

LIFE EVERLASTING:

A DIALOGUE

CN

THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION TO ALL WHO
RECEIVE THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

JOHN I. 11, 12.

“THE NIGHT IS FAR SPENT.”

Romans xiii. 12.

“I have written unto you that believe on the name of
the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have
Eternal Life.” 1 John v. 13.

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A DIALOGUE

ON

THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION TO ALL WHO
RECEIVE THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

JOHN I. 11, 12.

WELL, John, I am so glad that you have called this evening, for I want to ask you what you think of the Christian's eternal safety. Do you not think that by walking carelessly he may fall into sin, and be lost after all?

Do you mean, Thomas, that any one may perish, after he is born of God by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Yes, John. I have been looking into this subject lately, through things that have happened in our village. And I have no doubt whatever but that such may go into the world again, and undo all that has been done. How many do we see, after professing religion for a time, gradually fall away, and die in their sins!

This is too true, Thomas, of many who have made a profession of religion, as you say; but it cannot be true of the feeblest believer, for to him is given eternal life, and it would not be eternal if it could be lost. That which is eternal continues for ever, it has no end. And how happy for our souls that it is so! And how blessed also to know that the life which God has given every true believer is the resurrection life of His own dear Son.

This is saying great things, John. You know how Adam failed in the garden, and lost the blessed position he was in.

Yes, Thomas, but God is now dealing with man on different ground altogether. He is not proving him. This He did in various ways in days of old, and found him to be utterly worthless and good for nothing, but an object for His mercy and love. Therefore God is not looking for anything from man now, but is giving eternal life to all who see their need of it. He is saying, "Whosoever will, let him come and take the water of life freely." He has given His Son from His throne; and "he that hath the Son, hath life"—life on the other side of death, and therefore death cannot touch it. Life also beyond testing: just the opposite to that which Adam had in Eden. The life given to Him was tested, and, as you say, he failed and lost it. But the life which God is now giving is the eternal life of His beloved Son, who was faithful unto death, and is alive again for evermore. And God is now bringing into the relationship of children with Him all who believe, and will very shortly conform them to His image, and give them bodies like His own, so that they may spend an eternity with Him, in unclouded glory, where a sigh or tear will be known no more for ever. (Gal. iii. 26; 1 John iii. 2.) This is much more than Adam lost, and is as sure and certain as God's eternal throne, to all who receive the Lord Jesus Christ.

But, John, we read in Matthew xxiv. that "he that endureth to the end the same shall be saved;" and I have thought that eternal life would be given at the end of a life of faithfulness to God down here, but that we shall lose it if we are unfaithful.

This, Thomas, would be putting us into a similar position to that of Adam in the garden, a place of testing;

and if salvation depended on our endurance, or our faithfulness, I do not know who would have it. And yet we must be faithful, and holy too, "For without holiness no man shall see the Lord." And in the same chapter we read of those who will be stedfast, and endure, and it is impossible for them to be deceived. An unseen hand has hold of them, and they are attracted to an unseen One, and nothing else will satisfy them. There may be voices on every hand, saying, "Lo here, and lo there," but they have heard the voice of that good Shepherd, and they have no ear for another. Their souls are attracted to Him, and all else is vain.

So is it now with those who really believe. The world may come with its allurements, but it has lost its charm; its spell is broken, and they are on their way heavenward, and cannot go back, neither have they any desire to do so. Christ has won their heart, and they will never be satisfied till they see him. They feel lonely and sorrowful, because they are in a world where He is not. And often sigh, and long for the time to come, when they will be with Him and like Him for ever.

I do not say that they do not sin; for, alas, they often do. And "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us," for we still have the old nature unchanged as well as the new. The new nature is of God and cannot sin; but the old is as bad as ever it was, and must be watched against and kept under, or it will cause a great deal of sorrow and suffering, and rob our souls of much blessing, as well as dishonour God; and therefore cause Him to judge us in present chastisement, as a father doth his children; that we should not be condemned with the world. It is of course very sorrowful, and sad, to oblige Him to do this. But then it is well to know, that there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, where all true believers are.

It is very happy to look at God's people in this way,

John ; but how is it that we see so many go after present things, and leave things eternal ? The apostle Paul tells us of Demas in his day, who had forsaken him, having loved this present world ; but who before had been one of his fellow labourers, and sent his salutations to the saints at Colosse. Surely there must have been something real and true in Demas at that time. But you see he went into the world, and we hear of him no more.

No, Thomas, we do not ! And to us it would seem as if there must have been something true in him, as you say. And perhaps he was brought back again with much sorrow. But we read of a class of people in the first epistle of John, who went out from them, that it might be made manifest that they were not of them. And, alas, it has been the same in all ages, and it is so to-day.

Their hearts perhaps were attracted by the sweet spirit of the gospel, on the one hand ; or, on the other, they may have been filled with fear, because of coming judgment, and so endured for awhile, but in time of temptation fell away ; and, like the dog, they turned to their own vomit again, or like the sow that was washed, they wallow in the mire. Had they truly received Christ, this would not have been. They who love Him hate iniquity, it is sorrow to them.

Believers are Christ's sheep ; and sheep like to be clean. You never hear of them delighting in the mire as swine do. I once asked an old shepherd, who had been among sheep fifty years and more, if he ever saw one do so. He looked surprised at the question, and said No. He never thought of such a thing before. They may, if they are not careful, sometimes fall into a slough, and get themselves very dirty, but they are very unhappy while there, and will get out again as soon as they possibly can, because they loathe it, it is an abomination to them.

So is it with the man who has the Spirit of Christ, he likes to be clean. He is spoiled for the world, and the world for him. He may be led astray by it for a time, if he is not careful like a sheep enticed away by forbidden pasture; but he will not find in it what he wants; its enjoyment will be gone, and he will pierce himself through with many sorrows.

Once upon a time I heard a sheep bleating most piteously, as I passed along, and on looking round I saw it had got into a very dirty place, where it could not get out again, and was apparently very miserable on account of it. I never had greater delight in doing anything than I had in helping it to escape, although I got myself very much splashed while doing so. Had it been a sow, she would not have been uncomfortable however clean she might have been washed before, but would have lain down and wallowed in it, with real delight, because it is her nature to do so.

But you see, John, the passage shews, that the sow *had* been washed, and therefore had been made clean, and afterwards fell away, and perhaps was lost after all.

Yes, Thomas, but the truth is, she never had been saved; she had never been made a sheep of Christ by believing in His name. Many a wicked man receives light and knowledge, as Saul, king of Israel did, but not life and love through believing. And he may give up his evil doings for a time, as did Simon Magus, but his heart was not right with God. Therefore he was still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. He never gave Christ His rightful place therein; and therefore never knew the sweetness of redeeming love.

There may have been a great deal of excitement; but excitement is not Christ, and mostly it soon passes away. And though many are outwardly washed by it for a time, and leave off their evil doings, and walk like children of God, yet not having new life, they still

love sin, and by and by turn to it again, with greater delight than ever, and enjoy the world all the more for having left it for a time.

People of this character are fully described in Hebrews vi. There was a great deal of feeling and power in those spoken of there, but not one spark of faith and love. Had they passed from death unto life by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, they never would have done as they did. One spark of love to Him is better than all the power and feelings in the world. You may have the tongue of men and of angels, and give all your goods to feed the poor; but if you have not love to Christ, you are nothing. 1 Corinthians xiii.

You speak very plainly, John.

Yes, Thomas, it is the language of scripture, and therefore must be plain, and simple too, as all scripture is. The Lord Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." So that what characterizes the sheep of Christ is that they follow Him.

It may be very feebly, and very awkwardly too, as sheep at the best of times are but poor silly things, and make a thousand mistakes; but notwithstanding all, they follow on, nothing else will do for them. Perhaps sometimes at a distance through weakness, and scarcely knowing which way to go, they lose the footsteps of the flock.

Or, if they are not careful, they may for a time get entangled with the thorns and briars of the wilderness, or even slip into a loathsome slough if they go too near the edge of it, and thereby dishonour that name by which they are called, and bring upon themselves and others much suffering and sorrow.

David went too near the edge of that pit more than

once, and fell in, and never escaped the consequence of it as long as he was on the earth. And so did Peter, and many others, and they would have remained there, had not that good Shepherd delivered them, restoring their souls, and leading them again in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. They were forgiven, though they never forgave themselves, and felt the smart of it all the rest of their journey through.

But though the sheep lose much blessing and get much sorrow by following at a distance, still they love the Shepherd's voice. The name of Jesus is sweet to their souls. They are His sheep, and never can perish, however perplexed they may be with present things. John x.

The Lord Jesus, speaking to His Father about this little flock, said, "I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil." "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." And again, speaking to His disciples, He said, "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you; let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

This is very comforting, John, and I like it very much; but do you not think it is very difficult to understand in such days as these?

It is well for us, Thomas, that our blessing does not depend on our understanding, but on our believing. Our minds often get into confusion because we trouble ourselves about things we cannot understand. It is the believing God's word that brings real blessing, not the understanding it.

We may find a thousand things in scripture we cannot comprehend; they may be too high for us. For God's ways are so far above our ways, and His thoughts above our thoughts. But we get peace and joy in our souls, and honour Him by believing what He tells us.

All things are possible to him that believeth, though they may be impossible and all confusion to the wise of this world. The ways of God are simple to the child, while they confound the philosopher.

I heard of one such trying to shew a poor old woman that it was impossible for a whale to have swallowed Jonah, because its throat is not large enough. "Ah," the old woman said, "that is nothing to me ; for if the word of God said that Jonah swallowed the whale, I should believe it." This is the faith that honours God, and is life everlasting, as the Lord Jesus said, " Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life ; and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." John v. 24.

Could such go out and enjoy the world again, with all its corruptions ? Never, no, never ! Speak to one who has salvation, and see what he will say to you ! You would find his soul shrink back with horror at the very thought. Not because of coming judgment merely, but because of what sin is in itself, and what it cost Him, whom his soul loves. Abhorrence of sin, and love to Christ are the instincts of the divine nature in the believer ; his soul longs after holiness.

Well, John, I am sure this is how it is with me. I hate iniquity because I know God hates it, and I love righteousness because I know that God is righteous ; and yet I am in continual fear of being led astray by sin, for I find it mixed up with everything I do and say, I am so vile.

This is very good so far, Thomas ; but the truth is, you do not see yourself half vile enough ; so utterly worthless and good-for-nothing that you cease to have any hope in yourself in any way whatever. You still think there is, or ought to be, some little goodness or strength in yourself, and so you go labouring and toil-

ing on, day after day, and never knowing what rest or peace of soul is.

You so remind me of a circumstance I heard of, a short time back. A gentleman was travelling in a railway carriage, and spoke to his fellow passengers about their lost state as sinners before God, and their need of a Saviour. This they did not like. But after a time one of them thought he might have a few spots on him, like a specked apple, but he did not think he was lost. He was then asked if he did not think he was specked all over. Well, with a little looking into his state, he thought perhaps it might be so. He was then further asked if he did not think he was like an apple that was rotten all through. No, this he could not think; but even if it were so, the apple had a pip inside, which, with a little care and culture, might be made to grow up into a beautiful tree. He was then told that apple, pip and all, were rotten together, so that there was no hope for him in himself, in any way whatever; but if he obtained salvation, it must be wholly through the work of another, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This was too humbling for him. He could not stoop low enough to enter heaven on such humiliating terms as these, so he turned away. Had there been anything pointed out for him to do, he most likely would have been pleased, and have done it with all his might, no matter how laborious, or menial it might have been. But to be told that he could do nothing! this human nature does not like. It always revolts against it.

I am afraid, Thomas, that this is how it is with you. You do not see that you are utterly lost, and therefore you are trying to make this little pip, which you think you have, grow. Whereas, if you really saw that you had not one good thing in you—and were entirely without strength, hopeless and helpless in every way, so that you cannot do the least thing whatever toward your salvation, nor yet even keep it, if you had it—you would then be glad to turn away from yourself, and

your own doings, and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your all.

Then you could delight yourself in Him and what He had done for you, when He died and put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And if He put it away, it is gone for ever, out of God's sight. We who believe are spotless before Him, through the precious blood of Christ: washed, and sanctified, and justified. 1 Corinthians vi. 11.

But though this is so blessedly true of all who believe, yet sin is still in us, and therefore we have to mortify the deeds of the body, and shall as long as we are down here. But before God the old thing is dead. We are looked at by Him as having died in Christ, and buried in Him, also risen with Him in resurrection life, and soon to be with Him in resurrection glory. (Col. ii, 12, 13; iii. 1-4.) Therefore the Christian ceases to belong to this present scene altogether. Hence he hates its corruptions, and loathes himself because of sin.

Many of God's dear children are in continual bondage, through not seeing this. They do not know that their safety is in Christ. They think they have to stand in their own strength, and walk by their own wisdom. Therefore they go on day after day, labouring and toiling, in heaviness of soul, and have no lasting joy, because they are not sure how it will be with them in the end. They think their future in some way depends on themselves, instead of knowing that Christ has done it all, and their eternal security is in Him. He has said, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

I was speaking to an old gentleman a short time back—an excellent good man, as we should say—and he told me that he had been a preacher of the gospel for forty years. But he described himself as being like a man climbing up a very steep mountain on his hands and knees, and did not know that he should ever reach the top. He was not sure but he might make a slip, and miss the mark after all.

Whoever this preacher is, John, he has told out my condition exactly, for I am just in the same state.

This I can quite believe, Thomas, and therefore as far as you can, you are becoming your own saviour. Not intentionally, but it is so in reality. And you could not dishonour Christ more, because you are virtually saying, that what He has done is not sufficient for your salvation, but it requires a little of your own labour to make it good; when you know the Lord Jesus said, "It is finished," as He bowed His head in death.

Oh yes, John, I know the Son of God did that great work His Father gave Him to do, and nothing can be ever added to it, or taken from it. I am as sure of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, as I should if I had been an eye witness to it all. But how the blessedness of it becomes ours, is another thing; and after having once obtained it, whether we may not lose it again; this is the great question with me. I think if this were once settled in my soul, I should be happy indeed.

But, John, how do you understand that passage in the epistle to the Romans, "To them who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory and honour, and immortality, eternal life"?

Well, Thomas, eternal life is spoken of in scripture both in the present and in the future. And here it is in the future, but it is present also, and good works are the fruit of it. How did the dying thief get salvation, by works or by believing? You must have the blessing first, and then will flow out all these things; "Patient continuance in well doing."

The apostle John said, "I have written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life." Not *shall* have it; but *have* it now.

It is such joy to know that all becomes ours by believing, and with it power to walk so as to please God. We become His children by faith in Christ Jesus ; children by birth and not by adoption merely. "He that loveth is born of God." And you know how it is with your own children. If they are naughty and self-willed, you chastise them, but you never think of turning them out of doors as if they were not yours, and nothing would grieve you more than for one of them to think so. You delight in seeing them happy in the knowledge that they are your children, a part and parcel of yourself, and that every interest you have is in them. This is much more than adoption.

You may bring a child into your family out of the streets, and clothe him and educate him, and in every way treat him as your child ; but he never could be. Neither would he ever have the full liberty of a child in your presence, however kind you might be to him. He would always have the consciousness that you were not his father, and if he did not behave himself, you might open the door and tell him to walk out again. He would have no claim of *relationship* as a child upon you, and there would always be a measure of fear in his mind when in your presence, however you might try to remove it. But how sad for one of your own children to have that fear !

And God is bringing believers into His family by birth as well as by adoption, so that they can say, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God ; and it doth not appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." (1 John iii. 2.) And again we read that, "both He that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified, are all of one [one family], for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." Hebrews ii. 11.

There is no uncertainty about this great question, for all is as sure and real as God can possibly make it to them that believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The

Father would not be happy to have one of His children lost which He hath begotten again by the word of truth.

This is delightful, John. But would it not allow Christians to live as they like, if they thought they never could perish ?

Yes, Thomas ; but what do Christians like ? Do they love iniquity ? Can they enjoy the world and its pursuits ? If they can, the Lord Jesus cannot ; therefore they are just the opposite to Him ; and “ if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His,” whatever he may profess. All who are united to Christ, love what He loves, and hate what He hates. Their desire is to please God, and they mourn if they grieve Him. The scriptures tell us that, “ If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

They who know how clean they are in God’s sight, through the precious blood of Christ, will seek to keep themselves clean. This is so naturally. When you go out with your best things on, boots and all clean, you avoid every dirty place you come to. You go round ever so far, rather than go through the mire. But when you have your working things on, you are not so careful. So is it with those who know their happy place in Christ—whiter than snow before God through His precious blood. They then avoid the pollutions of this world, and turn away from everything that would be calculated in any way to bring a spot or stain upon them.

The moment the prodigal returned to his father’s house, he was clothed in the best robe of that house ; a robe worthy of his father ; also a ring given for his hand, and shoes for his feet—shoes in which he could walk faithfully for God down here. And having once tasted the bread of the father’s house, and the fatted calf, and known the father’s love, he did not want the poverty and husks of the far-off country any more, but

would blush when he thought of his former naughty ways.

This is very easily understood, John ; but how is it that the Philippians were told to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling ? Phil. ii. 12. .

Nothing is more simple than this, Thomas, because their souls were saved already by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts xvi. 30-34.) But then they had to work out their own salvation or deliverance from the evils by which they were surrounded, and this was an every-day thing with them, and so it is with us too.

God delights in seeing those who are saved, walking as saved ones, as His children indeed without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, shining as lights in the world, living soberly, godly, and righteously ; and He works in them to this end, both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

God cannot work in the unbeliever in this way ; he must first receive Christ, and with Him he will have life and salvation ; and then God can fulfil in him all the good pleasure of His will, and the work of faith with power. But man without Christ is dead in trespasses and sins, and therefore cannot please God.

But, John I have always been told that the Lord Jesus procured salvation for us by dying on the cross, and it is ours by working it out, in works of holiness and love, as you say ; and if we do not work it out, we shall not have it.

I am sorry you have been taught such things, Thomas ; for if it were so, then Christ would only have done one half the work of our salvation, and we the other ; we should have as much to do in it as He Himself, and therefore should have something to glory in before God ; and never could join that ransomed throng, around the

throne, where they sing, saying, "Thou art worthy, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood."

We could not give Christ *all* the glory, if we had so much to do in it ourselves. But having salvation as a free gift, eternally secured to us through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, we can then lose sight of ourselves, and our own doings, and thank and praise Him who has done it all for us ; and it is then and then only that we bring forth fruit unto God.

But there is another scripture, John, very similar to it, where the apostle spoke of himself and of them which were with him, and said, "We labour that whether present or absent we may be accepted of Him." This does not seem as if the apostle was really sure of his acceptance at last. 2 Corinthians v. 9, 10.

I am glad you have referred to this scripture, Thomas, because it brings out a most important principle ; but not of life and salvation, as you think. Suppose you had an occasion to leave home for a short time, and were to say to your children, Now I am not sure when I shall come back ; I hope you will keep everything in order, and behave yourselves properly while I am away. You then gave each of them something to do, also a little position to fill, and hoped they would do it well.

If they faithfully observed what you said to them, how delighted they would be when they heard the sound of your feet at the door, on your return ; and with what joy would they run and throw themselves into your arms ! What a happy acceptance or approval they would have by you ! You would notice every little thing they had done properly.

But suppose they forgot what you had said to them, and began to please themselves, and were not careful to do that which you had given them to do ; but allowed the things of the house to get all in disorder. ■

that there was scarcely one thing in its place ; would they be accepted or approved of by you on your return ? No, quite the contrary ! They would hold down their heads with shame, instead of throwing themselves into your arms with joy. Still they would be your children. In this way the apostle, and those that were with him, sought to be approved by the Lord Jesus on His return ; “for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and give an account of ourselves to God.” And their desire was, that they might do it with joy, and not with grief. Romans xiv. 10, 11, 12 ; Hebrews xiii. 17 ; 1 John ii. 28.

Then, John, you do not think it was the thought of being received into eternal blessedness, when they left this world, do you ?

No, Thomas, it could not be, or, as we have said before, salvation would be obtained on the ground of works, which is just the opposite to the gospel. It is so important to see the difference between being saved, and our happy responsibility to Him who has saved us.

The Lord Jesus is gone away, and He is coming again to take us to Himself, that where He is there we may be also. And He has given each one of us a little service to do, and a little position to fill for Him during His absence ; and by and by on His return, He will look over what we have been doing, and approve of all that has been done from love to Himself. But this only applies to those who are saved. Those who are not, want forgiveness of sins, and life everlasting.

What do you think, John, of the parable of the vine and the branches, in John xv. ? To me it is so very solemn. I have many times read that chapter and trembled.

I do not wonder at it, Thomas, with your thoughts

of salvation. I am surprised you are so calm and quiet as you are, standing on such a tottering foundation. Though I am sure there is nothing in that chapter to make the feeblest believer tremble, but quite the contrary; for nothing is more simple, or more beautiful, if you take it in its simplicity; because it is a question of fruit bearing, and not of salvation.

The Lord Jesus is shewing His disciples where they will obtain power to bring forth fruit unto God. It is by abiding in the vine, that is, Himself; for, said He, "without me ye can do nothing." This also is true to-day.

We have no resource in ourselves, or in each other, nor in anything of man. All our springs are in Him. From Him is our fruit found. Therefore it is for believers to let this fruit come out in their life and conversation.

The Lord Jesus is the true vine, and believers are the branches; and what characterises them is, that they bring forth fruit unto God; whereas those who are there only by profession do not. They may profess very largely, and make a great show, "but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." (Gal. v. 22, 23.) These are real fruits unto God, and He is glorified in them. But if the fruit is lacking, the life is also. This is the teaching of the chapter.

I well remember being quite confounded when I was a boy on seeing a gardener pruning a vine, and I said to him, It seems to me that you are destroying it by cutting it all to pieces. You are taking off these large beautiful branches, and here they lie about under our feet in the greatest confusion.

But he smiled and said, They are only runners; they never bear fruit, and are fit for nothing but the fire; it is these little branches here, which you are not noticing, where the fruit will be: you watch them, and you will see they will gently unfold themselves, day after

day, and by and by will produce beautiful clusters of grapes.

I then saw how very tenderly he handled those valuable little buds, and how carefully and firmly he fixed each one against the wall, so that no harm might come to them should a storm arise; at the same time removing every little thing that was calculated in any way to hinder their growth.

This was very useful to me in after days, for I saw very plainly that the Lord Jesus was the vine, as He said, and that believers are these little fruit-bearing branches, and that they have power to do so just in proportion as they adhere to, and receive sap from, the vine. Then the natural result is, that the fruit comes forth spontaneously, without noise or effort.

But you see, John, they are all spoken of as branches, both they that are cut off, and they that are not.

Yes, Thomas; God always speaks of individuals where He finds them. If they profess to be His servants, He speaks of them as such; and if they profess to be branches of the vine, He speaks of them in the same way. How many are there who make a great profession, but they have never seen themselves to be sinners, lost and undone before God; and therefore have never truly received the Lord Jesus Christ. They know nothing of passing from death unto life through believing in Him; but still love this present evil world. And though they are in the vine by profession, they do not belong to it, and will by and by be removed for the fire, if they continue as they are.

We see the same thing in the parable of the hundred sheep. They are all called sheep, but only one of them is spoken of as lost (or knows himself to be so). The ninety and nine are just persons (or think themselves to be so); they are not aware that they have

gone astray ; just such as abound now on every hand. You speak to them, and ask them if they see themselves to be lost sinners before God ; they will look surprised and tell you No. They act uprightly, pay every one their own, go to church or chapel on the Sunday, and do all they can. They think themselves just persons, and therefore need no repentance.

But perhaps you will meet with one out of the hundred, who will tell you, with tears in his eyes, that he is the chief of sinners ; he has not one good thought, nor one good word to say about himself ; but if he had what he deserved, he should be banished from God's presence for ever. This solitary one is the lost sheep spoken of in the parable, and is the object of the Shepherd's care. The Lord Jesus seeks that one till He finds it, and when He has found it, He lays it on His shoulders rejoicing, and all heaven is filled with gladness on account of it.

This is very simple, and very beautiful too, John ; but the question with me is, not the love and care of the Shepherd, but whether the sheep may not get off the Shepherd's shoulders again, and be devoured by the wolf after all ; as we read, "the devil as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour." And we are told in Hebrews x. that "if we sin wilfully after we have received a knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversary." And the apostle Paul tells us that he feared lest after he had preached to others, he himself should be a castaway. And if the apostle Paul did not know but that he might be lost after all, how much more may it be so with me !

Well, Thomas, your unbelief is surrounding you with thick clouds of darkness, and gloominess indeed. You are bringing forward things which have not the least

reference whatever to eternal life. For if the sheep were to struggle and get off the Shepherd's shoulders again, and be devoured by the wolf, as you say, it would just prove that the sheep was stronger than the Shepherd (which I do not think you would like to admit), and that He had lost His poor sheep after all His trouble and care to find it. And not only so, but the heavenly hosts would have rejoiced in vain, as they were disappointed after all.

And as regards the passage in Hebrews x. that referred wholly to the Jew, who thought that when he had sinned he must go to the temple, with an offering, as usual. No, the apostle said, you cannot do this; for there is no more sacrifice for sins. The Son of God has died, and it is no good your going back to the temple again, for there is nothing but wrath, and fiery indignation there. If you turn your back upon Christ, and trample underfoot His precious blood, there is no hope for you. And those who did it, just proved that they knew nothing of its cleansing power, or it would not have been possible for them to have done so.

Then as to the question of the apostle Paul fearing that after all he might be lost, when we hear him saying, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

Well, John, what could the apostle mean?

You will see very plainly, Thomas, if you read 1 Corinthians ix., the most of which is speaking of service for the Lord and its future reward. The apostle was obliged to preach the gospel, for necessity was laid upon him; and he said, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel;" but if he did it willingly, without charge, he should have a reward (ver. 18), and this he was doing. Not with uncertainty, for he kept under his body, and brought it into subjection, lest after he had preached to others, he himself should be a castaway, or unapproved. The apostle was very careful not to

allow anything in any way to come in so as to hinder his testimony and service for Christ, and so mar his work down here, and cause him to miss his Lord's approval in that day of glory.

Had the apostle not done so, the Lord Jesus might say to him, Yes, you preached the gospel certainly, but you did not do it willingly; you would much rather have sat still. Or the apostle might have done it for a good name, or a good living, or a thousand other things. Then the Lord Jesus might say to him, when the prizes were given to others, No, you have received yours already. You did it for a position, and you had it; or you did it for wealth, and you got it; therefore I have no reward for you now. I should have been so glad to have given you a garland, had you done it for me; but as you did not, and had your reward down there, it is all done with; for you cannot have it twice. And in this way the apostle would be rejected, as to any claim to a prize, for any service he had done; though it might have been good in itself, and others blest by it.

But we know this was not the case, for the apostle was truly faithful. He did not count his life dear unto himself, so that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. Therefore he could say, "I so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air." The prize was before him, and he was ever pressing on to it. Forgetting the things that were behind, and reaching forth to those things which were before, he pressed forward.

And when he was about to leave the world, he could exhort Timothy to follow in his steps, telling him that he had fought a good fight, finished his course, and kept the faith. Paul had the joy of knowing, before he left this world, that he had been a good soldier of Jesus Christ, not seeking to please himself instead of pleasing the Lord.

Therefore he knew the prize was waiting for him. There was laid up a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge would give him in that day; and not to him only, but to all them also that love His appearing. 2 Timothy iv. 5-8.

And the apostle urged the saints at Corinth to follow on also, by saying, "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain." But then they had life in Christ before they could take one step in that heavenly race.

We do not get salvation by running for it; we get that as a free gift, at the starting, and having it we can then run for God in this world, as the apostle did; and those who are faithful unto death, as he was, the Lord Jesus will give them a crown of life, or a crown or garland of glory which fadeth not away, as a reward for their faithfulness to him in the midst of unfaithfulness. He will remember every little thing that they had done for Him on their happy journey homeward.

And those believers who had not been faithful, will suffer loss by being rejected as regards the prizes. They had been building wood, hay, and stubble, instead of gold, and silver, and precious stones; therefore what they have done will be burned up, but they themselves saved, yet so as by fire. 1 Corinthians iii. 12-15.

But do you think, John, that there will be any rewards given in heaven, for anything we shall do for the Lord down here?

Yes, Thomas; nothing is more certain, for nothing is more clearly told out in God's word. But you must remember, that we do not get everlasting life as a reward; we get that as a free gift, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans vi. 23.

This is where so many make that unhappy mistake. They look at salvation as a reward, given as the result of their doings, or their perseverance in some kind of

way. Whereas it is given at once the moment we believe, and not a thing to be hoped for. We do hope for the glory, because we are not there as yet. Also the Lord Jesus holds out rewards to encourage us to be faithful to him, as we have seen. This also is a thing of hope. But not so with life eternal, this we have now. 1 John v. 11, 12, 13.

But the Lord Jesus would have us know that He will not let one thing pass unnoticed that has been done from love to Him in this world where He is despised and rejected. Not a cup of cold water will be forgotten.

One look of faith and love to Him now brings life everlasting to our souls at once, as in the case of the dying thief. But our different positions with Him in the glory will wholly depend on our walk down here. He tells us that all the churches shall know that it is He which searches the hearts and the reins, and that He will give to every one of us according to our works. Revelation ii. 23.

But you see, John, how so many of God's people have to work from morning to night, for the bread that perisheth, and scarcely have one hour to call their own, wherein to serve the Lord.

Oh, Thomas, mind what you are about! You must not look at service to the Lord in this way. We read of the apostle Paul working with his own hands, night and day, that he might not be chargeable to any man. And while doing so he was serving God as much as he was when preaching the gospel. And when writing to the saints at Colosse he told those among them who had thus to labour, to do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men, knowing that of the Lord they would receive the reward of the inheritance, for they serve the Lord Christ.

The Christian who serves his earthly master with an eye to the glory of God will receive His approbation

in the day that is coming, as much as the one who has nothing else to do but to be employed in His service all the day long. God looks for each of us to do the work which He has given us to do, and by doing it we honour Him, be it whatever it may; and He has measured out to each one of us grace and strength accordingly. And it is so well to know that His requirements are according to that we have, and not according to that we have not. This keeps us calm and happy in the question of service, but should not make us careless.

Your three boys are doing every day that which you have allotted them to do. And when the least does according to his strength and abilities, you commend him quite as much if not more than you do the eldest, although he might not have done half so much. So it is with our heavenly Father. You remember how it was said of Mary, "She hath done what she could."

Ah, John, I think I begin to see the blessedness of it; but I must not go into this question, before I have the first settled. I am not really certain that my soul may not be lost after all. I think if I were sure that I was eternally saved, I should leap for joy, and should not mind what I had to pass through in this world.

Well, Thomas, if you were to take God at His word, and believe what He tells you, you would be sure; for He has said, "I have written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life."

You see it is a present thing, and it is for us to have the present enjoyment of it. We honour God when we believe what He tells us; but we dishonour Him when we doubt His word. And I am sure, that it will very much help to make things clear in your mind, if you can see, that the passages of scripture which you have

hitherto looked at, as promises of life and salvation to the poor sinner, are only promises of reward for those who are saved, to encourage them in a path of faithfulness down here.

I think so too, John; but then I do not believe I should want any promise of reward to encourage me. I think if I knew that my soul was safe to all eternity, that would fill me with such joy that I should not want anything else.

You may not think so now, Thomas, because your soul's salvation is the one thing before you; but that gracious One knew the path we should have to tread, how very difficult and trying it would be, and that we should need every encouragement by the way. Therefore in His love He has given these promises. We encourage our children in paths of difficulty by promises of reward; how much more may not our heavenly Father do so!

Besides, I believe the not seeing this has been very serious. It has led souls into the path that you are now in, because they have thought that these promises of reward were promises of life everlasting. Therefore they have sought for their soul's salvation on the ground of works, and believed they should not get it if they were unfaithful; instead of seeing that eternal life is given without works, on the simple ground of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I can see what you mean, John, very clearly. But then I do not feel that I have eternal life; but, on the contrary, I find sin in me, mixing itself up with everything I do and say. If I had life everlasting, I do not think I should feel like this. I am sorry it is so, but I cannot help it. I try to do good, but evil is present with me. I wish to do the thing that is right, but continually find myself doing wrong. There is an evil

power, which is too great for me. I think if my soul was saved, this would not be the case.

Perhaps not, Thomas ; and this I can quite understand ! But God is true, and He never tells us in His word to feel that we have eternal life, but to believe it ; and then feelings will follow, and so also will power against sin.

We never get strength nor light in our souls, by looking into ourselves, because we find nothing there but darkness and gloominess ; sin appearing in everything, as you say. But we get real joy, and peace, and power also, by looking to the Lord Jesus Christ. He says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved."

Yes, John ; but we read of being blotted out of the book of life. And again, in Ezekiel we are told that if a righteous man committeth iniquity, his righteousness which he hath done shall not be mentioned unto him, in the trespass that he hath trespassed, and in the sin that he hath sinned ; in them shall he die.

Why, Thomas, this was said to Israel under the law, and you are going back there ; seeking for salvation on the ground of doing, and there is nothing but condemnation for those who do that. We are not under the law, but under grace. And happy for our souls that it is so, for by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight ; for by the law is the knowledge of sin ; we cannot get life by it. Galatians ii. 16.

And as regards your name being blotted out of the book of life, this is the old question over again. They who put themselves among the branches of the vine, are spoken of as branches, and those who put themselves among the living ones, are spoken of as having a name among them. But by and by their conduct shews, that it has no right to be there, as they are still dead in their sins, and accordingly it is blotted out.

But this does not apply to any one who in any measure knows the love of Christ ; because that love is eternal, as also the life ; neither is it in our own keeping. If it were, we never should know what confidence of soul was before God. For we never should be sure that we had not lost it, we are such poor things, and in such a dark and evil world. Our heavenly Father knew this, therefore He is taking care of it Himself for us.

Suppose anyone were to give your little boy a very valuable gold watch. You would say, Oh he must not have it in his own keeping now, for he will soon spoil it, or lose it ; I will take care of it for him. I will put it in a safe place, where no harm can come to it, and when he can take care of it himself he shall have it. In this way God has dealt with us who believe. He hath given to us eternal life, and then tells us that this life is in His Son (1 John v. 11) ; and “ when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also shall appear with Him in glory.”

Ah, John, I wish I knew the blessedness of it.

Well, Thomas, I was going to say, it is your own fault that you do not ; for God could not have made it more plain or clear in His word than He has, so that the most simple may see, and believe.

You said, John, that we were not under the law ; was not the law given that we should obey it ?

Yes, Thomas, but how could man obey a holy law, when he is so unholy and so full of sin ?

The law required that we should love God with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength, and our neighbour as ourselves. No one ever could do this but the sinless One, the perfect man, the man Christ Jesus. He did it, and never pleased Himself, nor had a will of His own ; and then died as

if He had been a guilty person, that we, the guilty, might go free.

How very different was this to the law ! The law gave nothing, but demanded everything, and cursed every one that did not come up to its requirements to the full. So that whoever came behind in the least thing, there was nothing but condemnation for them. Therefore as soon as an individual sinned knowingly in the least way whatever, there was no hope for him by the law ; as it is written, " The soul that doeth aught presumptuously that soul shall be utterly cut off ; his iniquity shall be upon him." (Num. xv. 30, 31.) And again, " Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." (Gal. iii. 10.) If they kept the whole law, and yet offended in one point, they were guilty of all. James ii. 10.

Oh, John, this is very terrible. How then could any one in those days be saved ?

Just in the same way that we are, Thomas ; by knowing that they were guilty, and condemned to death because of sin, but saved on the ground of mercy, through atonement. Every lamb they brought to the priest, in old-testament times, was a substitute for themselves ; and they died in their lamb. Their sin was laid upon it, and it died in their stead. Only they had to bring theirs with their own hands, and put it to death themselves, but ours has already come in love to our souls, and died of His own free will. "*The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.*" The guiltless took the place of the guilty.

Oh, John, how blessed is this ! What light it throws upon the sacrifice of Christ ! How thankful I am that the Lord Jesus has died. I never saw it so clearly before. But I should like to ask, What was the law given for, if man could not obey it ?

Just to shew him, Thomas, that he could not; but that he was both by nature and practice undone, and therefore had no power or strength in him in any way whatever to come up to God's holy requirements. So that, seeing his lost state as a sinner before God, he might be willing, and glad, to have salvation in God's way; entirely as a free gift—the object of God's mercy and love, and not through any goodness or worthiness of his own.

And is it really so, John? Was the law given that by it we may know that we are without strength, helpless and hopeless, and therefore brought to see our need of a Saviour?

Yes, Thomas, this is its present use; and it never was otherwise. It was never intended to give life, nor make a man righteous. As the apostle told the Galatians, that if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. And those who are seeking for salvation by it, Christ will profit them nothing. "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." Galatians iii. 10.

The law shews a man in a certain way what he is, and condemns him, because he is such; but never helps him, nor tells him how to get blessing.

Your face may be very black and dirty, and you know nothing about it; but if you look in a glass, you see it plainly. Well the law is that glass; it shews you how evil you are, and condemns you because of it; but it never cleanses you, nor tells you how to get clean. You must go to the gospel for that, and that will tell you, that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin. It makes the vilest sinner that believeth in Him whiter than snow before God, so that there remaineth no spot nor blemish in him. (Acts xiii. 38, 39.) This lifts him above law; it fills him with love, and so

enables him to fulfil its righteousness, and not its mere letter only. Romans viii. 3, 4.

Oh, John, and is it really so? Then this is just what I want. How glad I am that you have told me this. What a mistake I have been making. I have been measuring myself by the law, and found how very much I came below its standard, and was continually fretting myself on account of it. I had no joy, nor assurance of soul. I sought to do right, and found myself doing wrong. Wishing to go this way, I found myself going that; and never knew what rest or peace of soul was; the world and sin were too strong for me.

I now see that we have life through His death, and peace through His blood. The Lord Jesus said, "It is finished," as He bowed His head in death. I believe it, and my soul is saved. What a deliverance this is! How was it I never saw this before? I now see that the believer's standing is in Christ in resurrection, and therefore is eternally secure. We are accepted in Him the beloved, and seen as He is, dead and risen in Him. Therefore the question is not what we are, but what *He* is; not what we have done, but what Christ hath done for us. Oh how glad, and thankful I am to see and know this.

And do you really see it, Thomas? Well then you might be glad, for it is a deliverance indeed! You will praise God for it to all eternity. And I am glad too. I remember well enough how it was with me when Christ and His work were first made known to my soul. I could not sleep for very joy and delight, I was so happy and thankful, and my longing desire was to do something for Him, who had done so much for me. Before this I was always thinking about myself and what I must do to be saved. But now I could forget myself and think of Him, and what He had done⁴ for

me. My theme all the day long was Jesus and His love. I no longer tried to do right, but the love of Christ constrained me ; it was my meat and my drink, my joy and delight. Neither did I any longer seek to keep myself from sin, but I turned from it as I would from a serpent ; there was no effort in it. I hated even the garment spotted by the flesh.

The thought that I was linked up there with Christ in heavenly glory, both for time and eternity, made me wish to be like Him down here, to tread in His steps ; to do His will, and please Him well in all things.

Then, again, I saw that the parting promise of the Lord Jesus on leaving His disciples was, that He would come again, and receive His people to Himself, that where He is, there we may be also, and that He was coming in the twinkling of an eye, and we may be called away at any moment, to take our places with Him in the glory, to spend an eternity, in the unclouded light of His presence.

Oh how little did this make present things look ! How trifling is all that men count most dear, in the light of that eternal glory.

And how did I desire that it should throw its rays on my path, as I went hastily through this dark world, giving me to see everything clearly and plainly, so that I may make no mistakes in any way as I passed along should the Lord tarry, but be a true and faithful witness for Him, to whom I owed my all, and whose company I was going to enjoy for evermore.

I also saw that I was no longer of the world, even as Christ is not of the world, and that all its plans and pursuits were nothing to me ; but that I was leaving it behind me, day by day, as I passed along. The day I had passed, I should have to pass again no more for ever ; and each day brought me nearer and nearer to that rest above, that peaceful shore, where Christ is gone ; and I longed to be there—to see His face ; to be with Him, and like Him for ever.

How long is it, John, since you first saw these blessed realities, and got such complete deliverance from all your doubts and fears ?

Twenty-five years and more, Thomas !

Oh do tell me, John, how it has been with you while going out and coming in all this time ? You must have seen and passed through a great deal, and I may have to tread the same path, if the Lord tarry.

Ah well, Thomas, I will speak the truth. I have seen an end of all perfection. Weakness and feebleness have attended my every step. I have not found one good thing in myself all this time ; but have seen more and more every day how poor and helpless I am in myself in every way, and no more to be trusted to-day than I was the first day I started.

And if I had to look for salvation on the ground of faithfulness, or anything I had done, I should be to-day without one bright ray before my soul, for hope I should have none. It would be gone for ever.

But on the other hand, I have proved every day, and every hour of the day, how true and faithful that glorious One is, with whom I have to do. He has not failed me in one thing, but has been enough, and more than enough, for every step of the way. He has given strength for the day, and grace to help in every time of need. And I know it will be so, till the wilderness journey is over and passed, and I am there, where tears and sighs are unknown.

I am glad also to be able to say, that the Lord Jesus has given me to taste a little of His sorrow, as well as His joy ; for I like to know a little of the cross, as well as the crown—a little of the suffering as well as the glory. (Rom. viii. 17, 18.) And I can truly say that every joy and every desire I had twenty years ago, have deepened twenty fold. And that blessed hope becomes brighter and brighter every day.

But though I long to see Him, and be with Him, yet I am willing, and glad to wait, every hour and every moment, till the appointed time comes, because I know that He is patiently waiting up there, that poor sinners might be blest down here ; and it is but a small thing that we should patiently wait also.

And it is such real joy to know that the same hand which prepared the glory has also marked out each of our paths that leads to it, and is interested in everything connected with the journey. The very hairs of our head has He numbered, so precious has He made us to Himself. There is not a need or sorrow we have but He makes it His care, wiping away our tears with one hand, while leading us with the other.

And He knows experimentally every step of the way, having passed it Himself. He also knows every rough stone that is in our path, and all the sands of the desert. He has been in all points tried as we are, yet without sin. And our happiness is to remember Him in it all. If we are in sorrow, think of Him ; and if we are in joy, think of Him ; so that we may not be hindered by the one or the other.

And how happy it is to remember, that though waves and storms may come, they will only drive us nearer home. Not like the poor mariner out at sea, who is often driven back by fierce winds, and that perhaps many times, before he can reach his desired haven ; but with us, every wave that comes only hurries us on to that home of glory, the Father's house on high, the mansion above where Jesus is ; and it is all waiting for us.

“ Crowns and kingdoms are reserved
Where Christ is gone.”

And soon He will again leave His Father's throne and come into the clouds to call us up to meet Him in the air. Our testimony for Him down here in this evil world will then be over for ever, and we shall not have

another such opportunity, even in the eternal ages as we now have. There will be no more testimony for Him in an evil world, nor of being in any little measure faithful in the midst of unfaithfulness. Oh that we may rightly value these golden moments so as to use every one of them for Him !

When in His presence the whole scene will be one of love and joy and praise for evermore ; not the least thing will be allowed to disturb our enjoyment of Himself through one eternal day. But it is here in this dark world where the Lord Jesus so especially values every little bit of true-hearted faithfulness to Himself, because it is down here where He has been, and still is, despised and rejected.

But, John, have you had no doubts or fears as to your eternal safety all this time ?

No, Thomas ; how could I, after I believed God's word, and saw myself thus united to Christ, a part and parcel of Himself, a member of His body, of His flesh, and His bones, through simply believing in His name ? And if the least member was lacking in that day, His bride would not be complete. But this is impossible, for His own hands have done it, and His own hands will maintain it, to His eternal honour and glory. May the Lord keep us faithful and dependent at all times, treading in His lowly steps ; shining as lights for Him, in the midst of the darkness, by which we are surrounded, until He calls us from earth away, to be with Himself for ever.

H. T.

