the most emphatic manner, that although Divine long-suffering might still bear the manners of a stiff-necked people, the Covenant had

⁴ Gal. v. 24.

⁵ Exod. xxxii.; Ps. cvi. 20.

⁶ “And Moses took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp, afar off from the camp, and called it the tabernacle of the congregation. And it came to pass, that every one which sought the Lord, went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which was without the camp.” (Exod. xxxiii. 7.)

been already broken, upon which the nation stood at Sinai. Accordingly, we find the Holy Spirit, dating from this point Jehovah's repudiation of the natural seed of Abraham. He would, indeed, return again to the camp which He had left, to occupy the tabernacle which Moses had in charge to build, and which, with all its furniture, was a figure and pattern of good things to come; but the moral standing of the people was entirely changed. Sacrifice and priestly ministration preserved them under a broken covenant of Law, and from that moment the course of true Jewish faith was a prolonged enquiry, and hopeful waiting for Him of whom Moses and the prophets spake.

On the other hand, the "uncircumcised in heart and ears," found a snare in that which should have been their preservation, and lost themselves among the shadows which should have led them to the Lord. To them, the outward ordinance was everything; and so, although repudiated by the prophets,⁷ and disallowed by the forerunner of the Lord,⁸ Israel, after the flesh, still claimed to be the people of God, and Jerusalem was, outwardly, the city of solemnities, while Jesus lived on earth. As the true Shepherd, He began to separate His own sheep from that fold before the time for laying down His life was come.⁹ His death was His deliberate rejection by the world. More emphatically, He was rejected by His *own*. He was denied by the nation which alone professed to know Him. Israel would none of Him. But God has made the blood of His

⁷ Isaiah xxx. 8, 9; Jer. vi. 30; Hosea i. 9.

⁸ Luke iii. 8.

⁹ John x.

rejected Son the sanctification of the believer for a new and heavenly calling. The Hebrew, then, who hoped in Christ, must be content to give up that which once had been his honour and chief gain. He must forsake his people for the Lord. The camp still stood; but God had quitted it. To enter on the way of life eternal, he must first pass that gate by which the Saviour had gone forth to die the death of his redemption.

A similar experience belongs to the believer at the present day. His natural birth is, generally speaking, within the limits of professing Christendom. He grows up amid associations outwardly religious, and bearing more or less distinctly an Evangelic character. The world on which his eyes are opened is professedly a *Christian* world. But when the power of the Gospel is effectually known, and, by the grace of God, the inheritor of a Christian form and tradition becomes acquainted savingly with Christ, he finds himself in a new, and as it were, a foreign relation to the former things. Like the man blind from birth, whose eyes were opened by the Son of God, he finds himself at variance with the accredited religion of the world.¹ Because of the light which he has received, he is no longer suited to the world, which, under Christian semblance, is in darkness still, and natural hatred of the light. He must, therefore, if faithful to his calling, go forth to Jesus. His place on earth is now, as then, without the camp. The reproach of His cross has not yet ceased for those, who, in the true discernment of the grace of God, desire to walk worthy

¹ John ix.

of His name. It is He who by His Spirit still leads forth His sheep. For within there is no fellowship for them that glory in His cross. Flesh and blood cannot enter into the kingdom of God; nor can nature perform the worship of the Spirit. The altar of our sacrifice is far away from that which vainly sends up lip-service to the Searcher of all hearts, or consecrates self-righteousness as an acceptable offering to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 14. "For here we have no continuing city,"² &c. It cannot be; for our city is in heaven. The former clause of this verse is often on the lips of men who use it rather to express reluctant acquiescence in man's natural vanity, than as a plain declaration that they are estranged from earthly things by the bright attraction of a better and heavenly inheritance. But the spiritual man *disowns* continuance here. His desire is wholly in the future. He is *waiting*, not abiding, in his present life. Amid the dwellings which the world builds solidly for permanent endurance, he has an altar and a moving tent. Although Babylon's allurements are

² Let the reader observe again the dispensational contrast here implied. Israel *had* an abiding city here. They will have such again, when the promise is fulfilled which has established Zion's palaces upon a long-enduring base. (Ps. xlviii.; Jer. xxxi. 38-40.) In the land of promise they will long enjoy their portion. (Isaiah lxxv.) But we, whose *mansions* are in heaven, have only pilgrimage on earth. We cannot have a settlement in heaven *and* on earth. The reproach of Christ, which is His people's glory, is the world's contradiction of the rights of Jesus. To bear this, we must be without the camp. The certain consequence of an imperfect apprehension of the heavenly calling, is conformity to the world by those whose calling is to shine in it as witnesses of Him who is in heaven. It is impossible to overrate the importance of these things. God is glorified according to the distinctness and fidelity with which the special truth of the existing dispensation is confessed.

around his path as visible enticements every day, he has less temptation, if his faith be simple, to become a *settler* than the patriarchs of old. For they knew that long years intervened betwixt them and their soul's desire. It is not so with us who look for Jesus. For He has not set the measure of our patience. Neither times nor seasons are the subject of the Spirit's tidings, who announces to us that the Saviour is *at hand*. Men naturally seek their rest in present things. They have, or wish to have, a long abode on earth. Because their treasure is not Christ, they are not looking for the city where He dwells. The promise of His coming sounds unwelcome in their ears. To one who dwells within the camp, the predicted "end of all things" is the breaking up of the foundations of his rest. The close of the believer's patience is the beginning of the world's alarm.

Verse 15. "By Him, therefore," &c. Outside the camp the Christian finds himself with God. His altar and the preparation for His acceptable worship, are provided there. It is by Jesus, whom the world disowns, that we are called to offer now the sacrifice of praise; a service which finds no free exercise within the camp. For it can be rendered only by the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh. Their rejoicing is only in Christ Jesus. The pleasant odour of their offering is the believing celebration of His love. The sacrifice of praise which God accepts is the fruit of lips which make confession of His name.³ The praise which God thus looks for from

³ Καρπὸν χειλέων ὁμολογούντων τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ. The name,

the heirs of His salvation, should not only find utterance at particular seasons, but be always on our lips. It is looked for by the God of our worship as a *continual* sacrifice; for it is the believer's recognition of an abiding Saviour. Time and circumstance, which tell so powerfully on the children's natural experiences, are incapable of altering the Spirit's note of praise. For Christ, who is the song of the believer, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. In Him we find a joy unspeakable and full of glory, amid the needful heaviness of our manifold temptations. Praise is the Spirit's contrast to the godless hilarity of the natural man. To be abounding in the faith, with thanksgiving, is a true token of the Christian's spiritual growth. With a solemn consciousness of his position in a world which is not "of the Father," the believer is to put away, as inconvenient and incongruous, the former things. While the world rejoices in its own inventions, unmindful of the woe in which its laugh must be extinguished,⁴ God's children are to stand arrayed in their Divinely-furnished comeliness of thanksgiving and praise.⁵

Verse 16. "But to do good," &c. While our own lips are to be fruitful in the praise of God, we should seek also to open more abundantly the lips of others.⁶ God loves a free communicator of His gifts. But Christian beneficence is regarded as a *sacrifice*. It is to be rendered, that is, for the love of Him to whom the life of the believer is a thanks-

that is, of Jesus. The object of our praise being the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Comp. Phil. ii. 11.)

⁴ Luke vi. 25.

⁵ Ps. xxxiii. 1; Eph. v. 4; Jas. v. 13.

⁶ 2 Cor. ix. 11-13.

giving. The parsimonious parings which are grudgingly bestowed, rather to still a legal conscience, than to succour Jesus in His needy people, can give no pleasure to the God of *grace*. He knows who pour the richest gifts into His treasury. *Faith*⁷ enters as a principal ingredient into every acceptable work. A feeling of natural kindness may find pleasurable exercise in an active benevolence; but, no doubt, this is no sacrifice. For we have nothing truly our own to give, but what we first received from God; and if, in forgetfulness of this, we do our kindness independently of Him, we both wrong Him and deceive ourselves.

Verse 17. "Obey them that have the rule," &c. They should obey their leaders, and submit themselves. For in doing so they honoured Him who had made them overseers of the flock of God. They were not to think of them as masters, but as faithful guides. For they watched for their souls, and were accountable to the chief Shepherd for their charge. Themselves exemplifying in love the doctrines which they taught, they joyed or grieved, according to the spiritual condition of their brethren. In the love of the Spirit, and not by forced constraint, they had given themselves to be their servants, and the helpers of their joy. While, therefore, steadfastness of faith and godly order were observed, the labour of their guides would be a pleasure and reward. If carnal liberty were claimed, and, in the foolish jealousy of ignorance, they despised the Spirit's distribution of His gifts, it would fill the hearts of those who tended them

with sorrow, while they would reap no profit from the fruit of their own way.

Verses 18, 19. "Pray for us," &c. He was himself a watcher for their souls. In that character, and in the consciousness of grace and power from the Lord, he had exhorted them, rebuked them and instructed them. He had probed to the quick the seat of their spiritual disease, and he had wisely ministered the true restorative of their souls. As one set over them, he could direct them with authority; for his responsibilities were not to them, but to the Lord. But if he was their guide and teacher, he was also their companion in their tribulation and their hope. As a partaker of Christ, he was a sharer of their common joy. As one, moreover, who had been put in trust to keep the Master's charge, he felt his own infirmity, and desired to be strengthened through their prayers. It is more than likely⁸ also, that he was in bonds for Christ, when he thus addressed his Hebrew brethren. But if so, he wore them lightly. For his confidence was steadfast in the sight of Him who tries the hearts. He was conscious of no evil, though for the Gospel he might suffer trouble as an evil-doer even unto bonds.⁹

He sought their sympathy as one who suffered blamelessly. But besides this, he desired still more earnestly that through their prayers he might re-

⁸ Morally certain, to my own mind. But as the epistle contains no positive mention of his bonds (the translation in x. 34, "my bonds" having been made from what is allowed to be a wrong reading), I prefer stating it as above. Perhaps the language of verse 23 may justify a supposition that he was no longer in confinement, but, from some cause not explained, prevented from immediately re-visiting Palestine.

⁹ 2 Tim. ii. 9.

visit them once more. It is a gracious picture. He does not put them in remembrance of his apostolic dignity, and, as it were, dictate their supplications for himself, as if his liberty were indispensable to their well-being. But in the zeal of his affectionate desire, and in the happy spirit of confiding love, he urges his request. He reckoned on a due appreciation, on their parts, of his fervent love. He reckoned, also, on the ready answer of the Lord to prayers which sought the furtherance of His people's joy.

Verses 20, 21. "Now the God of peace," &c. To his expressed desire for their prayers, succeeds a full and blessed utterance of his own valedictory request on their behalf. God is invoked for His children as the God of *peace*. The special subject of his prayer was their practical adornment of the doctrine of their God and Saviour. But to serve God acceptably, they must know Him well. Their souls must be established and made glad by their perception of *His* work, before the necessary strength can come to bring forth fruits of righteousness well pleasing in His sight. Accordingly, his prayer for them in the Holy Ghost uplifts the countenance of the God of peace on them and on their works. God had entitled Himself to their full confidence as the Maker of their peace. For He had brought again from death the Shepherd whom the sword of judgment had smitten in their stead. They had come to put their trust beneath the shadow of His wings who had called to them from heaven as the God of peace. Thus he once more shows them, in his parting words, the firm security on which their hope is built.

God's peace is not a truce of time, but an agreement for eternity. For it is based upon the blood of an Eternal Covenant. By means of sacrificial death all enmity has been destroyed, and only love remains. The heirs of God's salvation are as sheep which have a shepherd. The Lord, who died to save them, has returned again to life, to fold in perfect peace the flock which He has purchased by His blood. By a secret resolution of the counsels of the Godhead, that blood was shed in righteousness. Having flowed to satisfy the just inflexibility of Holiness, it is become the security of an open and abiding Covenant of grace and mercy to believing sinners. Peace is therefore now the just expression of God's holiness to the believer. He blesses us in Christ. To the *great* Shepherd, He commits His flock in peace. By bringing Jesus from the dead, He has acknowledged the validity of His atonement. By confessing Jesus, in His death and resurrection, to be *our* Lord, we place ourselves by faith within the sure bond of the everlasting Covenant of peace.

God's people work His works. But the strength in which they do this is the grace in which they stand; faith alone being the instrumental means of doing what is pleasant in the sight of God. The desire of the apostle was his brethren's perfection in *every* good work; and he looks for the accomplishment of this desire to the God of peace. For God is the Doer of His people's acceptable works; by His Spirit He effects in them compliance with His will. To own this truth, and act on it in faith, is the perfection of obedience. Jesus has led us in this faith.

“My father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works,” were His words when just about to consummate in death, for our sakes, the work of that obedience through which we stand unblamably before the God of peace.¹ It is a faithful discernment of this fundamental maxim that alone confers on the believer a competency for the doing of all works which God calls good.²

Thus he quiets every fear and misgiving which his heart might feel on their account, by casting all their burden, and his own, upon the God of peace. *He* was bringing His own many sons to glory. In due time He would bid them everlasting welcome to His rest. Meanwhile, He was their Keeper; and He did not slumber in His charge. In Christ, God would preserve both him and his dear brethren in peace. To Jesus, the Great Shepherd, they should look for the needed pasture of their souls, even as through His intercession, as their great High-priest, they held perpetually a sure standing as God’s acceptable people. Their obedience unto well pleasing as beloved children would result from their full enjoyment, through the Spirit, of the holy liberty with which the Son of God had made them free.

Verse 22. And now his work of faithful love is at an end; and having finished it, he offers it to their acceptance, in a tone of earnest and affectionate entreaty. He would have them take his exhortation in the same spirit, both of brotherly affection and of glad submissiveness to God,³ which had moved him to write it for their sakes. From God, and in His sight, he had taught them in the doctrine of His

¹ John xiv. 10.

² John xv. 5; Phil. iv. 13.

³ Chap. vi. 3.

Son. When he thought upon the greatness of the subject he had treated, and regarded his epistle as a token of the love he bore them in the Lord, his words, though many, seemed to him but few. Yet he had said all that the Spirit gave him then to say. He had, therefore, said enough.

Verse 23. But he would not close his letter without apprising them of what he knew they would rejoice to hear, even as it gladdened his own heart to tell it. One of the prisoners, whose bonds they shared in spirit, was now free. Moreover, he had himself full expectation of soon witnessing and participating in the joy of their re-union in the flesh. He trusted that the Lord, who had procured His servant's liberty, might also add this further blessing both to him and them.

Verse 24. He had begun his letter without greeting, entering at once upon the rich and weighty subject of his "exhortation." He concludes it by a salutation both to them and to their guides. In this expression of His love the saints of *Italy* unite. From the manner of this salutation, there is room for an inference that this epistle was not addressed to them from Rome; and what is said in the preceding verse, respecting Timothy, may be taken to support this view. The scene of Timothy's imprisonment was at some other place than where the writer of this salutation at the time resided, whether then in bonds or free. If Timothy came shortly, he would bring him to the Hebrew saints. On the whole, it seems probable, that the epistle was written after his release from his imprisonment at Rome, but that he felt himself detained still for

a season in Italy. No evidence, however, is known to exist from which definitive conclusions may be formed respecting the sequel of the apostle's personal history, from the close of his two years' residence at Rome.⁴ It is a point which may interest critics, but the solution of which would add nothing to the solid blessing of the believer.

May the closing benediction (verse 25) of the Spirit be continually with the Christian reader of these Notes. *Amen.*

⁴ Acts xxviii. 30.

THE END.