

NOTES
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“The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into
the patient waiting for Christ.”

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CHRIST AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD.

It is not a little striking to see how simply you can read in the Old Testament the history of Christ. I quite admit, that if we had not the light of the New Testament we should not have seen this; but having it, we can enter very simply into the way in which the Spirit of God has developed in the Old Testament the truth in regard to Christ.

I do not know anything more interesting in the study of the Psalms than the apprehension of Christ in them, and indeed, as has been said, this is the great interest in the whole of scripture. We read in 2 Corinthians iii., "the Lord is that spirit," that is, of scripture, and the consequence is that we have now in that way the key to all scripture. I think the writers of the Old Testament scriptures had not that key; though holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, they scarcely had the key to the understanding of them. But when you have the key, then scripture becomes a completely new book. That is true of scripture from beginning to end. When you apprehend that the Lord is the spirit of scripture, you learn to draw in your mind a distinction

between the spirit and the letter, though the letter is perfect, and cannot be infringed in any way; but the one great point in reading any part of scripture, the Old Testament as well as the New, is to apprehend that the Lord is the spirit of the word. It would not be at all difficult to make plain, and in whatever part of scripture you like to read, from beginning to end, you will find it is so; the Psalms, the Prophets, all are full of Christ, all prove that He is the spirit of the word. The book of Leviticus would be a dull book in itself, without interest, but when you really apprehend the spirit of scripture, then Leviticus becomes a book of the deepest interest. And in this connection I will allude to one point; when God set to work to lay down injunctions in regard to the system of sacrifices, He began with the burnt offering, not with the sin offering. It is a great point to see that God speaks of things from His height. He speaks from the height of the burnt offering, and then comes down to the other offerings, until eventually He reaches the sin and trespass offerings. In the presentation of the offerings all spoke of Christ, and all shewed that God would be completely glorified in the place of death by His offering.

There are other things to which I might refer if necessary to prove the point that the Lord is the spirit of all scripture.

Now, my object in speaking to you is, that you should be able to get a true judgment of

things ; and I am perfectly confident of this, that we can only get a true judgment as the eye is attracted to the right hand of God ; and further to the One who is at the right hand of God. It has often been said, that the right hand of God is the point of interest for the saints, because everything for God, and that is according to God, will surely come forth from the right hand of God ; Christ is sitting there ; and will sit there only till His enemies are made His footstool. And therefore the right hand of God must of necessity be the point of interest for the minds of the saints.

I cannot tell what is going to happen from looking at events in the world. It is possible to forecast in that way, for when everything is to take place according to God, the first movement will be from the right hand of God. It will be a great moment for this world when Christ rises from the right hand of God. He does not sit there for ever. He sits now on the Father's throne, but the day will come when He will rise, and sit on His own throne. We learn that from the book of Revelation, and there we may see the tremendous changes that will take place when He rises from the right hand of God.

Now, I take up these three Psalms. First Psalm cii. as presenting to us remarkably the sufferings of the One now at the right hand of God. There you will find that He particularly refers everything to Jehovah. He says, " He weakened my strength in the way ; he shortened my days." The Lord

does not take up what He passes through as the act of men, He receives all as from God. It came to pass in the government of God, in connection with His ways as to Messiah and Israel. The fact is very simple to understand; it was impossible for God to bring in blessing for Israel in connection with Christ after the flesh. When brought in for Israel it must be in life with Christ; and though cut off as Messiah, God gave Him in resurrection length of days even for evermore. So that now He is a priest for ever after the power of an endless life. That is the great thought in Psalm cii., and it stands good for Israel.

Another point is that He gets compensation. The answer of Jehovah is the full recognition of Him as Creator. "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thy hands." We should never have known that it was Christ who was referred to but for the light of Hebrews ii. It was really Jehovah's answer, the full recognition that the One cut off down here was the Creator of all things; and while everything created will pass away, He remains. "Thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment: and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same and thy years shall not fail."

Now, it is an immense point if we apprehend that the One who suffered here on earth is really the Creator of all things. It would alter our sense

of everything here if we were conscious that all things were created by Christ, and without Him was not anything made that was made. Thus, "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not."

The Creator came here, came into man's condition, and His strength was weakened, and His days shortened. I believe we have to bear in mind, and the fact still stands good, that the Creator has been here in the midst of the world, that Christ has suffered here, His strength was weakened and His days shortened; and when all that has come to pass in this world, what can be the moral value of the world in the eye of God? And if we understand this, if it comes home to us at all by the grace of God, it must have a profound effect upon us.

Now we pass on to Psalm cx. and here we have another side, the Jehovah side; here Christ's enemies are to be made His footstool; a very different thought. It is no longer Christ suffering here, and His days shortened, but it is the One who has been received with acclamation at the right hand of God. That is the thought that comes out there, a thought of the greatest import to us.

We pass on now to Psalm cxviii. before dwelling in detail on Psalm cii. Here we find Christ received in the very city where He was once rejected. There the stone which the builders rejected is become the head stone of the corner.

The time has come when they say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." The Lord took up that expression when He came to Jerusalem for the last time, and said, "Ye shall not see my face until ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." That completes the history of Christ as Messiah. He will come again to Jerusalem as Man, as Priest after the order of Melchisedec, and then will they say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." He will be a Priest upon His throne.

I may mention one more point in that connection; the Psalms really close with the cxix. All those that follow are supplementary, songs of degrees and praise psalms; but the five books of psalms close with cxix. And you will find this a point of interest, for while Psalm cxviii. gives you the answer to Psalm ii., Psalm cxix. gives the answer to Psalm i. Psalm i. looks for the godly man, and in Psalm cxix. you find him, the law being written on his heart. Psalm ii. views Christ as rejected in Zion, and Psalm cxviii. shews that He is received gladly in the very place where He was rejected. It is no longer the kings standing up, and the rulers rejecting Him, but they say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." A mighty change has come to pass, and that brings home to us the completeness of the psalms. The picture is dark enough in the beginning, but the close is very

bright indeed. In Psalm cxix. you have a godly company in 'whose heart the law is written, a people in that sense completely prepared for the Lord. Then you have also the question raised in Psalm ii. answered in Christ being welcomed in the place where He was once rejected, and thus you see how you may read the history of Christ in the psalms.

Now, the point on our part is to share in the rejection of Christ. We often use scripture expressions lightly, and without much understanding of their import. Take for instance, such an expression as "crucified and dead with Christ," do you understand the import of that expression? We are said to be crucified with Christ, but they will not have to be crucified in millennial times. There will be no reproach to bear then; Christ will have come again in glory; no going forth to meet Him then without the camp bearing His reproach. Many expressions which are suitable to us will have no application to them; there will be no such thing as the fellowship of His death, dead with Him, and crucified with Him. These expressions are all right as to us now, but will have no place when Christ is here in glory. But the question I raise, and it is one proper to be raised, is how far are they real with us? We take up these expressions, but do they state what is really true in your souls? If you say, "I am crucified with Christ," does that express in your mind a sense of

identification with Christ in His crucifixion? This is a point of great moment. If we go back to our baptism, we see there God setting forth His mind as to us, we are buried with Christ. A very long time commonly elapses between the baptism of people and their minds coming to the import of baptism. The import of baptism is that we are buried with Christ, but you have to come in mind to the reality that you are dead with Christ. If you have come to this, you discern the character of the scene in which Christ has been rejected. Christ came here in the perfect grace of God, and the world rejected Him, and the world thus manifested that they preferred Satan as its god and prince because he ministered to the lusts of men, and they had no room for the goodness and grace of God. Hence the true place of the Christian is crucified, dead, and buried with Christ.

But then there is another side. If we have died with Him we shall also live with Him; we must look at the other side as well. There is the suffering side, but that means that you will have part with Him in glory when He comes again. In the place where He was rejected, the church will come with Him, and participate in His glory when He comes to be glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe.

Remember that Christ will never come again in humiliation, never again be known as He was once known when here on earth;

He will come again in glory, to be glorified in His saints. The church will be the vessel in which He will be admired; but at the present time, He sits at the right hand of God, waiting until His enemies are made His footstool.

Now as thus exalted, He is saluted as High Priest after the order of Melchisedec, and my object is to shew the import of that in connection with His presence at the right hand of God, and that His being made a priest thus is of the deepest import to us as Christians.

I will refer to two or three passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews. (See chap. iv. 14—16.) "Seeing then that we have a great high priest that is passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." I quite admit you do not get the actual expression here, "the right hand of God," but the High Priest has passed through the heavens, like the high priest in Israel went through the holy place into the holiest of all. Thus we have a great high Priest passed through the heavens, gone to the right hand of God, I do not doubt at all, to establish there the throne of grace. That was the effect of His going to the right hand

of God. Then He is also Priest; you get the thought of the throne of grace in the fact of Jesus being crowned with glory and honour, and this is the basis of the world to come. The principle of the world to come will be the rule of grace, and Christ is gone to the right hand of God to establish the rule of grace. He is a Priest there, and what hangs on that is, He is our representative. The instant you have the idea of a priest, He is representative, and if He is not representative, He is not a priest. Christ is thus very much like Aaron was on the behalf of the children of Israel. God took a distinguished man, the next to Moses, and made him the representative of the people. Moses was hardly the representative of the people. He was much more the representative of God, as Aaron was the representative of the people with God.

Another thought connected with the priesthood is that Christ, as representative of the people, is sympathetic. "We have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities." As representative of us at the right hand of God, He is sympathetic with us down here. Now, saints enter into that thought but poorly. In the various pressures under which people suffer from various causes, such as sickness, bereavement, and other trying circumstances, there is a sense of need of sympathy, and therefore it is a great thing to see that the High Priest is sympathetic; and if

you understand the force and meaning of that, if you have a sense of what the High Priest is, as representative at the right hand of God, but also sympathetic here, you will find that it bridges entirely the distance between you and God; and in consequence of it you are admonished to "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Mercy and grace are very great realities to faith. We not only obtain mercy, but find grace. Mercy is a less important thing than grace, but we obtain both. It is mercy as to the without, and grace as to the within. You avail yourself of the dominion of grace, to obtain mercy, and grace for the time of need. The kingdom is established in the person of Christ, at the right hand of God, crowned with glory and honour, and the Priest who is ordained to be our representative is sympathetic, and the reign of grace stands good to you and me. It is blessed to think that not simply the throne of grace subsists, but that you are encouraged by the Spirit of God to come boldly to that throne.

In the sense of this we should never faint under difficulties here. They may be very real, and appear overwhelming, but the throne of grace subsists, and you are encouraged to come boldly in every time of need.

We will turn now for a moment to the next chapter. (Heb. v. 9, 10.) "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation

unto all them that obey him ; called of God an high Priest after the order of Melchisedec. Christ has become the Author of eternal salvation, and that is in virtue of His work. It is not a question here of temporal deliverance, but of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him. Salvation is brought to pass, I do not doubt accomplished in the death of Christ. I believe that every enemy was vanquished in the death of Christ, and He has become thus the Author of eternal salvation to all that obey Him.

Thus we may stand here in this world in the blessed reality of salvation, with the helmet of salvation on our head because salvation is accomplished. There is no reason that I know of why a saint should not stand here at liberty from the power of the world, and sin, and Satan, because Christ has become to him the Author of eternal salvation. He has vanquished every foe, there is not a power left, for He has vanquished all in His death. The first point is, you are brought into the kingdom, under the sway of His grace ; but the deliverance is, that you are set free from the authority of all against God. Christians who are worldly really do not understand grace. If they understood the sway of grace, they would not be overcome by the world, Satan, or sin. If they are overcome there is not a real enjoyment of the good of grace, they are not in the benefit and blessing of the grace of God. The very teaching

of grace is that, "having denied ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ." That is the attitude of the Christian under the influence and power of grace; he is delivered from the present course of things, and learns how to live soberly in this age.

I turn now to Hebrews vi. 19, "Which hope we have as an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."

Also Hebrews vii. 17-19 "For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before, for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof; (for the law made nothing perfect), but the bringing in of a better hope, by which we draw nigh to God."

Also Hebrews viii. 1, 2, "Now of the things of which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man."

Now, just group these three passages together. I do not say that the presence of Christ at the right hand of God brings in the idea of a forerunner,

but the presence of Christ in heaven does. You and I are not to sit at the right hand of God, but we are going to be in heaven. Christ has entered as Forerunner and we follow. If He is Forerunner, He is the first of a company going to have a place in heaven, and the practical result is that we have a hope in heaven, for Christ is our hope. I can contemplate Christ at the right hand of God with the consciousness that I have a hope in heaven. My hope is not of blessing on earth, but that He is going to receive us to Himself, that where He is we may be also; and the practical working of that you get in the next chapter. By the which "we draw nigh to God." The whole legal system is set aside, a better hope has been introduced; and the working of that hope is in our drawing nigh to God. If conscious of having a place in heaven, and you have, if Christ is gone there as Forerunner, by that hope you draw nigh to God; and the more conscious you are of that place in heaven the more readily you draw nigh to God. You have every confidence in God, and are going to spend eternity there with Him in this love, and it must be by that hope that we draw nigh to God. With the Levitical system people could never draw nigh to God. They were, on the contrary, made to feel the distance between God and themselves because God was not then revealed. When God has come out in the fulness of His love, and made known to us what that love will do for us; in drawing

nigh you come near the One who has been made known to you. You could not draw nigh to God if He had not first made Himself perfectly known to you in the greatness of His love.

One point more, Christ is the "minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man." He takes up the position typified by Aaron in his charge of the holy places. And He has something to offer, He offers the two wave loaves, the consecrated company as presented by Him to God on the day of Pentecost. The wave-sheaf was offered on one day, and fifty days after there was the presentation of the two wave loaves, that is the church in the power of the Holy Ghost. He has something to offer as being minister of the sanctuary. If you asked me to define it I should have some difficulty, but Christ is minister of it. There is a real and true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man. The fact is this, all difficulties in regard to the work and service of God disappear as you enter into the blessed fact of God revealed in the death of Christ; and our approach to God is the necessary result of the sense in our souls of what God has revealed of Himself in that death. I turn to Hebrews x. 11, "And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting

till his enemies be made his footstool." That brings out a very important thought of the grace of Christ. He would not go up on high until every jot and tittle of the work was done; and now He sits at the right hand of God, the proof that all is done. "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." The presence of Christ sitting at the right hand of God is the proof that there is no more offering work to be done. There is a sanctified company, not merely of believers as such, but a priestly company called to serve the living God. They are perfected for ever; having no more conscience of sins. And hence all that follows. We have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which He hath consecrated for us through the veil; that is to say, His flesh. It hangs on the blessed revelation of God in righteousness and love. And if you approach it is to a God who has made Himself known in the perfect conciliation of righteousness and love. We can see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, because we see in the cross the perfect conciliation of righteousness and love. God was so glorified there in the death of Christ, and His love so expressed that we might be without fear in the presence of the glory of God. And the more familiar you are with the death of Christ, the more familiar you are with the glory of God. In the death of Christ God has made Himself known, and in the resurrection of Christ all His

pleasure in regard to man is displayed. And as you learn what it is to be risen together with Christ, you find that you have a priestly place in the presence of God, that you are sanctified, and that the presence of Christ there is the witness that you are perfected for ever.

Now what is the effect? You approach God not simply as believers, but according to the truth of the calling, so really affected by the love of God, that you love God, and approach Him in the consciousness that He has delight in your being before Him in the sense of His love. You approach with full confidence because you are in the light of that love which has been expressed in the death of Christ, and in the sense that it is His pleasure that you should be there before Him in association with Christ, a company of priests in the midst of whom He can sing praise to God.

Now, one word more. You must remember the present is the time of our education. We are formed now by the revelation of the love of God. We are educated in the truth of the calling; therefore the present moment is of the greatest importance, for there are lessons to be learned now never to be learned again. There will be a perfect answer in us to all we are learning down here. All will come out in the holy Jerusalem which comes down from God out of heaven. Everything must come forth from God. Christ comes from the right hand of God, and the holy Jerusalem comes down from God out of heaven.

So at present if we are to be a testimony for the kingdom and grace of God here upon earth, we can only be it in proportion as we have gone in to His presence, so as effectually to represent God, and His glory, and His grace here in this world.

In the first part of the Epistle to the Ephesians you go into God, and in the latter part you come forth from God, and in the power of the Lord's might do battle down here upon earth against the influences of the evil in the heavenlies. You stand in the reality of the kingdom, seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and are prepared to do battle with the power of the enemy.

One more word. Christ has been received in heaven with acclamation for the establishment of the kingdom. It is established in heaven; but remember that when Christ comes, and is welcomed here on earth, He will be set forth in the saints, for "He will come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe." He will come with ten thousands of His saints and be set forth in the holy Jerusalem which comes down from God out of heaven.

May God in His great grace be pleased to divert our attention from the earth and the man here. We shall never get a right thought of God while we look at things here. May He give us to apprehend the greatness, and the glory of the Man up there, and the place there, and how important all is in regard to us. He is the Fore-runner, the Priest after the order of Melchisedec.

He is the Minister of the sanctuary; and at the same time His very presence at the right hand of God is the witness that the offering work is done, the sanctified company is perfected for ever, and have no more conscience of sins. So that they can properly enter into the service of the living God.

F.E.R.



ASSOCIATION WITH CHRIST.

2 Kings ii. 1—14.

THERE is a remarkable point connected with the history of Elisha that you do not find connected with any other prophet, and that is, he was anointed prophet in Elijah's stead. (1 Kings xix. 16.)

So far as I remember, in every case prophets were raised up of God independently of any other prophet. Each had his own special ministry. You do not read of any other prophet who was raised up to take the place of another but Elisha, and that shews us how we have to take the ministry of Elijah and Elisha together. I do not doubt that in a way we get the answer to it in the ministry of John the Baptist, and the Lord, and at the close of Elijah's history which we have here, we can trace the Lord's own path of death and resurrection, and Elisha becoming the vessel of heavenly grace and power.

The point I want to impress upon you for a moment is, that the church is here in this world to represent Christ now that He is gone on high. I mean by the church, all Christians. Christians are here to represent Christ in

His absence. When Elijah was gone to heaven Elisha took up his mantle as it fell from him.

You must not suppose that we take up any ministry of any kind, independently of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you remember, in John's gospel, chapter xiv., the Lord says to the disciples, that they should do greater works than Himself. At first sight we might suppose that the ministry of the disciples was greater than that of the Lord, but though the *works* were greater, it was really the *ministry of the Lord* when He was gone which was carried out by the disciples.

If Christians are here to represent Christ, Christ being now absent, the testimony of God reposes in them. Christians are responsible for the testimony, but in order to this they are set in the power of Christ. It was the case when the Lord Jesus Christ took His place on high that greater works were done; but if you remember in John xiv. the Lord distinctly and immediately connects it with prayer, that if anything was asked in His name *He* would do it. It was not that the disciples did anything apart from the Lord, but the Lord did it through them.

He had been here on earth, and is now glorified with the Father, and therefore works take a larger and greater character. Another power has come in, that of resurrection—the power that has established glory—and therefore everything takes a greater character and form. For an illustration of it, you remember that there were two storms on

the sea. In the first the Lord was in the ship and asleep; He arose and rebuked the storm. You may say that was a great work, none but the Son of God could have done it; but when you come to the other storm He does not rebuke the sea, He walks on the water. He was really in a power superior to the whole force of wind and wave, figuratively to the power and evil, and that was greater morally than hushing the storm.

When the Lord was here He shewed the power of the kingdom. He shewed that He could meet all the power of Satan and spoil his goods. When you come to the power of resurrection He is superior to it all. He has overcome Satan in death, and risen out of it, and now He can set His people in moral superiority to everything here. He can hush the power of evil for us here, but it is a far greater thing for Him to lift us to Himself above it. The disciples would be conscious that beyond all the power of evil here the Lord Jesus Christ had gone to the Father; there is no power that He is not beyond. The power that comes in now is not so much to still the evil here, but we get the intercession of Christ on high, and He enables us to walk above the force of the storm here. It is in this power that we are set here in testimony for Christ.

The great point for us is whether we are with Christ in our souls. It has often been said, that John xiv. is that which fits you for John xv. In

chapter xiv. we are with Christ and in chapter xv. we are here for Christ. We are of no use here without we are bearing fruit. God indeed uses our history here to work out with us His blessed purpose of grace, and as it has often been said,—God works in us far more than He works by us, but still we are left here so that we may be for the Lord. I feel this a serious thing, to think of being left here for the Lord; one would like to fulfil one's privilege. God has to work with us and help us, and discipline us, and it is needful because of what we are, but as to privilege Christians are the only witness for Christ now He has gone. The poor man who was set free from the legion of demons was attached to the Lord, and then sent home to tell what great things the Lord had done for him. He was sent back as the witness of grace in the country that rejected his Deliverer, and that is what we are; witnesses of grace in this world, as those who are attached to the Lord. If we are not attached to the Lord and drawn into His secret, we cannot really be witnesses for Him. Attachment of heart is the great thing. I feel to-day that we are in a Christianised world. The world is so glossed over by a form of godliness that we do not see the evil of it, and that the Christ we love has been rejected.

That leads me to say another word. The question is often put, "Are you saved"? and perhaps it is answered "Yes, thank God, I am." But I would ask, what do you mean? What many a person

means by saying, "Yes, I am saved," is that they have got the *assurance* of salvation, they know that they will not be lost and will be in heaven, and they know that upon the authority of the word of God and upon the ground of the blood-shedding of the Lord Jesus Christ. Assurance of salvation is known, but that is not what I call a *present* salvation. What I would like to ask is, whether we are really in the truth of our baptism. In scripture we have the Red Sea as a figure of baptism and also the "Flood." It is very clear that baptism is the door by which a person leaves a world of judgment; this was distinctly typified in Egypt. Judgment was executed in the Red Sea and the people left the world of judgment to be in the company of the blessed God. Noah, too, came out of the ark to be in the favour of God in a new world. I fully own that the administration of baptism has its own bearing on the baptised, but at the same time a baptised person may not be in the truth of it. It had a very distinct meaning in the early days; they knew that it was their complete and entire separation from the world of judgment. I doubt very much whether we are all in the good of it. The whole thing has been so terribly weakened.

A beloved brother—now with the Lord—used to say that the church had entirely lost the idea of a *present* salvation. Present salvation is, that I am delivered from the system of this world, and belong to another system of things altogether;

that I am not dominated by the things of this scene where Satan is god and prince. He has his power in a kind of idolatrous way, not the actual worship of idols now, but using the world as the place of self gratification. (1 Cor. x. 7.) Hence the exhortation "Keep yourselves from idols." Another thing is *spiritual* wickedness, by which he has contrived to twist round what is spiritual, and turn it to the things of this world. The idea of people is, that Christianity benefits them in the world, and this keeps them in touch with the world. The worse form of evil now is, that Satan has corrupted Christianity so that we have a corrupted Christianity around us, and I ask, how far through the knowledge of a present salvation are we free from it? And if not free, how are we to be free? By your heart and mind getting more and more into association with Christ in heaven as those who are in the truth of our baptism. I would like every one to raise the question, "How far am I in the truth of my baptism?" It is thus you are really free from the power of that which has come under the judgment of God, and you know that through the death of Christ; you are associated with everything that is heavenly. Jordan for Israel was the entrance into the land; but for Elijah, the passage *out* of the land of Israel into heaven.

There is a significance in the fact that John's ministry began where Elijah's left off, that is at Jordan. Elisha came back from Jordan in hea-

venly power, and thus you have a ministry from heaven here on earth, the power of the kingdom come in. John's ministry was beyond Jordan and people had to go out to him there to be baptised. The point was, *they went out*. It must have been a wonderful thing to see the people going out to him, all making their way down towards Jordan. It was not coming into the land, it was going out. Everything in the land was apostate; Herod, an apostate king, ruling, and apostasy in the things of God; hence John begins outside of it all, God opened a door out of it by John's ministry. When all was apostate and people might be saying, "Who will shew us any good?" he opened the door of repentance for them. The people might say, if we go out we leave the heads of religion and the whole system of things here. Yes, that is the first point, they left it all. The difficulty with us really is to enter into the present salvation effected for us in Christ, so as to get clear of things here. Do the things here dominate you? You are not clear if they do. Is Christ your Lord? That is a question not beyond the youngest here. I say this, if you know Christ as Lord you get freedom from every domination but His. I see the remarkable grace of God, I may say, in opening the door out by John's baptism. The Lord Himself came in by it. It is administered now in the name of the Lord, so that I have a right to leave everything behind, and joy and rejoice in the Lord.

God has been pleased to intervene in the course of things here for us by an administrative ordinance, which identifies us with the death of Christ, but being in the name of the Lord, it connects us with the salvation set forth in Him. Israel of old were baptised to Moses, and they went with Moses, and if you go out to the Lord you will find the company of the Lord. John thus puts it in His gospel, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." You know salvation in the company of the Lord outside of the whole sphere of things here. First, He puts His sheep forth, they went out from the existing order in company with Him, then the Lord says, "By me if any man *enter in* he shall be *saved*."

Beloved friends, I do want to impress upon you *association with Christ*. There is not one true heart here to-night that would not like to be here for Him. We all want to be here for Him, not in self-gratification and self-assertion, but in the spirit of humbleness, meekness, and lowliness of heart, shewing what is of Christ in whatever place we may be.

It is one thing for us to listen to truth, but another thing to be in the power of it. You will get tested always, but you need never be afraid of the test. If you test gold you only prove that it is gold, and if you let the Lord have His place in your heart, a test will but prove that you do love Him. It was a hard saying for the disciples.

when He spoke of giving His flesh to eat and His blood to drink, and it is so to us; it is the accepting His death. But when the test came to them, "Will ye also go away?" what saved them? It was the truth of their affection to the Lord. Peter says, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." Affection to the Lord is what we want. Every first day of the week you have the fresh sense before you of the Lord's love to you, and that which draws the heart to Him is *love*. Elisha was drawn to Elijah. He had three tests given him; Elijah said unto Elisha, "Tarry here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel," and Elisha said unto him, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." And in verses 4 and 6 we have the other tests applied, but each is met by the same answer. The number three to me represents *perfected experience*. Abraham went three days' journey towards Mount Moriah. The Lord said when here, "I must walk to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected." He was also three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The multitudes were with the Lord three days in Mark viii. 2. All that, I believe, indicates perfected experience, so you find it with the disciples too. The Lord three times over puts His cross before them; the first time He mentions it He was to suffer and be killed by the leaders of religion; then secondly, the Son of man was to be delivered into the hands of men; *men* generally

speaking would kill Him, and the third time He was to be delivered to the Gentiles, and they would crucify Him. Priests, men, and the Gentiles would all reject and crucify Him. The disciples had to face all that; the Lord puts it all before them, yet He held them to Him, giving them His resurrection as their hope. Before Elijah took this mystic journey, he had cast his mantle upon Elisha, and Elisha said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee." He was not clear of things here, there was not the forsaking of things to be with Elijah in the interests of the Lord whom Israel rejected. Many will say it is a hard saying, but, beloved friends, nothing will draw you but love. The Lord said to His disciples, "Will ye also go away?" and Peter's answer was, "Lord, to whom shall we go, thou hast the words of eternal life?"

The second test comes to Elisha, "Tarry here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho," and again the answer comes, "As the Lord liveth and thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." What a blessed drawing of grace. Now why are we here to-night? How many of us can look back over many a year that He has kept us, and we are here together speaking of these things because He has held us by the cords of love.

It is blessed to know the love of the Lord and His support, and I fully own these trembling steps of mine could not have followed Him if He had not supported me. The older you get, and the

more you get on in the pathway with the Lord, the more you feel the need of His support, and the more you get it. He cares for the youngest, and the oldest needs His support as much as the youngest, and the love of the Lord holds His own to Him.

I want His love to keep me close to Him, and as I am brought near to Him I know where He will carry my heart; He will carry it to where He is. If we think of the Father's house, it is where Christ is; if we think of the glory it is His glory, and it would be nothing to us if it was not His. The more you know Him, the more you feel your own nothingness, and that He is everything to you.

Now the third time the test comes, and again Elisha meets it. Elijah says, "The Lord hath sent me to Jordan" and again Elisha replies, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth I will not leave thee." You constantly find hindrances, and thus the sons of the prophets come in and say, "Do you know you are going to lose your master, Elisha?" But ah! that man's heart was associated with His master's, and when Elijah had gone to heaven, he realised as never before what a head Elijah was to him; and so it is with us. Ascended on high Christ is our Head, He is not Head of the system of this world, but He is the Head of every man in it, and that is in resurrection. Elisha never knew what it was to have a head like he knew it when Elijah went to heaven. So far from being taken

from him he got a double portion of Elijah's spirit. The Lord said to His disciples, "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come to you." The Spirit has come down to make us know the Lord in the scene where He is, and therefore He could say to His disciples when going away, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions," &c. The blessed thing is this, they were to know that they had a place with Him; we are not left poor wanderers in this world, our home is where He is.

We get three times two words which correspond to the three tests. Three times it is said, "They two." "They two went on." "They two stood by Jordan." "They two went over on dry ground." How thoroughly is Elisha identified with Elijah; he is thoroughly associated in spirit with him.

Now when they are over Jordan they are outside the apostate land. Elijah had been the minister of judgment on the apostasy, but now they are outside of it and Elijah, the faithful witness in the midst of all the apostasy, is going to heaven. They are outside that scene and Elijah says to Elisha "What shall I do for thee before I am taken?" There was one answer in Elisha's mind, namely, "I would like to have a double portion of your spirit." It was not the spirit of judgment in the midst of evil, but the Spirit of One that was outside of it, in heavenly power.

Nothing will satisfy the Christian now but having the Spirit of the blessed Man that has gone to heaven. Elijah's reply is, "Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee." That is as much as to say, if your heart is knit with me in the place where I am gone it shall be so. And it is so with us, the Holy Ghost has come down on the line of love to the Lord now that He is gone. "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth," &c.

The Lord had said, "I am . . . the truth." All the truth of God is set forth in the Son, and how blessed it is to be engaged with Him, and the Spirit has come down as the Spirit of truth that we may enjoy what is set forth in Christ, and be in the good of it all. We have received the Spirit that we should be in the good of everything which has been effected for us in Christ as well as of all that is set forth in Him.

Take for instance the forgiveness of sins. It is not the question that you have it, but do you enjoy forgiveness of sins? There is no enjoyment of it apart from the Spirit of God. I have been set free from all my past history of sins and all that which was contrary to God in me, in order that my heart should be free with God. Not only am I free from judgment, but I am free *with* God by His blessed Spirit. Just a word in conclusion. I

desire that every one might know what it is to have Christ as an object, so that our hearts may be knit with Him. It is very blessed that the Lord should propose to us to follow Him. May the Lord give us in His grace to answer to the tests of faith in true affection, so that there may be the going after Him.

It is not that we want to get better acquainted with doctrine; we want to come to the simple elements of the truth that they may be enjoyed by us. I should be sorry if I had spoken here to-night without having endeavoured to draw your hearts after Christ. I put it to you; you know you love Him. I do not want to let the youngest off. The apostle did not let the Galatians off. You may say you are not up to it, and the Galatians could have said the same, but the apostle does not let them off on that ground. You may not understand the heavenly Jerusalem and the glory of which Christ is the sun and centre. You may say you are not up to that, but in the epistle to the Galatians the apostle speaks of the heavenly Jerusalem as "*our mother*," and he says, "We, brethren, are not children of the bond-woman, but of the free." The Spirit of God never lets the Christian off. He insists on christian privilege and leads the Christian into the enjoyment of his privileges. He may have to deal with conscience sometimes, but the Spirit of God never speaks lower than according to your privilege. You know the love of Christ; you

know His grace, and you know you are bound to go with Him, drawn by love.

There is not a Christian here that the Spirit of God will let off from the privilege given to you in grace. Oh, beloved of Christ, go after Him. What was the effect on Elisha of going after Elijah? He tore up his old clothes and he came back in the power of the risen Elijah, and he was equal to death here. "He smote the waters and they parted hither and thither, and Elisha went over." I want you to be in association with Christ. Did you ever lose by being in Christ's company? I do not admit loss at all. You come back from the other side of death to be here for Christ. It is a most wonderful thing that, when everything has gone to the bad in this world, the Spirit of God should put us in touch with Christ, so that we can be heavenly upon earth.

On the Lord's day morning you come into the assembly and you say we are a poor company, but if you drink in of His love you drink in of heaven, and when you know Christ there you come back into this world as those who have enjoyed heavenly associations. That is something which you find in the company of Christ. You learn it there and nowhere else. You may know but little, but I say go on with the little. I do commend it to you; that the youngest, drawn by the love of Christ, should be in association with Him, and then you will shew out the Man of heaven here. What rising up of the heart to the Father

there would be in us, and we should shew the traits which marked Him, lowliness, consideration, compassion, communion with heaven in this scene where Christ is cast out.

The Lord grant that we may enter into it and thus know practical deliverance, and being in the light of heaven come back here and shew something of Christ.

T. H. R.



THE COMFORTER.

John xiv., xv., xvi.

I HAVE no wish, beloved friends, to present a mere exposition of scripture, but I desire that the Lord may touch our hearts and make us conscious that there is a divine Person here to maintain us *for Christ*. In the first place to maintain us in affection for Christ; then to maintain us in testimony for Him in the scene of His rejection; and thirdly, to bring our hearts consciously into the knowledge and ineffable joy of the Father's counsels.

I am sure that if the question was put to the youngest believer here, Do you desire to be in this world for Christ? a chord would be struck in his heart. I think the youngest believer would say, Yes, by the grace of God I *do* desire to be here for Christ. Well, it is a great thing to have such a desire, because it shews that we belong to the company who love Him. We may feel that we are poor, weak things, and if we think of ourselves we are so indeed. But what a comfort to know that there is a divine Person here competent to maintain us for Christ in this world.

“If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.” This is the first mention, I believe, in

the gospel of the disciples' love for the Son of God. And He prays the Father for the gift of the Comforter in distinct connection with the fact that there is a company here of those who love Him. Now, I say to the youngest believer, the very fact that you desire to be here for Christ shews that you belong to the company of those who love Him. You may be the smallest one in the company, but you belong to the company. It is a blessed thing to love Him, and if you know Him as the One who has brought every blessing to you, and secured it for you by His death, you cannot help loving Him. Love is a very personal thing, and I believe the first awakening of love to the Son of God is when He establishes a personal link between Himself and our hearts. I trust that most here to-night know something of it. If you want it in this gospel, I would suggest the words, "He calleth his own sheep by name." (John x. 3.) He establishes a personal link between Himself and hearts in the world. That is the great thing. It is not a question of how much doctrine we know, or how clearly we can open out the truth of scripture, but how much are our hearts exulting with great joy in the blessed fact that a divine Person, the Son of God, has made us conscious of His love? Think of Him coming into this world to bring to us all the favour, and blessing, and joy, that divine love could offer, and securing it for us by an act that puts the seal of His love for ever on our hearts!

He went into death that His love might be known by our hearts. "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." It is in the apprehension of this that we become conscious of His love. Not that we can compass the blessedness of it, but we are brought into it like tiny thimbles let down into an immeasurable ocean, and it becomes our distinction and glory—the cherished satisfaction of our hearts—that we are loved by Him. The effect of this is that we love Him; we cannot help it. When the Lord Jesus was here I have no doubt His disciples loved Him. They might not be very intelligent, as we should say. But I believe what marked them, and made them precious to the Father and to Him, was that they were conscious of His love, and they were bound to Him in affection. You may see it in Peter, when the Lord said, "Will ye also go away?" Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." He was indispensable to them; He comprised everything for their hearts; outside Him there was positively nothing. Beloved brethren, in what measure is it so with ourselves? Has He so put the seal of His love on our hearts—so established His love there—that He has become everything to us, and all outside Him is a blank? We may see the same thing in Thomas. We speak sometimes of Thomas's unbelief, but let us not forget his devotedness. He said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." Do you not think he

was conscious of being loved? I am sure the disciples were conscious of being loved by the Person who was in their midst. He had brought divine love to them.

In John xiv. the Lord regards His disciples as a company in whom there is response to His love, and He says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter." The gift of the Comforter is in distinct connection with the fact that we love Him, and it is the blessed mission of the Comforter to maintain our hearts in affection for the absent One.

At this point I should like to say that there are three things from the influence of which we need to be delivered, in order to be here for Christ. They are brought before us in chapters xii., xiii., xiv. That is the world, the flesh, and the whole sphere of sight. If we are not delivered from the influence of these things they will greatly hamper us, and hinder the response of our hearts to divine love. In John xii. the world is judged; in John xiii. the flesh is exposed; and in John xiv. there is nothing left in the whole sphere of sight to command our hearts, because the Person who has made Himself everything to us has gone out of it. It is a very great thing for us to be in the good of this three-fold deliverance—to be in heart and spirit free from the influence of the world, and the flesh, and the whole sphere of sight. It is only as thus delivered that we can

be in the power and current of the Spirit here for Christ.

The world is a great system with all kinds of ramifications, and behind it all is the power of Satan, who is its god and prince. It is the whole system of things which obtains here, in which there is nothing that is of the Father, or that responds to Him. It is an immense thing to know that system as a judged thing. The Lord says in John xii., "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out." I understand this to mean that every element of the world has been brought to light, and shewn up in its true colours. All the perfection of the Son of the Father has been here, and there was nothing in the world that answered to it. On the contrary its hatred of the Son and of the Father came out in full display. The world may seem very attractive with its vast political machinery, its great educational schemes, and its philanthropic institutions; but, beloved friends, it is exposed for those who love the Son of God in the very fact that it has rejected Him. For those who love Him the world is thoroughly exposed; we have no respect for its pretensions; our hearts have broken with it and are free from its influence, because the Person who has made Himself everything to us has not found a bit of response in it.

Then in John xiii. the flesh is thoroughly exposed. It comes out in Judas in the most awful

form, as just being material for Satan. Satan understands the flesh perfectly; he is perfect master of all its intricacies, and he can do anything he likes with it. And in Judas we see what the flesh is capable of when it is allowed to take its own course. For the sake of a paltry gain he would betray the Lord. What an awful thing the flesh is! Then in Peter we see the flesh in what might be called its best form — taking credit to itself for its constancy and its power to suffer for Christ. And what becomes of it? It completely breaks down. Beloved friends, we have to learn that the flesh is a thing that will break down. We cannot trust it for a minute. It is *sure* to break down. The flesh may set up to be energetic in service, to be profound in humility, to be intelligent in the things of God, to be devoted in affection to Christ, or to be eminent in spirituality. But, sooner or later, it will break thoroughly down. I trust that none of us would care to go on with something that is sure to break down in the end.

Then in John xiv. the Lord says, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." That is, He was going out of the sphere of sight, but as an unseen Person He would have His own to be linked with Him in faith and love. When He was with His disciples He so commanded their hearts that they were delivered from the power and influence of other things, and now as the unseen and absent One He would carry

their hearts with Him entirely outside the range of seen things. If we are influenced and controlled by things which are seen, we come under the power of things in which Christ has no place. He has gone out of the sphere of sight, and the question is, How far has He carried our hearts out of it with Him? It is a great thing for us to be in some measure delivered from these things, for it is only as we are thus delivered that we really enter into the thoughts of divine love.

The Son of God has brought love here. As we read in John xiii. 1, "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." Everything that is not the outcome of divine love will break down sooner or later, and we do well to take this to heart. But there is something that cannot break down—that cannot fail—and that is divine love. I am sure the effect of knowing even a little of this love is to greatly draw us to the blessed Person who has brought it to us. A taste of it makes us long for more, and we are thus drawn to Himself. I have no doubt that every young believer here knows what it is to pray. You pray about your pathway, about difficulties and changes in your circumstances, about your trials, and your service. But I should like to ask, Do you know what it is to get near the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that He may lead your heart into the blessedness of His own love? He may give us a taste of that love, as it were, at a distance, but it is in order to draw us to Him—

self that we may learn it fully in His own company. Satan will do his best to divert us by all possible means from entering into this, but if our hearts have really come under the power of divine love we shall not be diverted. John had come under the power of that blessed love, and responded to it, leaning on Jesus' bosom. It seems to me that John xiii. is the school of love. The Master teaches divine love in perfection; the disciple learns with his head pillowed on that Master's bosom; and the result of the learning is that the disciples can be told to "Love one another as I have loved you."

What a wonderful thing it is to get into His company, to learn there how He loves. Because love does not ignore what the flesh is, nor does it forget our liability to be influenced and defiled by what is around us here. Yet He loves, and loves to the end. It is a blessed thing to know that His love has secured to itself the title to regard us apart from everything that is unworthy of that love. He has gone into death to remove from us divinely and for ever all traces of unsuitability to Himself. His death has set Him free, if we might so say, to love us, and as we appropriate His death it sets us free to be loved. On His side love is free, and as we appropriate His death we appropriate that which sets us free in spirit from all the sin and imperfection of the flesh, and we are *free to be loved*. The Lord Jesus looks upon us according to the thoughts of His love, and ac-

according to the perfect sanctification of His death, and thus apart from every trace of imperfection. When He "loved the church and gave himself for it," do you think He saw it in guilt and ruin? No, He saw it in its beauty, according to the thoughts of His own love. For us to enter into this there must be the appropriation of His death, and this sets us free to be loved. There can be nothing more blessed than to be free to enter into the love of divine Persons. It is eternal life, and the effect of it comes out in love one to another. Thus the saints are bound together in affection. It will be so perfectly and for ever in the Father's house. All hearts there will be full of divine love, and bound together in that love by the all-pervading Spirit. What a wonderful thing that we may taste a little of it even here.

In John xiv. the Lord says, as it were, "While I have been with you I made you conscious of my love, and made known to you the thoughts of my love. Now I am going away, but another divine Person will come to you to maintain in your hearts the link which I have formed. He will maintain in your remembrance the communications of love by which I attached you to myself. He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." A young believer might say, "If I could have been with the Lord I am sure He would have made me conscious of His love, and

I should have known that love much better than I do now." Well, beloved friends, the Comforter has come to maintain in our affections those blessed communications by which the Son of God established the knowledge of His love in the hearts of His little company of disciples when He was here with them. Those communications included His "commandments," and His "word." We read in verse 21, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." And in verse 23, "If a man love me, he will keep my word." As I understand it, His "commandments" are the expression of the pleasure of His love concerning *His own*, and His "word" is the expression of all that He is in *Himself*. He says, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another." That is the pleasure of His love concerning us, and if we love Him we keep His commandments. They are attractive to our hearts; they win their way into our souls and are treasured there; and they draw us in a very blessed way to Himself. Then His "word" expressed what He was in Himself; it established the knowledge of Himself in the hearts of His disciples; they knew Him in His own blessedness; they contemplated His glory. He says, "These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, what-

soever I have said unto you.” That is, the Comforter comes to maintain our hearts in those blessed affections which were formed by the communications of His love. Beloved friends, how far have we been in the good of the presence of the Comforter? It is a marvellous thing that He is here to maintain us thus in affection for Christ. He is here for this very purpose. If we are set for Christ there is no doubt He will thus maintain us. May the thought of it be real encouragement and strength for our hearts!

Now a few words as to the Spirit being here to maintain us in testimony for Christ. We are left here for the testimony of Christ. When He came here, sent by the Father, He brought into this world everything that was perfectly suited to the Father. And He was hated, persecuted, and cast out because the world did not know the One who sent Him. “Now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.” All the power of the world and Satan—all the power of evil—was put forth to get rid of Him, but, beloved friends, they did not get rid of the testimony which He brought here. And no power of evil can dislodge the testimony of God from this world. It was brought here by one divine Person, and set forth in Him in absolute perfection; it is maintained now in the saints by another divine Person—by the Comforter. People may get occupied with the ruin and failure of things until they get completely discouraged in heart. There

is immense power in getting to God's side of things, and in seeing that there are things which cannot break down because they subsist in the power of divine love and by the Spirit of God. It is certain that everything else *will* break down; everything that has not its outcome from divine love, and that is not in the power of the Spirit, will break down. But the Comforter will maintain the testimony of Christ here, and it is surely the chief concern of our hearts to be in the line of that testimony. The Comforter did not come to add to the testimony. When the Son of God was here the testimony was complete; nothing could be added to what He brought; He set forth all the blessed light and grace of the Father here, and everything that was perfectly suited to God and the Father in a man shone out in Him. And now another divine Person comes from the Father to maintain that same testimony in the church, the body of Christ.

I desire that our hearts may be impressed with the fact that the Comforter is here to maintain us in the power and grace of the wonderful testimony that came out in blessed perfection here in the One sent from the Father. It came out in all its heavenly grace and beauty in Him. There may be correctness in life and doctrine with very little display of the grace of Christ. Many believers have a line they would not care to step over; they would not like to do anything they had a conscience about; they are outwardly cor-

rect in life, and they are orthodox in doctrine. But there may be all this without much true testimony—without much expression of the grace of Christ; there may be very little in it to give real satisfaction to the Father. In the blessed Son of God everything was divinely right—it could not be otherwise—but everything was in such exquisite grace that it was infinitely acceptable to the Father, and the Father's grace was perfectly expressed in it. This is true testimony. How small the consideration of it makes us feel.

I believe if we settle down with mere outward correctness the world will approve us. The world can get on very well with a Pharisee, for he is of the world, but I am sure the world will never appreciate the grace of the Father—it will never appreciate the testimony. If we are here really in the grace of Christ I am sure people will not understand us. They will say that we are fools and not fit for this world. The world can never understand the wonderful grace which was shewn out here by the One who came from the Father, and it is the expression of that grace which constitutes true testimony now, and the Comforter is here to maintain us in it. The subjects of John xv. are fruit and testimony. Fruit is for the Father, and only that which is fruit for the Father is testimony in the world.

I come now to chapter xvi., where the Comforter is promised as the One given to lead us into the knowledge and joy of the Father's counsels.

“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.” The Son has an equal interest with the Father in the carrying out of the Father’s counsels. It is the distinctive glory of the Father to originate those counsels, and it is the distinctive glory of the Son to give effect to them. And we—marvellous to say—are brought into a circle of things which could only originate and be carried out by divine Persons—a circle of things where everything is the outcome of divine love. How could we enter into such things without the Comforter? It would be impossible. “I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” But, thank God, what He could not say to the disciples He could say to the Father in the marvellous language of John xvii. He could lift up His eyes to heaven, and say to the Father in their presence what He could not say to them. And we are privileged to stand by and hear one divine Person speaking to another, and occupied about us who are brought in infinite love within the circle of the Father’s counsels. And not only so, but the Comforter has come to lead us into the knowledge of those counsels, and into the ineff-

able satisfaction and joy of the divine love which has originated those counsels, and which will give effect to them in a universe of bliss for ever.

Beloved brethren, our great distinction is that we are loved by divine Persons. One feels lost in the greatness of it. I feel that I have only begun to touch the verge of Christianity, and nothing would please me better than for every one in this room to go away impressed by the fact, that there is very much in it that our hearts have not been conducted into. It is an immense comfort that the Holy Ghost has come, and that it is His blessed mission to guide our hearts into the knowledge of the Father's counsels. I cannot attempt to unfold those counsels, or to do more than suggest one or two thoughts in connection with John xvii.

The ground on which all is effected is, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." Then in verse 1 the Son asks to be glorified that He may glorify the Father. And He brings about the Father's glory by giving eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him. It is the Father's glory to have a company of many sons capable of appreciating Himself. It is His glory to have a company of worshippers before Him. Worship is the appreciation of divine Persons, and the appreciation of divine Persons in creatures must be adoration. He would have us as sons before Him—as those who have sprung out of the death

of Christ—as those who are the “much fruit” of the precious Corn of Wheat in new creation, suitability to the Father’s presence. It is the very glory of the Father to have such a company. And the Son has glorified Him, and is glorifying Him, by securing that company—by giving them eternal life. Then lower down in the chapter we find that the saints are also the glory of the Son. He says, “I am glorified in them.” It is a marvellous thing that we should have been taken up, and enriched and blessed by divine love, so that the glory of the Father and the Son should be displayed in us. The church is the vessel of divine glory. “To him be glory in the church.” We belong to the vessel in which divine glory will be displayed for ever. And the Comforter is to lead our hearts into these things, and to maintain the knowledge, and the joy, and the ecstasy of them in our hearts. If we enter into these things we must be beside ourselves. In the circle of divine love we are outside the range of the natural man altogether; we are in a region where nothing can sustain us but the Comforter, and He is here for that purpose.

Then the very consummation of everything is that we are to be with the Son where He is, to behold His glory which the Father has given Him—a glory connected with the love which the Father had for Him before the foundation of the world. We are to be introduced to a scene where we shall know what one divine Person can be to another,

and how one divine Person appreciates another. We shall find the eternal joy and rapture of our hearts in knowing what the Son is to the Father, and in knowing the Father according to the blessed revelation of His name made by the Son. "I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." And the Comforter is given to shew us things to come—to give us now "as heavenly light, what soon shall be our part."

I desire for my own heart, and for every saint of God in this company, that we should know the presence of the Comforter as a great reality. He is here to make these things real for our hearts. If we are really set for Christ, I am sure we may count upon the Comforter to maintain us in affection and in testimony for Him. And if we are responsive to divine love He will guide us into the knowledge of those counsels in which the blessedness of that love reveals itself. May God bring the light and joy of these things a little more into our hearts!

C. A. C.



BORN OF GOD.

1 John ii. 29 ; iii. 9 ; iv. 7 ; v. 1, 4-15.

It is a great thing to apprehend that there is on the earth the family, or the offspring, I might say, of God : that is in a moral sense. There is a race here which has derived its moral being from God and the description of it is exceedingly simple : it occurs in the expression, “ Which were born of God.” What marks them we shall see further on. I am going to take up the marks of this family or offspring of God ; but first of all I want you to get the idea of their having derived, one and all of them, their moral being directly from God.

It is not as in the case of descendants of Adam. No one of us came directly from Adam. He begat a son in his own likeness, but there has been a good number of generations between Adam and ourselves, and therefore it is impossible for any one to claim descent directly from him.

In the offspring of God every member of that family has derived his moral being *directly* from God ; and as I said the scripture description of them is, “ Born of God.” I purpose to dwell a little upon that now and to shew how it has come to pass, and to point out the characteristics of

this family who are born of God; and another point comes out in the closing chapter, namely, the witness of God. The witness is that God has given to us eternal life in His Son; thus God has given distinct witness concerning His Son, and it lies in that we are brought into the reality of eternal life. We have believed the witness that God has given of His Son and he that hath the Son hath life; we have come to the point "These things have I written unto you that ye might know that ye have eternal life who believe on the name of the Son of God."

My first point in regard of the race or family spoken of in scripture as born of God, who partake morally of God's nature, is this: that all is entirely dependent on the truth; that is, that it has pleased God to reveal Himself. Christianity is entirely based on the revelation of God. It has been said that really everything hangs on the Word having become flesh, so that God might be declared. All that you get here is necessarily consequent upon God being perfectly and fully revealed.

Now that you have the full light of God coming out in the death of Christ you have the expression, "born of God;" but there was not, nor could be any such expression until God was revealed.

If we look at natural things for a moment, they furnish an illustration of divine things. When a child is born, it has derived its physical being from its parents, but as yet it has not derived

any *moral* being from them. Where it derives its moral being from its parents is in growing up in the enjoyment of the affection of its parents. As it grows up it becomes acquainted with the tenderness and affection of its parents ; it is brought consciously into the scene and system of natural affections, and by-and-by it becomes intelligent as to things, and the effect is, that it has become partaker of a moral being from its parents. Like parent like child, in a sense. If there were nothing to hinder, and the child brought up in that way in the light of love, I have no doubt but that the child would grow up responsive to the thought of love. It would grow up intelligent, entering into the thought of the parents, and into the affection which had been lavished upon it from its birth. I am speaking for the moment apart from the question of sin.

When we come to divine things it is very important that we should get away from material ideas. You must remember that many terms which are employed in scripture are really used as figures. Born again, and so on, are figures which are employed by the Spirit of God to convey to our minds a moral idea. The moral idea connected with being born is, that you have derived a moral being directly from God ; as a child when it has become intelligent, when its mind is expanded, understands that it has a moral being as well as a physical one.

If everything went right in natural things a

child should be like its parents morally and not simply physically. There are often defects in dealing with a child; it takes a good deal of patience if the child is to answer to the affections of the parents, and to partake morally of the being of its parents. Of course we have to remember that man is fallen, and there is likely to be a great deal of difficulty and defect in dealing with children.

Animals derive instinct from their parents, but with man there is the great point of *intelligent* affection. There is the intelligence which can take in the mind and thought of another, there is the power of intellect and at the same time there is an answer to the affection of the parents. So it is with us. The moment you got your moral being from God was when you were brought into the light of God.

“Born again,” is an expression used to shew that you cannot touch the kingdom of God without it. But never could a person be said to be born of God unless that person had touched the reality of divine love. You must appreciate the testimony of the death of Christ, that it is on the part of God the setting forth of the greatness of His love to man. “God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” When that comes home to the heart of the Christian, then it is that the love of God is shed abroad in the heart.

Thus it is that our hearts are brought into the

presence of divine love, and there we touch the divine nature, and become responsive to it. We love God because He first loved us. That is the effect and result to us of God having been fully revealed. When man first comes to know about God, the great thing is His attitude. That is the first point apprehended as the fruit of receiving the gospel, and consequent on it the Holy Ghost is received. Then you begin to see what is behind the attitude of God; you get an insight into the heart of God; and being thus brought into the presence of God's love you respond to it. If you say you love God, then I say you are born of God. One proof of being born of God, is that we love God.

It is a wonderful thing for a man to be brought into the light of the love of God. The death of Christ is to the Christian full of light. The veil of the temple was rent in twain at His death, and it is the death of Christ that makes known the love of God. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." I know no lesson, for the believer, like this, to be learned in the cross of Christ. Get your eye there, and learn there the lesson of the love of God. The moment you touch His love you are responsive to it, and can say that you are born of God. You have derived your moral being from the blessed God as revealed. Had He not revealed Himself, it could not have

been the case ; but He is now the source of your moral being, so that you are of the offspring, the family of God.

I want now to look at the marks of one who is born of God. The first is, "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him." And again, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin ; for his seed remaineth in him : and he cannot sin because he is born of God." Now put these two verses together. On the one hand there is the practising of righteousness, and on the other, one does not commit sin. Read further chapter iv. 7, "Beloved, let us love one another : for love is of God ; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." The one born of God loves. In chapter v. 1 we have, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God : and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him." Here we have the heart going out and recognizing those who are born of God. Still further in verse 4, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world."

The first two expressions are essentially moral. One who is born of God practises righteousness and does not practise sin. Sin is lawlessness. One born of God walks here in self-judgment. Not only does the Christian carry out the practice of righteousness, but he refuses to admit, or sanction, in himself that which God has condemned in the death of Christ. The

evidence of a Christian is that he carries out practical righteousness. If you find a professed Christian allowing the flesh and other things, in his practice and ways down here, which God has condemned, you have very little practical proof that he is a Christian. It is difficult in these days to trust profession; you want practice to witness to such, and this comes out in the way of practical righteousness on the one hand, and the disallowance of lawlessness on the other.

It is impossible for one born of God to practise lawlessness, he cannot sin because he is born of God. These verses do not speak of isolated acts, but of the practice which characterises the Christian. They indicate marks important for us to bear here in the midst of a world full of lawlessness and unrighteousness. It is the first principle of one born of God that he walks in righteousness.

There is obligation to God, and you begin to carry that out in the practice of righteousness. You find that things here are inconsistent with the love of God as He has revealed Himself. You discover by the light into which God has brought you many things which in the light have to be disallowed. We are enjoined to "Speak every man truth with his neighbour." Do we love to speak every man truth with his neighbour? We should, "for we are members one of another."

I come now to the next evidence of being born of God, and that is "love." Every one can say that he partakes of the divine nature if he loves.

You cannot know the love of God without being responsive to it. It is not simply by doctrine that love is revealed to us. God has sent His Son who has died, and that is the witness of the love of God; and the word to us is, "Let us not love in word only, but in deed and in truth." God has proved His love in deed and truth towards us.

If I may use the expression, the Christian first touches the spring of love by the power of the Holy Ghost, and now he loves God and knows God. Then another point comes out, he discerns those who are born of God. Every one who believes Jesus to be the Christ is born of God. I think that love brings very great enlargement, and that is the point; it brings discernment and enlargement to comprehend all those who are God's children, and there is the desire to take in all, and that is a great point for us.

There may be many in London, many in the world, who believe Jesus to be the Christ, who have a reverence for the word of God, and does your heart take them all in? You may not compass them in knowledge, but, at all events, your heart may take them in because the great principle is, "He that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him." Practically things work as you get them put in this epistle. You come into the full light of divine love and you love God, then you love all those who are begotten of God. Then we come to another point; you overcome the world. If

you love God love will not tolerate lust; they do not go together. In natural things you cannot mix oil with water, and lust does not tolerate love. All that is in the world is "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," and that cannot mix with holy love. If you are acquainted with the *holy* love, and you are of it, you overcome the world. You overcome the world by the principle of the being which you have derived from God. Lust and love are mutually exclusive.

Do you mean to tell me that a man who loves his family can be a drunkard? It is poor love where a man, to gratify his own lust, brings his family to poverty. You would not commend that man to me for natural love. If that man loved his family as he should he would not bring them to poverty and ruin in order to satisfy his own lusts. Lust is intolerable to love, and a man does not overcome the world in any other way than by love. A man might retire from the world and become a monk or an ascetic, or something of the sort, but he would carry the world into his retreat, he could not be free from it.

Then the one who overcomes the world is born of God, one who loves God, and in virtue of being partaker of the divine nature he follows in the path of Christ himself. I do not believe it to be possible for the world to be overcome in any other way.

Now we come to the witness in chapter v., "This is he that came by water and by blood," &c.

"There are three that bear witness, the Spirit, the water, and the blood." Jesus Christ came by water and blood. That has reference to what took place when Christ died. A soldier pierced His side with a spear and there came out blood and water. I understand it to mean, that He came in full testimony to the holy love of God. In the death of Christ there was that which expiated and that which cleansed, but the blood and water were testimony to the love of God.

Christ came forth as it were from the holy love of God, and the blood and water were the witness of this: the witness of God's heart towards men, the witness of holy love. Sin was perfectly intolerable to love.

Everything will have to give way in the presence of holy love. God will be all in all, and in the presence of God's love everything contrary will have to give way. The water and the blood was the expression of the holy love of God; I speak of them as witness.

The Son of God came here. He had known and had part in the holy love of God. He became man that the love of God might be expressed in His death. The Spirit has now come on the same line, therefore there are three that bear witness. They all combine in one common witness, and that witness is the holy love of God expressed in the Son. All bear witness to the blessed source

from which the Son of God came. He came out from the Father and came into the world. That is from the source of holy love, and the blood and water are the witness and expression of that love. The object is that our hearts might be made acquainted by the three witnesses with the love in which the Son of God came.

There is another thing; they bore witness incidentally, not primarily, that Christ is apart from man after the flesh. That is very important. They bear witness to Him as, "the last Adam" and "second Man." He came in flesh in order to bring cleansing and expiation, but I believe the positive witness of the water and blood to be to the holy love of God.

Now what does that mean for us? "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." God has given you the witness in yourself. The love of God is shed abroad in the heart and you have come to this, that the love of God has been expressed in the Son of God. No created being could have done this. Prophets might have spoken of it but they could not have expressed it; we have it in the Son.

He first declared God on earth in His ministry, and then He died to express God's love, and the water and the blood are thus the expression of the holy love of God, and the Spirit has come down on the same line to be the witness in the Christian. The Spirit is the truth, so that the truth may be, not only objective, as in Christ,

but subjective in the Christian. Christ is the truth as to the declaration and setting forth of it, but the Spirit is the truth in the Christian.

Christ now abides after the fashion and order we have illustrated in John. There are three points in that gospel; (1) Christ set forth in the company of His own; (2) as the risen Man in the company of His own; (3) as coming again to receive His own, that where He is they may be also. I want you to put these three points together. They bring before us the thought of Christ in different conditions or positions, but of One whose heart is still unchanged; that is a great point to take in.

I think there is nothing more blessed than to see the changelessness of the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. His disciples dwelt under His shadow with great delight. They contemplated His glory as of an only-begotten One with the Father. You never could understand the truth of the church if you did not appreciate what Christ was here in the midst of His own upon earth. Then He comes into their midst in resurrection, and makes known to them that they were His brethren; then He marks their association with Him as after the Spirit not after the flesh; He breathes on them the Holy Ghost. In chapter xvii. He had demanded for them "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory." His disciples had beheld His

glory here, and now He prays for them to be with Him above, that they might behold His glory. We see here a heart which knows no change, the changeless heart of Christ.

“God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” The Son now is entirely apart from man after the flesh. We know Christ no longer after the flesh. I want you to be apart morally from man in the flesh, to know more of Him with whom we are associated in the power of the Holy Ghost. His heart is unchanged and we are associated with Him after the Spirit, so that He could say, “Go tell my brethren that I ascend to my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.”

The form in which it has pleased God to give us eternal life, is by bringing us into the full light of holy love and giving us grace to respond to it. Do you appreciate the love of God? Do you appreciate the witness of it?

Christ came from the Father alone but He takes us back with Him. “I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” The Son of God came forth to express God and He came alone, but He returns to God with the church, the trophy of His love. You have the Son of God, and in having the Son you have eternal life.

I want you to get the reality of these things; to know in the power of the Holy Ghost the great reality of the love of God. Many

know grace, but have little apprehension of divine love. If we know and appreciate God's nature then we can understand that we are made partakers of that nature. You have derived your moral being from the blessed God Himself, and love God because He loved you.

May He give us to know the blessedness of being born of Him. It is wonderful that the affections of divine Beings should rest upon man on earth.



GOD'S PLEASURE IN HIS PEOPLE.

It is an immense thing when any one, even the youngest amongst us, comes to understand a little the pleasure that God has in His people. That does not merely mean the pity and compassion with which He looked upon us as sinners, and saved us, nor even the delight He has in our salvation, but the pleasure He has in His people. When we know it, it must produce a great effect on us, and that effect is a desire that we should be for His pleasure, and that is a most important point. Now, if you are for His pleasure, and know the Lord has pleasure in you, what you will desire is, to be identified with His interests, and in however small a way you will like to do it to please Him; but there is another point, God has been pleased to bring in that in which we can now find our place as those brought to Him.

We have been speaking while together a good deal about the kingdom of God, but in that we all look at each other as individuals. I have my place, and you have yours, but God has been pleased to bring us into a place where we can have one mind, where there is but one ruling thought, and that place is the church, or assembly of God, where Christ is everything.

I might illustrate it a little in this way. With

regard to Israel we see them put under the blood, and then brought through the Red Sea, and God says, "I have brought you unto myself." He had saved them out of Egypt and from the hand of the Egyptians, and then God gives them His law. I do not now look at the law as that which God proposed to them that if possible they might get life thereby; on that ground all broke down; but as the communication of His mind and will for them. If we look at the law in that way, we see what blessedness there was in having it, the principle for us is in Romans xii., proving "what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." Every Christian must admit that the will of God is "good, acceptable, and perfect." For myself I could not conceive any greater blessing than knowing the will of God through the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ; to be commanded by Him and guided by Him is then esteemed a privilege. Because I see two things in His commands, one is, He commands blessing for His people, and the other is, He commands His people for a blessing; so that His commands to me always assume the form of blessing. You get the same thought in Psalm cxxxiii. in connection with Mount Zion the mount of grace. "There the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." There He speaks on the ground of grace established at His own centre.

Now after the giving of the law and the various ordinances of God, and which in principle relate

to the kingdom, there comes out another thing. Seventy of the elders of Israel go up the mountain, and there they saw the glory of the God of Israel, and they did eat and drink before Him. That I admit is a very feeble, but a very blessed illustration that God would have a people with Himself to behold His glory. That was a blessed witness of what was to come in for Christians, that we should be able to behold the Lord's glory, and furthermore to be in the blessed liberty expressed in the words, "They did eat and drink." *They* were on the ground of responsibility, and up to that point there was no breakdown, so that God did not lay His hands on them; but it was a great intimation that the time would come when we should behold the Lord's glory.

If I could only turn any one's eyes from looking at what there is in ourselves, and get you to see what is set forth in Christ, for it has pleased God, I may say, to set forth everything for us in the Lord Jesus Christ, you would be greatly affected by beholding the glory of the Lord. I see everything established in Him, and the more I look at the glory of the Lord, the more I feel how greatly I am blessed. And God would bring us there to engage our hearts with the Lord's glory. It is a most blessed thing, and the only way really to go on growing and increasing.

Then having brought them to that point, He says, "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may

dwelt among them." They were to make the tabernacle, and connected with that you get a great corporate thought. Before that, they were a congregation; but I think they were looked at in a certain way individually, but the moment you get a sanctuary you get a place of assembling, and the idea of a constituted assembly. And the great value of that is, there is one centre, and one object, and the Lord occupied every one with His own interests.

In a certain way every one has to begin individually, and his interest is in his soul. We receive the grace of God individually. I must behold the Lord's glory, and approve the Lord's will for myself. You must have an experience for yourself, and I must have it for myself, but the moment you come to the tabernacle, you join a common interest, and it becomes at once the place of assembly. Now, you have got the place of God's interests.

It is a remarkable thing in connection with the tabernacle that every family in Israel was represented in it. You will perhaps remember that every male in Israel of the age of twenty years and upwards had to give half a shekel to the Lord as atonement money; and of these half shekels they made the silver sockets, and also the hooks, and fillets of the pillars around the sanctuary. The point I want to impress on you is, that they thus had a memorial in the tabernacle. (Exod. xxx. 16.) Any one could look at that tabernacle

and say, as redeemed I have an interest there, my half shekel is there, and thus I am represented in that sanctuary. And that was God's interest. It is a blessed thing to think God has His people individually in His care, but what is such a wonderful thing for the heart, He says, now you make my interests your care. The world looks at us, and it sees what we are set upon. It is a very easy thing—and I am sure the servants of the Lord who preach the gospel will bear me out in it—it is very easy for any one to be occupied with the benefit of souls in the gospel and miss the great interest of the Lord. I am quite sure people can be greatly interested in the gospel without fully having the Lord's interests before their souls. The gospel of that day brought Israel out of Egypt that the Lord might gather them round His own habitation, and dwell among them.

Let us not look at the benefit of the gospel merely, great as it is, and I do not want to take you from it—but let every one have the sense of the interest God has in each soul; that He might have delight in it, that it might form part of His habitation, and be His joy for eternity. The youngest here should have a sense of having an interest in the assembly. Sometimes young people think that is only for the older ones, but I say the youngest here has an interest in what is so dear to Christ, and what the Lord is forming for His own glory and delight for ever.

There are two great thoughts to my mind in

the church. One is that it will be a place, and is even now, where there is glory to God. I see in Ephesians iii. that Christians were so brought into the thoughts and mind of God, that they should comprehend with all saints "What is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." That is God's thoughts for the saints of glory to Him in the church in Christ Jesus.

Now, let me say to every one here, the youngest, you are a little item in these thoughts of God's glory. Not merely this person, and that person, but every one is a little item in this plan of glory to God in Christ Jesus.

And then the second thought in the church is, that in it there should be the display of His glory to all created intelligences. God wants to be known, and even now the administration of the mystery is to this end, that "unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." In all ages will shine out the greatness of the grace of God "in his kindness towards us in Christ Jesus;" the display of that grace will be in the saints who form the church through the eternal ages. But then there is the other side of it, the church is that in which there is to be glory to God throughout all ages. There is something to God's eternal satisfaction in the church, and in

which He can delight for ever and ever. Not only because there is what His grace has affected in souls, but all bear the impress of Christ, and all will be in the likeness of Christ His own dear and blessed Son, so that there will be glory to God in the church in Christ Jesus throughout all ages. And there is not one Christian here who would not like to be part of that glory.

I would like to use an illustration for I want to help souls. There are probably many here who know more than I do, but there are many also to whom the Lord may give help in these things. Supposing you saw a sun-beam coming in from that window across the room, you would observe a number of little specks of dust floating in it, that is a beautiful illustration of what I want to convey to you. You may be only one of those little motes, but what marks it? It is bathed in that sun-beam, and I may say the sun-beam fills it. It cannot contain that beam, but it is in it, and filled with it.

What a wonderful thing it is for any saint to be able to say, there is God's work going on in the souls of His people. He is forming Christ in them in order that they may be like Christ for His joy for ever and ever!

Dear fellow believers, you and I like that thought I am sure. There is not one here who would not say, I enjoy that purpose of God's love.

Let me say the first great thing is, that you should have the sense of the love of God lighting

up the chambers of your heart, and next that you behold the Lord's glory, and see what is set forth in Him ; you turn away from man, and all that is of man and look up to Christ. Perhaps you say things are dark with me often, for I am a poor lacking, failing, thing. Many are tried about this, that, and the other, and if we could hear one another in our prayers, we should soon find out where each one is. How many a one prays, Lord make me this and that, or perhaps saying, I want thy Holy Spirit to help me to be this or that. What you are thinking of is what *you* are. You are thinking that God can make something of *you*. Is that so with anybody here? I suspect I speak the truth for many a one here, and I will tell you why I think so, because I know how I once did it myself. But, oh, the blessed relief it is, not only to see the Lord Jesus Christ in glory, and to stretch forth my hands to Him, and say, Well, I see everything set forth in that blessed Man there, and then turn round to yourself and say, I see all I once was has been made an end of in the cross of Christ! Oh, how blessed then to be occupied with Him, and to drink in some blessed thought of what the Lord Jesus is to us.

I trust every one here has the sense, I would like to be connected with that wonderful interest of the Lord, the church which is to be the vessel of His glory.

I have only referred to one little speck of dust,

but we should not see the sun-beam passing through the room, but for those little specks of dust. If the room were a vacuum, you would not see the sun-beam at all passing through the room. The very little specks of dust make it manifest. Thus the church is that in which all of Christ will be brought out for ever; and all by these little specks. Is it not a blessed thought for our hearts?

Now that brings me to the point I had before me in reading this chapter. What first comes out is fellowship in the gospel. These Philippians had given a little money to Paul, and he shews that by this fellowship they were identified with him in his conflict for the gospel. The little money they had given him was something like the Israelite's half shekel. Paul says you have your interest in all the gospel is effecting for God and for Christ in this world. Now it is a wonderful thing to have such an interest. I think of what the gospel has effected *for God*. I think of the interest of God in a soul. I am not merely looking at a soul that needs to be saved, though I trust I think of the worth of the soul in that way too. But when a soul has received the gospel, I think of the worth of that soul to God; and I rejoice to see progress in a soul if ever so little, for then the work of God is manifested. I rejoice when there is testimony of the value of that soul to God. I see this value of the soul to God because of His own work in it

even when there is failure. It may be to the extent that God is obliged to take away that person from this world. There is what is real in that soul, and God withdraws His own workmanship, and gathers it up to Christ, and thus secures that which He has wrought from being corrupted by that which perhaps the man would not judge. God has long patience; He would attract our hearts, and withdraw us from the things here to gather us into His own interests. But here is a soul will go after the world, loves this, that, and the other, will not submit to the blessed drawings of the love of Christ. And it gets the drawings of the world, and gets under the power of its god, and what will God do? I see the value of the soul to Him in that He takes that soul away. I do not want to encourage one in going on with the world, for it is a most solemn thing for God to take any one in this way. I would not like to feel the Lord had taken me away because I would not answer to the drawings of His love. I would like to finish my course, and for God to finish His work with me. All I want is to finish my course in the company of the saints down here. I pray God that I may never turn away from the company of the Lord and His saints down here. Would not you say the same? I know you would like to keep in the company of the saints, if all those who answer to the drawings of that blessed One's love.

Now, these Philippians had their interest in the

gospel, and so Paul referring to what they had done, says, "ye are all partakers of my grace." He was not in the active service of the gospel then, but in something just as blessed, and as interested as ever at that moment in its preaching. There were some indeed preaching it of contention, but if Christ was preached he could rejoice. . He says, "I am set for the defence of the gospel." He answered for the gospel in his bonds. But then how was it he could say, "ye all are partakers of my grace?" They had sent him a little money and he links them on with the great work of the gospel committed to him. They were using the things of this world for the gospel which he was maintaining by the grace given to him in bonds; and he connects them with this blessed sphere of his service. Paul was set for the defence of the gospel, and he maintained it, not by preaching but by manifesting Christ in his life. It is life, not what we *say*, but what *we are*, and a very little thing will shew which way our footsteps are going. I see the immense wisdom of God in giving us christian fellowship down here. It is a great thing to be in that sphere. I can look at myself as an individual, and look at the Lord's glory, and be transformed according to that, but I do see the value of christian fellowship, and I also see the saints owning more and more the value of christian fellowship. And believe me, the oldest saint among us would tell you how dependent he is upon the saints; how

he could not get on without christian fellowship, without the company of the saints. You see how Paul valued it. You see the greatness of his desire for them, and how he asks for the prayers of the saints for himself. Every apostle as far as I know speaks of christian fellowship. We belong to one another, and I tell you why, beloved brethren, because we are, none of us great enough to go on by ourselves; Paul valued the fellowship of the Philippians. Even in the things of this life, no man can go on by himself. You must have a man for each trade, and all that kind of thing kept up, and it has pleased God to arrange things in that way, so that every one is dependent upon another; and in the fellowship of saints the greatest member cannot say, I have no need of you. And the effect is practically upon our souls, that by cultivating christian fellowship other things are excluded. I do not mean when we meet together only, blessed as that is, but in our houses; what I dread then is being merely social. When we get together in assembly, then everything but Christ is excluded. We realise our measure according as Christ is in us, and it works out in this way that the grace in the one helps the other, and the grace in that one helps another, so we all help one another, and thus christian fellowship is a great thing, and it works out in life.

Then with regard to the testimony in the gospel, with the apostle Paul, the great point was life.

He could say, "to me to live is Christ." And furthermore, when Satan had got this great champion of the gospel shut up in prison, and it seemed as if Satan had scored a victory, Paul's one thought was "that Christ may be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death." "I know," he says, "that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayers, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death." I think salvation is always salvation; and so in the Philippians, I do not think it is anything else but salvation. But salvation means deliverance from the whole sphere where Satan, sin, and death have power and dominion: salvation sets free from it all. That is really what present salvation is. I admit, the final actual fulness of salvation can only come out for us when we are taken up to heaven, but I do see this, that even now we are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Salvation really sets free from the whole system of things in this world, and then you get the effect of association with Christ; for salvation brings you to Christ's side of things, you are to be for God's pleasure down here. "God works in you to will and to do of his good pleasure,"

and instead of being immersed in all the scene of man's pleasure which Satan has built up here, salvation is that you are delivered from it all, that you may be for Christ. I insist, and greatly, upon a present salvation. I do not mean by that assurance in a man's soul of salvation, and that will be in heaven by-and-by; what I mean is, you are set free from the dominion of the whole system of things where Satan is the god and prince, where sin has dominion, the sphere of man's will, and man's pride; one is clear of that state of things, and the result is, you seek to be for God's good pleasure down here. That I think is "working out your own salvation," you work it out into its proper result.

Let us go back for a moment to Paul, the servant of God, and the testimony of the servant with his life. I do not think my testimony will be of any good at all beyond really what God has wrought in me, and that in some little measure I am able to live Christ. We may say a great deal, and I dare say many of us have said a great many things we thought true, believing it all, having been taught it, and having accepted it in great simplicity of soul, but let us ask ourselves the question, how far am I a witness of this? How far do I live it? How far can I say, "Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death"? The testimony the servant renders must be greatly identified with himself. Take Jonah, for instance, how

much was he identified with his testimony. He bore the testimony of judgment to Nineveh, but the man who bore it had been down under the judgment of God himself; he had come up from the "belly of hell;" come up from the judgment to proclaim the judgment on Nineveh. He was a witness of the judgment he proclaimed, and it had an immense effect.

And when you come to the Lord as the Preacher you have, I may say, the same thing. There had been the preaching of Jonah, but a greater than Jonah was there. He was indeed going to be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, the witness of judgment borne so that He might be the witness of grace. And there had never been such a recipient of the grace of God as Paul, and therefore he comes out as the special vessel of the gospel of the grace of God, he becomes the pattern of the gospel as he says, "that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." Paul was himself descriptive of the gospel; and could say, I was in deadly opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ, but He has won a triumph over me by nothing but His infinite love, and now I go and make known that He has won this great victory over the greatest opponent. He might have sent him straight to hell, but in the tenderest way He said to him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Why, what have I ever done, Saul,

that you should persecute me? Oh, the grace, beloved friends, that could meet that man in the deadliest opposition to the blessed Son of God! And that could speak in that blessed, gentle way!

And so it was that Paul comes out as he does as the Lord's servant bound to Him by love, the witness of the triumph of Christ. Look at his life; look how he speaks of his ministry to the Corinthians; look at all he went through, all the way in which he exercised that ministry, that he might commend the gospel of the grace of God. "Giving no offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed." And saying to them I beseech you also, "that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." Let it have its full effect and power in your soul. "O ye Corinthians, our mouth is opened unto you, our heart is enlarged. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels." Now, "be ye also enlarged." Open your mouth and your hearts, so that I may be able to unfold to you the fulness and blessedness of the grace of God, for I am the witness of it. The grace of God he preached was identified with what took place in that man's soul. He can say, "you are not straitened in us," there was such a full overflowing of God's grace in his soul. The Lord give us to be enlarged, that others may see how the Lord has been pleased to identify the testimony of His grace in the gospel with us.

Let me ask a simple question, if anybody looks

at us, would he see that we make the assembly our first thought because it belongs to Christ? Do you say, I love to go where the saints are? One perhaps says, I have no time, I have so many other things to attend to. Some there are who are always seeking the company of the saints; you never see these people absent. But there are others listless and indifferent. May God give grace to each one to seek the company of the saints, and why? You will find Christ there, and all the blessedness of His love and affection there for you to enjoy among the saints. In this chapter the apostle brings before us the Lord coming down *to be found among men*, and that He might accomplish all the will of God, and tell out the heart of God in the death of the cross. And now God has put all administration into His hands up there to administer the grace of God, and why? Because He humbled Himself here, and came down here to carry out all the good pleasure of God. Not making Himself known, but making God known, and all His blessed love in the hearts of men. Is it not precious to consider the Lord making Himself of no reputation, and being found in fashion as a man?

Then he comes to the point of obedience. "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence." He continues this thought of obedience in connection with Christ having been obedient to death. I think some-

times that word obedience rather grates upon the ear, that is when there is self-will; but it is the obedience of love. What the Spirit of God does, I think, is to draw the soul under the blessed dominion of love, so that the soul bows down under the blessed sense of the obligation to respond to the love of God. And that is how obedience comes in Peter. He says, you are sanctified unto "obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." How did Christ obey? Nothing but love actuated Him, and the desire to please His Father. It was the obedience of love. We have been drawn by the Spirit into the sphere of this love out of the whole scene of all that selfishness, and sin, and folly, and evil that marks this world. The Spirit brings the soul under the blessed sense of the obligation of the love that gave Christ, and under the power of that precious blood which, thank God, for ever puts away our evil and sin, and the bad man himself who did the evil is gone in the death of Christ. I am to be thus under the obligation of love.

The apostle had been careful over these Philippians; he had been a leader to them. And I love to think of leaders; not masters and teachers but leaders of the flock; and what makes a leader is when a man is under the obligation of the love of God. Then he is able to impress others and lead them, not by word only, but by life. Paul could say in this epistle, "Be followers together of me." &c. It is a wonderful

thing to say, but his own soul was so under the power of love, the adorable love of Christ, that Christ was his one object. He tracked the lowly path of the blessed Son of God down here, that path of meekness and lowliness. Paul down here was laying himself out for the brethren either to serve them in life, or to be poured out for them in death, with the desire to lead them more and more under the blessed obligation of the love of Christ. I wish we were all leaders. Not merely those who spring into the front rank, but really leaders, as being ourselves thoroughly under the obligation of the love of Christ.

It may seem a very little thing just to be nothing in this world, a person under the obligation of the love of Christ, in your ordinary life. You may be no preacher, but in that way you may give a blessed testimony for the gospel.

I have heard people sometimes say, whom I have asked to come and hear the gospel, "When I see it does good to those who profess it, then I will come." That is a terrible thing that they should have to say it. But, alas, do we not see the same principles among Christians that actuate men in the world? The same worldliness, pride, folly, and vanity, and self-seeking, and pleasure loving? I grant we do not display these in a bad, open way. But, oh, to be under the blessed obligation of the love of God; to be under the real power of the Spirit of Christ in this world, and the sense of that love drawing our hearts together

after Christ, and leading us all to be of one mind. If you ask what is the truth of unity? It is not merely all thinking alike, or getting brothers all to accept doctrines as we see them, but all being knit together in one love, and in one word it is to have the mind of Christ. So shall we be for His good pleasure.

May it be so with every one of us for His name sake.

T. H. R.



GOD'S PURPOSE THAT WE SHOULD LIVE, AND HOW HE EFFECTS IT.

John vi. 52—58; 1 John iv. 9, 10.

I WANT to try and speak a little to you this evening, dear friends, upon what it is to live, according to the thought of God. Verse 9 of this chapter in the epistle of John gives to us the great thought of the love of God, that we should live.

I think it is important to dwell upon the expression itself, because we may speak of having life in a very vague and indefinite way, but the idea that is presented to us here is, that we ourselves should live—"that we might live," as it is said. It is a great thing, dear friends, to be in the sense of living to God according to His own thought of infinite love respecting us. I think, however, often the thoughts of Christians do not go beyond verse 10 of 1 John iv.; they do not go beyond the thought of propitiation for our sins. But I think verse 10 is less than verse 9. Verse 10 shews the way that God has to take in order to reach His great thought which is expressed in verse 9. His great thought was that we might live; but God could not cause us to live according to His thought of love apart from propitiation; and I think the reason for that is very simple, though

all things are possible with God where it is a question of mere power. I think it must be evident to all that God must act in divine consistency, and scripture shews that man—whatever God's thought as to him was—was actually in death, as under the judgment of God; and seeing that death, under which man was, was the judgment of God, He could not act in an arbitrary way in regard to it. All that God is in righteousness and holiness was involved; and therefore, the question of the judgment that rested upon man must be met—and must be met before God could carry out the great thought of His love respecting us. That is why I say that verse 10 is the way God had to take in order to reach the great thought which was in His love; propitiation comes in. The state in which we were must be met; God must be glorified in regard to it. But He meets that state and glorifies Himself in regard to it, with a view to carrying out His own thought; and that is, that we might live.

I shall not attempt to give any definition of life, but I think it is perfectly clear that there must be involved in the thought of life, the idea of enjoyment; and not only that of enjoyment, but also of response. There must be the enjoyment of that which God has called us to; and there must be ability to respond to that which God has manifested in regard to us. That is, we must be brought into the sense, the conscious-

ness, the enjoyment, of the love of God; and there must be ability also to respond to that love. Nothing short of this can we 'look upon' as life, as it is presented in scripture. And it was God's thought that we should live,—that we should be brought into this blessed consciousness of His love, and with ability to respond to that love. But I will endeavour to trace it a little.

I think that it was indicated from the very beginning that God intended that man should live. When He first formed him and placed him in the midst of all that which His hand had formed, there was in the midst of the garden in which He set him the tree of life, which I suppose indicated that man was to be sustained as a dependent creature, but sustained in life. He was to be there in the enjoyment of all the goodness of God—all that might be known of God; he was to be in the enjoyment of it, and in blissful response to it. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden. But there was also another tree in that garden,—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,—in regard to which the man received commandment from God that he should not eat of it. If the tree of life indicated that man was a dependent creature upon God, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil shewed that man was placed here in responsibility to God. In responsibility man fell—he broke the commandment which God gave to him, and fell under the judgment which was con-

nected with the breaking of the commandment: "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Man fell under death, so that the Lord God spoke to him after he had brought him from his hiding place of returning to the dust out of which he had been taken; "till," He said, "thou return unto the ground for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.' "

Now, beloved friends, Christians in general have a very feeble idea of this—and shall I say that we have had a very feeble idea of it?—that man, here in this world, is under the judgment of God; and it would therefore be vain to speak of man being in the enjoyment of anything that God is, while he is at all in the consciousness of being under that judgment. To say that man is not naturally under the sense of that judgment does not help us in the least degree. But if he has any consciousness of being under that judgment, he certainly then is not enjoying anything that God is, for God is love. I suppose the very first consciousness that is wrought in the soul by the Spirit of God is that of being under the judgment of God; and I say that whilst in the consciousness of being under the judgment of God, it would be very vain to speak of living in the enjoyment of that which God is. That judgment must first be met.

If I speak of the law for a moment, the law came in afterwards. During the time from Adam to Moses, as Romans v. shews, there was

no law, but the law was given by Moses. The law again spoke of life, and it spoke of love. It said, The man that doeth these things shall live; and again it said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart; it spoke both of life and of love. But there is no law that could give life; it spoke of life but the law could not give life. If there had been a law that could give life, then righteousness should have been by it. But there was no law that could give life; it spoke of life, and it spoke of love, but it did not give life or produce love. The law merely served to prove that man was really under the judgment of God. And so when the moral process of the law is described in Romans vii. it is shewn as that which brings man, in his own conscience, into the sense of death before God.

The law, then, did not meet man's ruined condition, it only served definitely to prove it, to shew, in addition to the fact of his being in that condition, that he was perfectly helpless in regard to it. Man cannot remove death, simply because he cannot remove sin. But now we see that which God has done in regard to it—verse 10:—"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." There is no spring of anything on our side. It was not that we loved God, "but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The movement was on God's side. On

our side there was no movement, there was no desire toward God; but there was in the heart of the blessed God the desire toward man—the desire of love; and there was movement on His part to remove the terrible judgment that rested upon man; and that could only be accomplished in the way that is so sweetly indicated here: He “sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” The scripture speaks very affectingly because it designs to affect our hearts toward God. He sent His Son. By this one act we may measure the awful gravity of sin. It was God who sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. But if, on the one hand, we measure the gravity of sin before God by the One whom He has sent to be the propitiation, on the other hand we see that the love that God had toward us was active to remove all this terrible burden that rested upon man—He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

I might remark in passing how different all this is to man's common thought of Jesus propitiating an angry God! It was God Himself who sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Propitiation there must be, for God is angry against sin; He has indignation against sin (that is perfectly clear), and therefore propitiation there must be. But propitiation had its being from God's side; He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. In the death of the Lord Jesus, then, God's own Son,

we see how God maintains the truth of all that He is. There is the perfect expression of His holiness, His utter abhorrence of sin; there is the perfect expression of His righteousness in that He judges sin to the uttermost. But there is the perfect expression of His love, as our very verse tells us, because it was He Himself who found means from His own side of judging sin to the uttermost, and yet providing a way whereby blessing could flow to His people. It is, then, in the death of the Lord Jesus, God's beloved Son, that we see God glorified so that the pressure that rested upon us might be entirely removed. God is free to carry out His own wonderful thought; but the way in which He shews He is free to carry out His thought is in all that which He has done in regard to Him who suffered and died. He has raised Him from the dead, and has glorified Him. It is in that blessed act that we see how God is free to carry out His wonderful thought. I suppose we really learn nothing of the truth of Christianity aright except as we see the expression of it in that blessed One. Romans vi., speaking of His death presents to us very beautifully the other side, where it says, "In that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God." There is the blessed truth that there is a Man living to God without any object, I might say, outside His blessed presence. He has been shewn, according to the language of Psalm xvi., "the path of life,"

and He is gladdened with the joy that dwells in the presence of God;—"In thy presence is fulness of joy." We see in Him, beloved brethren, a Man living to God in the full consciousness and joy of the Father's love, and the perfect expression of all that God intended man to be in before Him; and there we begin to learn the truth of life, beloved friends; though I do not lose sight of the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ here upon the earth was in all the blessed consciousness of the Father's affections, the beloved of the Father as a man here upon the earth. But the advance that we get now upon that is this, that He has now reached the actual condition that God purposed for man. He was here upon the earth in our condition of flesh and blood, without any taint of sin, but now having passed through death and reached the presence of God in resurrection, He is in the actual condition beyond death, in the incorruptibility, that God purposed for His people; therefore it is in Him, as He is now before the face of God, that we see the expression of God's wonderful thought concerning us. He lives to God. There is a Man in the full consciousness of all the affections of the Father's heart, and who perfectly responds to those affections, we may be perfectly sure.

I want to trace, what is so deeply important to us, how we ourselves enter into all this; and it was on this account I read those verses from John vi. When we come to ourselves and God's

thought of our living, I quite grant at the outset that you must take into consideration that we have yet to reach the actual state in which our Lord Jesus Christ is. Life and incorruptibility have been brought to light for us through the gospel, because, as I have sought to shew briefly, they both have their perfect expression in Him who died for us and rose again. In order to reach the completeness of God's thought respecting us, we have to take that into consideration,—that is, that the actual state in which the Lord Jesus Christ is, in resurrection, has yet to be reached by us. The Lord speaks of it repeatedly in John vi.—“I will raise him up at the last day” (four times at least He spoke of it); the Lord goes on to that in His thought. While that is true, all that morally constitutes life is laid open to us at the present time, and that is a great thing. The actual condition may be future, and undoubtedly it is, because we are all here to-night in mortal bodies, and we are very conscious in one way and another, that we have not yet reached the actual state of incorruptibility. But I say that while the actual state which is proper to life is still future, all that morally constitutes life is laid open to us at the present time; so that what I want to speak of, as the Lord will enable me, is this, how we ourselves, in our own souls, reach, at the present time, life.

Now, the first point I would dwell upon in John vi. is that of which the Lord speaks in verse 53;

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat [or, shall have eaten,] the flesh of the Son of man and drink [or, shall have drunk] his blood, ye have no life in you” (more literally “ye have no life in yourselves”). I think the first point that has to be accepted in this, that there is no spring of life in the flesh apart from eating the flesh of that Man and drinking His blood—we have no life in ourselves. It may seem an elementary point to dwell upon, but it is of great consequence that we should see and clearly accept that there is not the slightest power in the flesh to understand, to enjoy, or to respond to the blessed love of God. I am not ignorant of the fact that many speak of the love of God, but if you come to examine that which they say concerning the love of God what is it? I do not think you find that it is anything beyond the sympathetic compassion and benevolence that a man may exercise toward his fellowmen; and therefore, what you find often goes along with all that much speaking on the love of God, on the part of many is this, that they even go so far as to deny the eternal punishment of the wicked; and that seems to prove conclusively, that while they speak of the love of God, they are really ignorant of it in their souls. You may ask me, why? Because the love of God is a holy love. We have just used the expression in our hymn, and I perfectly believe it. It is a holy love. I am perfectly sure that no one but Himself apprehends the love of God. The passage of

scripture that seems to me most clearly to shew it is that which we have in Romans v., when it said, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us." God would have His love in our hearts for His own satisfaction. But how can His love be known and enjoyed in our hearts? Only by the Holy Ghost being given to us; "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us." My point then, is this (I repeat it), that there is no spring of life in the flesh; we have no life in ourselves, and therefore, the first step in regard to our being brought into the enjoyment of the love of God, is the acceptance of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Death rested upon us as men under the judgment of God; and it is only by the death of the Son of man, the Lord Jesus Christ, that we can be relieved of the pressure of that judgment. That is the first thing that must be accepted. Verse 53, upon which I dwell, is what I might call the exclusive side of our subject. It shews that apart from the appropriation of the death of Christ, we have no life in ourselves; there is no spring of life whatever in the flesh.

Now I come to verses 54, 55, and they are to me very touching; "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." We all remember Samson's riddle that he put

forth to the thirty young men; "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." And I think, beloved friends, that we have Samson's riddle here in its application to ourselves, that the Lord Jesus Christ brings for us meat out of the eater, and sweetness out of the strong. But how does He do it? He does it by His own death. Death is the most solemn thing we could contemplate, that is, when we contemplate it as the judgment of God that rests upon man; and in verse 53 it shuts out all thought of there being any spring of life in man. On the other side, death becomes to the believer the most blessed thing that he could contemplate, because it brings out in the most touching way the love of the Lord Jesus to him. In what other way than this could the appropriation of the death of Christ be food for us? "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." If we would have our souls nourished, nourished in divine love, we must contemplate the death of our precious Saviour. It is a wonderful thing that God should have taken up the very judgment that rested upon man—His own judgment—and made it through His beloved Son the perfect expression to us of the divine love with which He has loved us. As it is said in Romans v., "God commendeth his love towards us," &c. So here the Lord Jesus Christ would take our hearts captive by the love that He has expressed in dying for us; and in the contemplation of His death for us, He would truly

nourish and refresh our souls. "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." Oh, beloved friends, how many times we feel the lack of nourishment! It may be that our spirits have been a little caught by all that which is around us in this world. May be that we have been unwatchful and not dependent; and the consequence is that we feel our lack of nourishment? Where shall we get our nourishment? We must contemplate the Lord Jesus Christ in His death, and contemplate with appropriation of it to ourselves. The word appropriation is one that has been long and often used in regard to this chapter; and I suppose no other term so fitly represents that which the Lord Jesus spoke of. In eating we appropriate to ourselves that which is set before us. The Lord Jesus Christ sets His death before us. Beloved brethren, how much do we know of the appropriation of it to ourselves? It is a moral thing to appropriate the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, because in it must lie the recognition of the fact that not in ourselves, nor in the things which are around us in this world, but in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ we become acquainted with His own blessed love. There we begin to taste what is really life, so He adds in verse 56, "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him." That is, beloved friends, as we appropriate His death in this way to ourselves, we have no thought that runs counter to it; we find it impossible to gain our pleasure

in the least degree in the scene in which Christ has thus died for us. So that all our thoughts, all our affections become wrapped up with Him. "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him." Our whole moral being becomes circumscribed by that which He is, as having not one affection and not one thought outside Himself. I know some would say in regard to this, that this is scarcely practicable, because as men and women here upon the earth, we have our relationships, and we have duties connected with these relationships, and the like. But I think the simplest, the youngest of us here, can see that much depends on how we take up those relationships, and the duties which pertain to them. That is, a man may take them up as living in them, as finding his spring in them—all his pleasure and delight are found in them. On the other hand, a man may take them up as recognising the Lord and seeking to discharge all the obligations which rest upon him in respect to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Beloved friends, if we take them up in this latter way, I am sure we shall never find them inconsistent with that which the Lord speaks of here. Because taking them up in this way that I have described you are conscious that however well you may acquit yourself of the obligations that rest upon you, it is still in regard to things here; and the things here are all passing and perishing. You do not find in that way your spring in them.

If you take a servant for example ; I am perfectly sure of this, that no servant serves so well as one who has found perfect satisfaction outside the sphere of his service. And I will tell you why. If he has not the sense of having found perfect satisfaction outside the sphere of his service, then within the sphere of his service he is seeking satisfaction, and that to some degree must mould and fashion his service in that sphere. But the man who has found his satisfaction outside the sphere of his service comes into that sphere perfectly at liberty to do his Lord's will ; he has nothing to seek. It is beautifully expressed in several of our hymns. That verse comes to my mind :—

“ And stayed by joy divine,
As hireling fills his day,
Through scenes of strife and desert life
We tread in peace our way.”

The hireling has nothing to seek ; he simply does his work and passes on—he fills his day. Beloved friends, we can only do that as we are in the sense of that which the first line of that verse speaks—as we are “ stayed by joy divine.” We have found our satisfaction outside the sphere of our service, so that we can enter that sphere simply as under the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I think, beloved friends, this may be plain to you, I am perfectly sure that this world is not the sphere of our life. It is said in Colos-

sians (an epistle which has life as its subject largely)—it is said, “our life is hid with Christ in God.” It makes it perfectly clear that this world is not the sphere of our life. This world is the present sphere of our service, but it is not the sphere of our life. And a most blessed thing it is to have the consciousness of life in that heavenly sphere, so that we can enter the sphere of our service with nothing to seek, nothing to choose, to do our blessed Lord's bidding. But I return to my subject. “He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him.” That man is conscious that all his springs of life are in another sphere; they are not in the first Adam; they are not in himself, the representative of the first Adam; they are not in things here. All his springs are in Another, who is in another sphere—“he dwelleth in me and I in him.” So that leads to verse 57; “As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.” There we get the same expression, I believe, as that we read in verse 9 of 1 John iv. “that we might live through him.”

I think, then, beloved friends, there are these three distinct points. There is first the exclusive side of the truth, that is, there is no spring of life according to God in the flesh, because man after the flesh is under death. And then, secondly, in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ we learn His infinite love; divine love is brought to light for

us in that death of His, and there our souls become nourished. I am sure it is a great thing to contemplate in this way the death of the Son of man, to appropriate it to ourselves—that death rested upon us, but I see the precious Saviour in divine and infinite love coming into death, and that takes my heart captive, so that I learn to find all my springs in the blessed One who died for me, and in the great affection which has been brought to light for me in that death. Now, beloved friends, He lives, and any sense or consciousness that we get of life is inseparably connected with our sense of association with Him before God. We have to enter into that which the Lord Jesus Christ spoke in John xx., when He said to Mary Magdalene, “Touch me not.” He refused to be detained in this world; His links with it were broken. In John xix. you see most solemnly disposed of all that connected itself with the Lord’s life in the flesh here upon the earth. The soldiers disposed of His clothing, and He gave His mother to the care of the disciple whom He loved; both of these incidents plainly telling us that the Lord’s links with the present order of things were broken, and broken never to be resumed. The Lord then says, as risen from the dead, “Touch me not.” He refuses to be detained in this present order of things.—“I have not yet ascended to my Father, but go to my brethren.” Beloved friends, have we the sense of being the brethren of the Lord Jesus Christ?

I do not think that a sinner is really one of the brethren of the Lord Jesus Christ. The grace of God has come to us as sinners, it has reached to us where we were, in all the depth of our degradation, but, beloved friends, it has reached us in order to draw us from that place where it reached us; and if it draws us from the place where it reached us, to what spot does it draw us? It draws us to the place which He Himself occupies with the Father. As the brethren of Christ we are looked at as those who have commenced a totally new history. It is in virtue of all that has been wrought in us by the Spirit of God, but we are looked at as those who have commenced a new history, He looks upon us as His brethren—"Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." Now, beloved friends, to enter into the sense of that we have to appropriate Him to ourselves. I think in that particular chapter Mary very beautifully shews us in a very simple way what appropriation is. When she was left alone, even by John and Peter, who went to their own homes, she said, "they have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid him." Many have dwelt upon the possible emphasis on the pronoun "my." It is as though in her passionate love to the Lord, she said, I know not if He be a Lord to others, but He is my Lord, I cannot do without Him, He is everything to me. There is a woman perfectly

inconsolable ; neither heaven nor earth could console that desolate woman. There were angelic visitants there, but angelic visitants could not console the heart of that woman, for men had taken away her Lord. Whatever we might have to separate from, whatever may fail us, whoever may go, the one imperative necessity of our being is our Lord—"my Lord." It is that soul that is brought into the sense of life. I do not think any other is. I think that appropriation is a matter of love. The Lord speaks in this chapter of our believing on Him, and I am sure every one will understand that it is a great thing to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to believe on the Son of God ; but, beloved friends, appropriation is a matter of love. If I love Him, I must have Him. I see it in human things ; two friends meet, two friends bound together in the most affectionate intimacy of love ; and what a delight it is to those two friends when they are left alone, every ceremony called for having been gone through, and they are left alone in the perfect intimacy of love, they know what it is to appropriate each other for the time being. Beloved friends, the Lord places Himself in love within the reach of our appropriation. Then comes the question, do we love Him enough to appropriate Him ? We can only appropriate Him as the One who has died for us ; and therefore here His death comes first in order. Beloved friends, do we love Him so, through

grace, that we must have Him ; “ He that eateth me, even he shall live by me.” I can understand this, that if a friend I love as dear as life comes to me, I can appropriate him. As he goes on to speak to me of that which is of deepest interest to him, I begin to live in the very sphere of his interest. But, beloved friends, what must it be to appropriate to ourselves the blessed Son of God. His love has brought Him within the reach of our appropriation, otherwise we could not have appropriated Him. Now, beloved, as we appropriate Him to ourselves, in the infinite depth of affection we learn from Him all that the Father is to Him and in that way we learn what life really is. We live through Him. Oh, beloved friends, the thought of the eternal love of God regarding us is a wonderful thought. “ In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.” There is the precious expression there, the “ only begotten Son,” the only One who knew the love of the Father’s heart ; and “ in this was manifested the love of God towards us ; in that he sent his only begotten Son, that we might live through him.” That is God’s side. Here we get our side ; “ He that eateth me, even he shall live by me.” Oh, beloved friends, do we know anything of this in the secret of our souls, what it is so in love to lay hold of the blessed Son of God and eat Him, as He speaks here, that in the ap-

appropriation of Himself to ourselves, we enter into what it is to live before God?

I will just notice that concluding verse, the Lord's words here; "This is that bread which came down from heaven." It does not belong to this world, it comes from another sphere altogether. This is that bread which came down from heaven; not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead; he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever." I think, beloved friends, it is important that we should distinguish between that which supports us as men and women here upon the earth, and that which brings us into a totally new sphere—the heavenly sphere, to which the blessed Son of man belongs. "This is that bread which came down from heaven." God graciously sustains us as men and women here upon the earth, and I would that every one of us knew more what it is to be sustained. But in that sense we eat and die, because the eternal life that God gives to us—which the Lord Jesus Christ here states belongs to him who eats His flesh and drinks His blood—that eternal life does not belong to this world at all; it belongs to that heavenly sphere. As we eat that bread which cometh down out of heaven, as He says here, we are more than sustained as men and women here; we are conducted by the very eating of that bread to the blessed sphere from whence it comes.

I can only pray God that we, in dwelling upon all this, may be established in love through the Lord Jesus Christ. Though I would say one

word in conclusion as relating to that which I would leave upon your hearts. It is as touching what the Lord so affectingly speaks of in regard to His death; "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed."

I would we were more nourished in divine affections. I think, so far as I can see, the great defect amongst us is that we are so poorly nourished. I see the examples of it in scripture; I see it in the Corinthians, they came behind in no gift, but they were badly nourished. I see it in the same way in Hebrews, in chapter vi. the apostle was encouraged in regard to them because he had seen their love; there was the sign of their having started in that path which leads to the end he had in view. He desires they should be nourished, and surely God desires our souls should be nourished at the present time. And how would He nourish us? He would lead us into a deeper contemplation of the death of His Son. In that death divine love has been brought to light; and as we contemplate that divine love brought to light for us, our souls must be deeply moved to follow after Him in appropriation to ourselves the blessed One who died for us.

J. R.



GRACE RELIEVES THAT LOVE MIGHT BE ENJOYED.

(JOHN XII. 1-8.)

IN the beginning of this chapter we see a little company of persons, who had been relieved by the Lord Jesus, and who had been attracted by Him into His own company. And I want to shew you to-night that each of those who composed that company had been relieved by the Son of God from the pressure that had been upon them—a pressure which was peculiar to each, yet different in each case—they had been relieved to the end that they might be free to be in the enjoyment of Himself and His love in His own presence.

I think this incident is recorded by the Spirit of God to unfold a great principle, which is alluded to in the last verse of chapter xx.: “These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name.” The object of this gospel is that the Son of God might be known by us, and life in Him be our present and eternal portion.

I have alluded to the fact that this company of three persons had been relieved, by the grace of the Son of God, from the pressure that had been upon them, to the end that they might be free to enjoy His love in His own company. They had received relief, but the relief they had received was not the object the Lord had in view in relieving them, but being relieved they were free to be with the One who had delivered them. This double blessing is frequently brought before us in this gospel. For instance, take the case of the blind man in chapter ix. The blind man first received sight from the Lord, and afterwards, when the Lord revealed Himself to him as the Son of God, he worshipped the One who had thus revealed Himself.

It is a great day in the history of a person when he apprehends the testimony expressed in the Son of God. Every Christian has heard the voice of Jesus; but hearing the voice of the Son of God is quite another matter. In hearing the voice of the Son of God, you do not hear an audible voice, nor do you hear a person read to you what the Son of God has said in scripture. The thought is, you apprehend the revelation of God which has come out in the person of the Son, for in Him God has been revealed in order that He might be known by us.

Our relief is based upon the vicarious death of

Christ in receiving, on our account, the judgment due to that from which we needed deliverance. But in addition to the judgment He endured ; in Him God has expressed the greatness of His matchless love in the very place of death. Both the righteous judgment of God on the man that had sinned, and the mighty love of God, have been expressed in the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. The ending of what we are as connected with Adam is expressed there, and the bringing in of another order of man also finds its foundation in the love which has been there made known. The man that had sinned has been exterminated morally that he might be replaced by another, and if any man be in Him there is new creation. The love of God brings in a new order of man in association with the One who is to God's pleasure and in whom His love has been expressed and made known. This is the love that God commends to us, and this is the love the Spirit sheds abroad in our hearts. The judgment of God is the basis of our relief, and the love of God, realised by us, fits us for, and draws us into the company of the One who has relieved us.

We will now return and consider the interesting narrative that is before us. As touching Lazarus, it is easily seen that the pressure of death had been upon him. There can be no mistake as to this, for Jesus had plainly said,

“Lazarus is dead,” and the one thing he needed at that time was deliverance from the bonds and sphere of death in which he was. No one could give him this deliverance but the Son of God. Indeed, we are told that the sickness and death of Lazarus had been allowed by God for His glory, and that the Son of God might be glorified in his being raised. Lazarus had been in the bonds of death, and in raising him the Lord manifested Himself as the resurrection as well as the life, and thereby declared Himself the Son of God with power.

We are told in verse 5 that “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.” Because He loved them He acted in grace to the relief of those whom He loved, to the end that they might be loved into loving Him and be free to find the home of their hearts in the company of their Deliverer.

And so it is with each one of us. We are risen with Christ, through faith in the operation of God in raising Him from the dead, to the end that we might live in association with Him in that sphere of life and liberty in which He lives unto God. If we are delivered from the sphere of death it is that we might find our life in the company of the ever blessed Son of God.

But it may be asked, “What is the sphere of death from which a person needs to be de-

livered?" I should say that it is the sphere of this present world, which, in the first Epistle of John, is said to consist of "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." These three principles go to make up the world, and give the elements of all that is in it. And the person who is held by either is not free from the bonds of death. These are the bonds that are binding many to-day, and these are the bonds from which many Christians need to be delivered.

As a rule these bonds in our case are not all snapped in a moment, or all at the same time. Generally the first mentioned—the lust of the flesh, is the first snare to be detected and broken. Indeed, I do not see how a person can be a Christian if he is still a slave to the lust of the flesh.

But he might be delivered thus far, and still be a slave to "the lust of the eye and pride of life." And again, "the lust of the eye" might be detected and judged long before the soul is exercised as to "the pride of life." Under the term, lust of the eye, would be included all that pleases the mind or senses, such as empty literature, pictures, pleasant sights or sounds, or the many things in which the votaries of pleasure find their enjoyment. Are my hearers free from such things? Or do you need to be delivered from this phase of the world?

Or again, a person might be delivered from the two first phases of the world and still be a slave to "the pride of life." The lusts of the flesh may not enslave, the lust of the eye may not attract, but there may still be an endeavour to keep up a social position that has been either inherited or acquired. Worldly persons may have been separated from, but worldliness in the way of maintaining a status or position here may still be adhered to. This also, equally with the lusts of the flesh and the lusts of the eye, are of the sphere of death, and are not of the Father but of the world. What has a man who is risen with Christ to do with such things? They all belong to this world, and are opposed to all that is in the sphere where the Father's love is known.

The knowledge of the Son of God delivers from these things, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" May we realise His present grace and hear His voice—the voice of the Son of God, and know what it is to live in the sphere of the Father's love. The hour has come when the dead hear the voice of the Son of God, and hearing, live.

Martha had also needed the knowledge and

grace of the Son of God to set her free to serve the Lord according to His pleasure. I take it that the deficiency in Martha had been that she had not known the greatness and glory of the Son of God—what He was in His own Person had not been discerned by her. She had not apprehended that He was God. Consequently in Luke x. we see that she was careful and troubled in her service. That she did not apprehend His deity is clearly seen by what she said to the Lord on the occasion of her brother's death. Her estimate of Him was that He had power with God, and that God would answer His prayer; consequently, after saying, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," she added, "But I know that even now whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." She believed that God would answer His prayer, but until then she did not know Him as the Son of God. But in those memorable words of Jesus, "I am the resurrection and the life," I think she heard the voice of the Son of God, and received that revelation into her soul, which led her to exclaim, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, that should come into the world." Her lesson having been learnt, she went her way.

I think many are careful and troubled through not having discerned Jesus as the Son of God.

Their conception of Him begins with His nativity and miraculous birth. His humanity is the prominent thought of Him that is before their mind. They admire Him, as in lowly dependence and perfect obedience He wended His way through this world to the perfect delight of God. They think of Him in all that He endured on Calvary's cross. But the Son of God, in the greatness of His deity, is little known by them. The greatness of His Person is not discerned.

The Spirit of God has carefully guarded the deity of the Son. In the Old Testament He is called "the mighty God," and in the New He is affirmed to be the "great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." May we know Him thus and worship with adoring hearts.

If we would be relieved from care and from being cumbered in the service of the Lord, we must know the Son of God, and be assured that the work is *His*, and that He is competent to carry it to completion; we would then work *from* Him as well as *for* Him. There is a moral dignity and calm surrounding the servant who is assured that the work is the Lord's, and that nothing and no one can withstand the Son of God. The sense of this relieves from care in service, and gives the assurance that victory is certain, since the work does not depend upon the

servant but on Him who sends him. Instead of thinking that you must do the work and count upon Him to help you, as Martha did, when she said, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone?" you would be careful that you are a vessel meet for the Master's use, and ever ready to be taken up by Himself for His pleasure. In this way the knowledge of the greatness of the Son of God relieves from care and anxiety in His service.

I now turn to Mary. Mary had known what it was to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear His word, and we also see her at His feet in chapter xi. She had long apprehended the greatness of the Son of God. Therefore in the presence of death she said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died;" but she does not add with Martha, "But I know that even now whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." To Mary, Jesus was more than a righteous man whose prayer God would hear and answer. She discerned that all power was with Him—power to prevent from dying and power to raise the dead. She had heard His word, yet there was a burden from which she needed to be relieved; that burden is expressed in the words, "When Jesus therefore saw her *weeping*." Bereavement had filled her

soul with grief, and caused the tears to course down her cheeks. Jesus saw her weeping, and in sympathy with her He also wept.

It was not wrong for her to weep in the presence of death, nor wrong to mourn the loss of her brother, nor wrong to feel the ravages death has made in this world of sin; not to weep at such a time would have shewn her devoid of natural affection. But to be a worshipper in the presence of her Lord, as we see her in chapter xii., she must have her tears dried and her grief turned to gladness.

The One who delivered Lazarus from the bonds of death, and delivered Martha from her care and trouble, also dried the weeping eyes of Mary, and while Lazarus sat at the table with the Lord, and Martha was engaged in unencumbered service, Mary broke her box of very precious ointment and anointed the feet of Him who was her all in all, while she laid her glory at His blessed feet as she wiped them with her hair.

Under similar circumstances it is not wrong for us to weep, as Mary did. Not to have natural affection would be to manifest the spirit of the last days. But we need not sorrow as those who have no hope, nor allow the impulses of natural affection to hinder us in our communion with the Lord. If we do so, He is

deprived of the sacrifice of praise and worship of which He is ever worthy.

If not delivered from the sphere of death—this present evil world; if not delivered from care and trouble about many things; if not delivered from grief caused by what is right in itself—natural affection, either by the cause of the grief being removed, or by our souls being supported by the Son of God, our great High Priest; we are not free to sit in the company of the Lord to enjoy His things, nor to be efficient servants in His service, nor to worship at His feet.

In our chapter Lazarus is a picture of a “common person” in Christianity, Martha a picture of a true “Levite,” and Mary a “Priest.” May each one of us answer to all three, and make the Lord a supper, so that He may find His joy in our company.

I would also remark that another person is in evidence on this occasion, I refer to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. He is not sitting at the table with the Lord, neither is he serving Him, nor worshipping at His feet; he is murmuring and seeking to rob the Lord of the worship that He was receiving from Mary’s adoring heart. In Judas we have a picture of the flesh in each one of us. We may have been in the company of the Lord for three years, as

he was, but if we know ourselves we have to confess that the flesh in us would ever rob the Lord of His glory, by the endeavour to keep our hearts from worshipping Him in the enjoyment of His love. Yes, the traitor was there, but he had no part in what was taking place. Well it is for us that the Lord takes our part against the flesh in us.

How great the grace that is ever ready to free our souls from every worldly entanglement, care and grief, so that in the freedom of His company we may enjoy Himself and His love according to His pleasure.

May we be led on in the knowledge of the ever blessed Son of God, so that we may be freed by His grace from all that hinders, to the end that we may make Him a supper, and know what it is for Him to sup with us and we with Him, during the night of His rejection, for His name's sake.

E. W.



CHRIST A LIGHT OF THE GENTILES.

Isaiah xlix. 1-13; Luke i. 68-80;

Acts xiii. 46-48.

THERE is a class of people in the present day (I think they are contemplated in scripture) unwilling, in a certain sense, to give up the truth of Christianity, but who at the same time subject scripture to a treatment which is entirely unwarrantable, and practically a denial of its being the word of God. It is all very well to accept simply the facts which are related in scripture, but the facts related form a very small part of scripture. We get a great many things related, and the relation of facts may be called in a sense history, but history forms a very small part indeed of scripture. The bulk of scripture is the revelation of the thought and feeling, of God in regard to things down here. The impression that scripture makes upon any one accustomed to study it is, that it speaks of a living God. And when I refer to a living God, what I mean is this; a God who has His mind and feeling in regard to everything that is transpiring down here. If I might use the expression, He is affected by it. I do not mean affected in the

way in which we are, but He *is* affected by things here. You get the expression in Genesis that He repented that He had made man; and such a thought is presented in scripture as that He is afflicted in the afflictions of His people; and many another thought of the same description, all of which bring before your minds the idea of a living God—that is, a God of feeling, and of purpose too. It is this idea which scripture forms in you in regard to God. I feel it more and more for myself; as I go to scripture I become increasingly conscious in my soul of being brought into the presence of a living God, while conscious also that it describes a succession of generations of dying men down here; one generation passes off the scene and another appears, but scripture presents to you in contrast to that, a living God, One who has His own mind from beginning to end; who has never been diverted from that mind; but is at the same time affected by that which passes down here upon earth. I think that is a most important thought to get of God; and you will find that scripture is taken up with making known the thought and mind of God. We are told what the spirit of scripture is: the Lord is that spirit. Paul speaks of the apostles being made competent ministers of the new covenant; not of letter but of spirit, and later on he says, “Now the Lord is that Spirit.” I think you get the idea of scripture fulfilled in Christians. I have thought there is an analogy in scripture to

the prayer of Ephesians iii., the idea there is that the church was to be a kind of living scripture; not scripture, but a living expression of the mind of God. I think that is the idea that comes out in the prayer; they were "to be strengthened with might, by his Spirit in the inner man;" "that they might comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge," &c. This presents the great idea of a living expression of the mind and character of God in the church down here. While you have the scripture, that which is written, at the same time there is the living expression of God in the church by Christ dwelling in their hearts by faith. If you were to ask me what the spirit of scripture is, I would get a definition of it from this passage; it is the counsel of the Father made known by the Spirit, the object and centre of which is His Son.

There are people who would tell us in the present day (and they profess to be Christians) that there is no such thing as prophecy. Well, this begs the question to begin with. They cannot prove that it is impossible there should be prophecy. Supposing this part of Isaiah was never written by the prophet Isaiah, as some would tell us; supposing it was written at some later date than it was assumed to have been written, no one can contend for a moment but that it was written before Christ; and yet you get pro-

phetically a most remarkable revelation of Christ. I could not say you get a history of Christ, but you get a revelation of Christ in a way that would never have entered into man's mind. A Jewish mind would never have dreamed of Messiah being rejected by the people, but that is the way in which He is presented here; He has laboured in vain, and spent His strength for nought, and in vain. That was the result of the Lord's ministry here upon the earth. It is the first thought so far as Israel's Messiah is concerned. What Jewish mind would have conceived such a passage as that in anticipation of the Messiah? But it was written, and the ablest critic cannot contend otherwise for a moment, some time before Christ. I do not care if it were ten or one hundred years before Christ, the point is we get brought out here what no Jew as such, would have perceived, the rejection of Messiah when He was presented to the people. This is the beginning of a section, which section includes some eight or nine chapters, and brings before us God's controversy with the people on this ground. That is prophetic, it brings before us the truth that Christ was to be presented to the people who were to return from the Babylonish captivity; and being presented, He had to say, "I have laboured in vain, and have spent my strength for nought, and in vain;" and, after, He says, "yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God." I refer to that in an introductory way.

There are three thoughts in the passage I want to dwell upon — all of them spoken of prophetically ; when you come to the New Testament, you find these thoughts fulfilled.

Many very blessed and glorious thoughts are presented to us in the Old Testament, but they could not be fulfilled at the time : they had to wait for the Man of God's counsels before they could be fulfilled. What is lacking in the Old Testament is the Man. God was testing man in a variety of ways, but the Man of God's counsels was not here ; so whatever might be the thoughts presented in the Old Testament, they had to wait for the Man in whom those counsels and thoughts could have their fulfilment. In the New Testament, the change is this ; you have the Man. You will remember what the angels announced to the shepherds at the birth of Christ, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

There are just three thoughts that I will refer to in the passage. The first is in verse 5, "And now, saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength ;" that is one thought. The next is in verse 6 ; "And (Jehovah) said, It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel : I will also give thee for a

light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." Now I read the verse in Acts xiii. to shew that Paul takes up that thought, and connects it with his testimony. That is, he turns away there from the Jew, and quotes this passage to shew that God had accomplished the thought in it. That is, that Christ who had been rejected on the part of the Jew was set for a light to the Gentiles.

There is still a third thought, and that comes out in verse 8, "Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in the day of salvation have I helped thee:" that is quoted in 2 Corinthians vi. as having its application to the present time. The apostle says there, "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." I do not doubt that the strict application of the passage is yet future, but a present application is given by the apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthians.

It is those thoughts that I want to dwell upon. To enlarge a little upon the thought of Christ being set a light to the Gentiles; I want to make plain to you what that means. In Luke i. we see what, properly speaking, Christ is to His people; that is, God had raised up among His people a "horn of salvation," and John the Baptist was to give the knowledge of salvation to His people by the forgiveness of sins. That is what Christ has now brought to the Gentiles; He has brought the salvation of God

to the Gentiles. The word was turned away from by the Jew and was addressed to the Gentiles, and they heard it. I shall go a little further to shew you what the object of the salvation was. The object was that they might come into the divine thought, and that was eternal life: "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed." They were to be brought into the thought of God about them. Salvation was sent to them to that end. The salvation which properly belonged to the Jew, according to the song of Zacharias, went out, according to the prophecy of Isaiah, to the Gentiles—"It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." The point is this, that Christ takes the place of the servant of Jehovah here; He in that sense supersedes Israel. Israel had that place in regard to Jehovah, they were His witness and His servants. Christ comes in and takes that place. You will find that principle prevailing through Matthew; Christ takes the place of Jehovah's servant, so that eventually the remnant of Israel may come again into the place of Jehovah's servant. Properly speaking His service was to bring back to God the tribes of Israel. The tribes of Israel were lost, but Christ came to restore them; but instead of being received and welcomed here, He was rejected on the part of His

people; and therefore Christ has to accomplish Jehovah's will.

Christ retires into the pleasure of Jehovah. He says (although the purpose of God in regard to Israel was not accomplished) "yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of Jehovah, and my God shall be my strength." He takes up the position which we see brought out elsewhere; "Behold I and the children which God hath given me." "I will wait upon the Lord." That is the position which comes out here. It was a very wonderful place for the Lord to take,—for the One who was Jehovah to take the place of Jehovah's servant; and having once come into the place of a servant, He never leaves that place, and I am sure of this, that if ever the tribes of Israel are to be brought back to Jehovah (which they will be in due time), it will be Christ; Jehovah's servant, who will bring them back; they will be placed in connection with Christ their Saviour.

What marks the present time is this, He says, "yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of Jehovah, and my God shall be my strength." He is glorious in the eyes of Jehovah. The Lord says, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him." Christ might be despised (as He was despised in the eyes of the people), but He is now glorious in the eyes of

Jehovah. Do you think there was ever a moment when Christ was so glorious in the eyes of Jehovah, as when He suffered on the cross? That was the moment of glory, though put to shame on the part of man here. He was glorious in the eyes of Jehovah, and His God would be His strength; and the supreme moment of that was the cross. You have to estimate things morally. If you look at things outwardly, it was the moment of His shame and reproach; but if you look at things morally it was the moment of His glory. He was glorious in the eyes of Jehovah at the moment of His shame and ignominy. He glorified God in the place of man's dishonour. That same language ought to have its application to us; you may be in reproach on the part of man, if you go forth unto Christ, but I think we ought to understand that the church is glorious in the eyes of Jehovah, and God is their strength. But Christians have evaded the reproach. They attempt to make out in the present day that Christ is in honour. Christ is not in honour, He is in reproach. He has never been in honour here since He suffered on the cross; the reproach has never been set aside. The proper place of the church is to be in His reproach here, but at the same time glorious as partaking of the Spirit of glory, as the apostle Peter says, "The Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you."

Now, the next point is. God says to Him, "It is a light thing that thou shouldest

be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth."

What I see is this (may God give me to make it plain), Christ is salvation to the Gentiles because the kingdom is established in His hands. The moment the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ is presented to man, the kingdom is presented because the kingdom has its expression and seat in the Lord Jesus Christ at the right hand of God; and the kingdom is preached that men may come under the sway of grace; and that being under the sway of grace, they may be brought into the knowledge of salvation. No one ever came to the knowledge of salvation in any other way. I am confident that it is in being brought under the moral sway of God as presented in the Lord Jesus Christ that you and I get salvation. It is a great thing to be brought under the moral sway of God; to know that God has pleasure in grace; that He has pleasure in accounting us righteous. His attitude toward man is grace, and nought else. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men," &c. It is the one important point for us as here upon earth that our souls should be sensibly and consciously under the sway of divine grace, and that we should be maintained in the sense of what the mind and attitude of God is towards man; we are brought into the

light of a Saviour God, who has pleasure in salvation, who would have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. With such a God as that we have to do. I trust that we all have full confidence in the grace of God, and are pleased to be under His sway. The sway of God means the greatest blessing to you and to me. We are maintained in His favour, God imputes nothing to us; and in effect we look for the glory of God:—"we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." We do not expect to be down here for eternity standing in the grace of God, but we "rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." The present is a time of great weakness, although you stand in grace—you have the throne of grace whereby to find grace to help in time of need; but you will not always have a time of need, and will not always need mercy and grace. The time will come when the glory will be displayed, and then you will rejoice with exceeding joy. It will no longer be a time of weakness, when you will need the service of the Priest. It is a moment of weakness now, and you need to be sustained by the Priest; that is, Christ touches you, and the place where He touches you is your weakness. If you had not a weak point, you would scarcely have a point where Christ could touch you. His sympathy can touch you because you have a weak point. But you will not always have that; the glory will come. We wait for the

blessed hope and appearing of the glory, and when that comes we shall be glad with exceeding joy.

Now, the fact of being under the sway of God brings in another thought, that you are delivered from the sway of the enemy. No man was ever delivered from the sway of the enemy but by being brought under the sway of God. No man can stand in independence; you are under the sway of Satan, if you are not under the sway of God. If, on the other hand, you are brought under the sway of grace, you are delivered from the sway of evil. God has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. The transfer has taken place by our hearts being brought under the sway of grace; and we have forgiveness of sins—all in the Son of His love. You have a change of lord; by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ you come under the law of the grace of God, you have forgiveness of sins, and at the same time are delivered from the god of this world—that is, delivered from the power of darkness. That is salvation. I say, to be delivered from the great world system, and sin, and the god of this world, means salvation to man. We have it in figure in the history of the children of Israel; they were brought to God in the wilderness, but at the same time in being brought to God they were delivered from Pharaoh and his hosts. This is celebrated in

the song in Exodus xv. So we are brought into the kingdom of God and under the blessed sway of grace, and "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost; and our hearts being under the sway of grace, and subject to the Lord Jesus Christ, are delivered from the power of evil. It is thus you get the real knowledge of salvation and the forgiveness of sins, the object being that you may be brought into the divine thought. Christ is God's salvation to the end of the earth, and a light to the Gentile. This was not a new thought consequent upon Christ's rejection by the Jews, it fulfilled a very old thought; certain things had come to pass consequent upon certain circumstances, but these things had ever been in the counsels of God. Do you think it was possible for a moment that the grace of God could be limited to the Jews? One of the first things that comes out in Christ's ministry is that the grace of God could not be limited to the Jews; you get mercy for the Gentile in the case of the centurion. The sovereign power of God was working in the Gentiles as well as in the Jew. You will remember the case of the Syrophenician woman, the Lord reaches her in grace; He answers and fully commends her faith. All this is clear proof that the sovereign power of the Spirit of God was working outside the Jew.

Now the thought of God has come out,

Christ is set for a light to the Gentiles. Salvation has come to the Gentiles in the testimony of the kingdom of God, in order that they may come in to the thought of God, and that is, eternal life. Just one word as to the way of it. I think it comes to us through righteousness. The last verse in Romans v. is important—"grace reigns through righteousness." The effect of the rule of grace is that you can touch the question of righteousness; you never could touch that until you were under the sway of grace. As long as a man has any kind of doubt in regard to his position as to God, that man can never bear to face the question of righteousness. Many a person goes on in sin because he does not know the grace of God; but being brought into the light and under the sway of grace, the practical result will be that you will carry out righteousness. Grace reigns through righteousness.

The reign of grace will not tolerate sin. It will be true in the millennium when the reign of grace is established publicly. Christ takes away the sin of the world, and grace will reign through righteousness; and so, in regard to the Christian, grace reigns through righteousness now. If you profess to stand in the kingdom the proof and evidence is that righteousness is maintained in you down here; it will work out in the way of self-judgment. You will walk in the light of the altar (if I may so speak) in the light of the holy judgment of God; and disallow in yourself that which

has been already judged in the death of Christ. God has delivered you by bringing you under the sway of grace ; and now you seek to walk soberly, righteously, and piously, in this present age. The result is that you are drawn very much more fully into the light of God, the Spirit of God is free to work in you, to help and to instruct you, and you begin to reap a great deal in the power of the Holy Ghost. Many a person has the Holy Ghost who does not reap much from the Holy Ghost. You may find people in the condition of the Galatians giving license to the flesh ; they are not carrying out righteousness, and therefore the Spirit of God is hindered. The Spirit of God will not tolerate the flesh, the Spirit and the flesh are entirely irreconcilable. If you give place to the flesh, then the Spirit of God will set Himself against the flesh. On the other hand, if you give place to the Spirit, the flesh is not tolerated. The two are irreconcilable — “the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh ; and these things are opposed the one to the other, that ye should not do those things which ye desire.” The presence of the Spirit in the believer involves the obligation to righteousness, the disallowance in himself of that which has been judged and ended in the death of Christ. You have come into the light of the cross of Christ, where sin was condemned in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but

after the Spirit. Supposing the Spirit is free, what then? You will find that the Spirit will spring up as a well of water in you, and you will get more and more liberated in spirit, and your heart brought more and more in contact with the holy love of God. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." The effect is that you respond to that love; you are so affected by it as to produce response. It is not simply that you are brought into the love of God, but in the light of what God is as revealed in the person of His Son, you become acquainted with divine Persons, and learn to discriminate between them. You learn how to address yourself to the Father, and to the Son—you become intimate, and sensible of what is suitable to the Father, and to the Son. You love the Son, and the Father loves you because you love the Son; and the Son loves you because the Father gave you to Him. You are brought into the light of all that by the power of the Holy Ghost. You get the value of the witnesses in John's first epistle—the Spirit, the water, and the blood; not only their efficacy but their value as witness. Many a person may know their efficacy who knows very little about them as witness. You may have faith in the blood, may be cleansed by the water, and may have the consciousness of the Spirit as a seal, but you want to have them as witnesses; they are witnesses that God has given to us eternal life, and that

life is in His Son. You are thus brought to the reality of eternal life in the power of the Holy Ghost. You advance in holiness in becoming acquainted with love. The nearer you come to God, the more your heart is in the light of His love, the more holiness is promoted; and as you become a partaker of the divine nature, you are able to say God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. That is the great thing which God has in view in regard to every saint; and if the testimony is given in the person of the Son of God, if God has set Him a light to the Gentiles, it is to make His mind known to the Gentiles, that He may be God's salvation to the end of the earth. God has pleasure in salvation; but God has also His own blessed end to serve in that salvation; and that end is that He might be known in all that He is in His own blessed nature in the heart of man, so that the heart of man may be filled with confidence in God. You know what the effect of the fall was! to destroy man's confidence in God. I do not doubt that before the fall man had confidence in God. The effect of the fall was the sowing of distrust in the heart of man. The next step was that man set himself up as a rival to God. "The Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil." God has set Himself to undo the works of the devil; and this He has achieved in the most blessed way by making Himself known in the heart of man. Allow me

to say, that you do not confide in a person unless you are conscious of that person's love. Confidence is not exactly the fruit of faith; many a person believes who has but a very small measure of confidence. Scripture puts confidence in another way. "We love him, because he first loved us;" and in the knowledge of divine love you get confidence. The first great witnesses of love are the water and the blood which flowed from the side of Christ. The next is the Holy Ghost; and these three agree in one common and consistent testimony; and it is the pleasure of God to bring you into the light of His holy love, and to build up your hearts in confidence of that love.

One word more. "In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages;" &c. I will say a word as to the bearing of that. You have to turn the grace of God to account so that as the apostle puts it, "ye receive not the grace of God in vain." If you know the grace of God do not bury your light under a bushel; turn the grace of God to account. Turn it to your own account; do the best you can with it in regard to yourself, but at the same time if you have salvation make manifest that you have it. Do not let people think that you are still a wretched slave to the course and system of this world. Rather make manifest that by the grace of God

you are in the blessed reality of salvation, delivered from the great world system which exists here, and from the god of this world; let this become manifest. I would like people to be simple in turning the grace of God to account, going on in the practice of righteousness, looking for the hope of glory; going on in, that sense, in light of eternal life, though they actually have not come to it. We know where it lies, and it does not lie very far off, it lies in the region of the holy love of God; and this love has been witnessed to in this world. You have not to go to heaven to find expression of the love of God; God has been pleased to give expression to it in the three witnesses here upon the earth. The Holy Ghost Himself has come in that line.

One word more. The Christian has the witness in himself; "He that believeth on the Son of God has the witness in himself." "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us;" and it is the pleasure of God to welcome believers into the most blessed circle. "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed." They were ordained to it, and the apostle Paul brought salvation to them, that they might be led by the Spirit of God into the thought of God about the poor dogs of Gentiles; that they should be brought into the most blessed circle in the universe—into the circle of holy love where the Son of God is, and into which the Spirit of God

has been sent to conduct them. That is the thought of God with regard to the Gentiles. As I said before, it is an acceptable time, a day of salvation. It is a time when opportunity is given to us to be witnesses to the grace of God. He first gives us to be witnesses to the reality of His salvation; and then He gives us grace to carry the testimony of His kingdom to others. But in order that your testimony may be effective, you need to be in the sense and power of His great salvation.

Now I have only to say one word more, and that is, if you are content to walk in the light of God's salvation and to accept reproach, when the kingdom is displayed, then it will be God's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Instead of being a subject of the kingdom in that day, your part will be to sit with Christ on His throne and to have part in His glory; and whatever God has given to Him, He gives to you, that you may share in His glory, just as, while in this world, you share His reproach.

F. E. R.



THE NEW PATH.

Luke x. 42 ; xi. 33—36 ; xii. 29—37.

Beloved friends, I desire to look at these passages with you. I want to take the truth contained in them home to myself as much as I want to put it home to you. The first thing I would say to you, is that the Mount of Transfiguration in chapter ix. indicates a new departure in the Lord's ways. From that moment in Luke's gospel what becomes apparent is that He is going to heaven. Whatever pathway the Lord takes is of great importance to us. When the Lord came down from heaven to earth it was of great importance. When the angels made it known they said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on *earth* peace, good will toward men," but you find in the end of chapter xii. (ver. 51), that the Lord says, "Suppose ye that I am come to send peace on earth?" The Lord has taken another direction now. In chapter xix. you get a further thing. The disciples greet the Lord, but what they now say is, peace *in heaven* ; it is another thing altogether. They celebrate the coming of the King by whom all that could create opposition in heaven—the power of wicked-

ness and evil—had been annulled. I want every one to get a very clear sense of the pathway the Lord has taken. I think you get an indication of it in the account of the transfiguration in Luke. There is a little different bearing in each of the three gospels. In Matthew the point is the coming of the Son of man in His kingdom. When you come to Mark, you see the kingdom of God with power, therefore you get a great deal about the demoniac, which represents I think, specially the condition of Israel upon the earth. (Zech. iii.) When you come to Luke, you have another thing. There the Lord says, "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God." What is greatly before the soul in the account given in Luke is the character of the kingdom, and that is, it is heavenly. The Lord leads the disciples up into a mountain, right away from men, giving them what you may call a "vantage point." I often see people perplexed about things, but it is a great thing to get a vantage ground, away from men and things below, to see what God would set before us. We may know all the truth of scripture, but the great point is, have I really reached the "vantage point," where I can enter into the things which God has for me. One thing that affects you in Luke is, there were men in the glory with the Lord. It shews that He is to have companions there. They are speaking of His exodus which He

would accomplish at Jerusalem. Instead of taking a throne, it is from thence He is going to *heavenly* glory. From that moment the Lord goes down the mount to take another direction, and that is to heaven; in that sense His death was but the way to heaven. "When the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem." It was the way out. At the death of the Lord Jesus in Luke's gospel, the thief goes that very day to Paradise with Christ. Are we in that path? If that is the path the Lord has taken, are we set for that path? Do we set our faces to go that way?

In chapter x. Martha and Mary come before us. They are the first specimens of the company who are connected with the Lord now that He has taken a new pathway. It is not that Martha did not love the Lord, but she wanted to entertain the Lord down here. What the Lord says to Martha is, "One thing is needful." What Mary chose never was taken away from her. If we are going to heaven, do you not think it would be well for us to get a little of the tone of heaven before we get there? The children of Israel when they came to the plains of Moab were learning. Moses was teaching them the ways of the land. The land is the great subject of the book of Deuteronomy. They had to know the will of God when going through the wilderness, but when they came to the plains of

Moab, Moses teaches them the ways of the land. It was in a certain way typical, although it could never rise up to what our privilege is. Moses was associating their hearts with the land. It is a grand thing to get a vantage point. Are you willing for it? I think we learn the first step from Mary. Do you accept the truth in your soul that "one thing is needful"? We have not got a law-giver who will give us ordinances, but we have the Lord Jesus Christ, to sit down at His feet. If we had seen Him on the Mount of transfiguration, we should have said, "Well, there is a heavenly Man!" He was praying. A Man in perfect communion with the Father; the fashion of His countenance alters. The glory of the heavenly sat upon Him. That is the blessed Man—you sit at the feet of Jesus. If you want to know heaven it is learnt as you sit at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ. Martha felt that there were a great many things claiming her attention; there was *serving* Him, but I see something greater. Mary learned of the Lord and so got her heart associated with heavenly realities. I feel the importance that now Christ is not actually and personally here, that there is a place where His Spirit dwells. I say, "Stick to the assembly." It is there christian affections flow, it is there you drop everything else, and you get into touch with what is of Christ. It is the Lord who is prominent before each. I shall never forget the impression made upon me when I first went into

a meeting. I had heard the best preachers—had sat under them, as they say. I went into a little country meeting, the singing was what people call, “grating on the ear,” but I never heard a hymn sung more to the Lord than that one. And then they were addressing God as their Father, speaking freely to Him! The impression never left me. It is in the assembly you can enjoy the affections of Christ among His own. Blessed as it is to speak of the Lord and to serve Him, there is nothing like the retreat of the assembly, the place of the overshadowing of Christ, and therefore I commend it to the youngest here.

In chapter xi. prayer comes out. The immense privilege of being before God to speak to Him. I think the Lord teaches us great definiteness. “Friend, lend me three loaves.” When one sees the greatness of expecting everything from heaven, one feels the immense privilege of being able to speak to God in heaven made known to us as Father by the Lord. In verse 34 we come to another thing, that your body is to be light. God was pleased in the Old Testament to give a measure of light. The law was, so to speak, the testimony of God. The tabernacle contained in type the light of God. It is a new thought brought in, that the bodies of the saints should be light. Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, and the Queen of Sheba came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom

of Solomon. Jonah in his person was a sign of judgment for Israel; and on the other hand there is the communication of all the wisdom of God in our Lord Jesus Christ. If God gives us the blessed light of Christ, and heavenly light has come into your soul, what is it for? Your body is to be full of light! The saints are the testimony. There is a kind of responsibility attached to it. If the word takes effect in the heart, there is the responsibility that the light should be held forth. "Holding forth the word of life." I think you get the idea in John i. "The life was the light of men." In chapter viii. they say to Him, "Who art thou?" He was what He said. What the Lord spoke you can read in living characters in Him. Now He is gone to heaven, things are to come out in the saints. Think of it!—that the body is to be expressive of Christ. It is not what we say, but what we are. I think many a thing would be dropped if we realised that the body is to be for Christ. Paul's eye was directed entirely to one object, and he pursued it. We may be a great distance behind, but you and I can pursue. You are to be a person of one object with the eye single, realising that "one thing is needful." It is a great thing to have that settled. It leads to this, that the whole body is full of light. I do press it home upon you, dear friends, that *the body* is light. It is lighted up from within. The heart takes in through the eye. If I look at

Christ, my heart gets formed according to Christ. I think the blessed Lord desires that our hearts should be free for it, not careful about many things. "Make you His service your delight, He'll make *your* wants His care." Can we not put our Amen to that. If I attempted to take the care upon myself, I should not do half so well as committing it to God in prayer; it is this which sets the spirit free. In chapter xii. you get two things. First that the Lord would set you free from the fear of man, and later on you see how you are set free from care—"Consider the ravens." God feedeth them, even as He once used them to feed one of His servants. If I have the sense in anywise of how He has cared for me in the past, it has all been mercy, grace, and goodness, that He might set my heart free to know Him better. You see it in Israel. Their garments did not wax old. It was all to draw them to Himself. The Lord led them about to instruct them, but He kept them as the apple of His eye. He will keep you that your heart may be free to enjoy His love.

Then we come to what follows. Seek ye the kingdom of God—not the things of this world. I wish our hearts had the sense that we are a heavenly people. Seek ye His kingdom, (it is really here the Father's kingdom) for your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." I think that

is the heavenly part. On the Mount of Transfiguration He had left the earthly side of things for the heavenly. The more you feel you are heavenly, the more you will be like a little flock in the midst of ravening wolves. The devil goes about seeking whom he may devour, but, "Fear not, little flock." To think of the good pleasure of the Father, that He wants us to enjoy that scene, and to know that we belong to the kingdom of the Son of His love. If you know the Father's good pleasure you can give up things here. "Sell that ye have." The whole thought of the world is to provide for itself. Such a thought only hinders you from pursuing the things of the blessed Lord. You drop things here that you may really get a little nearer the Lord.

Well then, you have a treasure in the heavens that faileth not. If the eye is turned towards Christ the heart is directed to Christ, the heart goes out to where Christ is. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. He says, I care for you to the very hairs of your head. I believe that many a man might have been as timid as could be, and yet when he came to the fire of martyrdom there was not a shadow of fear. The Lord could set that man free from the fear, and give support in it. I believe that the Lord walked with many a saint to the stake. The Lord was with the three children in the fiery furnace. Satan will stop you with

opposition, or he will load you with cares. The Lord would have me see that He has reached the goal. He has sat down in the joy up there, and therefore, I believe I shall reach the goal too. He would have our hearts free. "Let your loins be girded" — a different attitude from being weighted with cares. I am sure that if our hearts are in the world, and the Lord were to come, it would take us all by surprise, and I am sure also that you would not like to be found asleep. The Lord has not forgotten to come. We may forget but the Lord has not forgotten — "I come quickly;" that shews that He has not forgotten. The appeal is to awaken affection. I think we all want to see Him. The Lord values an upturned face to Him. Are our hearts looking that way? Is the eye single? Then the body is the vehicle for the display of Christ. The Lord give us to feel there is "one thing needful," and that is to know more of Christ. May we choose that good part which cannot be taken away from us. May the Lord give us to value it for His name's sake.

T. H. R.



LOVE ESSENTIAL TO THE ASSEMBLY, AND THE ASSEMBLY ESSENTIAL TO LOVE.

JOHN XX. 1-20.

It is certain this is not the first time we have read this chapter, doubtless it is familiar to every one present. And considering this, I could not hope to instruct you much in the truth of it, but there is just one definite thought before my mind, and to which I desire to give utterance if the Lord enable me to make it plain; and it is simply this, *love is the way to the assembly.*

Intelligence is not the way to it, but love forms the way to the assembly. I speak of the assembly, because it is no new idea to those who are here, that the latter part of what I read is a pattern of the assembly. And it is very sweet to see here set forth the moral elements of the assembly. It so tends to free us from ecclesiastical thoughts of the assembly, for it is the moral elements that form the pattern of it. And I think it must be evident to all who consider the pattern, that all the value of the assembly hangs on what the Lord Jesus Christ is. It must be

evident to every one, that there was no outward value attaching to these people themselves; nothing they had outwardly would draw the eye or the notice of men. Here were a few poor fishermen and the like, gathered together in some obscure place in Jerusalem, with nothing of an outward character to attract the attention of men. At this time the temple existed with all its magnificence, its gorgeous ritual, its robed priesthood; and connected with it, was all the learning, and the moral weight of the nation as such; all that was with the Jews. And yet in this pattern of the assembly those who are gathered together closed their doors for fear of the Jews, they did not court their favour; and I am sure that they must have been conscious at that moment that not all the learning and moral weight, and all the experience, or whatever else belonged to the nation of the Jews, could be of the slightest use to them. On the other hand, there was everything for that little company in what the Lord Jesus Christ is. If we look at the company before the Lord took His place amongst them, what a poor, feeble company it was; but when the Lord takes His place in the midst, not a heart that loves Him but would say, what a blessed spot that must be, or in the language of a hymn we used to sing:—

“How sweet and sacred is the place
With Christ, within those doors

Where everlasting love displays
The choicest of her stores."

I am perfectly assured that not one who loves the Lord Jesus Christ, but would feel in a moment, love's choicest stores could be displayed where the Lord, the Son of God, was in the midst. And if we have got so far, we have some idea of what the assembly is. And if we have some good idea of what the assembly of God is, then it becomes as evident as possible that not intelligence, but love is the way morally to the assembly.

I quite grant the assembly was formed by the Holy Spirit, as shewn in 1 Corinthians xii. "For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

But to me it is exceedingly sweet, that before the Holy Ghost came down from heaven on the day of Pentecost, we have the assembly in its moral features. The great moral feature is love. do not think the assembly could have any existence at all, but for love. It was the love of Christ that called for the assembly; He would have His own around Him. But, on the other hand, it is the responsive love that His love has formed in the hearts of His own, that makes the assembly what it is to them; they must have the Lord's presence.

Now, for a moment let us consider what the

assembly is in man's thoughts, and what it is in contrast in the divine thought. 1 Corinthians will help us in this. We find as regards the Corinthians, they came behind in no gift. Whatever might be looked upon as necessary for the well being of the assembly here on earth, they had; and yet it seems to me that they were very little in the benefit of the assembly. They were very little in the divine idea of it, and why was this? They were as yet so impoverished as regards divine affections, they had been so poorly nourished in divine love. In chapter xii. the apostle shews that the church was on earth as the vessel of the present activity of the grace of the Spirit, and all that which was wrought in their midst was by one Spirit. But there was something greater than this, they had "been all made to drink into one Spirit." And what was the character of that one Spirit, into which they had been made to drink? The Spirit is the Spirit of love. It is a point of great interest in 2 Timothy i., "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." Now, that to me is exceedingly sweet, coming in where it does.

I do not doubt that in a general way as the end draws near, the solemn word of the Lord becomes verified, that "because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." But the Spirit by which the church is formed is still the unfailing resource of God's people here on earth.

And therefore, however great the ruin, in the Spirit we have our resource, and He is not only the Spirit of power, so that we are assured of being sustained as we are in the line of the testimony of God ; but He is also the Spirit of love, and of a sound mind. I do not find that the abounding iniquity the apostle contemplated in the ruin described in his second epistle to Timothy, caused the slightest decrease of affection between these two faithful servants of Christ. On the contrary, it appears to me, their affection one for the other grew more decidedly apparent. On the one hand, Timothy wept in the absence of Paul, longing after him, and Paul we find was mindful of Timothy's tears, greatly distressed because he could not see him. It is most touching to me, to see those two precious servants of Christ knit together in divine love, notwithstanding all the failure and confusion contemplated in the epistle.

I think, beloved friends, we are low down if we make the confusion that exists, an excuse for the lack of love. That is not the way even in a human family. It only draws the troubled ones more closely together. The hearts which are right grow more affectionate towards each other. So with the heavenly family. We feel to-day perhaps as we never felt before, how essential we are to one another. I feel on such occasions as these how divine affections bind us together, and through infinite grace we realise

how essential we are to one another, and I trust it may be increasingly so. I do not look for a diminution of affection among the saints of God. It must increase by the Lord being more to us than He has been. I am sure if by our being together these four days, the Lord becomes endeared to every one of us, the result will be that our hearts will be more firmly knit together than ever before.

Beloved friends, love is the one unfailing thing. 1 Corinthians xiii. speaks of it thus. And that brings me back to Corinthians in my thought of why the apostle in chapter xii. speaks of the church on earth, as the vessel of all the active grace of the Spirit, and then at the close of the chapter says, "and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way." What way was that? He goes on in the next chapter to speak of love, and says, love never fails. Knowledge vanishes away; all that man esteems vanishes away, but love never fails. To make much of knowledge or ability may be the snare of the servant, perhaps of all more or less. I am perfectly sure no Christian could live for any length of time upon the pleasure of his service. It is a great pleasure to serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but there comes a point when we must ask ourselves the question, whether is the greater, our service to the Lord Jesus Christ, or the Lord Jesus Christ whom we serve? This was beautifully indicated in the well-known lines:—

“E’en Anwoth was not heaven,
And preaching is not Christ.”

The servant here may value the privilege of preaching, but sooner or later, he will have to learn that the Master whom he serves is immeasurably above all his service to that Master. To me 1 Corinthians xiii. is in its way matchless in beauty, for it shews that what I am is more to God than anything He can do by me ; and that is comforting to the feeblest Christian. I may not be able to do more than a little, but I thank God I know that I myself am immeasurably more to the heart of Christ than what I do. It has been well said, God has a greater work to do in us, than by us, and I firmly believe it. It is a wonderful thing to be under the hand of the Spirit of God, for God’s own pleasure, that He may work out in us that which He pleases, fulfilling as it is said “all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power.”

Then further as to the contrast I spoke of between what the church is in man’s thoughts, and that which it is in the divine thought. I see that the Corinthians were making much of ability, whilst forgetting that which belonged to their spiritual state and well-being. If we carry that to its conclusion it is what is arrived at in the present time. I see a vast organisation where all that is of man, can find a great place for display. But the difference I see between the Corinthian

state, and the state of the present time is this: the Corinthians took the love-gifts lavished upon them by Christ, and made them a matter for their own display. But these love-gifts are not now seen in the church. There had been what are called sign-gifts which are not manifested now, and men have put in their place what they are naturally; man's own intelligence, his own weight, and his own experience, and whatever else may belong to man's ability. But, beloved friends, while in the midst of all this, and seeing all this amongst that which bears the name of Christ, what are we called to do? Through His infinite grace to enter into the divine thought. What is the divine thought? That the assembly is the present home of divine affections here on earth. And it is perfectly worthless if it is not that. That is the thought we are called to enter into, God's thought of the church.

See how the apostle reproaches these Corinthians in chapter xi., "What?" said he, "have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not?" Little alas, did they understand about the assembly of God. I am at little loss about anything if I understand the assembly of God. It is worth while to dwell even upon the term itself. *It is not the assembly of man, it is the assembly of God.* And if it is the assembly of God it is *divine*, and if it is divine, it is *holy* ground. Beloved friends, I delight in it!

God still holds the reins providentially as to this world, though He does not interfere with it outwardly, but amidst all the sorrow and confusion that fills the world, there is one little spot He claims, and that little spot is divine ground. What is that spot? *The assembly of God.* But if it be the assembly of God, we may be perfectly sure nothing of man has any place there. It was so even in regard to the sanctuary of old. (See Lev. x.) You find there as to the priesthood, with the men who drew nigh to God, there could not be the expression of human sorrow, nor any expression of human joy. After two of Aaron's sons had died under the judgment of God, Moses told Aaron, and his two remaining sons, not to rend their garments. There must be no expression of human sorrow in the presence of God. At the same time he tells them not to drink wine, nor strong drink on entering the sanctuary. There must be no excitement of nature there. We need to lay this to heart. You may say, does God propose to turn us into Stoics, into men or things that have no feeling? Indeed He does not; there is nothing further from the mind of God. But I will tell you what He does desire for us, and that is, that we should be conscious of the sympathy of Him who is the Priest over His house, that we might be attracted by His love into the circle where He is. This we learn in Hebrews, where His priestly service for us in our present weakness is unfolded to us.

It is a wonderful thing to grasp something of the idea of the assembly of God, and thus to see how perfectly dissociated we are from all that is of man here.

Now having sought to shew you the difference between the church in the mind of man, and what it is in the thought of God, I will endeavour to shew the point I named at the beginning, that the existence of the assembly is essential to the love of Christ. I think to get the idea of the moral elements of the assembly, we must begin with that little company formed around the Lord Jesus Christ in the days of His flesh.

In the opening of the gospel of John, we see the Lord attracted some, and called them to follow after Himself. The two disciples of John were attracted thus, others He called. Where is the spring of that, dear friends? The spring of it was surely in His own heart, because of His love He would draw around Himself men to whom He could speak in the confidence of love. It is amazing when we consider it, that the Lord should have such pleasure in the company of those who were so ignorant. But it only enhances the glory of His love in that way. I delight to think of it!

He turned when He saw those two disciples following Him, and challenged them, "What seek ye?" They answer, "Rabbi, where dwellest thou?" As though to say, Thou art the eternal object of our hearts. It is so blessed to think of

the grace of that precious One! "Come and see." How blessed to be in a spot where we can be perfectly at home with Him! The desire raised in their hearts by His own attractiveness to know the spot where He dwells, is responded to by His own gracious invitation which gives them a divine warrant to follow Him. "Come and see," He says. Those whom He attracts He brings where He dwells, the place where His own are to be perfectly at home with Him. Beloved friends, it is a wonderful thing to dwell on! "They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day." That incident forms a distinctly new beginning in their history. And so in the case of others, you find the Lord giving a new name. Thus when Simon is brought to the Lord by Andrew, He says, "thou art Simon, the son of Jonas, thou shalt be called Cephas"—or Peter, or a Stone. The Lord gives him a new name.

Now, it is a great thing for our souls to grasp this simply. Suppose we are attracted after the Lord, from the moment of our coming into contact with Him we begin a totally new history, a history which relates to Himself. Whatever advantages we may have had as men in the flesh, all becomes of no account in our relation to Christ. Thus Paul said in a later day "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." His genealogy was of the best, but all that was gain to him as a man in the flesh, was accounted loss for Christ.

We see then that this kind of thing began with the Lord in the days of His flesh. He attracted to Himself, called after Himself, and surrounded Himself with those men, who began from the moment of taking their place in relation to Him, a totally new history. And what was that history marked by? It was marked by divine affections; and as they entered into those divine affections, they were formed in them.

Now, that brings me to a point in our present chapter, a point commonly recognised, that is, the desolateness of Mary Magdalene. It is manifest that none were able to console that poor woman, not even heaven itself. There were heavenly visitants there, but they were not able to console her. What was the cause of her grief? They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." She says, "*my* Lord," not *the* Lord. When she ran to tell Peter and John, she said, "*the* Lord," for she counted on the love of those two devoted disciples of the Lord as being like herself. But when they had satisfied themselves as to the truth of the report, that the sepulchre was no longer the resting-place of the body of the One whom they loved, they went to their own home. Not so Mary. And what lies under that touching expression, *My* Lord, is surely this, if He is not the Lord to others, He is Lord to me. Others can dispense with Him, I cannot. He is the one necessity for my soul. I must have Him! I must have Him!

Many make difficulties in connection with the word so often used in regard to John vi., the word "appropriation." Mary shews us what appropriation means. She appropriates the Lord. She says, He is "my Lord." Do you think the Lord was displeased with her for this? I could not think it for a moment. And John vi. shews us in His own words that His love had brought Him down within the reach of man, and it is responsive love that appropriates Him. Here is a specimen, *my* Lord, *my* Lord. Appropriation is a matter of love. It is the soul that loves, in response to His own love, that must have Him. He is *my* Lord.

Now, beloved friends, the point I next reach is this, the one who does so appropriate Him in the sense of His infinite love must know His death has taken place, and what is involved in that death. The Lord in John vi. alluded to eating the flesh, and drinking the blood of the Son of man.

Beloved friends, have we learned in the secret of our own souls what is involved in the death of the Lord? If so, the point we have reached is this, One has come in flesh, and so within the reach of the appropriation of man, and that one in grace has become absolutely essential to our happiness; and yet that One that has become absolutely essential to our happiness is no longer here. He has been here but is no longer here. To me it is an affecting thing related in chapter xix.

of this gospel, how God allowed the clothing of the Lord Jesus Christ to be disposed of by the soldiers. They disposed of His general clothing but His robe arrested their attention, and because of its beauty and worth they would not rend it, but cast lots for it whose it should be. But it was the clothing which the Lord wore in His earthly circumstances, which God allowed the soldiers to dispose of. And another point is added which is the action of the blessed Lord Himself. He saw His mother standing by the cross, the one of whom He came according to the flesh, and He committed her to the care of the disciple whom He loved. Thus He owns her, but shews by His own action that for Him there is no possible return to earthly circumstances.

Now, beloved friends, we are in earthly circumstances, but what must rest upon our souls if we love the Lord is this, that the Lord is not in earthly circumstances. We see Him in the close of the four gospels risen from the dead, but as risen from the dead, He did not afresh enter upon earthly circumstances. He did not appear before the eyes of the world, and He touched nothing belonging to it. But beloved friends, there is that which He touches; what is that? He touches the hearts of His own. There is only one object of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that one object of interest is His church which He so perfectly loves. Oh, that this thought may rest on all our souls! I see

the Lord in His activity as He approaches one and another of His own after His resurrection from the dead, and I see running through all His activities that the one object of His interest on earth was His loved ones. He touches them, and with a view to what?

I pause for a moment to turn to the well-known Luke xxiv. ; when He drew near to the two disciples, did He not touch them? Their hearts were made to burn within them. But He did more than touch their hearts; He came within their house. There He took the bread into His hands as He had often done, and it seemed for a moment as though He thought of returning to earthly circumstances, but He was known of them in the breaking of bread, and He vanished out of their sight. He had reached His point with them. He had made Himself known to them in this significant act of breaking the bread. And they returned to Jerusalem the same night. Now they were perfectly moved. The exposition of scripture did not move them. It made their hearts to burn, but they still went on their journey, and settled in their home, and they tried to retain Him who had been such a comforter in that sad journey. But now He makes Himself known to them in the breaking of bread, and when they reached Jerusalem they tell how He, the Lord, made Himself known to them in that significant action, the breaking of bread. Of course, no one would look on this as the Lord's supper, but

the Lord's supper shews us what is the significance of the breaking of bread, that is, it is a sign of the Lord's death. He is known of us in death, and only known in death now. There is no living Christ here after the flesh. We feel His absence here, and what a shadow His absence must cast over everything here.

Now, in John vi. the Lord says, "my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." He speaks of His death undoubtedly, but we learn that there is in the Lord's death, that which is practically capable of nourishing and refreshing our souls. I see in the death of the Lord Jesus, not only that He has broken with the world, but I learn there His own infinite love brought out in that same death. This is clear to all, the Lord in His great love to us, would have us with Him where He lives according to the purpose of God, and that purpose could only have fulfilment as He lays down His life for us. His love then led Him to lay down His life for us, and His death brings to us the knowledge of His infinite love to us.

Now, if we have gone thus far, we are prepared for the next point. Mary supposes the one who appeared to her was the gardener. Her ignorance has often been pointed out, and her mistake clear. The gardener is the one who keeps things in order here. The Lord had parted with things here by death, but He said to her "Mary." The Lord's words convey an infinite amount

of meaning to the soul that receives them. He uttered only one word to her, but I could not unfold to you the volume of meaning that lies in that one word, "Mary!" It was her old name, not a new name such as we have seen given to Peter. By it the Lord shews that though He has parted with earthly scenes and circumstances His love led Him to think of her still in the midst of these earthly scenes and circumstances. And is not that sweet to us? I know the Lord thus thinks upon me. He knows how to draw near to us as He drew near to those two disciples, but if He draws near to us, it is that He may so touch our hearts, and so affect us by the knowledge of His unfailing love, that He may draw us after Himself to the place where He is. He thinks upon us in our sorrow.

So in the Epistle to the Hebrews where we get the truth of priesthood, we have the words "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities;" &c. He thinks of us in the midst of our scene of sorrow and trial here upon earth. What is the effect of conveying that to our souls? This is the effect, He not only relieves us of the burden of sorrow resting upon us, but fills our hearts in place of sorrow with an indescribable sense of His own love to us.

Now, beloved friends, His object is to draw us, to His own side. That you get here. He said to Mary, "touch me not;" &c. Henceforth He

must be known with the Father entirely dissociated from earthly scenes and circumstances, He ascends to His Father, but He ascends there representatively of His own. He says, "my Father, and your Father; my God, and your God."

Beloved friends, it is infinitely sweet if I think of the Father in all He is, but how can I reach to the scene where the Father is? Blessed be God that One is there in the blessed enjoyment of all those deep affections, and He is there representatively of His own. The Father to whom He has ascended is not only His own Father, but He is the Father of His beloved ones who are here.

It has often been said, this message becomes the rallying word for the disciples who were scattered. "Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her." So the next thing, we find them assembling together.

What I see is this, that where the love has been formed in the soul—the love that is responsive to the love that has been shewn to us, nothing can content that soul but the spot where the One is who so loves us.

I have already said, the Lord knows how to draw near to us in our circumstances, but it is to draw us out of those circumstances, that we may enter into blessedness with Him. Where shall we find Him, beloved friends, but upon His own ground? The more I know His grace in coming

where I am in present circumstances, the more my soul is stirred to meet Him on His own ground and in His own circumstances. Where shall I find Him thus? I find Him thus *in the assembly*. Before He left His own in this world, He said, "I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you." Think of the grace of the blessed Lord, He so counts upon the love of His disciples. He knew they would be perfectly comfortless if entirely bereft of His presence!

Again, He says, "And ye now therefore have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." I find it verified here, and so He comes to us. Their hearts rejoiced when they saw Him again, and that joy is the inalienable portion of His beloved people here on earth. I do not think the assembly here on earth is the place of sorrow, it is the place of joy. There is that which involves sorrow and affliction here, but the assembly is the place of indescribable joy, and I would to God our hearts knew more of it.

I see two great features here of the assembly, peace and joy. When He comes into the midst, He says, "Peace unto you;" He sets them in the consciousness of His perfect triumph over all the power of evil. He thus identifies them with Himself against whom the power of evil had risen to its highest height. In His death was the rising up to its greatest height of all the power

of evil. His resurrection is the perfect proof of His victorious triumph over all the power of evil; and the assembly is thus the place of divine calm, and restfulness. They had everything to fear, and nothing to gain from the Jews, but the Lord stands in their midst, and they are relieved of the pressure, and the fear, and set in perfect calm in the triumph which He had gained over all the power of evil. Beloved friends, do you believe the gates of hell can prevail against the assembly? I do not believe it. No, in the depths of my soul, I believe Christ's assembly which He builds is a perfectly impregnable fortress against all the power of wickedness, and not all the power of evil can destroy that which Christ has built as His assembly. But, remember, He has built it in the divine nature. There is nothing built in the flesh. The history of flesh is ended in His death. Everything is built in the divine nature, and that is perfectly impregnable. No power of evil can touch it, and I bless God for it.

In 2 Timothy, where everything is broken up, what is brought in for relief is the purpose of God; and all the divine work is on the line of that purpose. There is nothing like that to quiet and encourage the heart. The assembly is the place of divine calm and restfulness, and I am sure if you are in the realisation of the presence of the Lord in power in your soul, you are in perfect peace. I do not mean the peace en-

joyed by an individual, but the divine calm of the spot where the Lord Jesus Christ is. There is no more ruffle in that spot than in heaven itself.

It is said, "then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." Can you explain that gladness? Can you set it forth? I cannot. This I say, I know it is the Lord's purpose to put His disciples there. He can bring His own into all the fulness of joy which is found in the presence of God where He is. Thus peace and joy are the characteristic features of the assembly.

I must close, beloved brethren, though I confess to you the precious theme upon which I have dwelt detains my soul, and I trust will detain yours. But I close, and I close with the expression of the earnest desire which is in the soul, that we all might through the infinite grace of God know a little better what the assembly is in the divine thought.

What it is in the mind of man is, alas, thrust upon us on every hand. I do not wish you to be occupied with that, but it is thrust on us.

Then how blessed a thing it is to retreat into that circle that is of no account whatever in the eyes of men, and which wishes to have no recognition from any man, but in the retreat and solitude of that circle to find the Christ of God, His beloved Son, the object of His divine affections and to have Him filling our souls with great joy, as He fills the heart of God. The Lord grant it for His name sake.

WHAT GOD IS—GOD IS LOVE.

1 JOHN IV. 7-12.

I AM sure, beloved friends, that, in reading the Bible, you have noticed that it only contains two subjects—what man is, and what God is. They may be presented in different ways and aspects, but in their essence it is simply the unfolding of the heart of man and the heart of God. And it is impossible to conceive a greater contrast: it is the contrast between perfect darkness and perfect light. The apostle John sums it all up when he says, speaking of the Word, “In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” In the previous chapter also we have the contrast distinctly marked: “Whoso hateth his brother is a murderer. . . . Hereby perceive we the love [of God], because he laid down his life for us.” (1 John iii. 15, 16.) From this we learn—and I want you to mark it—that man is *hate*; and that God, as set forth in Christ, is *love*; that man is hate, and manifests his hatred even unto putting his brother to death, as Cain actually did; and that God is love, and mani-

fested His love in Christ laying down His life for us.

Again, we ask, can you conceive of a greater contrast? But it *must be* considered and comprehended, if we would understand the truth of what man is, and also what God has wrought for His own glory in revealing Himself in Christ and in the blessed work of redemption. This is all contained in the wondering exclamation of the apostle: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons [children] of God;" for what causes the heart of the apostle to overflow is the contemplation of the fact that the love of the Father has flowed out, for its own gratification in its own sovereign exercise, towards those who were in a state of ruin and death, and has brought them close to His own heart, in the intimate relationship of children.

Coming now to the passage I have read, you will see that three words in verse 8 are the foundation of all that follows. All the rest clusters around the statement—the blessed statement—that GOD IS LOVE. This is the setting forth of what God is in His own nature; He is also light, it is true, but this is said relatively to darkness—"God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." (Chap. i. 5.) We also say that God is righteous, that is righteous in His actings and

ways, but when the word of God speaks of what He is absolutely in His nature, one word describes it, and that word is LOVE. If we enter into this, we shall have no difficulty in understanding that "love is of God," for in truth it could not be found elsewhere in the universe. I do not deny, in any wise, that much natural affection may be seen in fallen man, that husbands and wives, parents and children may be knit together very closely by it; but we are now speaking of divine love, what only, in fact, is really love; and this we say proceeds alone from the heart of God because it is nowhere else found. Love, then, is of God, and consequently the love that fills our hearts to-night has come down into them, through the Lord Jesus Christ, from that blessed and sovereign source. We had therefore never known love otherwise; and this indeed is what the apostle says, "Every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." It is thus an absolute necessity to be born of God before we can love, and know God.

Let us now consider briefly how God has revealed Himself, and how we are brought to know that He is love. The statement in the word of God would not of itself, we judge, have conveyed the truth that God is love to our souls. We mean that unless God had come out, unless there

had been a manifestation, or expression of Himself, we never should have comprehended it—even though we had meditated upon the scriptures from morning to night. As we have pointed out already, love is nowhere else but in God, and it is thus outside of man's experience. The natural man knoweth not the things of God, and hence the things which are most simple to the child of God are either an insoluble problem, or folly to the keenest intellect: the light shone in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not. Let us remember—especially when reading the scriptures, or listening to ministry—that without divine teaching we cannot grasp what is set forth.

As we understand it, the incarnation was the first step in the display of what God is as love. He was ever the same from all eternity; and I do not mean that there were no outshinings of God in the Old Testament, only that it was not possible, before redemption had been accomplished, before the cross whereon He was glorified in all that He is concerning what we were, and what we had done, that He should come out into the light. We thus read that clouds and darkness were round about Him; that righteousness and judgment were the habitation of His throne. (Psalm xcvi.) Look also at the wilderness encampment of the children of Israel. Of all the two million souls which composed it, not

one, save the high priest once a year, dared to go into the presence of God. God could not come out, and the people could not enter into the holiest of all where He dwelt. God was love, but He was not free in righteousness to reveal Himself to His people. But when Christ came all was changed; as we read in 2 Corinthians v., God was in Christ, and, as it is in another place, all the fulness was pleased to dwell in Him. All that God is was then revealed in that lowly Man, that Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, so fully and completely that He said to His enemies, "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also"; and to Philip, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." The revelation was there, if not available until the Holy Ghost came after Christ was glorified. There was the perfect presentation of the Father even if those around Him had not yet eyes to perceive the glorious revelation.

Although this is true, it is to the cross we have to come for the perfect display of what God is. It was there in the death of His beloved Son that He told out all that He is, His righteousness against sin, His love in providing the sacrifice; yea, every divine attribute was displayed in the cross, and in all the perfection of their entire harmony because there every question of good and evil was for ever solved. If the

Son of man must be lifted up, God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. The moment that our blessed Lord had "yielded up the ghost," the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. It was God, who had been waiting, and, may we not say, yearning to reveal what was in His heart; and He thus stepped in to declare that He was now no longer hidden, that He was set free in righteousness to come out to seek and to save that which was lost. It is wonderful, beyond all our comprehension, that God should come in, and tell out in the dark domain of death what He is! As in the hymn—

" Love that on death's dark vale,
Its sweetest odours spread."

It is all this really to which the apostle calls our attention in verses 9 and 10: "In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." There are two things in these admiring and adoring statements of the apostle. He had said, God is love; and that would have been true if He had ever remained in the solitariness of His own bliss; but, as we are now told, He *manifested* His love toward us; and then,

secondly, John teaches us wherein the love is ; it was not in that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. He unfolds our state—that we were dead, without life towards God, and guilty in our sins, to enhance our conception of the love. Dead and guilty, how could we love God ? Nay, we must be in such a condition indebted to Him for everything. We could do nothing : it was God who acted, and in the sovereignty of love, when we were without life and in sins. Let us then magnify His marvellous grace, which, in pursuance of His eternal counsels, has brought life and propitiation to us in and through His beloved Son. Now we can understand that the gospel is the display of what God is—LOVE.

Let me connect with this a passage in Romans, that we may see how this love is made good in our hearts. After unfolding the truth of justification in Him who is risen out of death, from under the judgment which He bore on our behalf, and the blessings on which the justified enter as their blessed possession, the apostle speaks of the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us. If you examine the context you will find that there are three stages in this love : it was testified to in the death of Christ, it was commended to us (God's "own love") in that while

we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, and, finally, it is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. (Chap. v. 5.) God has thus come out, He has revealed what He is, that He is love in the death of Christ, and through that death He has made a way to our hearts as love; and hence His love becomes the atmosphere of our souls, that in which we live and move and have our being. How marvellous it is that God should care to make His home in our hearts! We could not comprehend it in any measure, if we did not remember that He has acted thus from His own heart and for His own pleasure, because He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Now I want to say a word about the application. We read in verse 11, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." First, let me remind you of a distinction: it never says that we ought to love God, but it does say that we ought to love one another. The law said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, &c.; but in Christianity no such obligation is laid upon us; it is only our brethren whom we "ought" to love. The reason is obvious. We love God because He first loved us, and we do this as the consequence of the activity of the Holy Spirit, who has shed abroad the love of God in our hearts. This

is the response which He produces when He brings before our souls the wondrous character of the love of God in Christ Jesus. We love Him, I was about to say, because we cannot help ourselves, and hence loving God is the normal characteristic of every believer—as the apostle Paul speaks, “To them that love God, the called according to his purpose.” You may say, as indeed we all have to say, we know very little about it. This may be so, but still do not forget that it *is* the characteristic of all believers, and that the more we are occupied with His ineffable love, that love which was told out in the death of His Son, the greater will be the response. We had never known love otherwise: hereby perceive we love, what love is, because He laid down His life for us; and the marvellous thing is, as we said just now, that it was shewn out in all the darkness of death. What we need therefore is to let this blessed love flow unhinderedly into our hearts, until they are flooded with it, and then that which has flowed down from the heart of God will, in the power of the Spirit, becoming within us a springing well, rise up to its eternal source.

But, as we have already reminded you, there *is* an obligation to love one another. If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. The nature of the obligation is simple: it is

that we should act towards one another as God has acted towards us. So in the previous chapter, after the apostle has shewn that love is seen in Christ laying down His life for us, he adds, "And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." The obligation thus reaches, if the occasion arise, to the manner and the measure of the love of Christ! We may therefore say that it would not be righteous if we did not love one another. Happy is it for us that every one who possesses the divine nature *does* love his brethren, for he that loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him; only do not forget that the apostle speaks of love in manifestation towards one another, as is seen by his specifying the case of a brother in need. Let us remember this; for while it is good if you love me in your heart, I shall never benefit by it if you never let me see it in manifestation.

If I might say one practical word, beloved friends, in this connection, it would be this: the cure of all discords among the saints may be found in this obligation. You remember how the Lord pressed the importance of the subject in the parable of the two debtors, and that He described the king as saying to the servant, who had failed in love toward his fellow-servant, "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that

debt, because thou desiredst me; shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?" Ah! yes, if we were governed by this spirit, all our personal breaches would be healed, we should be knit together in love, and Christ would be magnified.

Another thing would follow. If we thus loved one another it would turn to a testimony before the world, according to the words of our blessed Lord: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." How blessed a testimony this would be! We sometimes have special prayer-meetings for the gospel, that the word may be in power, and surely we cannot wait too perseveringly on the Lord in prayer. But be certain of this—if love one to another is active in its manifestation in any assembly, souls will be both drawn and reached, and God will be glorified. As has often been said, we affect others more by what we are than by what we say. If therefore we desire to attract souls to the ministry of the gospel, love is the best advertisement.

There are two or three things more I would like to touch upon briefly, and they are the

blessings connected with knowing the love of God. If we turn to verse 12, we read: "No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." In the gospel it is, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Here I suppose that we are to learn that only the Son, the Son who is in the bosom of the Father, was competent to reveal the Father. None but a divine Person was sufficient for this, as the Lord said indeed: "Neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (and it might perhaps be added that only the disciple who lay upon the breast of Christ was the suitable instrument to record the revelation). But in the epistle the revelation is made good. By what means? If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us! Again, lower down—only this goes still further—"God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." (Ver. 16.) Here are deeps which can never be fathomed; and yet how blessed to contemplate them!

Two remarks may be made—with a practical object in view. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us—it is thus when love

is in active manifestation that we are in the suited state for God to dwell in us. Nay it is more than this, loving one another, just because it is the activity of His own nature, *brings* God in; and, dwelling in us, He causes us to know His love ever more perfectly. Secondly, if we dwell in love, for God is love, we dwell in God, and God, for He is love, dwells in us. With what fervent desire then we should seek to be kept in the love of God! Are we waiting for heaven? Why, if we are in the truth of this, heaven is already brought into our souls. Oh, with what overflowing hearts we should be found together in assembly, if we entered into this, hearts which would find a blessed relief in pouring forth their praises and adoration in the power of the Holy Ghost!

In conclusion, I desire to refer you for a moment to a verse in chapter i.: "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sins." (Ver. 7.) I refer to this, as the question may arise in the minds of some as to how far the manifestation of our love one toward another should go. This scripture supplies the answer. The first thing it teaches is that God has wholly come out into the light; that is, that he has wholly revealed Himself;

and it is indeed in the light that we learn that He is love. The second thing is, that if we walk in the light, as we can owing to the efficacy of the precious blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, we have fellowship one with another. The circle of our fellowship then is the light, and we must never travel outside of that circle, but inside that circle there is nothing but love, and love in active manifestation. This is the limit of our fellowship, the circle of light, for that which is expressed there, in our fellowship, is HOLY LOVE. If you go outside of that circle, you go outside of the revelation God has made of Himself—a solemn thing to remember. Inside that circle you enjoy the revelation He has made, and it is that He is love; and it is in loving one another that you realise and express your unity and fellowship. It is always indeed that, when love is active, we realise the oneness of all the people of God.

I will not say more : if the Lord do but take a little of what has been before us, and bring it home to our hearts in the power of the Holy Ghost, it will be the means of lasting blessing to ourselves, and to the saints with whom we are in immediate fellowship. May He grant that it may be so for His own name's sake, and to Him shall be all the praise !

E. D.