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“ACCORDING TO.”

THIS oft-repeated expression signifies that God deals with men on principles or standards which He reveals, and which are the expressions of His mind.

In the Old Testament we read of the shekel of the sanctuary, and every weight was regulated by that (*see* Exod. xxx. 13). And further we read, “A false balance is an abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is his delight” (Prov. xi. 1).

When Jesus came into the world as a man in order to do God’s will, He did it according to the written standard of the Scriptures. After His resurrection He said to His disciples, “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day” (Luke xxiv. 46). We also read, “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,” and “he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Cor. xv. 3, 4).

Thus the most wonderful event that has ever happened on this earth, viz., the death and resurrection of Jesus, was according to the Scriptures. God could allow of no deviation from that standard, even when Christ was on the cross. Surely at such a moment, if it had been possible, it would then have been allowed; but no, God forsook Christ, and maintained the judgment till all was done according to His revealed mind. Through the atonement God has shown that He is just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus (*see* Rom. iii. 26). And all God’s actings

are *equally* according to His standards. If He discloses His salvation for those who believe, it is "according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus iii. 5).

Mercy is God's sovereign right, and by it He does not hold sinners to their sins, but shows them a way by which they can have forgiveness, as we read, "The forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. i. 7).

If God makes these saved ones heirs, it is according to the hope of eternal life (Titus iii. 7).

The saved of this dispensation have a *heavenly* portion, because eternal life for us implies association with Christ in His life and home. This doubtless looks on to the time when our heirship shall be realized in the inheritance.

Then on what terms does any person enter into such blessings? We read of two blind men who appealed to Jesus, as son of David, for mercy, and Jesus asked them, "Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you" (Matt. ix. 27-29). In giving blessing, Jesus acted on the standard of according to the faith of the receiver. The blessings of to-day are on the same principle, and every believer has received as much spiritual blessing as he has had faith for.

Faith is always the response of man's heart to the light God has been pleased to give him.

This light might be the faint light of creation to the heathen; or the brighter light of the types of heavenly things in old time to the Jews; or the brightest light of Christianity as seen to-day in the Scriptures, with the Holy Spirit sent down

from heaven. If a man saw the particular light which was given him, and responded to it by believing, God recorded his faith as righteousness.

Behind each of these testimonies there was Christ; so in receiving the testimony they received Christ. Their knowledge might be very small, but God reckons faith for righteousness. Concerning things about which God has given no light, there can be no faith. This preserves the intelligent believer from speculations, for if any matter is not mentioned or included in the Scriptures there is no light about it, and therefore there can be no faith. This is a safeguard against the imaginations of the human mind.

God acts on the principle of "According to your faith be it unto you," so that when persons have faith they always get what they have faith for. Faith is God's gift, and cannot be lightly spoken of. It should grow, and as it does the saint becomes increasingly intelligent in the ways of God as set forth in the Holy Scriptures.

There is yet another dispensation to dawn on a part of mankind, but it is slow to come, because God is longsuffering, yet it must come. It is called "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. ii. 5).

The standard for judgment is made known as fully as the one for blessing. We read, "The judgment of God is according to truth" (Rom. ii. 2). Again, "Who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. ii. 6). Again, "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men according to my gospel" (Rom. ii. 16). Thus three times this expression is used in connection with the day yet to come. The weights are

recorded, and everything will be weighed up. God's truth, man's deeds, and Paul's gospel are weights used in the day of judgment for every sinner who has had the light of the gospel, but who, having rejected it, has to stand at the great white throne. God knows how to discriminate between those who have had different degrees of light. The secrets of men are, alas! the same; they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. Genuine conversion is a necessity for those who shall inherit the kingdom of God.

TRUE RESPONSE.

FAITH is the true response of the heart of man to the light God gives.

Whatever was the nature or manner in which God in olden times gave His testimony to various individuals, in every case their response was their faith. In Hebrews xi. God has given us a record of pioneer men and women who responded to the testimony He gave at particular seasons of man's history. The list dates back very early, when there were men who had no fellow-believers to talk to, and no Holy Writings to consult; yet they walked in the path of faith. The particular path was wholly untrodden previously, but was pointed out by the light God had given to each one of them, and they for the first time walked in it, and were thus pioneers. God was pleased to have a good report written of them, for the encouragement of those who may be called to follow them in a moral way.

Since those early days God has given the special light of Christianity, and He has always had persons whose hearts gladly responded to every fresh revelation of Himself, or of His intentions in connection with Christ.

When Jesus was on earth He recognized faith, and also noticed the absence of it.

Of the Gentile centurion He said, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Matt. viii. 10).

To the Syrophenician woman He said, "O woman, great is thy faith" (Matt. xv. 28; Mark vii. 26).

To an afflicted woman He said, "Thy faith hath made thee whole" (Matt. ix. 22).

To two blind men He said, "According to your faith be it unto you" (Matt. ix. 29).

To a blind man He said, "Thy faith hath made thee whole" (Mark x. 52).

To a sinful woman He said, "Thy faith hath saved thee" (Luke vii. 50).

We read also of the want of faith.

To Peter He said, "O thou of little faith" (Matt. xiv. 31).

To the Pharisees He said, "Ye . . . have omitted . . . faith" (Matt. xxiii. 23).

To His disciples He said, "Where is your faith?" (Luke viii. 25).

Faith is the response of heart to the light, whether the light brought the knowledge of temporal blessings to men's bodies, or the deeper eternal blessings to men's souls.

Faith grows, as in the case of the Thessalonians (*see* 2 Thess. i. 3), but may also decline, as in the case of John the Baptist (*see* Matt. xi. 3).

There is a difference between "the faith" and "faith." The whole range of Christian doctrine is called "*the faith*," while the measure of the response to it is called faith, which may be great or small.

To hold the mystery of the faith was essential for any office-bearer in the early churches (see 1 Tim. iii. 9).

Jude wrote, "It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Thus the whole Christian doctrine taught by the Holy Spirit is called "The faith of God's elect" (Titus i. 1). When the disciples of Jesus said, "Lord, increase our faith," He replied, "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you." The sycamine tree represented the testimony which God had given to Israel, however much they had corrupted it, which was to be rooted up out of Israel, and planted amongst the Gentiles, who were figured by the sea. Faith in the disciples would effect this great change which God had determined upon. They would bear their testimony first among the Jews, but if they rejected it, then it would be established among the Gentiles, and the purposes of God would thus be effected. The disciples were looking for something great in themselves, rather than responding to the light which Jesus was giving to them. Thus faith is *nothing great in man*, but rather *readiness* to respond to the light that God gives.

On one occasion Jesus said to His disciples,

“ Let us pass over to the other side.” Thus He made known to them His intention, and this should have been enough for them. But on the way over they came to Him, and said, “ Master, carest thou not that we perish ? ” This showed they had not grasped His intention of passing over with them to the other side ; so He rebuked them by saying, “ How is it that ye have no faith ? ” Saying they had no faith, only referred to what He had said about the journey over the lake. They had faith in His Person, but not in His power to effect what He had said, especially when He was asleep.

Great faith was found with the Gentiles, who were ready to respond to the light which Jesus shed on them. As Simeon had said, A light to reveal the Gentiles ; while to the Jews Jesus had to say, “ Little faith ” and “ Where is your faith ? ” The nation of Israel were so reluctant to respond to the light which Jesus brought, that He could not do many mighty works among them because of their unbelief.

In Christianity faith is connected with the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures. The Spirit has taken the place of Christ on earth, and the Holy Scriptures have taken the place of the words of Christ.

The present divided state of God’s people proves the want of faith amongst them. How little response there is to the truth !

The presence of the Holy Spirit is little more than a doctrine to many ; such have no faith in His personal presence and power to carry into effect every interest of Christ during His absence. If proof was required of the faithfulness of the

Spirit, surely it is found in the fact that He is a Divine Person, and has the same interest in both saints and sinners as the other Persons of the Godhead.

All the forms and ceremonies, with the bad doctrines and bad practices, which have been introduced by professing Christians since the days of the apostles, show clearly they have no faith in the actual presence of the Holy Spirit or in the divine authority of the Scriptures. This prevailing unbelief greatly affects believers to-day, as the false practices of the Pharisees did the disciples when Jesus was on earth (*see* Matt. xv. 12; xvi. 6; xvii. 10). How many believers resort to worldly means to effect (as they think) Christ's interests in connection with getting persons to enter into the kingdom of God! This can alone be effected by "water and the Spirit." Water refers to that moral cleansing which is the effect of receiving and responding to the testimony of the death of Jesus (*see* 1 John v. 6), and the activity of the Spirit.

Preaching, without the power and activity of the Spirit, is lifeless, and without result for eternity. It is possible there may be the appearance of conversions and many confessions, and the enemy may be active to move in this matter, but this work, sooner or later, all withers away, while the work produced by the Spirit always abides. And when Christ comes again He will own all such work as His own work effected by the power of the Spirit. Faith never doubts the reality of the Holy Spirit being on earth, both as the Spirit indwelling all believers, and also that He acts—like the wind blowing—in order to give

effect to all the counsels of God. The reality of these truths, if seen as light, would indeed supplant the darkness of unbelief, and faith would grow exceedingly, and the love of everyone abound.

God always presents light suited to the state of the person about to be enlightened. In Christianity this light comes through persons who have been already enlightened, as in the case of the Ethiopian who was reading the Scripture, but when asked by Philip if he understood what he read, replied, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" (Acts viii. 31). Philip was used by the Spirit of God to enlighten a man who was in darkness, and he gladly responded to the light, and came into the circle of blessing, the result of which was that he went on his way rejoicing.

Thus the Lord's people become active in doing *His work in His way*, knowing that "neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (1 Cor. iii. 7). The real result is the increase, and that is God's work by His Spirit. Apart from that, all will be burnt up at the judgment-seat of Christ.

THREE THINGS THAT HAVE COME.

GRACE, truth, and faith have come. We do not wait for them, for they have already come, but we should see how far we are instructed

in what they denote, and how far we are in the enjoyment of them.

“Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John i. 17). They were what Jesus brought, and therefore “came” by Him; they are also placed in contrast to the law which was given by Moses. No prophet had introduced the system of grace, but Jesus established it. What do we know about grace and truth? This is a wholesome question for all believers to put to themselves.

In this passage grace stands first, because it describes God’s attitude towards mankind, and it began to be preached by Jesus when on earth, but was fully established after His death and resurrection. For then we read of grace reigning (Rom. v. 21), and “the throne of grace” (Heb. iv. 16).

The law raised the question, Could man meet God’s claims, or approach Him and be accepted? The history of the chosen nation (Israel) proved that it was impossible, so God superseded the law and brought in grace as a new way of acting towards men.

Grace describes how God can approach man and bless him. The law could not bless, because it was weak through the flesh, and thus made nothing perfect; so as a means of approach it was superseded by grace. Grace had often been spoken of in figure in the Old Testament, but Jesus Christ brought it.

Under law God was to be the *receiver*, while man was to be the *giver*; but when grace came, God became the *giver*, and man was called upon to be the *receiver*. This is still the testimony of the gospel, and is now fully established, for *grace reigns*.

The understanding of this principle of God's acting towards men is very important for every believer, both for his own peace and joy and also for his proper testimony to his neighbours. By "a principle" is meant a rule of action which being established is not deviated from. It may be superseded, but while it lasts it is an absolute rule.

Grace means favour bestowed as a free gift on those who need it, and it always implies *willingness* and *power* on the side of the one who gives, and *acknowledged need* on the side of the one who receives.

In the life of Jesus on earth we see willingness and power to bless men; He came into this world unasked for and undesired by men, but was "full of grace and truth" (John i. 14). He sought out the needy in order to bless them.

Grace is doubtless the most difficult thing for the heart of man to take in, it is so opposite to his own thoughts and feelings. Even believers who have bowed to grace so far as the forgiveness of their sins is in question, often make but little progress, because they are slow to bow to a continuance of grace. In the early days of Christianity, through the vigorous labours of the apostle Paul, the Galatians had made some progress in their apprehension of the sufficiency of grace, but false teachers got amongst them (see Gal. v. 12; vi. 12), and of some of the Galatians Paul wrote, "Ye are fallen from grace" (Gal. v. 4).

Now it is clear no one could fall from anything unless he had first been in it; so these believers could not have fallen from grace unless they had

first been in it. Alas! very few of God's saints in these days have ever known the sufficiency of grace; many have always been taught doctrine which implied that grace was not sufficient of itself. They hold a bit of grace in one hand and some works of law in the other, and hope with the two together to get safely to heaven. The Galatian believers had been taught by the gospel that grace alone was sufficient, not only for salvation, but also for living after they were saved; but, alas! they had adopted certain parts of the law, and in doing that they had fallen from grace. They had not given up Christ as a Saviour, but sought to add something of law in order to suppress the evil principle of sin in themselves. They did not see the scope of the death of Christ, which not only put their sins away, but set them aside as children of Adam, that they might have a new place in Christ.

Jesus brought the new principle of grace, and now as the result of His death and resurrection it is established. Grace reigns, and it can never be superseded, because God has His satisfaction in that which is the fruit of His own love. In order for the reign of grace to be established, the reign of sin had to be brought to a judicial end; and therefore the death of Jesus, His being cut off from the earth, brought to an end as before God the history of man in the flesh, while in the resurrection of Jesus God set forth another order of man, in whom He could find His pleasure.

Man after the flesh (that is, as born of Adam) was only a grief to God, and every action of God towards him only proved how worthless he was; so the only remedy left was to bring in another

Man of a wholly new order. The blessed Jesus was this from His birth, and so death had no claim on Him; but if He was to bring man, on whom death had a claim, to God, then He must meet every claim which was on man. This was the only way to deliver man from the power of death, and make him suitable to receive the grace and truth which "came by Jesus Christ."

Since the death and resurrection of Christ, grace has been God's only attitude towards mankind. Grace reigns, and many have yielded to its power, and have thus been brought into the kingdom of God. Grace is God's only attitude towards sinners, but it is also the principle He continues to act on towards His saints. So we read, "This grace wherein we stand" (Rom. v. 2), and again, "The true grace of God wherein ye stand" (1 Peter v. 12).

The very failures which saints are conscious of in themselves, make them appreciate the principle of grace; for what else could suit them and carry them through the wilderness? Thus grace always implies a need existing, and the more conscious we are of the need, the more we shall appreciate the grace or favour which meets that need.

The word *grace* always stood at the head of the apostolic epistles, which were addressed to assemblies, as a necessity for saints so long as they were in this world, and also as that which needed no explanation, because they all knew well what it meant. This shows that when a sinner has been blessed on the principle of grace, and has received the Holy Spirit, what is really wrought in him is not a bettering of the old condition of man in the

flesh, but the introduction of what is entirely new. The old remains unchanged and unchangeable. The old principle is corrupt, and can in no wise be altered, but when the Holy Spirit has been received there is power to suppress the old, and make room for the activities of the new. Thus a believer is called to reckon himself dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God in Christ Jesus (Rom. vi. 11). When through the daily supply of grace a believer does this, the old does not flourish and bear fruit; but when through lack of grace and subsequent carelessness the old is ministered to, then it acts and bears its fruit.

Now God's grace is sufficient for every need, but the individual must appropriate it in order to be strong in it. The one who appropriates it proves that he is sensible of his need of it; for he knows he has a power of evil within which is uncontrollable apart from God's grace; but he also knows that grace is the all-sufficient remedy, because it strengthens what is of God in the inward man, while it suppresses the activities of the flesh. There is no need of the law to reform the old, because if the new only is nourished the old will wither, although still present in every believer. This is God's way for His people, and it is a way of liberty, because it frees the believer from the *power* of sin in the flesh; and when the Lord comes the second time He will free His saints from the *presence* of the flesh, in which sin dwells. False teachers are always bringing in new remedies for the improvement of the flesh, and when one fails another is introduced, and so believers are diverted from apprehending the sufficiency of God's grace. The cross of Christ has for ever set

aside the first man, and God has brought in another Man to take his place. Man in his natural condition has always opposed grace; he did so when Christ brought it, and has done so ever since it has been established as the principle of God's actings. Nevertheless God continues His work of grace, in spite of man's ignorance and opposition.

TRUTH.

Now what does truth imply? for it, too, has come by Jesus Christ.

Grace and truth are coupled together, and have doubtless a very intimate connection with one another—both came by Jesus Christ; and also we read that He was "full of grace and truth" (see John i. 14-17).

—Truth is the full revelation of God, and also His estimate of everything; at the same time, it is the refutation of all the devil's lies. Man believed the devil at the beginning of his history, and has believed him ever since, and prefers his lies to God's truth. Thus the devil, the great enemy of mankind, rules the darkness of this world, and so long as men are in darkness they believe lies concerning God and His actings. Jesus was the light of the world, and called on men to follow Him that they might have the light of life, and He also said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John viii. 32).

When the light of the truth first dawns on any man he sees himself as he never saw himself before, and finds out how he has been deceived by the enemy. He looks back on his life and wonders how he could have been deceived, and how he could have found pleasure in the vanities of an evil world.

The importance of the truth cannot be over-estimated by God's people, because it applies to everything in which God has to say to man, both now in grace, and also in what He will say to man in the day of judgment. It tells how the believer will render his account *before* the thousand years begin, and how the unbeliever will be finally judged *after* the thousand years are ended. Now that truth has come by Jesus Christ, believers have no excuse for being ignorant, nor any right to claim to have any opinion on Divine things. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth, because He discloses the mind of God to believers when they are willing to be led into the truth. Often, alas! they are not prepared for it, and so the Spirit is grieved. In the Old Testament God used types and shadows because the truth itself had not then come; but after Jesus brought it, it could be said, "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth" (1 John ii. 8). God's mind is now made known through the truth which He has caused to be written. Holy Writings have given a permanent form to the truth, so that God's people may be instructed and become intelligent in the truth. Those who learn the truth are a great help to other believers, for they have begun rightly to divide the word of truth (*see* 2 Tim. ii. 15). They understand how God has acted in different ways at different times, so they do not confound the Old Testament Writings with the New; for though both are equally Divine, and profitable for the man of God, yet they must be distinguished, or false teaching will result.

Most errors in teaching are spread abroad by

misusing Old Testament Writings. No doubt they were God's voice for the time in which they were spoken; but the New Testament is God's voice for the *present* time. All the instructions which God gave to His people of old have moral weight for His people now; because the truth having fully come, it sheds its light on what was written before.

An instance or two may help to make this point clear, for it is very important.

In the Old Testament we find precious prophetic intimations of Christ's first coming, which was then future; while in the New Testament we find the details of His having come, and what He said and did, both in His life and in His death and resurrection.

Again, in the Old Testament there was the promise of the Spirit, whose coming was then future; while in the New Testament that promise was partially fulfilled at Pentecost, though the final fulfilment, which refers to Israel and the nations, is still future.

Again, in the Old Testament the law and the prophets were God's testimony to His people Israel, but in the New Testament we read that the law and the prophets were until John (the Baptist), and since that time the kingdom of God is preached (Luke xvi. 16). So the testimony of the law has been superseded by the truth of the kingdom of God, which Jesus began to preach, and which is God's testimony for the present time.

Again, in the Old Testament the seventh day was the Sabbath, and its observance was insisted on by the law, but in the New Testament that day has been superseded by the first day of the week.

The Lord repeatedly cast a slight on the Sabbath by doing many of His miracles on that day, which greatly displeased the Pharisees (see John v. 16 ; vii. 23) ; and finally He lay in the grave under the power of death on that day (so far as His body was concerned), but rose again on the day following the Sabbath, called the first day of the week. In the millennium the Sabbath will again be the day which will be regarded to the Lord, as we read in the account of Israel's restoration in Ezekiel xlv. 17, etc.

Again, in the Old Testament the children of Israel were God's people, but under the New Testament they have been cast off, as a nation, for a time (see Rom. xi. 25, 26) ; and believers on the Lord Jesus Christ are God's people (see 1 Peter ii. 10) till the Church is completed, when Israel will again occupy the land which God gave to Abraham.

These few instances will serve to show that what Scripture calls *the truth* came by Jesus Christ, and was further unfolded by the apostles, and by them committed to writing ; and these Writings are used by the Holy Spirit to-day to form believers after Christ. Titus was in Paul's day to warn believers against the "commandments of men, that turn from the truth" (Titus i. 14). And believers to-day need to consider how far the doctrines they hold are turning them from the truth which the apostles taught. Why have real believers to sigh and groan over increased worldliness in Christian congregations, and lack of spiritual food ? Is it not because they have departed from the truth ? They have not given up every individual truth, but the expression "the truth" takes in *all* the revealed mind of

God. If one part is given up, then only a part of the truth remains, and *a part is not the whole*. "The truth" is *the whole, with no part wanting*. If believers have the whole truth, it will separate them from the world, and will at the same time draw them together nearer to Christ. Worldly believers only want so much of the truth as will secure heaven to them when they die; and they often oppose the spread of the whole truth because it exposes their worldly ways. Those who desire all the truth must be separate from what is contrary to it; otherwise they can make no progress, and soon have to cry out, No food! The truth gives believers instruction, both for their *individual* walk and also for their *collective* position, even when ruin has come amongst God's people. Now it is clear if we have instruction for our fellowship with other believers, and do not follow it, we are acting in self-will, and grieving the Spirit, who cannot encourage us in a wrong path. If we leave the path of self-will, and take the path marked out by Scripture, we shall get both *light* and *food*. Also we shall be a testimony to other believers of the reality of the truth, and may be the means of helping them into a better apprehension of it, for their comfort and joy.

Then the gospel will be clearer, and will come with more power from those who are subject to the truth themselves; for their words will have power and solemnity, and will convey a real sense of the love of God which they are enjoying.

This is the path of faith, but, alas! what we see around is turning *from* the truth, rather than *to* the truth. However, God works amongst His saints, and one and another is awakened to the

value of the truth, and seeks grace to follow it. If we seek the truth for the truth's sake, we shall not be diverted by any inconsistency we may see in those who profess to have it. Some have been diverted from seeking the truth by the failure of those who professed to have it, but that showed they were more occupied with persons than with the truth. The Lord could say, "The truth shall make you free" (John viii. 32). This was said to those Jews who believed on Him; *Jesus* was the object of their faith.

FAITH.

Law was the principle for men to act on under the Old Covenant, and not until the New Covenant was established in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus could it be said, "Faith is come" (Gal. iii. 25).

By faith all the Old Testament saints pleased God; although it was not then the principle taught, for they were under law. Faith was alluded to in the Old Testament writings, as we read, "The just shall live by his faith" (Hab. ii. 4), which is quoted in the New Testament three times—Romans i. 17, Galatians iii. 11, Hebrews x. 38—as marking the present period.

Faith is the principle which God has established for men to act upon, whether as to the beginning of the gospel for the sinner, or as to the full gospel, for the believer. Thus we read in Romans i. 17, "From faith to faith." "From faith" is the principle on which God acts, while "to faith" marks how man must receive God's righteousness. When Jesus was on earth He recognized the principle, but could not establish it until the trial

of the first man was ended, and He, as risen from the dead, had taken His place as the last Adam.

When the Spirit came down from heaven, then we find faith fully established as the only way of blessing. The gospel was proclaimed, and justification administered to all willing to receive it on the principle of faith.

There must be faith in the heart of the one who seeks to be justified, which faith is produced by God's testimony, for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. x. 17). But what would be the use of a person coming to God by faith, if He was acting towards men on the principle of works? Or what would be the use of a person bringing works for justification, if God was acting on the principle of faith?

How important it is, both for our own blessing and for our testimony to others, to understand the principle of faith, on which God is acting at the present time. When Jesus was on earth He recognized faith wherever He saw it.

He *commended* it (in Matt. viii. 10 and xv. 28).

He *tested* it when men said they had it (Matt. ix. 29).

He *reproved* His disciples for their want of it (Mark iv. 40).

He *strengthened* it when it was likely to waver (Mark v. 36).

But, for all this, it could not be said to *have come*, as a principle, till after the death and resurrection of Christ.

Righteousness is now revealed "from faith to faith" (Rom. i. 17). When God recognizes faith in the heart of any person, He justifies that person because he is a believer in Jesus (Rom. iii. 26).

Thus the expression, "Faith having come," has two sides to it; first, that God has established that principle as the only way to approach Him; and, secondly, we must act on it, if we are to please God. "Without faith it is impossible to please him" (Heb. xi. 6).

"Before faith came, we were kept under the law. . . . But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (Gal. iii. 23-25). For in Christ Jesus all believers are the children [sons] of God by faith. Faith is a great test; it judges the state of heart, and makes the person conscious of how little faith he has.

Christianity is a system of faith, as we read, "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. v. 7). Sight is natural, while faith is spiritual. A very important feature in faith is that it is always guided by the intelligent use of the Scriptures. False teachers in Christendom make a boast of having faith, and often deceive the simple. Sometimes they boast of *living by faith*; by which *they mean* that they look for their support in temporal things from those who are willing to give to them. This is not the meaning of living by faith in any of the *three places* in which the expression occurs, and which have been already mentioned. The Spirit of God is not referring to the natural life, but to the spiritual life of believers, and *all* real believers live by faith. The natural life is supported by food and raiment, for which believers should work, as we read, "If any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess. iii. 10), while our spiritual life is supported by faith in an unseen Person and unseen things.

Other false teachers tell people they can be

healed by faith, if they are sick, and they quote passages of Scripture to prove it; but the connection will always show that in some way or other the passage has no reference to the present time of human suffering. Scripture teaches us that spiritual blessings are the characteristics of the present moment, and faith takes hold on this, and refuses to be diverted by anything which is not the testimony of God for the present time. Prayer is, and always has been, the resource of believers in every sort of trial and suffering, and they are exhorted to make everything known to God (Phil. iv. 6), and then to cease to be anxious because all is committed to Him. Thus faith brings believers consciously very near to God, and away from worldly influences, which only act upon sight.

May our knowledge of grace, truth, and faith increase so that there may be more moral conformity to Christ, for His glory and our blessing.

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

THE term kingdom of heaven (or of the heavens) implies that the ruling is carried on from heaven.

This seems to have been God's intention before sin entered (*see* Gen. i. 16). When John the Baptist began his testimony it was evidently a new one. There was no mention of the glory of God returning to the temple in Jerusalem, as foretold in Ezekiel xliii., when He will again

establish His throne in the midst of restored Israel, as must be in a yet future day. John spoke of a rule about to be established in heaven which should take the place of what was then existing.

John was the last of the Old Testament prophets; he did not re-call to the old dispensation, but announced a new one.

The former prophets had called on the nation of Israel to return to Jehovah and His law, as we read, "Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments" (Malachi iv. 4).

John's preaching did not re-call to the law of Moses, but prepared people for the testimony of the kingdom of heaven.

Those who believed John were baptized with water unto repentance, and thus a company was formed who, owning their ruined condition as a nation, took an outside position—which John's baptism gave them—to wait for the One who should introduce them into the kingdom of heaven.

These were the excellent of the earth, in whom Christ found His delight (see Ps. xvi. 3), and He joined that repentant company through baptism. John said, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" Jesus replied, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."

John's baptism only separated them from the nation who remained unrepentant, but did not bring them into any sphere of blessing. They waited for Christ, and when He joined them He became their leader, and they followed Him.

John was the immediate forerunner of Christ, and so had a special place, as we read, "Amongst

them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist, notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matt. xi. 11). Those in the kingdom would be positionally nearer to Christ; for John was beheaded by Herod before the kingdom of heaven was set up in its present form.

When John was cast into prison Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. iv. 17). John's testimony was silenced before Jesus began, for God never has two testimonies going at the same time. Jesus' testimony was louder than John's, because He added miracles of healing.

Great multitudes were attracted by Jesus, so He went to a mountain and gave out the principles of the kingdom (see chap. v. to vii), as Moses had done in a former dispensation from Mount Sinai. However, opposition soon began, as we read, "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matt. xi. 12). This opposition was from the religious leaders of the people, for we read of the Pharisees, that they shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, neither going in themselves nor suffering others to do so (Matt. xxiii. 13).

Thus faith was necessary to break through the opposition, and reach Him, Who was saying, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." So the kingdom justified the violence of faith.

The Lord referred to Jonah setting forth death and resurrection, as applying to Himself; then as to the mass of the nation who rejected Him, He

pointed out their last state under the reign of Antichrist.

The unclean spirit of idolatry had left Israel, for we do not read of Jesus finding any idols; but in the days yet to come the unclean spirit will return with seven other spirits—making eight, a resurrection number—and they will dwell in Israel, and their last state of idolatry will be worse than at any former period, so shall it be to this wicked generation (Matt. xii. 43-45).

After the Lord had thus judged the nation, He gave the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven in six parables, placed together, and these followed by four at different times during His ministry. Thus there were ten in all, each giving some special feature of the kingdom.

Had Christ been received by Israel He would have crushed the Gentile power according to the figure of the stone cut out without hands, which smote the image on the feet, and then He would have set up the kingdom which would never be destroyed (see Daniel ii. 34-44). When that takes place it will be the kingdom of heaven set up in manifestation and power; but as Christ was rejected, He set it up in the mysterious form, allowing the Romans to retain visible power.

The Lord said to His disciples, "It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them (the unbelieving Jews) it is not given" (Matt. xiii. 11).

In Matt. xiii. there are six parables of the kingdom, viz.: The tares of the field (*v.* 24-30); the grain of mustard seed (*v.* 31); the leaven (*v.* 33); the treasure (*v.* 44); the pearl (*v.* 45); the net (*v.* 47).

The first three of these parables were spoken to the multitudes, but the last three privately to His disciples (see v. 36). "Then Jesus sent the multitudes away, and went into the house; and his disciples came unto him, saying, declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field." The explanation shows how carefully the parable was given, and that it was meant to be understood.

"He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man" (v. 37). Christ took this title to Himself when He was rejected by His own nation, and began a fresh testimony in Israel. He ought to have been a reaper, for the prophets had sown before, but, alas! there was no crop to reap, and so the Lord began a fresh work.

"The field is the world" (v. 38). Here the extent is larger than Israel, for the Lord was sitting by the seaside, a figure of the nations hitherto unformed religiously by testimony.

"The good seed are the children of the kingdom" (v. 38). Only those who were the fruit of the sowing are accounted as belonging to the kingdom. The nation of Israel are left out, and the work of the Son of Man taken account of.

"The tares (or darnel) are the children of the wicked one" (v. 38). This would be the result of the enemy's work; bad doctrine would be sown, and grow and produce a generation of vipers, in the same outward sphere or field as the children of the kingdom.

"The enemy that sowed them is the devil" (v. 39). There had been false prophets in Israel, and there would be false teachers in connection with the kingdom of heaven. The source of this antagonism is plainly stated, so that false doctrine should

always be known and avoided because of its origin.

“*The harvest is the end of the world*” (or end of the age—N.T.). The time is coming when what has grown together must be separated. This will take place when the kingdom is set up in power and manifest glory, which will last for 1,000 years, as foretold by the prophets in the Old and New Testament (see Ps. lxxii; Isaiah xxxii.; Rev. xx. 4).

“*The reapers are the angels*” (v. 39). These are the executors of judgment, whether to clear the heavens (see Rev. xii. 7) or to clear the earth (Matt. xiii. 41) for the setting up of the kingdom of heaven in manifestation.

This is the fullest explanation of any parable uttered by the Lord, and gives a great clue to the meaning of the others. Every detail is worth careful consideration.

The second parable was the grain of mustard seed, which grew into a great tree. The mustard was naturally only a herb, and not conspicuous in the field. The testimony which the Lord left in this world was to grow, but remain small and unobserved, not to occupy any prominent position in the scene where He had been cast out. But this needed faith, and when that was lacking it took an unnatural growth and became a great tree, that is, a great power in the world. Then the birds of the air—the same that caught away the good seed in verse 4—came and lodged in the branches of it. Wicked spirits found a home in the tree, which could never have been had it remained a herb. Thus to-day ritualism, worldliness, and infidelity lodge undisturbed in Christianity, which has become a great worldly power,

having departed from the testimony of Christ and His apostles.

The third parable was leaven permeating three measures of meal. In Scripture leaven is used as a figure of evil, and especially evil doctrine. The following passages show how the Lord used the figure. "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt. xvi. 6). "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod" (Mark viii. 15). "Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke xii. 1).

Paul used it in a similar way, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump; purge out therefore the old leaven." "Neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. v. 6-8; Gal. v. 9; *also* Leviticus ii. 11).

This gives the Scriptural meaning of leaven when it is used as a figure. The woman was the secret agent for this form of corruption. The meal was pure, but hiding the leaven in it corrupted the whole. It became inflated, and assumed an unnaturally large appearance.

Thus the Christianity of to-day is thoroughly corrupted, and there is no part of Christendom where the evil influence of the enemy's work has not reached.

In a threefold way the enemy has interfered with Christ's work as the sower, and spoiled the outward appearance.

First, in mixing the tares with the wheat, that is, joining unbelievers with believers in their religious privileges.

Secondly, in making the mustard grow to a

tree, thus becoming a political power, instead of remaining as a herb.

—Thirdly, in corrupting the pure meal with the leaven of evil doctrine, puffed up and sectarian, as seen in 1 Corinthians iv. 6-8.

The other three parables in this chapter set forth the hidden forms of the kingdom of heaven, and were only spoken to the disciples. They set forth the Lord's own view, so if we are to get the true meaning we must stand with Him, and look from His standpoint. The standpoint makes a great difference.

The first of these three is "Treasure hid in a field, the which when a man hath found he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field" (Matt. xiii. 44).

But what was the treasure? The church looked at as connected with the counsels of God. So He bought the world for the treasure that was in it. What did He sell? His rights to the throne in Israel as son of David; His rights to the promises as son of Abraham; His rights as a man even to His life on earth. Thus He bought the field, which is now His by purchase, the result being He can take possession of it at any moment. When He does every knee must bow to Him, and every tongue confess Him Lord. The gospel calls on men to own Him Lord now, during the day of grace, but if this day is slighted, then they must own Him in the day of judgment.

The next parable described what is more special. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matt. xiii. 45, 46).

What was the pearl? The church as viewed by Christ in its own beauty. We read, "One pearl of great price." Thus unity is clearly set forth in the "one pearl," and intrinsic value in "great price." Paul wrote, "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it . . . that he might present it to himself a glorious church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (see Eph. v. 25-27).

This clearly shows the love of Christ for the heavenly company which is composed of all saints between the periods of the resurrection and coming again of Christ. It must be evident that Christ was referring to what was at that time future, which fact is confirmed by comparing Matt. xvi. 18. The saints who lived previous to the church period will have a heavenly portion, but the church something peculiar to herself, as having been formed mystically from the side of Christ during His sleep of death, and brought to Him in resurrection (compare Genesis ii. 22, 23).

The church or assembly will be displayed in heavenly glory in the form of a city; it will be plainly visible to the earth during the thousand years. This seat of government will have twelve gates, and each gate will be one pearl (see Rev. xxi. 21), so that everyone who enters any one of the gates will be instructed by the entrance what this heavenly city really is. To Christ's extended view it is one pearl; and He wishes others—whose views must necessarily be small—to have His thoughts about it. Thus each entrance will be an abiding witness to the fact that Christ's thoughts and feelings towards the church have not changed.

The third of the parables which were told only to the disciples was, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net which was cast into the sea and gathered of every kind, which when it was full they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels and cast the bad away" (Matt. xiii. 47, 48).

The net sets forth the means by which fish were brought to shore. Jesus had said to His disciples, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. iv. 19).

Thus it is plain who the fishers and the fishes represent, while the net was the gospel testimony put forth amongst all classes of persons, for it "gathered of every kind."

The gospel entrusted to the disciples had a great influence over both Jews and Gentiles, drawing them together out of their natural element on to the shore. Then the fishermen were to sit down and deliberately gather the good into vessels. Only the good were to occupy them, those persons who were really converted by the power of the gospel. There was to be no haste in their decision, but when concluded the good were secured in vessels, the bad they had nothing to do with. Angels are the executors of judgment in these parables. —The vessels may represent local assemblies, as we read, "The seven assemblies which are in Asia" (Rev. i. 11).

The importance of understanding these parables is seen in verse 52, "Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old."

There are also other parables in this gospel

of Matthew which set forth principles which characterize the kingdom of heaven, namely:—

Two debtors (chap. xviii.) set forth God acting in mercy.

The labourers (chap. xx.) set forth God acting in grace.

The marriage (chap. xxii.) sets forth God acting in righteousness.

Ten virgins (chap. xxv.) set forth what constituted readiness to meet the Bridegroom.

The kingdom of heaven was not only to have certain outward appearance, but to set forth principles on which God was acting. Man needs mercy, for he has offended God, and the Jew had done so as well as the Gentile. The Jew owed 10,000 talents, but the King forgave him the debt; and this should have impressed him greatly, but instead of that he refused the same mercy to the Gentile. They had no doubt treated the Jews badly when they were in captivity (*see* Psalm cxxix-cxxxvii.). Thus they owed the Jews 100 pence, a small sum compared with what the Jews owed God. If God had forgiven them their national sins, they should have forgiven the Gentiles theirs; but instead of that the Jews forbad the apostles to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, so wrath came on them to the uttermost (1 Thess. ii. 16). Nationally they are in prison, and must remain there till after the great tribulation, which will take place during the reign of the false king who will be antichrist (*see* Daniel ix. 27; Matt. v. 25; John v. 43; 2 Thess. ii. 3; Rev. xiii. 11). Forgiveness in connection with things on earth was one mark of the kingdom.

Next, God has rights on earth, and these rights

cannot be interfered with or restricted. A householder goes out early in the morning to engage labourers, and those he called first agreed to a certain rate of payment; this figured the Jewish nation, who entered the land under law, which was an agreement. But later in the day the same man hired others, and they went to work without any agreement, trusting the hirer to give what was right; these in figure went in to work under grace, such as Paul, who was born out of due time, and then Gentiles. When the day for labour closed, it was found that those who came in last were placed first. For the last were first and the first last. This action of the householder is explained by the fact that he had a right to do as he would with his own. A true figure of God's grace being unfettered by law, or man's judgment?

Another principle was righteousness, for if grace reigns, it must be through righteousness, so "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king which made a marriage for his son" (Matt. xxii).

If man is to participate in the display of the king's son's grandest day, he must in every way be suitable—not only accept the invitation, but be suitably attired. One man had done the first, but declined the second; this proved he thought little of the occasion; he was found out and separated from the company of those who were suitably attired. Thus man's thought of grace apart from righteousness can only result in the sorest judgment, "outer darkness," "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Lastly, "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps

and went forth to meet the bridegroom." This parable seems to mark the actual position of this view of the kingdom. Beginning with the word "then" indicated the bridegroom had left the house, but intended to return; and so the virgins left the house, too, to go and meet him on his return.

There can be no doubt that the bridegroom represented the Lord, who, having left the house of Israel and gone to heaven, promised to return. The wise virgins represented those who were wholly attached to the true Bridegroom, and were free from false religious association. At the first the going forth from Judaism was so strong that some who were not real were in the company. Their outward profession was the same, they all had *lamps*, and evidently some thought that would be sufficient, for they had no oil when they started. Oil in Scripture is always a figure of the Holy Spirit, and is a characteristic feature of the Christian dispensation. During the absence of Christ the Holy Spirit is the life of everything on earth. He dwells in every true believer, as we read, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. vi. 19). Thus real believers to-day have the oil, and will go in with the Bridegroom when He comes. The wise will be shut in, while the foolish will be shut out. The wise have slept part of the time of Christ's absence; that is, they have forgotten about His return, for when the apostles died this expectation was lost, but at midnight the cry was made, "Behold the Bridegroom!" This cry woke up the virgins, and they at once turned to their lamps. The foolish felt their need of oil,

and said to the wise, "Give us of your oil"; while they are seeking oil the Bridegroom will come. All the wise have oil, and will go in, while all the foolish, who are without oil, will be shut out. The possession of oil will be the test of readiness.

The midnight cry having gone forth, many believers have been awakened by it, and have trimmed their lamps by cutting off that which hinders their light shining, such as worldly ways and human opinions about Divine things. Thus the kingdom of heaven in mystery has many features which are plainly set forth, so that those who seek instruction may become like the scribe, who has treasures of things new and old.

When Christ returns with His sword girt upon His thigh, He will establish the kingdom of heaven in manifestation. The mysterious form of the kingdom will have ended (see Psalm ii., xx., xxiv., lxxii., xciii., xcvi., xcix., ci., cx., cxix.; Isaiah xi., xxxii., lxiii., lxv., lxvi.). These references will suffice to show the great importance God attaches to this subject. In fact, all the prophets alluded to it. The expression kingdom of heaven is not found in the Acts or Epistles, because the coming of the Holy Spirit to reside constituted the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of heaven meant that One who was hidden in heaven was ruling. Thus the Holy Scriptures are to be looked at as the means by which Christ rules, although He Himself is hidden in the heavens.

The kingdom of God was constituted by Christ taking His place in Israel, and when He left the Holy Spirit took up that place on earth; so a

Divine person on earth is necessary for the kingdom to be called the kingdom of God (*compare* Luke xvii. 20 ; Rom. xiv. 17).

To sum up our consideration of the kingdom of heaven, we see it is a sphere of great importance, as also of privilege and testimony ; outside this sphere are Jews and heathen, where darkness reigns supreme.

Peter had the keys of the kingdom of heaven given to him (see Matt. xvi. 19), and he opened the door to the Jews who believed the gospel on the day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 41), and subsequently to Gentile believers at Cæsarea (Acts x. 48), and those persons left their old associations by baptism and entered into the new moral sphere of blessing on earth. Persons going to heaven itself must not be confounded with the kingdom of heaven, which is entirely on earth. May the Lord give each of His people an increasing spiritual capacity for meditating on the Scriptures as His present mind for them so long as they remain here.

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

THE expression "kingdom of God" implies a Divine Person present and establishing a sphere of authority and blessing.

There are both the *present* and *future*, as well as the *heavenly* and *earthly* aspects of the kingdom.

The *present* and *heavenly* aspect of it is realized in the believer in a state of heart divinely formed, by the truth of the kingdom ; while the future

aspect will be seen in both *heavenly* and *earthly* glory. There is much said about the kingdom of God in the gospels and epistles, so we propose to look at some of the various places where the expressions occur, in order to get a scriptural idea of what is taught on the subject. Perhaps it would facilitate our inquiry if we were to ask a few questions, such as :—

1. *What* is the kingdom of God ?
2. *Where* is the kingdom of God ?
3. What is the *character* of the kingdom of God ?
4. *Who* are those who *see* the kingdom of God ?
5. *Who* are those who *enter* into the kingdom of God ?
6. *Who* are those who *inherit* the kingdom of God ?
7. *Who* are those who are *excluded* from the kingdom of God ?
8. *What* is the *preaching* of the kingdom of God ?

If we can get scriptural answers to these questions we shall have some basis for further inquiries. Let us take the foregoing questions in their order.

1. *What* is the kingdom of God ?

A kingdom is a sphere where authority is maintained and privileges are dispensed. Therefore the kingdom of God must be where God's authority is recognized, and where His blessings are enjoyed. When Christ entered on His ministry, as recorded by Mark, we read in chapter i. 15 that He said, "The kingdom of God is at hand." Thus we should not expect to find it in the Old Testament ; there is much in the Old Testament about Messiah's kingdom, but that is another line of truth. The kingdom of God was about to commence, in which God would have His pleasure, and order things

according to His own mind. Thus we can understand the meaning of what Jesus said to the Jews in Luke xvii. 21, "The kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (N.T.) He Himself embodied the kingdom of God, and He was at that moment in the midst of the nation of Israel; but, alas! they were blind, and saw no beauty in the One who set forth the pleasure of God. The nation rejected their Messiah, and the kingdom passed into its present form, which is entirely moral. What is meant here by moral, is that it does not consist in the bettering of the flesh or the first man, but the introducing what is new, which bears the characteristics of the Second Man, before the display in glory, when the saints will outwardly bear the image of the heavenly Man.

- 2. *Where* is the kingdom of God?

At the present time it is only visible in the saints, when they are walking in subjection to the will of God, and thus confessing they are of the kingdom, as having begun to enter it. The heavenly part of the kingdom is being formed now; by-and-by the earthly part will be formed. The heavenly part belongs to heaven, while the earthly part belongs to the thousand years of Christ's reign, which is often called the millennium.

The heavenly part in its *future* aspect is seen in 2 Timothy ii. 12, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." Also in chapter iv. 18, "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom." Thus in the epistles, which were written to Christian assemblies or individuals, the heavenly part of the kingdom is referred to, either in its present or future form; while in the gospels of Matthew,

Mark, or Luke, where the Lord is seen on earth, with a remnant of Israel around Him, He referred to the *earthly* part of the kingdom of God, although many of the principles He announced hold good for the heavenly part too.

3. What is the *character* of the kingdom of God ?

“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink ; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. xiv. 17). This gives the moral character of the kingdom of God at the present time. Meat and drink were connected with the material system of Judaism, which was declared to be weak and unprofitable, because the law “made nothing perfect” (see Heb. vii. 18, 19) ; so it was superseded by the testimony of the kingdom of God, as we read, “The law and the prophets were until John : since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it” (Luke xvi. 16). The character of the kingdom is morally stamped on those who have entered it, and righteousness is the first distinguishing feature, then peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. These are all subjective marks, and produced by the truth in the hearts of believers.

4. *Who* are those who *see* the kingdom of God ?

This is plainly stated in John iii. 3, “Except a man be born again [or anew], he cannot see the kingdom of God.” This is absolutely and entirely a divine work in the heart of a person wrought by the Holy Spirit apart from human means. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” Until the Spirit has wrought this *first* work there is no perception of

anything Godward. There is no attraction to the heart of man in anything outside flesh, until the mysterious energy of the Spirit has taken place; then the one who has thus been born anew, sees the kingdom of God.

5. *Who* are those who enter into the kingdom of God?

Those who see the kingdom are most assuredly those who do enter into the kingdom. However, another action is necessary, as Jesus said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John iii. 5).

Water sets forth death, as *moral cleansing*; while *blood* sets forth death, as *judicial cleansing*. Here in verse 5 it is *water*, and not *blood*. A Jew was familiar with both, although, perhaps, he had not very much comprehended the meaning of either. When the side of Jesus was pierced blood and water flowed forth as the witness of His death (see John xix. 34); and in the first Epistle of John it says, "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood." The Word of God, when applied to the heart by the Spirit, brings about this moral cleansing; it brings death in on all that which the flesh would boast of, or lean on (see Phil. iii. 4-7). In this way persons are brought to see their lost estate, and cry out for salvation, which is obtained through faith in the gospel, and then that person begins to enter the kingdom. I say begins, because entering seems to be progressive. No length of time need elapse between *seeing* the kingdom and *entering* it; but, alas! often much time is lost. Then entering may be very slow, as there are many hindrances, as we

read, "How hardly shall they that have riches *enter* into the kingdom of God" (Mark x. 23); "Children, how hard it is for them that trust in riches to *enter* into the kingdom of God" (Mark x. 24); "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to *enter* into the kingdom of God" (Mark x. 25); "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation *enter* into the kingdom of God" (Acts xiv. 22). —

Riches were taken by the Jews to be a sign of God's favour, and when any one possessed them, he was not likely to be attracted by the testimony of the kingdom, which in the days of the Lord's ministry on earth presented no outward show, for He Himself had not where to lay His head. Riches bind the heart of the possessor to the scene to which they belong, for they belong to this world. Thus, when the heart is bound by riches, it is not desirous of entering much into the kingdom of God. Then, again, there is the opposition of kindred and friends, and many other things which hinder progress, unless there is the moral courage which presses through them into the enjoyment of the kingdom of God. Many believers, during their lives on earth, only just pass the threshold of the kingdom; others, although hindered for many years, do sometimes get a fresh start, and enter more into the kingdom. When set free from every earthly association by the Lord's coming, we shall *fully* enter into and enjoy the kingdom of God.

6. Who are those who *inherit* the kingdom of God?

All those who have entered the kingdom here, will inherit the kingdom by-and-by, as we read,

“ And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an *inheritance* among all them which are sanctified ” (Acts xx. 32). Again, “ Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the *inheritance* : for ye serve the Lord Christ ” (Col. iii. 24). Again, “ They which are called might receive the promise of eternal *inheritance* ” (Heb. ix. 15). These passages refer to the heavenly part of the kingdom of God, to which all true Christians belong, but there are many passages which refer to the subsequent earthly part ; as, “ Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world ” (Matt. xxv. 34). Again, “ I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God ” (Mark xiv. 25). The connection in which these passages stand shows they belong to the earthly part of the kingdom of God.

7. Who are those who are excluded from *inheriting* the kingdom of God ?

Those who have taken a place in this world among the people of God without having had the new birth, who have trusted ritualism instead of the gospel of the kingdom ; of whom it is said, “ Know ye not that the unrighteous shall *not inherit* the kingdom of God ? ” (1 Cor. vi. 9). Again, “ They which do such things shall *not inherit* the kingdom of God ” (Gal. v. 21). Again, “ Nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath *any inheritance* in the kingdom of Christ and of God ” (Eph. v. 5). All these statements are in letters addressed to persons professing to be God’s people ; but some amongst them were only empty

professors, although they may have been baptized, and breaking bread, and joining in christian exercises ; but all these things put together are only dead works in the light of God's word, if there has been no new birth, with the subsequent entering the kingdom.

8. What is it to *preach* the kingdom of God ?

It is evident one must have both *seen* and *entered* the kingdom, and also must know something about its character and history, in order to bear a right testimony regarding the present state of the kingdom, and the activities of the Spirit of God in it.

When the Lord began His preaching He said, " I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also : for therefore am I sent " (Luke iv. 43). The Lord did not unfold things beyond the time that then was, but His death and resurrection enlarged the sphere, and so we find Him during the forty days " speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God " to His beloved disciples. When He had ascended to the right hand of God, the testimony of the kingdom received yet another enlargement, for the Holy Spirit came down, and the gifts of the ascended Christ were given to men. Paul preached the kingdom of God in its fullest development.

In the Lord's teachings we get the whole history of the kingdom of God. In Mark iv. 26-29 the sower sowed the seed, he left the field, but there was an unseen power which would make the seed grow to maturity ; when this was reached the sower reappeared as the reaper. We know the sower was Christ, and that He left the field of His labours, but sent the Holy Spirit, that unseen

power, to make the seed grow and carry on through preaching, the work of the gospel in connection with the kingdom of God, till Christ comes again to set up the earthly part in power (see Rev. xiv. 14-16). Thus the Holy Spirit alone effects anything in regard to the kingdom of God during Christ's absence, but uses servants in the work. In Luke xiii. 18-21 we get another view of the kingdom, and how the enemy would corrupt the real work of God. First, we have "a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden." Notice, a grain and a garden both give the idea of what is small; but an unnatural growth took place, and "it became a great tree," it occupied an important place in the world, and this made room for the fowls of the air to lodge in the branches of it. The fowls represent wicked spirits which teach false doctrines, lodging in the branches of the mustard tree which represents the kingdom of God. Had the true saints of God followed their Master they would have remained small in man's eye, but great in God's eye. When we are lowly in heart the enemy cannot touch us. Alas! worldly principles are now held even by those who are real believers and are taught in the kingdom of God. That which began small has assumed proportions, which falsify the true character of the kingdom of God. In Luke xiii. 21 we get yet another view of the decline of the kingdom; it is likened to "leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." Here the kingdom is viewed as corrupted, for the leaven inflated the meal, and an unreal appearance was the result. Leaven is always used in Scripture to denote evil.

It is necessary for those who seek to bear a true testimony to know something of the natural appearance of the kingdom of God, or they will be misled by the unnatural appearance, supposing the corrupted form of to-day is right. Both the great tree, and the inflated dough, set forth what suits man's mind naturally, so that unless believers are entering into the kingdom they will be diverted by the attractions of the great tree of human importance, and the inflation of the dough appearing to be much larger than it really is, as we read "how some are puffed up" (1 Cor. iv. 8). Christ as seen on earth is the remedy for this unreal state of things. He was meek and lowly in heart, and always kept the place of dependence. If saints follow Him they will be free of these snares, and able to preach the kingdom of God so far as they have entered into it. †

The expression "the kingdom of heaven," or of the heavens, embraces a wider sphere than the kingdom of God; it is only found in Matthew's Gospel in the New Testament writings, while "kingdom of God" is found in the four evangelists, the Acts, and some of the epistles.

The kingdom of God always supposes what is genuine in itself, although the kingdom may lose its proper character for a time. The enemy may gain advantage over the saints, and they may be caught in his snares. It soon becomes evident when saints have been entrapped by the enemy, for they are no longer at liberty for the Holy Spirit to lead them on in the truth; and they are in danger of going farther astray, which leads to more bondage. When this is so, they lose their freshness, their love, and their power. They seek

to be great like the tree, and boastful like the inflated dough, they become worldly-minded. True, they are not of the world, but having got within the reach of the influence of the god of this world, they have been overcome. God may give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, and they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil (see 2 Timothy ii. 25, 26). Should they not get delivered in this way, then the Lord's coming or death will deliver them out of the power of the enemy. Satan has no power outside the world. No one who has been born again can ever be lost, although, for a time, the proper character of the kingdom may be wanting in him. Thus inconsistent believers are always a sad hindrance to the testimony of the kingdom of God. Do not these scriptures show us the need of watching and praying?

ON REPENTANCE.

REPENTANCE is a subject which is frequently met with in the Holy Scriptures. Sometimes it refers to God Himself; sometimes to His people; and sometimes to man in his natural state.

The repeated reference to this subject gives it a prominence which every careful reader of Scripture must notice, and it is important that some definite meaning should be attached to it in our minds.

Repentance *always* denotes a change, whether of thoughts or actions.

In considering God's repentance, we must

remember that God always has a right to do as He thinks good, and He is not responsible to any creature for any of His actions. We read, "He giveth not account of any of his matters" (Job xxxiii. 13). And as was confessed by one of earth's proudest monarchs, "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Dan. iv. 35).

When God repents, He does so of His own free will, and not as man does. So we read, "God is not a man, that he should repent" (Num. xxiii. 19). And again, "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent" (1 Sam. xv. 29).

Moreover, Jesus taught His disciples that "with God all things are possible" (Mark x. 27). And this was in contrast to "with men it is impossible," showing what a different circle God moves in from what man does. God must always act consistently with His Being, and thus we read, "God, that cannot lie" (Titus i. 2), and "in which it was impossible for God to lie" (Heb. vi. 18). Whatever attributes belong to God, we find He always acts consistently with them. For instance in Psalm xxii. 3 we read, "Thou art holy," and consistently with this attribute, God forsook His Son, when He was fulfilling that Psalm on the cross.

It is wonderful grace that God is pleased to record some of His repentings, that we may know they were not mere acts of His power, but that His feelings were mingled with the acts, which became moral necessities on the part of God. This is plainly set forth in the first record of God repenting. We read, "It repented the Lord that

he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth . . . for it repenteth me that I have made them" (Gen. vi. 6, 7). This was the result of man's history, which had at that time lasted about two thousand years. Man, as left to himself, had come into such a condition that God, in consistency with Himself, was obliged to remove *from* the earth the creature He had made *on* the earth, while reserving in grace one family for a fresh trial of man.

Much later in the earth's history God planted the Hebrew nation in the land of Canaan, and when they had failed, and He had borne with them, and changed His ways of acting many times, He said, "I am weary with repenting" (Jer. xv. 6). And again, "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them" (Jer. xviii. 7-10). Again, "If so be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way, that I may repent me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them" (Jer. xxvi. 3: *see also* Jonah iii. 9, 10). Thus God revealed His sovereign right to alter His ways of acting as often as He saw good, but He always desired to act in blessing towards His creature man.

So long as God was dealing with the Adam race as such, He was continually repenting, that is, changing His ways towards them; but as soon as Christ in resurrection and exaltation comes on the scene of prophecy, we read, "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Ps. cx. 4). This prophecy referred to the exaltation of Christ, as we see by its use in the New Testament. (See Matt. xxii. 44; Acts ii. 34; Heb. vii. 17.) Jehovah not repenting shows His perfect satisfaction in Christ, who is the Firstborn from the dead, and thus the beginning of the creation of God. This is exquisitely beautiful as showing God's estimate of that glorified Man, so that whether for heavenly or earthly blessing, everything is stable in Christ. The Holy Spirit dwelling in believers is the proof of this, and when the heavenly calling is completed, and the heavenly saints taken to the Father's house, then the earthly calling will again be God's testimony. Of this testimony Israel will be the centre, and so we read in the prophet, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help"; and to this end God intervenes and says, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave: I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues: O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes" (Hosea xiii. 9, 14).

Thus, on the first Adam being removed and the last Adam established, God has sworn that He will not repent; and when death and the grave (which were the result of the first Adam's sin) shall be destroyed, God will not repent of that. Both the man and the result of his doings shall be

removed, and God will no more repent, because then He will have perfect satisfaction.

Thus we see the sovereignty with which God acts, but He reveals the motives for His actions, that the believer may justify God in all His ways now, before the public manifestation of these things. Surely, "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord" (Ps. cvii. 43).

MAN REPENTING TOWARDS GOD.

So far we have looked at God repenting, now we will turn to man repenting. Man is but a creature, and has no right to act independently of God his Creator, but when he has done so, God calls upon him to repent. God makes no apology to man, but asserts His claims over him, and calls on him to return. In connection with Israel God had to complain through His prophet, "I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright, no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?" (Jeremiah viii. 6). Here we see what God looks for, namely, self-judgment—"What have I done?" This refers to the actor, and not so much to the action. This is what characterizes man's repentance when it is real; he sees he has been usurping the rights of God, and he exclaims, "What have I done?" When God's light shone on men of old it produced this confession. Job said, "I am vile," and also, "I abhor myself" (Job xl. 4; xlii. 6). David said, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel xii. 13). The thief on the cross said, "We indeed justly" (Luke xxiii. 41). These persons pronounced judgment on themselves, without mentioning

their actions. No doubt they did judge their actions, but to judge the *actor* is *deeper* than merely judging the action, and it is this that constitutes repentance when a man has sinned against God. Mark, when only the wrong *action* is judged, it is almost sure to be repeated; but when the *actor* is judged, then the person is clear of that matter, because when the root is judged there is no more fruit from that particular plant.

When Jesus began His ministry He insisted on the fact that "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke v. 32). And when He rose from the dead He said that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations" (Luke xxiv. 47). After Christ had gone to heaven and the Holy Spirit had come down, Peter preached, "Repent" (Acts ii. 38); "Repent" (Acts iii. 19); "to give repentance to Israel," etc. (Acts v. 31); and Paul preached, "(God) commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts xvii. 30).

Thus repentance is a necessity on the part of man, in order that he may receive the gospel.

The gospel is God's salvation for the man who sees he has wronged God in departing from Him by pursuing his own will, and who judges himself about it. But if the sinner continues his course refusing God's call to repentance, he will get at the great white throne the judgment of the lake of fire (Rev. xx. 15).

For anyone to say he is a believer, while he has never judged himself for the course which he has pursued, is only deceiving himself, and perhaps some of his neighbours.

Now the work of repentance may be deeper in

some persons than in others, but there must be *repentance* before God can give forgiveness. To forgive an unrepentant person would only justify him in his evil course. Repentance being the judgment of oneself, it is not necessary to remember all the evil acts that one has done. This would be impossible, for one has been so careless that one kept no account of the wrong actions; but what we must do, before we can receive God's forgiveness, is to judge *ourselves*; as Elihu said, "If any man say, *I have sinned*, and perverted that which was right" (Job xxxiii. 27). The gospel is appreciated by the repentant sinner; he finds God in righteousness can *meet* him and *save* him. God meets the sinner in grace, while the repentant sinner meets God by faith.

Preaching is often very defective in respect to repentance; some preachers persuade their hearers to go a shorter road, and avoid the bitter herbs of repentance. Those who follow such counsel and make hasty confession, even when there is a work of God begun in them, are afterwards plunged into doubts, fears, and even despair. They know they made a confession of being saved, when in reality they had not travelled the road the Spirit of God leads in, and they fear they are hypocrites, and get so distracted that they begin to doubt everything; or they get careless and go into the world, finding that what they were pressed to confess was not really true of them. Sometimes these poor persons may have timely help from believers who know where they became diverted, and they may be helped to retrace their steps and take God's road to blessing, namely, *true repentance*, which they avoided before. The road

no doubt is doubly difficult when it has been avoided, because there is no more that simplicity which characterized the beginning of the Spirit's work in the heart. So it is very serious for preachers to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God apart from repentance. Jesus said, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark i. 15).

This point is of the utmost importance to all those who labour in the gospel, whether with the young or those who are more advanced in years; with the latter repentance would be deeper than with the former, but repentance is necessary for everyone before forgiveness of sins can be known as a reality to the heart.

A misuse of John's Gospel has in many cases resulted in lip confession without the reality in the heart, and it has greatly damaged those who have accepted merely the *letter* of that gospel. Repentance and remission of sins need to be known before the teaching of that gospel can be understood.

BELIEVERS' REPENTANCE TOWARDS GOD.

Now with regard to those who know they have been saved from coming wrath, and called saints (as all believers are in the beginning of the apostolic addresses; see Rom. i. 7; 1 Cor. i. 2; 2 Cor. i. 1, etc.), we might well ask, What need have they of repentance? Well, only when they have gone their own way, instead of walking in the fear of the Lord. When this has happened, there can be no further advancement in the truth until repentance has been effected, and the wanderer restored. How is this effected? God causes His light to shine on the conscience, and if the wanderer

responds to the light he sees his course has been evil, and self-judgment begins. It is not so much what he has done—the actions—that is so serious in his mind, but to think he—the actor—could have been led by Satan into such a path, and perhaps, while there, so blinded that he found fault with those who were walking in obedience. This, and a great deal more, comes before the wanderer, and produces that self-judgment which leads to restoration.

Sometimes the wanderer has a bad conscience all the time of his being out of the way, yet he may continue hoping to come eventually right without repentance, but this is impossible.

Sometimes the wanderer is determined to continue his course, and then he avoids the light and keeps away from the company of those saints who are walking in the truth. He may seek the company of self-willed believers, and appear to be satisfied with it, and even become hardened because of the deceitfulness of sin. He may become more active in what is called gospel work, and such service as is seen in Philippians i. 15, where we read, “Some indeed preach Christ even for envy and strife.” When such preaching is used for blessing to the unsaved, the effect on the wanderer is still more serious, as he takes it as a proof that his course is not so bad after all. It does happen sometimes that God uses unconverted persons, as well as those of His saints who have wandered from the light, as instruments of blessing to the unsaved, because God is sovereign, and uses whom and what He will (*see* Matt. vii. 22). However much a self-willed believer may seem to be used, another day will disclose what God thought of the one who was walking in self-will,

and covering it up by activity in gospel work. All will be disclosed then, for hidden things will be brought to light.

When true repentance is brought about by God's light again shining on the wanderer, he seeks to have it out with God alone; he judges himself as well as his course, and lays his heart bare to God. In doing this he will have to encounter the opposition of Satan, and the longer he has been away in the path of disobedience, the greater the opposition of the enemy will be, for he will suggest all sorts of reasons to justify the maintenance of the wrong position. Thus, some wanderers are overcome by the enemy and give way to his suggestions; they then lose the light they had, and continue their wrong course more self-satisfied than before. After this they may possibly get no more light, and so continue to the end of their days; then they are freed from their self-will by death, instead of getting free by repentance and subsequent restoration. Their entrance into the Father's house is in no wise called in question, because that is on the ground of the death and resurrection of Christ; but crooked walk does affect their place in the kingdom, and therefore believers are warned, "that no man take thy crown" (Rev. iii. 11).

Now in having the self-will out with God there is great relief. David said, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old" (Ps. xxxii. 3); but in confession there is forgiveness, and the priesthood of Christ supports the heart at this most trying time, when otherwise despair would be caused by the enemy. "I have prayed for thee," said the Lord to Peter.

Confession is not asking for forgiveness ; there is no need to ask for it, for it is granted on confession. Forgiveness is waiting for confession, and so on confession the wanderer is forgiven ; that is, he realizes it. Thus we read, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John i. 9). Take particular notice that there is no question of the believer's sins being imputed to him, for God remembers them no more, because Christ suffered for them when He suffered, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God. He bore them all away in the judgment which He took on the tree, so that they are all cancelled in view of the day of judgment. But what we are considering is, How does careless walk in a believer affect him while here ? The Holy Spirit being grieved, He is no longer at liberty to shed abroad the love of God in the heart, so that the wanderer does not realize the warmth of God's love invigorating his heart towards Christ and those who are Christ's. He feels cold, and soon begins to find fault with others, especially those who are walking in holy separation to Christ.

Separation from evil has always characterized men of faith since sin came into the world, and the Old Testament is full of records of men who walked in that path. When the church or assembly of God failed in its testimony corporately, then we find separation enjoined on those who seek to please the Lord. We read, "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour" (2 Tim. ii. 21). And in the addresses to the seven assemblies in Asia, in Revelation ii. and iii., we find the word, "He that hath an ear,

let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches" ; and five of the assemblies out of the seven are called on to repent. Thus when decline had set in, the saints were called to hear what they should do in a day of failure. They were not to be indifferent to what was due to Christ, but each individual was to hear the Spirit's voice.

When the wanderer has failed to maintain separation, and gone again to what he had left, if he is to be *restored*, it will be to the place which he lost. He lost his place of separation, and how humbled he should be at having lost such a place of privilege! If the departure has been in actively opposing the truth, it is very serious, and of such we read, "If God peradventure will give them repentance" (2 Tim. ii. 25). This seems to be connected with God's call to holy separation from evil ; these persons opposed it, and it is not certain if God will grant them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. Having so sinned, there is doubt whether they will be restored to the place they lost ; they may die without such being granted. Many converted persons received their blessing in the various systems which the self-will of men has formed, and they may remain there for a time ; but should God afford them light from outside the particular system they are in, and they have faith to follow that light, it will increase. Should they allow circumstances to make them indifferent to this light, then it may be withdrawn, and not given again until they have repented of their indifference to the light God set before them.

No doubt repentance is very humbling, but surely it is more humbling to continue in a wrong course seeking to justify it, for then it becomes

more difficult to retrace the steps. Where the point of departure from the Lord is known by the individual, there can be no restoration until he has retraced his steps to that point. Here the wanderer finds the comfort of having an Advocate with the Father, as well as the support of the great High Priest, while the Holy Spirit leads the heart through the deep waters of repentance on to the solid ground of restoration.

REPENTANCE TOWARDS MEN.

When repentance is called for, on account of having offended either the assembly or an individual person, then the repentance only refers to actions; because men judge actions only; God has the sole right to judge motives. When the Apostle Paul wrote the second epistle to the Corinthians he feared he should find some who had not repented of their bad actions, but had continued in them (*see 2 Cor. xii. 21*). He also repented of his own action in sending his first epistle to the Corinthians, but when he had heard of its good result he ceased to repent.

Whenever a wrong action has been done to the saints, they should look for repentance, and at once forgive on confession of the wrong. Many little wrongs can be looked over, for love covers the multitude of sins, but some wrongs are so serious that unless there is repentance there could be no forgiveness.

When a person has sinned so grievously that the assembly has had to exclude him from its privileges, and to brand him as "wicked"; when he has repented of the action, the assembly should be ready to relieve him from the charge it was

obliged to impose, provided that when *gathered to Christ's name* they had no other difficulty about the matter.

God keeps forgiveness waiting for His erring, repenting, and confessing saints; and the saints should do so too, and bestow it *joyfully* on the repentant one, on his repentance and confession of the action, or course of action, for which he was disciplined. Jesus exhorted His disciples, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. v. 48). Surely if Jewish disciples were thus taught to be perfect in their ways of acting, how much more saints now, who know the grace of the present dispensation. Where is the grace shown to-day as enjoined in the answer to Peter's question, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" Mark the farthest length the Jewish mind of Peter was capable of going; but Jesus said, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matt. xviii. 21, 22). Again, "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him" (Luke xvii. 3, 4). This referred to the Jewish individual, but how much more should believers now be able to rise to grace of this sort! Alas! how much failure is here manifested, and hard, ungracious ways are shown towards one another, often under the plea of faithfulness, while it is really unfaithfulness, because *forgiveness is withheld*. Time is often required to ascertain whether a person has repented

of his evil action or course, but as soon as this is known confidence and grace should be shown.

A sinner's repentance and confession are often more rejoiced over by the Lord's people than those of a wandering saint; but should this be so? Should we not hail with delight the restoration of a wandering believer as the work of the Holy Spirit, as much as a person for the first time confessing Jesus as Lord? Is it not partiality to think more of one than of another? God's ways are equal, and He complains when His people's ways are unequal.

When God calls man to repentance, whether the sinner or the wandering saint, it is always in view of his having gone his own way, which he had no right to do, and which God calls *unrighteousness.* Therefore in man's repentance towards God there must of necessity be self-judgment, because God could not forgive an unrepentant person. The forgiveness would be different according to the person being either sinner or saint, but the repentance is self-judgment in either case.

God's forgiveness awaits repentance and confession, whilst Christ's activity on high and the Spirit's activity below bring this about, and the saints who are walking in the truth do their part by washing one another's feet. We read that Judas, "when he saw that he [Christ] was condemned, repented himself, . . . and departed, and went and hanged himself" (Matt. xxvii. 3-5). Judas evidently did not expect Jesus would have been condemned, but that He would have delivered Himself; so when he saw He did not do so, the gravity of his action in having betrayed such a One came upon him, but not as repentance

towards God, for he immediately went and added to his crime by taking his own life, which Scripture had said belonged to God. So while he repented of the action of betraying Christ, remorse took possession of him, as we read, "The sorrow of the world worketh death" (2 Cor. vii. 10).

When the kingdom is about to be displayed, then will be brought to light everything which has been done in the energy of the Spirit of God, while all the activities of the flesh in the things of God will be burnt up. This shows that the repentance of saints is a very important matter, and the light of God's Word is used to bring home to the heart the sense of what is becoming, or what is not becoming, in a saint. We shall thus either "assure our hearts before him" or be self-condemned (1 John iii. 19, 20).

Thus repentance and confession are very real things, and should be thought very seriously of. Many a fault into which a believer may slip through unwatchfulness is known to himself only, but that should not make him think little of it, but rather let him be thankful that it is secret, and seek repentance and restoration, lest he get hardened, and the next time he fails it should become public, and involve others also. Peter tells us, "This is the true grace of God wherein ye stand," and if this grace becomes better known to the saints, they will become more active in seeking to bring about the restoration of those saints who have missed their way, and are no more enjoying that increase of light which the Spirit is ever ready to give.

Happy those who walk in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.