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J. H. BURRIDGE.

Author of "The Coming of our Lord Jesus for His People," "The Secret of
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Preface.

THIS life is called the life of man's vanity. "His days are as a shadow." All that is considered good and pleasant in life is as transient as the morning vapours: the rich man dieth as the poor ; it only takes a few years to show that the life of the one is a life of vanity as well as that of the other. Life is spent: one in a continuous struggle for daily sustenance ; the other in ease, luxury, and pleasure. There is certainly a little more resemblance between the life and death of the former. It has been a life of toil, trial, and sorrow, ending in the darkness of death. But the latter lives in vain pleasure and dies in real woe; he lives in supposed riches and dies in real poverty.

But both are gone naked out of this world, and life, whatever it was, for both has now fled away, as far as this world is concerned.

Well might man, with an intuitive knowledge of

the truth of the wise man's inspired words, ask : "Is life worth living?" when they know not the gospel of God, nor the love of Jesus.

But is there not some great momentous concern that demands our attention? Is there not some great question of eternal import, to be settled during this short life, either for good or bad? Is there not some noble object, in life, of lasting gain, such as will make it worth living?

Yes, there is ; it is the eternal salvation of the soul, and the glorifying of Jesus the Saviour after I am saved. While I am here the question of my eternal happiness or misery is to be settled. I may make it my one first, and great, concern in life to secure eternal salvation, with eternal glory, thus living for the next world ; or I may have no higher object in life than the wealth, fame, and pleasure of this world, thus living for this life only, indifferent as to the claims of God upon me, as well as to the eternal welfare of my own soul.

This small volume is issued for the help of those who desire to make the higher and more noble object their great concern in this world, who are anxious about the question of eternal issues.

When we speak of the salvation of the soul being

the one great concern of life, we mean, not only the securing of salvation by faith at conversion, but evidencing of the same by a life of devotedness to Christ, which will also secure a reward at His hands by-and-by that all the wealth of this world is not to be compared with.

The bulk of people live wholly for this world, as though there were no interests for man outside it. They live entirely for the present ; they spend all their days for the gratification of their own lusts ; for the gathering in of all that is called treasure here, "and in a moment they go down to the grave," their life and all that it was spent for, all that their interests and energies were concentrated on, gone as far as they are concerned ; unless, indeed, it be to rise in judgment against them.

And not unfrequently do we find men seeking to justify themselves for living thus for this present world only, by denying eternal interests and eternal truth. How foolish to conclude a thing is not true simply because I may wish it not true ! What a delusion !

In many other cases the great question at issue viz., personal salvation, is lost sight of in the confusion of tongues about religious theology, modes

of worship, etc., etc. But how few show that deep and real concern about eternal things which their immense importance so urgently calls for!

May the following addresses be used of the Lord to deepen the interest of His people in eternal things, and to beget such an interest in the souls of many who are, as yet, not His people!

The first chapter (which was written for anxious souls and has been published for some months), is added to the following six lectures—which were delivered in Glasgow—to make the series more complete by adding the first step which was wanting in the addresses themselves, as these were for people already saved. It is hoped that this addition will make the book more suitable for general circulation.

That the Lord may graciously command His blessing on the little work as it is sent forth, is the earnest prayer of the writer.

J. H. B.



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I.

Forgiveness, Peace, and Certainty.

DEAR READER,—Are you concerned and in trouble about your condition before God? Then, do allow me to ask, Why is it that you have not peace with God? And if you believe the gospel, Why is it that you are not certain of salvation?

“Oh!” you say, “that is the point. I am often troubled about it. I *hope* it will be all right with me; and if it is possible to be certain about it, there is nothing in the whole world that I would like more than that certainty. For all the untoward circumstances, the trials, sorrows, and reverses of this life, must be of but little moment to the one who knows that his soul is saved, and that he is destined to eternal glory.”

Yes, truly, if we are sure of deliverance from hell and eternal happiness in heaven, all that we are surrounded by here—pleasing or painful as it may

be—is scarcely worth mention when compared with that eternal weight of glory. Indeed it is not worthy to be compared.

But the question with many people is, *Can* we be sure of it? And if so, *How* are we made sure of it? The answer to these questions depends upon the answer to two others, viz., What is the gospel? And what are the good news it brings?

Well now, in the first place, the gospel supposes men are sinful (the truth of God in connection with the gospel positively declares it), for it proclaims pardon.

It supposes men are guilty, for it proclaims justification.

It supposes men are at enmity against God, for it declares that reconciliation is effected by the death of Christ, and peace made by the blood of the cross.

It supposes men are lost, for it proclaims salvation.

Now, then, who is this gospel for? It is for sinful, guilty, and lost men at enmity against God. Are *you* one such?

Perhaps you think that you are not quite so bad as that. If so, I do not wonder at all that you have not peace. Because all the while you think there is a *little* good only in you, you will be looking to yourself in some way or other. And you will never find peace, while you look at yourself, your doings, or your feelings. You must look away from yourself to Christ and His finished work,

if you would know what peace is. And I know you will not do this while you think there is a little good in yourself to look to.

This is no doubt the reason why those who have gone to the greatest lengths in open sin, when they become convicted before God, find peace more readily than those who have led good moral lives. What is in man has been more manifested—or manifested in a more open way—in the former; they have no difficulty in owning that there is not a bit of good in them; they say from the heart, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” And hence they more readily look away from themselves to Christ and His finished work; they are glad enough to do so. And then they find that all is settled; peace is made, and made for them.

But the same root of sin is in the latter, though it has not come out in the same way,—that is, in a way that manifests it before men; but God sees it. Men look only upon the exterior, but God looks right down into the heart. And that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in His sight. The pride of life and self-complacency that characterise the unconverted moral man, are as bad in the sight of God as the unrestrained lust of the flesh in the unconverted immoral man. It is sin in different forms of manifestation.

But perhaps you say, “How am I to get this deep sense of sin and abhorrence of myself? I know I

am a sinner, but I do not feel that I am so very, very bad. And if I do not feel it, what is the use of saying it? ”

Well, the first thing is to know that, whether you feel it not, it is so, because God says it is. Guilty, lost, and undone, are the words God uses to express your condition. It would be no use for a criminal to say he did not *feel* guilty, if he was guilty, and proven so, as the sinner is before God, as all the world is. See Rom. iii. 19.

But the reason you have not a deep sense of sin, and do not feel yourself so very bad is clear. It is because you have been looking at yourself more according to what you are in the eyes of men, than according to what you are in the eyes of God.

When Job (the best man in the world at that time) was looking at himself, in the eyes of men, and according to his own thoughts about himself, he was far from having a deep sense of his sin, but thought that there was much good in him. But there came a moment when he was brought into the presence of God. What had he to say for himself then? Listen, “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear ; but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job xlii. 5, 6).

Then I say, dear reader, get into the presence of God, and look at yourself there, then you will have no difficulty in realising your sinful condition.

Then the *fact*, declared by the Word of God, that you are a lost and guilty sinner, will be brought home to your conscience in real power. But if it be already brought thus home to you, *i.e.*, if you have not a word to say for yourself, but with a deep sense of your condition can only cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner," then do not here make another mistake by thinking that you must remain in this state for some time—you know not how long—sorrowing for your sins which press heavily upon your conscience. For Satan knows how to change his tactics according to the state of our souls. So he will do all that his power enables him to blind your eyes to your condition as a sinner; but when he can no longer succeed in this, when God, who caused the light to shine out of darkness, causes the light of His truth to shine into your dark heart and discover your guilty state to you, his great effort will be to keep you in that condition, by telling you that you must now go on sorrowing for your sins, and do the best you can to live a better life. Do not listen to him, but listen to the Word of God. If you know yourself to be a ruined sinner, thank God that there is salvation for you.

If you could sorrow for your sins, with the deepest sorrow that the heart of man is capable of, the rest of your life, that would not atone for them—would not put one of them away.

But as full atonement has been made by the blood

of Christ, all that is needed on your part is that you know and own in real confession your sin and guilt before God, and accept with thankful heart the pardon, peace, and salvation which in rich mercy He offers you.

One look at yourself in the presence of God is enough to convince you that there is nothing but sin in you. You need not be concerned as to whether you have repented enough or not. The only question is, Do you now take your place as a repentant sinner before God? If so, salvation is for you. No one can dispute your title to it.

Jesus came to save sinners ; He died for sinners. And the fact that He died for such, shows in itself how desperate their case was, for nothing else could meet it. And it is true still that "this Man receiveth sinners." Come to Him as a sinner, and He will receive *you*. And the pardon-imparting and peace-giving words which were spoken to the woman who came *thus* to Him, while He was here, are for thee, and for every one who will come in the same way to Him,—viz., "Thy sins are forgiven thee ; . . . thy faith hath saved thee ; go in peace" (Luke vii. 48, 50). Precious words ! They are for you, dear reader, if you will take your place as that poor woman did, *i.e.*, a repentant contrite sinner at the feet of Jesus. Oh, what a meeting is that of a Saviour and a sinner ! How He welcomes the sinner ! What words of love and

grace He speaks ! How simple and real it all is ! Just come to Jesus, and say, "Lord Jesus, I come as a lost sinner to be saved," and the above precious words are for you. Will you not take them in simple faith to yourself ? Does He not mean what He says ?

Do you say, "Yes, I am indeed a troubled sinner, anxious to be saved." Then harken ! What does He say ? "Thy sins are forgiven." That is, *THY* sins ; for these words are for you. "Oh," you say, "how can I know that ?" Simply because they are for every troubled sinner who will receive them from the lips of the gracious Saviour as spoken to themselves.

Then that settles all. It is His word, the word of One who cannot lie ; it is for you, and you take it in simple faith. Then you know your sins forgiven. Many other passages confirm you ; such as, "Who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification" (Rom. ix. 25). This gives the ground-work. This is why your sins are forgiven, viz., because Christ bore them. And hence another scripture says, "Through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins ; and by Him all that believe are justified from all things" (Acts xiii. 38, 39). This is the proclamation of the blessed fact to you. And concerning those who believe it, the apostle John says, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins *are* forgiven you

for His name's sake ;” “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John i. 7, ii. 12).

Yes, you know it now because He says it. It does not matter who says it is not so ; God says it is.

Some men say—and men whom we think ought to know better—that it is not possible to know you are saved until you die. But what does this matter for faith ? Passages can be multiplied which plainly declare that the one who believes *is* saved, and may *know* it. It is not a matter of opinion at all. Men have no right to bring in their own thoughts here. And if they will do so, who will put them before the Word of God ? It is all settled between the soul and God, by means of His word and simple faith, consequent upon the death and resurrection of Christ.

It is your sins that trouble you, is it not ? And you have not to answer to men for those, but to God. The whole question is between your own soul and God. If it were only a question of your standing and character among men, you might not have much to be concerned about. But it is not. You know you must have to do with God, who is of too pure eyes than to behold iniquity, and cannot look upon sin. And yet you know, too, that you are a sinner, and that unless you are pardoned you cannot enter heaven. And to be shut out of heaven, is to be shut up in hell ; so saith the Word of God.

So that the all-important question with you is, "Can I have my sins forgiven? Is it possible to know it?" "You must hope for the best," some one tells you." "Ah," you say, "that will not do; that does not give me peace! What! when I know that I am a sinner, and that there is either eternal judgment or eternal glory before me, can I have nothing but a *hope* of deliverance from that judgment and safety for the glory? Nothing but a *hope*! Then I must go on in fear of death and judgment all my lifetime."

Oh! dear reader, listen not to the thoughts of men on this most important matter. Our thoughts, if not derived from, and based upon, the Word of God, are simply worthless, and even injurious to souls. What saith the Scripture? this is the question. What is the gospel as set forth in the Word of God? Yes, it is the gospel you need; what is it?

Now let us look at the order of things a little.

The first question is your sins. Is it possible to *know* them forgiven? Well now, what would satisfy you on this point? If God were to tell you in plain words that it were so, would this be enough? "Oh, yes," you say, "I have sinned against God; against Him, and Him only, is my sin; so that if He were to tell me that they were forgiven, it would settle the whole matter."

Then hear, and believe. Are not the Scriptures

the Word of God? "I have no doubt about that," you reply. Then what is the meaning of such passages as, "Blessed are they whose iniquities *are* forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Rom. iv. 7, 8); "He bare our sins in His own body on the tree;" "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more for ever;"—as well as the Scriptures before quoted?

Here, then, we have the Word of God for it, that the forgiveness of sins may be known.

But still perhaps your question is, "How can *I* know that *my* sins are forgiven?" Simply by this gospel; these good news are for you, preached to you, and therefore you have a right to take all to yourself. It is God's word to *you*; and nothing but unbelief on your part can hinder your conscious possession and enjoyment of the blessing it declares.

Nobody can question your title to the blessing the gospel brings. It is to "every creature," to "whosoever will."

So much is the gospel for you that you must either receive or reject it. If you do not receive it, you will be judged for the rejection of it. Oh! do not allow unbelief to rob you of the blessing.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And speaking of Him, it is said, "This Man receiveth sinners," and "through His name the forgiveness of sins is preached." What a gospel!

Will you not believe it ! Does not such good news come as a healing balm to your broken heart, turning your groans and your cries for mercy into praise and thanksgiving to the blessed God who gave His Son to die for you ? For nothing could put away your sins but the blood of Christ. Christ must shed His blood, or sinners could not be pardoned. For "without shedding of blood is no remission." And the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin. It must be the blood of Christ, God's only begotten Son.

Yes, God loved *you* (for we can each one take it to himself), and He gave Jesus to die for *you*, and now sends to tell you that by looking to Him, by simply trusting to His death, all your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.

And, after all this, can you still be unbelieving ? Will you still listen to the dictates of your own heart, rather than the word of the living God ?

"But," you say, "I do not feel happy." Of course you do not, because you have not yet received in simple faith the blessed testimony of the gospel, that your sins are forgiven. You are looking to your own feeling, instead of to Christ ; you are listening to your own thoughts, instead of the Word of God.

It is not a question of thoughts and feelings at all, but of faith and facts. It is a fact that you are a sinner ; you believe it. It is a fact too, blessed be God, that Christ died for your sins ; do you believe

this also? It is a fact that you deserved the judgment of God ; you believe it. It is also a fact that Christ bore that judgment for you ; do you believe this? It is a fact that you are guilty ; you believe it. It is a fact too that Christ died for your sins, and was raised again for your justification ; do you believe this too? It is a fact that God is satisfied with what He did, for He has given Him the highest place in heaven ; do you not believe this?

Then if you believe that Christ died for your sins, that He was raised again for your justification, that God is perfectly satisfied with what He did, and what He did was done for you,—all is settled, and a full salvation is made sure to you by the word of God. The work of Christ was for *you* ; He undertook to put away *your* sins. Did He not? Then will you not accredit that work as a perfect and finished work? God has ; which is shown by the fact that Christ is raised from the dead, and exalted on high.

Oh, that you would take all to yourself, and say, “Yes, I see it is not a question of whether I feel it or not ; God says it is so, and I will believe His word ; surely that is to be more trusted than all my thoughts and feelings. God says, he that believeth “hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment.” I believe in Christ and hear His word, and what He says of me must be true ; I will no longer doubt it. I have eternal life ; God says so. I now see that

the evidence of salvation does not come from within, but from without ; not from my own feeling, or from the dictates of my own heart, but from the word of God."

Oh that such were the language of my reader ! And why should it not be ? How simple and plain it all is. Where is your difficulty ? "Well," you say, "I do not know, perhaps I do not believe aright." That is not the question. Do you believe at all ? You either believe in Christ as your personal Saviour, and in the gospel as news of pardon and peace to your own soul, or you do not believe. Which is it ?

"Oh, I do believe," you say. What do you believe ? Many say they believe in Jesus, and that He died for them, who do not believe what He says. I met one such a short time ago. I will give the substance of our conversation, as it may help my reader.

"Well, Mrs. J—, you are anxious about your soul are you not ? 'I am very anxious.' Do you want to be saved ? 'I do indeed.' Well, I am sure that Jesus wants to save you, for He came into the world to save sinners ; to *seek* and to save that which was lost. Where, then, is the hindrance ? 'I do not know.' Do you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ ? 'Oh, yes.' You believe that He died for you ? 'Yes.' Oh, I see you believe in Jesus, but you do not believe His word,

—you do not believe the Scriptures. ‘Oh, I do indeed.’ Pardon me, Mrs. J—, but you do not. ‘Mr. B—! I do really.’ Now I will prove to you from your own lips that you really do not. You believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as your needed and only Saviour, do you not? ‘Yes, indeed I do.’ Now, then, here is a scripture that you do not believe. Turn to 1 John v. 13, ‘These things have I written unto you that believe . . . (that is *you*); that ye may *know* that ye have eternal life.’ Now then, this verse is written on purpose for you, and it is the word of God to you; yet you do not believe it. Here Mrs. J— paused for a few moments; then said, in emphatic and earnest tones, ‘Well, if God says it, it must be true, and I *will* believe it; for I do believe in Jesus; I am trusting to Him for salvation, and if God says that I have eternal life, it must be true.’ I went on to say,—You see He does say so positively; and this is not the only passage which states it, but every gospel text that speaks of the way of salvation does just as clearly. And the scriptures addressed to believers speak of them as a people already saved:—‘By grace ye *are* saved;’ ‘Who *hath* saved us and called us with an holy calling;’ ‘In whom *we have* redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.’”

These are not all the passages brought before Mrs. J—, and may not be in the same order; but

what we sought to show her was, that the one who believes on Christ—who is resting alone on Him—has eternal life, is already saved according to the Word of God. And she took Him at His word, and said she could now thank Him that she knew she was saved. May my reader do the same.

You believe that Christ died for sinners; but do you believe He died for *you*? You believe that His work was finished; but do you believe it was finished for *you*? Is your reply, “Yes, I do.” Then all is settled, and settled for *you*. All your sins are put away by the precious blood of Christ. A full pardon is yours. You no longer stand charged with guilt before God. For Christ, who died for your sins, was raised again for your justification.

Peace and certainty follow upon the reception, by simple faith, of this full pardon which has been purchased by the blood of Christ, receipted by His resurrection, and proclaimed by the gospel; with the reception too of the testimony of the Word of God as to the condemnation of “sin in the flesh,”—that is, the root of sin that we find within us, as well as the fruit it brings forth, was judged in Christ at the cross, and therefore we shall not be judged for it. How simple and real all is! It is not a question of others, but of yourself. You can say, “He died for me.” Now let us look at the simplicity of it all.

If Christ undertook your case as a guilty sinner before God, and made it His matter to settle the whole thing, it is no longer a question between God and you, but between God and Christ,—as is clearly seen at the cross, where the question was fully gone into, manifestly as a question between God and His Son. Was it not settled there? Everythings depends upon the answer to this question. And, thank God, the most decided answer in the affirmative is given in the words, “It is finished”—confirmed, beyond all question, by the fact that God has raised Christ, who died for your sins, from the dead, and given Him the highest place in heaven.

Is there anything between God and Christ now? Manifestly not. Then has He anything against you? How can He have, if Christ settled it all? And did He not? To say that God still has anything against you, as to your standing before Him, would be like saying that Christ did not settle all for you. Will you say this?

Mark, we are not here speaking of the Christian’s walk. The first thing to see to is that you are a Christian—that you are saved. Christian walk and conduct come in after.

I met a man the other day who was afraid to say he was saved (though he saw that the gospel proclaims salvation, and said he believed it) for fear he should not walk as a true Christian afterwards. Others think that they must walk as children of

God before they can know that they are such. Now all this is confusion. They are devices of the enemy of our souls to rob us of peace and joy.

The salvation of the soul is what we start in the Christian path with,—not what we hope to get on the way, or at the end. There are other aspects of salvation which have to do with the way and the end, but not the salvation of the soul ; this we begin with ; indeed, we are not true Christians in the true sense of the word until we *have* it.

The salvation of your soul must be the first thing to be settled. Then you will be able to go to God as your Father, with a sense of the grace that *has* saved you, and ask for grace and strength to walk as a saved person, as one of His children. But you must be saved first. All other things will come in their place afterwards. “Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you.” The simple plan of salvation, declaring, as we have seen, the forgiveness of your sins through Christ Jesus, is what you want now ; when you are saved, other scriptures will instruct you as to your walk.

And surely you need go on no longer without this pardon and peace. Will you not accept it at once ? Do not continue to look at your feelings, but look at Christ, as the bitten Israelite did to the serpent on the pole. Did not Christ die for your sins ? “Yes,” you say. Is He not now in heaven

without them? Again you say "Yes." Then where are those sins now? Are they upon you? How can they be, since Christ put them away? Will God still charge you with them, when He has judged Christ for them? No, He will not, blessed be His name; for "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

It is so blessed to know that all is settled by another; and that He who settled it, is my own loving, and loved, Saviour!

I once met a poor woman who was under deep conviction of sin, and had been for some years; but could not find peace, because she had been looking for change of feelings in herself, instead of to Christ and His finished work. I will relate, as nearly as I remember, my conversation with her. It may help others.

"Oh! sir," she said, after I had given her a tract, "I have been long anxious to be saved; I have been striving to make my peace with God for eleven years." I knew she was sincere, and meant right, but in order to show her as forcibly as possible the mistake she was making, my reply was to the following effect:—"Striving to make your peace with God! I am sorry to hear that." The poor woman looked somewhat startled, as she said, "Sorry to hear it! what do you mean?" "Why, in striving to make your peace with God you have been virtually denying two things:—First, your

helplessness to do anything for yourself, and that Christ therefore has done all for you ; and secondly, you have been unwittingly denying one of the most blessed truths of the gospel, viz., that CHRIST *hath made peace* by the blood of the cross. The scripture says, ‘He made peace by the blood of His cross,’ and yet you say you have been striving to make it for eleven years. Is not this like saying that He has not made it? For if you have got to make it, He never made it. But, thank God, He did make it, and made it for *you*, and therefore you have not to make it, but accept it as the blessed result of His work. Nothing but the blood—that is, the death of Christ—could make peace for you and me. Now then, see again how simple it is, ‘He made peace by the blood of His cross.’ And therefore peace is now preached ‘to those that were far off, and to them that were nigh.’ You see this peace is not only made, but proclaimed—held out to you for your acceptance.” Here the woman’s face brightened up, as she said, “Then peace is mine ; for I do believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” “Yes, peace is yours. God is satisfied with what Christ did for you ; and surely you may be satisfied too.” “Oh, I see it all now ; how simple it is ! I need be troubled no longer. Oh ! do thank God with me.”

And does not my reader see it all too? Will you not rest on the finished work of Christ, and accept

the pardon, peace, and salvation that is offered to you through that work?

Another verse says, "He (Christ) is our peace." Your works are not your peace; your feelings are not your peace; but Christ, the One who died for you and rose again, He is your peace. Your works are nothing to rest upon; but Christ's finished work is the sure foundation of faith. Your feelings may change every day, yea, every hour; but He changeth not. Your own heart will never give evidence of salvation. But if your heart did tell you you were saved, you could not trust it, for "he that trusteth his own heart is a fool." It might deceive you, for it "is deceitful above all things." Evidence of salvation, we repeat, does not come from within, but from without—from the immutable Word of God. This will never deceive you; do not be afraid to trust it.

God tells you, he that believeth *is* saved—*hath* everlasting life—*shall not* come into condemnation—by grace ye *are* saved. God says it,—therefore it must be so, is the language of faith. Surely we can trust His Word, though we can trust nothing else.

I have found people using the text in 1 John v. 10, "He that believeth hath the witness in himself," to justify them for looking within for evidence of salvation. Now instead of casting a person upon himself, or leading him to look within, it is quite the opposite. The witness here spoken of is the Holy

Ghost. But what is the record—that is the truth—witnessed? The next verse gives us that. But, in the first place, it must be seen that it is the one who already believes—that is, the one who has taken in the good news of the gospel, and therefore is saved—that has the witness in himself. But does He bear witness of our own feelings or state? No, He bears witness of the truth of God and the Son of God. “This is the record that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.”

The record of the Spirit and word of God is, that you have eternal life. Is not this enough for you? If this does not assure you of salvation, what will?

The gospel went home to the Thessalonians with *much assurance*, we are told (1 Thess. i. 5). So that there was no uncertainty about their salvation. Moreover, they were waiting for the Son of God from heaven; how could they have been waiting for Him, as the One they wished to see, if they had had a question about the salvation of their souls? But that they did not, is confirmed again by the fact that it was the One who was raised from the dead, “even Jesus, *which delivered us from the wrath to come*,” they waited for.

Now we get the secret of this much assurance in the next chapter, ver. 13. “For this cause thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it *not as the word of men*, but, as it is in truth, *the*

word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”

Yes, here is the secret of “much assurance.” It is receiving the gospel as the word of God. When this is the case, not a single doubt can remain. For the gospel says the one who believeth “hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation,” *i.e.*, judgment.

I receive this, not as the word of men, but as the word of God. This settles the whole matter. It is the word of God, who cannot lie, that assures me that I have eternal life, and shall not come into judgment. I believe this because God says so; this, then, is how I am sure of it. Blessed assurance! What a gospel! The origin of it is the love of God; the basis of it is the death and resurrection of Christ; the object of it is the salvation and glorification of poor guilty sinners, deserving nothing but eternal damnation.

This is the gospel that is preached to my reader. Is it too good to believe? If it were the word of men only that made known such good news, we might well think so, and discredit it. But it is not so; it is the word of God. And He hath done as it hath pleased Him. He so loved, that He gave His only begotten Son to die that we might have eternal life—that we might be saved. And now He sends the word of this salvation to us. Oh! then, let us accept it in simple faith, and with thank-

ful hearts. Shall we doubt the word of God, a word so full of grace and blessing?

The words of the apostle Paul (used in regard to a temporal salvation for himself and all travelling with him, when nothing but death seemed to stare them in the face), "I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me" (Acts xxvii. 25), may be applied by believers to what God has said about *eternal* salvation. God has told us that we are saved—have eternal life—and shall not come into judgment; and each one of us can say, "I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me." Blessed, simple, yet real faith!

Then doubt no longer, my dear reader. You believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; and God tells you that your sins are forgiven, you have eternal life, and soon shall be brought into eternal glory. And cannot *you* say, "I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me?"

If so, may you go on in the enjoyment of all that the work of Christ has secured for you and His word proclaimed to you, and shine henceforth as a child of God "in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation."

And now you may search into the Scriptures to see what God says about your walk and conduct as a saved person.





II.

Christian Standing.

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I have preached unto you, which ye have received, and wherein ye STAND.”

—*1 Corinthians* xv. 1-4.

“By whom also we have access into this grace wherein we STAND.”

—*Romans* v. 1-5.



IT is a good thing to know that we have a solid foundation. We shall never be much good as workers in the cause of Christ, if we are not really sure and sound as to the foundation on which we stand. If I would have my hands free to work I must know that my feet are firm. If I would go on earnestly beseeching others to accept the gospel, I must know, not only the theory of that gospel, but the reality and power of it in my own soul by the strongest possible conviction—such conviction as can only be known in the soul by believing what God Himself says, and believing it *because* He says.

There is a verse in *1 Thess. i.* that gives us the

secret of assurance, it is the gospel going home in power to the soul *as the word of God*: † Thess. i. 5, "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." Then in 1 Thess. ii. 13, the apostle says, "When ye received the word of God ye received it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth the word of God." We may hear it of man, as did the Thessalonians from Paul, nevertheless they received it as the word of God.

And now I want to distinguish Christian standing from Christian walk, and to shew really the basis on which the children of God stand before Himself. What is our standing? In or upon what do we stand before God? Have we a firm footing in the presence of a holy God? A footing that will never give way. A foundation that will never fail us; not even when brought into the holy presence of God, "Who is of purer eyes than behold iniquity." Now the first verses I have read in 1 Cor. xv. shews that we stand in the gospel—*i.e.*, the gospel presents a standing. The apostle says, "Moreover I declare unto you the gospel which I preached at first, which also ye have believed, and wherein ye stand." Now what was the gospel? In the first place remember that it supposes man an utter ruin; there is nothing whatever in man to build upon. Whoever builds upon anything in himself will find, sooner or later, that he is on a sandy foundation.

There is nothing in man but sin, therefore he is dependent on the mercy of God. No writer of scripture brings out more forcibly and clearly the ruin of man than does the apostle Paul. And perhaps no writer brings out the glory side of the gospel more beautifully—more clearly than does the same apostle. And here he says it is in the gospel that he declared unto them that they stood. Our first question therefore in connection with our subject is, “what was the gospel that Paul preached?” In a word, it is pardon, peace, and glory, the work of Christ. The work of Christ procured salvation for lost and guilty men. Now friends, are you standing upon that? Have you taken your stand in the gospel that the apostle Paul preached? That is upon the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, we ask, shall that work ever fail? No! It might be said of the work of Christ, as it is of His word—“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My word shall never pass away”—neither shall His work. His work on Calvary’s cross is of eternal efficacy; and it is on that work that the Christian stands. What is heaven’s estimate of that work? What does God think of the work of Christ? Is there anything in the word of God that gives us clearly and definitely what God thinks of the work wrought out on Calvary’s cross? Yes, there is. What is it? It is the exaltation of the One who did the work, at His own right hand. The One

who undertook the work of atonement—the One who bare our sins in His own body on the tree, is now in the glory of God without them, and He has the highest place in heaven.

Men would not have Him here on the earth; they cast Him out, and rejected Him; they said, “Away with Him, away with Him.” Heaven received Him gladly enough, and has given Him the highest place there.

Now just look at this plan of salvation in a logical way for a few moments—for whatever people may say about God’s salvation, it is not only simple and clear, but it is logical too. Christ the Just One, is delivered for us the unjust; He who knew no sin, made sin for us who were sinners, and guilty before God, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Now look at Christ on the cross; He had sins upon Him, that is certain—but the question is—Had He your sins upon Him? A little while before God said, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” But see Him now on the cross! He is forsaken of God. “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” There is a question of sin between Christ and God? Whose sin is it? Not His own, that is certain. It is the sin of the believer—yes, it was my sin. Then where is Christ now? He is in heaven; it is clear there was a question of sin between God and Christ on the cross, and now Christ who was rejected by

God on the cross has the highest place in heaven. Where are those sins? They are not upon Him there, that is certain. He has put them away, for they cannot be upon Him now, neither can they be upon me. For God charged my sins upon Christ on the cross, then it is very certain He will not charge them upon me, for—

“God will not payment twice demand,
First at my bleeding surety’s hand,
And then again at mine.”

Therefore, Christ’s presence in heaven is a clear proof to my soul that God is perfectly satisfied—yea, glorified by the work He accomplished on Calvary’s cross. Nothing can give more real solid peace and joy to the soul of the believer than to know for certain that, first, Christ was on the cross for his sins, and secondly that He is now in the glory of God without them.

Then, can there be a question of sin raised between God and my soul? If Christ undertook my case, and the question of my sin was thoroughly gone into between God and Christ, then I say the question is to be raised between God and Christ, if it is to be raised at all. But, no, it is settled once and forever. Never shall the question be raised against me; never can there be the imputation of sin to the one who truly believes in His name.

But there are perhaps certain things we need to look at in connection with this, for there are many things that trouble a man before he has real solid peace, before he—as we might say—knows that he is on a sure foundation—that he has a firm footing. He needs to know not only that Christ put away his sins ; but there is a deeper question that troubles him often, and that is the principle of indwelling sin—called in scripture the “old nature,” or “sin in the flesh,” or “the old man.” And it is this question that presents such difficulty to the mind of the young believer. He says, I can see and understand how my sins have been forgiven—how Christ put them away—but I cannot see how this old nature within me is forgiven, how it is going to be dealt with.

Well, in the first place, I would say that scripture never states that “the old man,” *i.e.*, the old nature, the flesh, shall be forgiven ; but I will tell you what it does say. It says that “the old man” was crucified with Christ. Nothing but death will do for that. Our sins are pardoned, but the nature that brought forth the sins was judged in Christ. “Our old man was crucified with Christ”—that evil principle within. “But I cannot understand that,” said a man to me in England a few months ago. “How can it have been crucified with Christ when I find it still existing within me, and ready to come out at any moment ?” “Well,” I replied, “if it did not exist within you as

to fact, there would be no need for the exhortation in Romans vi., 'Likewise reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin.' And if it is not dead before God, there would be no basis for the exhortation." The great question for me is, am I to be judged for the evil nature within me, or was it judged in Christ? If judged in Christ, then I need not be troubled about it, save to reckon it, treat it as dead, for that is how God treats it.

Now, it is a good thing when we come to reckon with God; and this is what faith always does. However difficult it may appear to us, the scripture says that the old man, the old Adam nature, the root that brought forth the sins, was crucified with Christ. It was brought judicially to an end before God. Christ became my substitute. He became a sin-offering, and now God sees an end of the old nature on the cross of Calvary. And He would have you and me to reckon as He reckons about it. "Likewise reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin," but alive unto God. The old nature is there, but don't allow it to act.

I asked the above named gentleman this question, "When you get to heaven, where will you look for an end *before God* of the old Adam nature that brought forth these sins? At your own death, or the death of Christ?" "Oh," he said, "I shall see an end of it at the death of Christ." I replied, "That is what faith does now." Faith sees it now,

and enjoys the truth of it. Therefore, the conclusion is, though the principle of sin is within me, I know that it has been judged in Christ on the cross. Therefore, I shall not be judged by God. I want to reckon as God reckons about it. This is peace. This is rest.

Another question that people often trouble themselves about is their *future sins*. "I can understand how my past sins may be forgiven, how my sins up to the present moment, or up to my conversion, are forgiven, but it is the future sins, sins after conversion that trouble me," is the language of many a one. Now, in the first place, how many sins were future when Christ died? All of them. How many did He bear? All of them. If, as we have seen, the very nature that brought them forth has been judged—the very root—then there are no branches spared. At conversion, all your sins—past, present, and future—if you like to speak of them in that way, not that we like to anticipate future sins,—but they were all blotted out as a thick cloud. Now, this is absolute forgiveness. But then we know that we do go on sinning daily (when I speak of sinning daily I am not referring to crimes and outward sins, but to sins before God, in whose eyes the thought of foolishness is sin). Now these sins were absolutely forgiven when I was converted. But there is what we might call administrative forgiveness; and if I do anything that breaks the

link of communion, there will be no forgiveness in this sense till I confess it. The sin will give me a bad conscience till I have been to God about it. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive us." Here I get administrative forgiveness, and communion is restored, and it is all on the ground of the death of Christ, only the whole thing is done once and for ever in the most absolute way. The debt has been paid most fully. Christ suffered for our sins ; the whole account is settled, therefore God is *faithful and just* to forgive.

Now another question ; for I do desire that every child of God here should be clear as to their standing—the true foundation on which the child of God stands—because I know how much depends upon this as to our apprehension of all the other blessed, glorious, and sublime results of redemption. We see now that the Christian is a man of two natures. The old nature is still there ; but there is also a new nature. We are a new creation in Christ. Though sin is present in me, it has lost its power over me. The Christian is no longer a slave to it. Before his conversion it had the mastery over him—now he is converted he has the mastery of it in the power of the Holy Ghost and faith. You understand the difference, do you not ? If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves ; and it is only those who are deceived who will say so. Nevertheless sin shall

not have dominion over you. It has lost its dominion. It is there ever ready to come out; therefore it is only in the power of the Spirit of God. as I live by faith of the Son of God, that I live out the new life, and it is impossible to live out the two at the same moment.

But I wish to say a few words about the question of perfection. There is great confusion, in the minds of Christians, as to perfection in the present day, for, like "salvation," whenever they meet the word they seem to think it always means the same thing. I do not know why they should. If they are reading any other book they do not; then they always apply the meaning of the word according to the connection in the context—but whenever they read the Scripture and come across the word salvation they seem to think it always means the same thing; and so with the word perfect or perfection. Now it is very clear that salvation is used in different ways. It is not always the salvation of the soul that is in question where the word occurs. The apostle in Philippians speaks of his salvation from prison. "I know this shall turn out to my salvation through your prayers." In the same book he says: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." He is not there speaking of the salvation of the soul, but of the deliverance we need by the way—the working out of the salvation that we have when we believe. "By which ye *are* saved"

—our text tells us, speaking of the Gospel—“By grace ye *are* saved”—another tells us, “*having received* the issue of faith—the salvation of your souls,” says another passage. There is another aspect of salvation, and that is the salvation by the way; and there is a third aspect—and that is the end—the salvation of the body, when Christ comes to change these bodies of humiliation. Peter speaks of this aspect of salvation that “as ready to be revealed in the last time,” that is, when Christ shall come—the grace that shall appear; and this is the salvation which is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. But I need not say surely that when Paul says “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” he is not speaking of the salvation of the soul? He says directly, “For it is God that worketh *in* you to will and to do of His good pleasure.” I get the salvation of my soul through Christ’s work *for* me, and when I possess the salvation of my soul I work it out, that is, I bring it into my whole life by the power of God’s Spirit working in me. So it is to those who are already the children of God that he is here writing, hence he exhorts them to walk *as* children of God, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation. There are evils, on this side and that side of my path; therefore I need continual deliverance. There is the fear and trembling—fear lest I fall into this snare, or be caught in that trap.

Now we shall see that the word perfection also has its different uses. I will just relate a little conversation that took place in this very district, when I was here four years ago. I met two earnest Christian young men who were, as they said, believers in perfection. Oh! I replied, so am I. One of them said he had not sinned for six months, the other said he had not sinned for three months. Well, I asked, if you live for six months more are you sure you will not sin during that time? O, he could not say that. You have been perfect six months? "Yes"; but you can't say you will be perfect for six months more? "No," he answered, "though I am going to try to be." Well, I said; after all, my perfection is a better kind than yours. I believe in perfection—but I have been perfect fifteen years—and I am going to be perfect forever, and I have the plain simple statement of God for it, "Hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." That is the sort of perfection, I replied. Would you not like to know that perfection? And again the Gospel of John tells us not only that he that is born of God sinneth not—but he cannot sin. You say you have not sinned for six months, but you dare not say you cannot sin, yet the Word of God says he that is born of God cannot sin.

Here these sincere young men became quite perplexed and just ready to learn. They saw there must be a mistake somewhere. Well, they said, we cannot

understand it. What does it mean? Now, I replied, you must not think that the word "perfect" means the same in every place where it occurs. It is used in three different ways. In one place the apostle says (Philippians ii. 12): "Not as though we had already attained or were already perfect." There the word "perfect" is connected with the glorified state unto which the apostle is making his way. That is a perfection we have not yet reached. It is the perfect state in glory, when we shall have reached the goal unto which we are pressing. A few verses further down he says: "Let us, as many of us as be perfect, be thus minded." Now this shows that there are some who are perfect in another sense; and that there are others—though Christians—who are not perfect in the same sense; here the word means full-grown, no longer babes just born, but grown-up into the truth. (See Hebrews v. 14, where the same word is rendered "of full age.") It simply means, they are established in the fundamental truths of the Gospel.

Let us mind those things then. Let us walk by the same rule—and as another scripture says, "Let us go on to perfection." And thirdly, in the sense in which it is used in the first passage quoted, the weakest believer is perfected for ever. That is, as to my standing in Christ; all is perfection. Another scripture says, "Ye are complete in Him." Though there is such a thing as progressive apprehension of

the truth, as well as progressive practice of it. The text in John, "he that is born of God sinneth not, neither can he sin because His seed remaineth in him," looks at the child of God as one born of Him, in the new nature which cannot sin. The sin comes from the old nature that is still there though judged at the cross before God. But I leave this question here to go on to Romans viii. The first verse says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." Is that possible, for poor sinful man, who could not stand before God? For if Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who should stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mightest be feared. Yes, it is possible for poor sinners of this guilty world to be in a place where there is no condemnation.

Where is that place? Where is such a foundation to be found? It is not found in anything that we can do; neither in our own works nor even our own faithfulness to Christ. However much we should urge this faithfulness upon one another, it does not depend upon that. It does not depend upon my walk. No greater confusion could be brought into the gospel than to confound the Christian's standing with his walk. You must keep them distinct. And yet, see the connection between them. My standing in Christ is most absolute. He was made sin that I might be made the righteousness of God in Him. It is not a question now of what I am in myself—a poor

blundering child of God on my way through this wilderness world—with much to shame and humble me before God ; and before men too. But what am I in Christ as God views me? Complete in Him, and there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. Judgment has taken its course ; all that was consumable has been consumed, and the fire of God's judgment will never come there again, for there is nothing for it to devour.

And my walk, as we shall see in the next address, my state, and my condition should all be based on that, and come out of it. But keep it distinct in itself. Do not think your standing is dependent upon your walk ; it is not : it would be derogatory to the work of Christ to say it is. But your walk is dependent upon your standing. You must know what your standing is before you will know what your walk should be. One is objective, the other is subjective. I will make it a little more simple if I can. You must know your relationship, before you can walk in a way becoming the relationship. A prince must know he is a prince before he can behave in a princely way. So it is when I know I am a child of God that I desire to walk as a child of God, and have power to do so. But my walking as a child of God does not make me one ; nor does it help to keep me one ; it gives evidence to all around that I am one. Now that is simple, and at the same time it shows the importance of knowing our standing to

begin with. But it is the work of Christ that gives you a standing before God. Do not think therefore that *your* works, your faithfulness, or anything that you can do are needed to make that more secure. This would be dishonouring to Christ's work. Though there will be the fruit if there is the life. But the fruit is dependent upon the life and not the life upon the fruit.

And now I go on to Romans v. 2—By whom also we have access into this grace wherein we stand. Where do we stand? Not on our own merits; not in anything we have done. Sandy foundations are all these; though a man were the most religious in Glasgow, though he were a member of the most highly reputed church, though he were the most busy worker in that church, though he devoted his time, his talents, and his money to the cause of such church; yet if he were not in the grace of God the man would have no standing in the presence of God. It is in the unmerited grace of God that the Christian stands.

God might, as it were, have put me on my feet, and said, Now, I have given you a start, and I leave you to go on your way; if you fall it will be all up with you; whether you maintain this standing before Me or not depends upon your own merit. But He does not do so. No, He gives me a foundation, a standing before Himself, and it is in unmerited favour. Peter says in chapter v. verse 12, "This is the

true grace of God wherein ye stand." What is grace? The unmerited favour of the blessed God. It has *pleased* God to make us His people. That is a sweet word, and so in Romans viii. I get these three blessed things. In the beginning of the chapter, no condemnation, further down, relationship, the spirit of His Son given in our hearts, whereby we cry Abba, Father; and at the end of the chapter, no separation; and all this is most absolute, because it is founded on the work of Christ. If it were dependent upon anything in us, if God were to say, If you obey My voice, if you live a holy life, you shall have it, and if you do not, you lose it—you would lose it before another twenty-four hours passed over your head.

Whenever God makes conditions, they are perfect, they are rigid. If the Scripture tells us the thought of foolishness is sin, it is so. In the ten commandments, if one offend in one point he is guilty of all. But, thank God, I stand in His sovereign grace.

Now, note the peculiar wording of this verse. It says we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand. We are there already, and yet we have access to it. Suppose I live in a spacious field, my house, my home are there. There I am right in the centre of the field, and yet I say I have access into this field wherein I live. There seems some want of common sense. I am in the field, I live there; why, then, do I talk about access? But I believe there is a

deeper thought in it than the mere standing. Take the illustration a little further. I stand in the field ; beneath its surface are precious treasures—gold, silver, and precious stones, the deeper I dig the more precious the metal and stones become, and so I have access to this field wherein I stand—access to all its treasures. So with the grace of God ; I stand in His grace, but I have access ; it is mine to explore—to dig up the wonderful and precious treasures of that grace, to know the heights, depths, lengths, and breadths of it.

Do you know, dear Christian, what it is to make these explorations ? I believe it opens up all the field of absolute blessings, riches, and treasures that are ours consequent upon the redemption of Christ ; and, therefore, the verse goes on to say, “And rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” What an anticipation for our souls—the glory of God ! How shall we behold it ? We shall behold it in the face of Jesus Christ—the One whose visage was marred more than any man’s, and His form more than the sons of men. We shall behold Him effulgent with the glory of God. Now just another word and I am done, and it is this : You will see from what we have said that the salvation of God is most absolute, and that my standing is outside myself altogether—it is in Christ. Now I don’t believe that the apprehension of this will lead to laxity of love or laxity of life.

I know there are people who say: If this is the case, if you are so absolutely saved, you may just go on and do as you like. But such people forget that that question has been raised before, and raised by the word of God, and answered there too. After Romans v., where we get the most absolute character of the salvation of God, the question is, "What shall we say to these things? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer therein." We have got a new life; therefore we have got new instincts, and new desires. And if that new life does not come out some way, you are not warranted in saying it is there.

I believe a true sense of the grace of God that brings me into such blessed relationships will deepen the desire to answer to it in my practical life. The sow may turn to her wallowing in the mire—the dog may turn to its vomit—but not the sheep. The sow that was washed implies outward reformation. The sow was washed, and took her place with the sheep, but never became one. So she turned again to her natural element, wallowing in the mire. A sheep would not do this; it is against its nature. I was walking round a farm in Worcestershire once, and one of my friend's sheep had got into a pool. There it lay, the most wretched object you could set eyes upon, and as it saw us

draw nigh, it looked up and bleated most pitifully, as much as to say, Help me out ; help me out. A sow would have been quite at home in such a place ; but the poor sheep was miserable. So it is with the child of God. He may fall into sin, but he will be wretched till he is delivered from it again. The very wretchedness of the man is the sign of Divine life within him. If he goes on wallowing in sin, and enjoys it, and shows no conscience about it, we are not justified in saying he is a Christian at all, whatever profession he makes. God knows. The foundation of God standeth sure. But the word for us is, "Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

I repeat, it is a dishonour to Christ to say a man is a child of God when he is apparently wallowing in sin. God grant that we may understand more the true nature and character of His salvation.





III.

Christian Walk.

Col. i. 1-18.



THE subject before us in our last address was one of a most absolute character, because it depended upon Christ—upon what He was, and what He did. Hence, as we saw, our standing before God is most perfect—in every way suited to Himself, so that He does not see a flaw. I say it with reverence, and in honour of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, that God does not see a spot in His redeemed ; we are perfected for ever by His one offering ; we are accepted by God in all the sweet savour of the sacrifice of Christ ; so that you see it would be a dishonour to the work of Christ to say that there was a flaw, or anything at all wanting, in the Christian standing before God.

Of course when we look at ourselves and our failure in this world this may seem irreconcilable ; and until

we understand the difference between our standing and our walk, we shall be in perplexity, and have nothing clear. We cannot know what it is to have a clear view of God's salvation while we confound our standing with our walk, or, in any way whatever confound the work of Christ with our own Christian work. That work stands alone. There is no other like it under the sun. There is no other like it in God's universe. It is complete in itself; it is unique in its character; it is infinitely efficacious; it propitiates the throne of God; and that is the work, in all its solitary dignity, that has saved my soul. To attempt to add to it, or to say that anything else is needed for the sinner's acceptance of God, would be most dishonouring to the One who did it. And in honour of that work I stand before God without a flaw. I delight to repeat it.

But while our standing is most complete and most absolute; independent of ourselves, or anything we have done or can do, made ours on the principle of simple faith alone—I say while this is so, there is a practical side, and God has not left us here, having saved us and made us fit for heaven, to go on in the paths of sin, or to blunder through the world as best we can, to grope our way (if I may so speak) in the dark. A passage in Titus shows not only that we are redeemed from hell, but we are redeemed from all iniquity. Another passage, in Galatians, tells us that we are redeemed from this

present evil world. We are glad enough to know that we are saved from the judgment that the world is going on to, but we are not often so ready to own that we are delivered from the world that is going on to the judgment.

Seeing that Christ has saved us from the judgment of the world, shall we still mingle with that world? Shall we find our pleasure in that world? Shall we find our heart's portion in that world that rejected Christ? Not to say a word about faithfulness to Christ, would it be faithfulness to our fellow-men who are dancing along the road to eternal banishment from the presence of God? Should we not rather be warning them to flee from the wrath to come? And remember, you cannot warn another of his danger if you are going on hand in hand with him. You must be separate from the world to preach the gospel of Christ to it. The world not only did reject Christ but does reject Him still. Therefore in coming to our subject to-night we have something most practical before us. I do not want you to confound these truths, I want you to keep each in its place.

In the old economy, that of the Jews, we find life and blessing were consequent upon obedience, not that life was ever obtained in that way ; not one single man ever got blessing by law keeping. Then, you say, were none saved in the Old Testament? Yes ; but not by the dispensation under which they lived.

They were saved outside the dispensation of law ; faith penetrated it ; they looked to the end of the law, and there they saw Christ. Their faith was dim, but in their sacrifices they saw something beyond. So that they could speak of the blessedness of the man who knew his sins forgiven, as did David. That is something outside the law. The law never spoke of forgiveness. The law offered life on the ground of obedience, and if the obedience was not forthcoming, it left the man under the curse. It put life and blessing consequent upon obedience.

When we come to the New Testament we get the order reversed. The law proved man guilty and under the curse, and now we come to the wondrous light of a gospel dispensation, and God just takes up a man, redeems him from the curse of the law, pardons his sins, and gives him life in the most absolute way. Now we have obedience consequent upon life.

Look at it in another way for a moment. Law came, making its demands upon man, claiming obedience to every precept thereof from man ; it was written on hard tables of stone, and it proved to be the ministration of death. Why ? Because of sin which was in man, which it showed up, but did not eradicate. So the law is called in 2 Cor. iii. the ministration of death, while on the other hand, the gospel is called the ministration of life. Law comes first, and shows man to be dead, dead in trespasses and sins ; it is the ministration of death. "The law

revived and I died," says the apostle. That is where Christ found me by the gospel.

The same chapter tells us the gospel is the ministration of righteousness, while the law is the ministration of condemnation. One more blessed fact in these contrasts. I have said the law was written upon hard rigid tables of stone, outside of man, and making demands upon him which he could never meet. The gospel—Christianity—is Christ written—engraven upon the fleshy tables of the heart; and practical Christianity is Christ lived out in the life. But He must be known in the heart first. We need this in days like these. There is enough theoretical Christianity all around, and we see how withering it is to the Lord's people. How barren and unfruitful; how devoid of the grace and the spirit of Christ it leaves those who are saved—even if the theory be in a measure correct in itself. When shall we learn that Christianity is not made up of dogmas and theories? Christianity is Christ written upon the heart, and lived out in the life, so that we become "epistles" of Christ.

Then are there no doctrines in the scripture that are to be maintained? There are. What are they? The doctrines of Christianity set forth Christ Himself in all His dignity and glory. They maintain the dignity of His person and the efficacy and character of His work, and they shew the result of rejecting the gospel, preached consequent upon that work.

The doctrine of Christ should be maintained, by all who love Him, because they concern Him and His wonderful redemption work through which God is glorified and man blest. But never separate truth from Christ—never separate doctrine from the person, because all revolve around Himself. Why is the doctrine of atonement dear to me? Because Christ wrought that atonement, and it is the ground of my cherished relationship with Himself. Christianity has to do with a person. Hence the affections of the heart are brought into operation, and we have a real living person and object for our hearts; and in proportion as we feed upon Himself, the whole character and tone of our life and conduct here are affected thereby.

Now we enter upon the question of our walk, and though my getting life and being brought into the relationship of a child of God, and my obtaining salvation does not depend upon myself, yet my enjoyment of that salvation, and my giving evidence to all around depends upon my walk and obedience through this world. So that while salvation and eternal blessing do not depend upon the walk, the present enjoyment of salvation and the evidencing of the same before men do depend upon my walk. How blessed it is to keep things in their place. I must have life before I can live.

Some people talk about turning over a new leaf, and living a better life before they have it. And,

of course, they find nothing but failure. I must know my footing, and be able to stand before God, before I can walk before men after a Godly sort ; I must be a child of God before I can live and act as a child of God. The responsibility and the conduct comes out of the relationship ; and it should correspond with the place and the relationship into which I am brought.

If we saw this one simple principle it would help us immensely in our perusal of the whole of God's word. All those passages that are difficult to us, because they seem to cast a doubt on what the abstract statements of the gospel makes so clear, will become clear to us in the light of what we are saying. I cannot go into all such passages now, only let me say wherever you find them they have to do with a people down here in the wilderness. They look on professing Christians here in the world, and they come as healthy tests to the soul ; for you know that there are many who profess to be saved who are not born again. Therefore "ifs" are necessary. There may be every outward ordinance of Christianity and yet not the inward life. Hence, "If ye continue." I take that as one specimen. Now that does not mean that my continuance in obedience and faithful service makes me a child of God, or saves me, or even keeps me saved. It means that my continuance evidences the fact that I am saved. Hence such scriptures always apply to all professing Chris-

tians while passing through the wilderness world. Do not seek to blunt their edge. They are most healthy wherever they occur, or God would not have put them there.

Now the first feature of "walk" after what I have said is what the scripture calls walking in newness of life. Turn to Romans vi., and there you find it. You remember what I said about that chapter in the last address. I sought to show that there we have not only the fact that our sins have been put away by the sacrifice of Christ, but the very nature that committed the sins—the root, the evil principle within—has been judged on the cross as well. So in this chapter, verse 4, we are called upon to walk in newness of life. "Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Now, see the beautiful figure. We have seen that this chapter shows that the old man was crucified with Christ, and in this chapter baptism is taken as a figure of that. Very few people perhaps understand it; but there it is. Now baptism is only a figure—the reality took place in the death of Christ. I died with Him. The old nature was crucified with Christ, and judicially ended before God. Hence I am not to be judged for it, because it met with its judgment in Him. Now I am alive in Christ—

risen ; and in baptism I own this by going down into the waters of death, and coming up out of them—a beautiful figure of death and resurrection.

Now, how can I live unto sin, and yield my members as instruments of unrighteousness to it? I have owned by baptism that the old man is dead. I will grant you that we need faith all along the way to realize this, and evidence the fact in our souls. But we have owned it in figure once for all, and we are now new creatures in Christ, and all we possess is on the resurrection side of death. The Red Sea gives us a beautiful picture of this. The children of Israel were really saved from the judgment when they were in Egypt ; by the blood of the paschal lamb ; but after that, they found themselves in a worse difficulty than ever.

Like many young Christians now-a-days, when they first lay hold on Christ as their Saviour and begin to rejoice, they think it will be smooth sailing now ; and when a little trial without or within arises, they find themselves in a greater difficulty than ever. They thought they were not going to sin, but be pure, or perfect (as some people say) ; but, alas ! to their great alarm they find the evil principle of sin is there, and it looks worse in their eyes than ever it did before, because they never saw it in the light. They are like the man in Romans vii. who desired to do right but found evil present with him. Many

a young convert is ready to say, "O wretched man that I am who shall deliver me?"

The man in Romans vii. is like the Israelites at Pi-hahiroth on the banks of the Red Sea. They seem hemmed in on every side; there are—the waters of death before them, the mountainous difficulties on either side, and in the rear the enemy following hard after them; and they say, What shall we do? Now, the best advice to be given when nothing can be done is, "stand still." So Moses says, "Stand still and see the salvation of God." They stood still, and God came in, the waters were divided and they went through dry shod, and came up on the resurrection banks of the Red Sea where they began to sing the song of redemption, ascribing the glory of their salvation to Jehovah. So with the young convert, he gets to see the very evil principle within him was crucified with Christ and now he can sing the song of redemption.

Sometimes I have said—and though it is rather quaint it helps to express the truth taught there—"You will never get out of the condition described in Romans vii. until you find you can't," then you will be out of it directly. The moment he says "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" he is able to reply: "I thank God through Christ Jesus our Lord." Deliverance comes directly. He has been looking in at himself, and there sees he nothing but sin and failure, but now he looks out

from himself, and the question is “*Who* shall deliver me?” The Deliverer is near, and makes Himself known immediately. “I thank God through Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Now, after what I have said, you can understand how the Christian should walk in newness of life. Old things are passed away, all things are become new. I am to live out the new life, and if the new life which I possess in Christ is lived by me it will come out in the same qualities, the same graces, the same virtues as shone forth in Himself. In just that proportion in which I live the life of Christ shall I be adorned with His graces and virtues. But I need a power within for this life, and the power is the Spirit of God. Turn to chap. viii. 4 (Romans).

Now here we find the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit. There is a real blessing in that verse when you see it. It does not say the righteousness, or righteous requirements of the law ought to be fulfilled in those who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit. It says, “the righteousness of the law is fulfilled,” *is* fulfilled. It is an abstract statement. True only of those who walk after the spirit and not after the flesh. The old nature could never meet the requirements of the law. The new nature lived out after the spirit, and not after the flesh, does. It is just as natural for the new nature to bring forth that which is required

by the law, and that without the law itself as a standard, as it is for the old nature to bring forth sin.

Here we find grace and law meet. The law says, Love God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind. Man in the flesh cannot do it (see verses 7 and 8). But the man who walks after the spirit can love his neighbour as himself. That is, he has a nature that is capable of it, though he may not always be living in the power of that nature. Only one who is born from above can do so. Indeed the Christian is called to love his brother better than himself, even to lay down his life for him. We know but little about brotherly love, practically. Oh that we knew more ! If we were feeding upon Christ Himself we should know more of the family character of the word "fellowship" which is so sweet. Such a blessed word ! We know little about it except in a conventional or formal way ; "in the fellowship," and "out of the fellowship," as we say. Fellowship is a real thing, fellowship with God and His Son and each other ; it springs out of this life that we have. It must be spontaneous. You cannot bring it about by legal effort, or in any way suited to Christ, by divisive means ; it must be spontaneous, and can only be that when we live upon the manna sent down from heaven. It is so in regard to all the fruits of the Christ life. When we feed upon that blessed Person our souls become

assimilated to Him, and our hearts go out to care for His people naturally, as Timothy did.

Now I want to turn to a verse in Ephesians iv. 1, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."

Now, no epistle gives us the vocation of the Christian in a more full and blessed way than the epistle to the Ephesians. It shows most clearly and beyond all question that that calling is heavenly. We are called out from this world that lieth in the hands of the wicked one, from the dead, sinful, degraded state in which we were found, to be inheritors of heaven itself. The first chapter speaks of the inheritance to which we are called, which we are going to possess with Christ Himself. Already we have the earnest of that inheritance, the Spirit of God. Yea, indeed the Christian has two earnest of the inheritance—an earnest at each end, if we may so speak—*i.e.*, here in the wilderness and there in heaven. The Holy Ghost in us here and Christ Himself there. In Leviticus xxiii. we have this truth beautifully illustrated by the wave sheaf. When the children of Israel began to reap their harvest the first sheaf that was cut down was offered to Jehovah as a wave offering, and then laid up in the holy place before Him. And as sure as that sheaf was laid up in the presence of God so sure was the gathering in of the whole harvest.

Now the Lord Himself is the wave sheaf ; He has been cut down and has been waved before God in resurrection, and He is hidden up there in the holiest of all, in the presence of God, thus declaring to the whole of God's created intelligence that the whole harvest, of which He is the earnest, shall be gathered in. Then there is the Holy Ghost, an earnest within us. Part of the inheritance we have here already. Now this is a blessed, sublime, and magnificent calling, worthy of God Himself. If God acts in grace, you may look for something grand, and you get something grand, for He acts in a way worthy of Himself.

Now, when we are called with such a calling, which call is absolute, we should walk worthy of the calling. There is a practical side. We should walk as a heavenly people. The first chapter of Colossians exhorts us to walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing. This is, if anything, more striking still, especially if you look at it in its moral bearing, considering that that chapter presents Christ in all the dignities of His person—as the creator and sustainer of all things, as the One who has the pre-eminence, the One in whom all fulness is pleased to dwell. And we are exhorted to walk worthy of Him unto all pleasing.

If an ambassador goes out to a foreign country, he behaves himself in that country in a way worthy of Queen Victoria—worthy of the sovereign of the

country which he represents. And so it was said of General Gordon, that when brought in before a foreign king, a seat was put down before and below the king for him, and the king sat upon his raised pedestal. The general took his chair and seated himself beside the king; saying that he wished him to understand that whether he were a captive or not, he was there as a representative of Queen Victoria and the British nation. The king angrily replied, Do you know I have power to kill you? General Gordon—who knew something of the gospel of God—replied, That would be the best thing your majesty could do. It is only the scruples of my religion that keeps me from doing it for myself. It would be gain for me. The king said, Has my power no terror for you? Not the slightest, your majesty. Then he commanded his officers to keep him alive as a punishment. I only refer to the incident to illustrate what is meant by walking worthy of the Lord.

The general would maintain the dignity of his country at the risk of his own life. We are here to represent the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall soon come forth in majesty and glory, as Lord of lords and King of kings. His life is the pattern for us. Then let me point out one or two things in connection with this wonderful scripture in the first of Colossians. We are exhorted to walk worthy of the Lord—not pleasing in some things—but

unto all pleasing. Being fruitful—not in *some* good works, but in every good work. Here I must say a word about good works before I go further. I think sometimes—because people have misplaced good works and tried to attach a merit to them which will procure salvation — many Christian people seem to set them aside altogether, or at least not to set much value on them either in themselves or others. Now this is a mistake ; though good works will never merit salvation ; yet they are the outcome of that salvation in those who possess it. Let us be fruitful in every good work before God.

Let me read, in connection with this, one verse in Ephesians ii. 10, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works ; which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” You know what the word walk means here ? It implies the whole deportment, conduct, and behaviour of the Christian’s life. Therefore it says, walk in good works. The Christian’s walk should be adorned with good works.

A woman came up to me once in a place called Dudley, near Birmingham, when I was preaching near there, and said, I would come to your meetings, Mr. B., if you would preach good works (I was conducting gospel meetings at the time). Oh, I said, but do I not do so ? No ! I understand you do not preach good works at all. I replied, that is a

mistake. I do preach good works. Well, she said, my friend came the other day, and she said you condemned good works. I said, your friend came to a gospel meeting, and when I am preaching the gospel to sinners, I do not preach good works. I tell them that what they call good works are tainted with sin before God. And that the work required for their salvation was too great a work for them, and therefore has been accomplished by another, even Christ. But when I am preaching to those who are saved, I do preach good works. There are two scriptures in one chapter (Titus iii.), that just put these things in their place. One passage says (speaking of salvation), "It is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He hath saved us." Just two or three verses further down there is a verse that reads thus, "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which believe in God might be careful to maintain good works."

May we know more what it is to walk in good works, being fruitful in *every* good work, and then it goes on to say, "increasing by the knowledge of God, strengthened with all might according to His glorious power." We are not only to be strengthened with all might, but it is to be according to His glorious power; and to all patience, not a little patience, but to all patience. How little patience we have with one another. How soon we become

irritated when things do not turn out as we wish. We need to be strengthened by His glorious power for this. It does not say strengthened by His glorious power to wonderful works, or great lectures, and preaching, no, it is unto all patience.

Now mark, all this is walking worthy of the Lord, for it is what characterized Him when He was down here. Now I am going to connect another verse with this from Ephesians v.: "Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour!" So we should walk in love. Now wherever you get love mentioned in connection with the walk of the saints down here it connects us with those around us who should be objects of that love. I believe in the case of the Thessalonians, where they were going on with the work of faith and labour of love, the work of faith linked what they did with God, the labour of love linked it with men. Hence when it was a question of faith in God, it was work, but it becomes labour when it is among men. But it is the labour of love. Only divine love can sustain the heart of the child of God in labouring amongst the people of God.

One well-known servant of God said not long since, "If you want your heart broken serve the saints of God." Only the love of Christ can sustain the heart in it. But we are called to walk in love, it

should be one great characteristic of the Christian's deportment and life, through this world, yea, the motive spring of all we do. Now I will connect a verse in the 3rd Epistle of John, verse 4. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth." Light and love, truth and grace, always go together. Never separate them. You cannot separate them without dishonouring the Lord Jesus, without impeaching the word of God. Light and love, truth, grace, and righteousness always go together in the Christian life.

Nevertheless the one great actuating principle is love, for nothing is acceptable to God where this is wanting. You may give your body to be burned, yet if the motive power is not divine love it is of no profit. So we should walk in the truth; and you know what that brings in, "Be ye holy for I am holy." We are members of the body of Christ, we are not of the world even as He is not of the world.

Now one more thing I must refer to; and that is, we are exhorted to walk as children of light. Now we are brought into the light, where everything is seen according to God. And being brought into that light we should walk as children of light. In all transparency before God, without a dark corner in our hearts. We are not left to grope our way in the dark. The light of God's word is unfolded to us by His Spirit. The state of things may be poor and low, but the light of God is shed upon it, and

the intelligent scriptural student who reads the word in the fear of God, owning its authority and power over his own conscience, has the light of God shining upon it all. So John viii. tells us, "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness." A passage in Isaiah says, "O come, let us walk in the light of the Lord."

People around us are doing what the prophets accused the children of Israel of doing in their day, walking in the light of their own fires, walking in the light of the sparks of their own kindling. We are called to walk in the light of God. We do not want any human light. We don't want the light of science brought to shine upon the word of God, to shine upon the Christian, to tell us what the Christian is, what the world is, and even dare—as it does—to tell us what God is. No, we have got the light of God and we don't want any human light ; we don't want the candles of man. Let Rome have them within her dark precincts if she likes ; she needs them and they are significant of her darkness. But the one who follows the Lord Jesus Christ has no need of man's candles ; he walks in the light of the Lord.

There is another verse in Ephesians v. that tells us to walk circumspectly, that is, in a few words, to keep a sharp look out all round, see that there is nothing for the world to complain of, or use as a dishonour to the Lord Jesus Christ, or to the Christian calling.

Finally, I want to refer to that passage in Hebrews xi. which shows that we may not only walk *before* God but that we may walk *with* God as did Enoch. And when walking with God we shall please Him. For in this blessed communion we get to know what is suited to Him. Enoch walked with God and he had this testimony (that is he had it within Himself), that he pleased God. When the prodigal was brought back he received not only the ring and the robe, but he received the sandals to fit him to walk before his father. And so may we now walk with God. The Lord says, "I call you not servants but friends." God grant then that we may be real, practical Christians, that our walk may be glorifying to Him and such as will spread a blessing all around us. For the Christian's life should be a blessing to others. Alas! Alas! we are too often a pest to those around us. The Christian should be a channel of blessing here in this world, and it can only be by occupation with our Lord Jesus Christ.





IV.

Christian Steadfastness.

OUR subject to-night is Christian Steadfastness ; and to make the whole subject easy of apprehension I may divide it into seven parts, or give it to you under seven heads, which are these :—

1. The steadfastness of God.
2. The steadfastness of God's word.
3. Steadfastness in the faith.
4. Steadfastness before God.
5. Steadfastness of confidence.
6. Steadfastness before men.
7. Steadfastness in service.

The word steadfastness is rather a large word. It is quite the opposite of changeableness. It is quite the opposite of doubt or uncertainty. It implies a real definiteness and stamina of character, such as alone can be derived from the exercise of simple faith in God.

Without any more preamble I will launch into the subject. The steadfastness of God is the first point, and for this I will read Daniel vi. 26: "I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble before the God of Daniel, for He is the living God and *steadfast for ever*, and His kingdom that which cannot be destroyed, and His dominion shall be even unto the end."

Perhaps there is nothing that we suffer more from than the changeableness of our own hearts and of our friends, and of circumstances, nothing but change meets our gaze in this scene. The man of fortune, perhaps without a day's notice, becomes a pauper. The strong robust man to-day, is writhing with pain or may be a corpse to-morrow. That friend who appeared to be so true to you a week or a month ago, has now turned round and become your enemy. That purpose you had in your heart only a few days ago has been abandoned. How blessed it is in the midst of all this to turn to One who says, "I the Lord change not," and of whom the Scripture says, He is steadfast for ever. It is blessed to know, that whatever else may change—or whoever else may change—that my God changeth not. He is steadfast for ever. And now He says to us, "I call you not servants, but friends." He is a Friend to us, that sticketh closer than a brother." He wavereth not.

There is not a greater stay to my own soul in

this changing scene, than to know that the God of my salvation is a God, "with Whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Such is thy God, Christian. Are you not delighted to know it? You have changed many a time. You change even in your feelings toward Him. Sometimes those feelings are so acted upon by His grace and goodness, that your whole soul is heated up till your heart becomes all aglow with affection to Christ; such as only finds expression in songs of praise to His blessed name.

At other times, perhaps only an hour hence, you find your heart sink within you. Some evil report has reached your ears, or some petty circumstance has changed, and taken effect upon you, until now you are reduced to a state of feeling before Him that just borders on murmuring.

But though we change, God never changes toward us. Daniel's God is our God—steadfast for ever. Lay hold of it, dear Christian hearers. You will not be able to get through the world without it. Those you love most will perhaps show the greatest changes toward you. Lay hold of this fact that you have a God (and you have recourse to Him at any and every time), who changeth not, who is steadfast for ever; and whose kingdom is that which shall never be destroyed; and His dominion unto the end of the earth.

We are brought into that kingdom that shall

never be destroyed. Hebrews xii. speaks of a kingdom which we have received ; which cannot be shaken, that shall never be destroyed. It is steadfast for ever, like God Himself. What is this kingdom ? It is the kingdom of His dear Son, into which all are brought who are delivered from the dominion and power of Satan, and they are made perfectly at home before Him. This is true to simple faith now. Are you not at home in the presence of God ? Have you a fear in the holy presence of God ? Surely not, if you give the honour to the work of Christ that is due to it. As we have seen on past evenings, we are accepted before God in all the sweet savour of that whole burnt-offering—the sacrifice of Christ.

Now I pass on to the steadfastness of God's word. Turn to Heb. vi. 13. Here we have the steadfastness of God's word. That word that brings salvation to us. Is there anything more precious ? Anything more blessed than to know that God would make sure to you the salvation preached in the Gospel ? He would not leave you in doubt about it for a moment. It is His object, as this chapter shows, to make sure the blessing to His people ; and I delight to know it comes in where it does, in this chapter which presents a great difficulty to so many people ; because they too often mix up the outward appearance and the outward things of the Christian religion with the inward realities.

This chapter is a cause of much stumbling to hundreds, if not thousands of children of God, because it mentions a whole list of things that a man may experience with the profession of Christianity, and yet at the same time shows that he may go back into sin and be lost. Then we ask, Was the man ever saved—ever a child of God? It does not say so in the chapter.

All the things mentioned here are outward things of the Christian life, outward profession; things that may be known outwardly without the inward reality; hence there is no mention of the vitals such as the blood, faith, and life, mark that, in the whole list given here. But the three things that perplex souls the most are that they have tasted the good word of God, and the power of the world to come, and made partakers of the Holy Ghost. These are the things that perplex. How can these things be without conversion? they think. In the first place, they have tasted the good word of God. It never says they have eaten it, or that it has gone home in life-giving power to their souls.

There are many people around us who know in some measure the sweetness of the gospel, are impressed by it, and think it a wonderful gospel, and actually tell us it is too good to be true. They get a taste as it were, but they do not take it in. The power of the world to come has been set before

them, they feel the power of it. The reality of eternal things has been known in some measure to them. I have seen men tremble under the power of the world to come, and this without really accepting the gospel. And such people come in among the people of God, to the meetings, and hear the gospel preached regularly. They feel the power of the world to come. They take their place with Christians by profession for a while and then give up that profession, thereby showing that they never had the reality.

Then, partakers of the Holy Ghost simply means they have been in the assembly of God's people, and by profession, part of it, where the Holy Ghost in all His power is acting, and they have only been partakers in this outward sense. Made partakers of the Holy Ghost in this passage is not equivalent to being sealed by the Spirit, but one word makes this clear, which the apostle goes on to say, "But, brethren, we are persuaded better things of you, and *things that accompany salvation*," showing there may have been all the things mentioned in this chapter, and yet not the real and vital accompaniments of salvation.

O ! may we lay hold of the blessed fact that God desires to make the blessing sure to His people. Just as He did to Abraham so He would to us. And because He could swear by no greater He swore by Himself. His word has gone forth from His lips, it

shall not return to Him void. God has said the soul that believes in Jesus has got eternal life, and shall never come into condemnation. That is enough for simple faith when it comes as the word of God—faith needs no more for assurance. Can we put together in the English language any words that would show more clearly to our souls that what God preaches in the gospel is immutably true, and is steadfast for ever? It is the work of Christ secures the blessing for us. It is not even our faith. Faith lays hold of it. It is the word of the living God that makes sure to us the blessing. May we take it in in all its steadfastness. And what does it become? It becomes the anchor of the soul. It anchors the soul down amidst the boisterous winds and waves of this changing scene. Where does the anchor hold on to? It is in the holiest.

A friend tells the story of his being near a harbour when there was a very rough sea, and watching with interest the way a vessel was drawn in. A little boat brought the anchor from the vessel and made it fast on shore. Then they got a long rope fastened to the vessel and began to wind it up, and to pull the vessel in. The anchor was all right and they were winding towards the shore by means of the anchor already there. So we have, as God's word shows us, Christ there in the holy place a forerunner. And as surely as Christ is

there so surely will we be there. Thank God for the steadfastness of His own word.

The next point is steadfastness in the faith. It would be impossible in a short address to give all the passages of scripture that treat of this subject. The Bible is full of them. Turn to 1 Peter v. 8 : "Be sober, be vigilant ; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour ; whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished by your brethren that are in the world."

Here we are exhorted to be sober, to be vigilant, because we are in an enemy's land. But why are we to be vigilant in, and steadfast in the faith? What is "the faith"? It is something more than just simple faith. "*The* faith" in the New Testament is a term that embraces Christianity and contrasts it with Judaism. It (Judaism) was a religion of outward ordinances, every part of it appealed to the senses—the feelings of man. But Christianity, in contrast to that, is called the faith, because faith is required to lay hold of all the wonderful and grand blessings thereof. The one was a system of "carnal ordinances ;" the other a system of heavenly doctrine, concerning a loving Saviour and an accomplished redemption. "The faith," then, is a term embracing the whole of the sublime doctrines of our glorious Christianity. Hence we are exhorted in another epistle to be sound

in "the faith." Not only sound in faith as a simple principle, but sound in "the faith," *i.e.*, all the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. The Epistle of Jude exhorts us to contend earnestly for "the faith."

It is a definite thing, committed to a definite people at a definite time. Now nothing could be more simple and more clear than this. It embraces the whole of the Christian creed (if I may use the expression), perhaps I had better say the whole code of Christian doctrine. And I need not say how necessary it is at the present time that we should be reminded of the need of being steadfast in "the faith." Do you know, there is not a doctrine set forth in the New Testament—not a doctrine of Christianity—not a fundamental truth of the gospel, but what is denied by the devil, through his emissaries all around us; and the denial of Christian truth is no longer limited to those that we know as infidels.

The place of infidel preaching is no longer limited to the public hall platforms. It rings forth from the pulpits of our day, and we have need to remind each other, and stir up each other to steadfastness in the faith. It is needed now-a-days all around us. If I may use a popular term, "the religious world" has nothing definite before it; and some, even Christian ministers, seem to glory in the fact that they have nothing definite before them; they seem to think it a

mark of learning to be clear on nothing and dubious about everything ; they seem to think they have got far, far beyond the Scripture, they have made such progress that they have left the Scripture far behind.

This is the theology of the day, you may call it modern theology, the higher criticism, or what you like, I know very well that avowed criticism is one great feature of it. It is about all it can do. It criticises everything that is steadfast, everything that is true, and seeks to explain it all away, while it has nothing whatever to offer in the place of it. It sits in judgment not only upon the Word of God but even upon God Himself.

So these people begin to tell us, not only that the Word of God is irreconcilable to moral reason and sound intellect (for these are their standards of judgment), but they even dare to tell us what is worthy of God and what is not worthy of God, and if the scripture reveals anything they consider not worthy of God, then they say it cannot be true ; and they will deny it. It is just another form of idolatry. That is, they make a god of their own, according to their own idea of what God should be, forgetting that man is fallen and alienated from God, and not liking to retain the knowledge of the *true* God.

So this is what we have. It is alarming. Thousands of simple Christians are perplexed over this very thing at the present time ; and those who teach them have such a subtle, insinuating way of bringing

forth these doctrines—of instilling doubt into young souls, till they are so perplexed that they do not know where to turn, or what to do. Shall we not lift up our voice, and seek to sound forth the truth of God in the face of all this? Shall we not seek to stir up the Lord's people to steadfastness in the faith? Has God given us a revelation, or has He not? Am I going to take the mind of man, the moral sense, or sound intellect as my guide—my standard of what is true or what is false? Then I find myself in another difficulty directly; because the question arises, What man, or what class of men, shall I follow? because they cannot agree among themselves as to what we are to receive and what we are to reject. What one class of men deny, another class teach, and deny something else.

Thank God, we have our Bibles, in the midst of such a state of things; and here we have a revelation from God Himself that tells us we are saved through the blood of the Lamb. People all around you are denying it. You need to be steadfast in your maintenance of it. Do not allow the infidelity that is so popular in the present day to lead you astray. I do not refer to profane infidelity, but what we might call Christian infidelity,—infidelity of professing Christians. Do not allow it to shake your confidence for a moment, be steadfast in that which you have learned from the word of the living God. But I must leave this part

of the subject—important as it is—we might, indeed, profitably occupy the whole evening on just one point, “soundness, or steadfastness, in the faith.” It is a rare thing now-a-days to find a few people sound in the faith. Nearly everybody seems weak on some fundamental point, looking at Christians generally around. May we be awakened to the alarming fact.

The next point is, “steadfastness before God.” Turn to Psalm lxxviii. 8. I am sorry I have not time to dwell upon this part of the subject as I would like to do, because of its importance. We have seen the steadfastness of God, the steadfastness of His word, the nature of steadfastness in the faith, steadfastness in all fundamental Christian doctrine. So that we may not be shaken by any sophistical reasoning of men around us, but be ready to say, Let God be true and every man a liar. Now we come to steadfastness of spirit before God. What an important thing this is!

He that cometh to God, says another passage, must believe that He is, and a rewarder of them that *diligently* seek Him. Another passage says, “Let not him that wavereth, think that he shall receive anything from God.” Now, do you know what it is to go to God in this steadfastness of spirit? You have been asking something of the Lord these last few days. Have you been steadfast in it before Him? Do not let us be fickle in our prayers and requests—asking

something just in a fickle sort of spirit, and turn away thinking no more about it. We should not trifle in prayer like this. The children of Israel were not steadfast in spirit before God, and this is given as the reason of their sin and failure. I believe if we are not steadfast in spirit before God, if we are not steadfast in our dealings with God, we shall never know what it is to be steadfast before men.

It is a real thing to go in simple faith and make known to God our requests—sometimes it may even be well to be like Jacob, and say, “I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me,”—He will not turn you away. In the Gospel of Luke five times the Lord exhorts His people to prayer, and three times out of these are exhortations to importunity of prayer. You have been asking God to help you to live a life more real, to give you more separatedness of heart to Christ, have you not? Friend, be steadfast. If there is one thing I have prayed for more than another for the last five years, it is that I might be steadfast before God and before men. In all your dealings with God do not allow that fickleness and changeableness, so natural to the human heart to come in. God wants definiteness. Now, though I would like to say more on this, we must go on to steadfastness in confidence.

Turn to Hebrews, and you will see how beautifully it links itself with what we have just been

saying about steadfastness of spirit before God (Hebrews iii. 14). Now there is nothing that God delights in more than the steadfastness of His people's confidence. Even among men we honour and delight in the confidence of our neighbours—especially amongst our brethren. A well-known servant of God, who has just left this world and gone to be with the Lord, who showed some of this steadfastness, both before God and before men, said once, when speaking of this simple trust in God, that he knew a gentleman who one day got cross with his dog, and in his temper he threw his stick at the dog, and the dog had such confidence in his master, that, though the stick was thrown in temper at him, he picked it up and brought it to his master; his master was so softened down that he took the stick and patted the dog on the neck. Yes—you respect even the confidence of a dog. It is wonderful, but it is true, God seeks the confidence of His people.

Now this scripture speaks of holding the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end; that does not mean that our holding unto the end, makes us partakers of Christ; but the holding our confidence steadfast unto the end shews we are partakers in Christ. There are many professing Christians, who have not the reality in their souls; so we have to add, "By their fruits ye shall know them;" and the holding of our confidence

unto the end evidences the fact of our belonging to Christ, and a convert always begins with simple confidence in God. Now we should hold that fast. We often hear people say they had more simple confidence, less doubt about divine things, when they were converted than they have now. It is because they took the Word of God *as* the Word of God. Whereas, since then, they have allowed the sophistical arguments of men against some precious truths to have a power (and it is astonishing how soon they get power over the soul), and their confidence gets a little shaken.

Hold firm the beginning of your confidence; your confidence hath great recompence of reward. Oh for more simple, sublime, confidence in the blessed God, it sets the heart at rest in the most violent storm of circumstances around! You will never be able to go through circumstances here for God if you are not above them in the superiority of faith. You will meet opposition from the most unexpected quarters, perhaps meet discouragement where you thought you could make sure of encouragement. It is blessed to know—to be above all in the superiority of simple confidence in God—to know He is for me; that is enough. It lifts the soul above circumstances, and enables one to act in the circumstance for God. The secret of it is holding fast your confidence firm unto the end.

Now we come to steadfastness before men ; and I will read a verse in the next chapter (Hebrews iv.) for this, verse 14. Seeing then that we have a great high priest that is passed unto the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us *hold fast* our profession, etc. Connect this with another verse in chapter x. of this epistle verse 23. *Let us hold fast* the profession of our faith *without wavering*. Now "profession" is that which we have assumed here in this world, profession of Christ, of the gospel—let us hold it fast, let us be steadfast in it. This is steadfastness before men. I have said, If we do not know what it is to be steadfast before God, we shall never know what it is to be steadfast before men. There is so much to turn us aside, so much party influence, so much individual influence, so much influence of circumstances that, if we don't know what it is to be steadfast in spirit before God, we shall never be steadfast through such a conflicting state of things here.

I have said of late something that I could not have said truly five or six years ago, I have said, "Well, thank God, I have ceased to fear man," and I honestly say, I don't know now what it is to fear man. I am fearless, *by the grace of God*, of man, though I desire more love than ever to men; but I cannot say that I am fearless of circumstances, but I want to be steadfast in my prayers to God, that I may be kept steadfast even here. Do be fearless

of man. You will find it is necessary to the testimony, as also to have a fixed purpose in this life of changing circumstances and friends.

There is a passage in Proverbs that says, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. . . . Turn not to the right hand nor to the left." Now we need more of this real fixedness of heart and purpose that is so much lacking among the people of God in the present day. We are just tossed about by the turn of the current, instead of going on with real fixedness of heart doing the Lord's will. There is an American motto that says, "Make sure that you are right and then go ahead;" and I would apply this to ourselves too. First, make sure you are right, don't make a mistake there, be steadfast in spirit before God. See that you have your mind in the exercise and under the control of His word.

I do not care who the man is, if he has not got some definite aim in life he will be an unhappy man. I am sure no one has such a noble aim as the Christian, let Christ and His glory be the aim of your life, look straight before you, turn not to the right hand nor to the left, keep thy foot from evil; then there will be a testimony that will tell upon men all around. I am not saying you will not meet with opposition, but I believe that even the opposers of a servant of God, who has got a definite

purpose before him, and that purpose to serve Christ unswervingly, I say, I believe even those that oppose will be convinced in their own souls that they are opposing that which is right. The servant of Christ I have before referred to (I speak of dear Mr. Spurgeon), was characterized by the steadfastness of which we are speaking and even his enemies, who have been fighting against him for years past, are melted to tears by his departure.

They opposed him for years yet they felt the power of his words, and felt ashamed before the steadfastness and stamina of his character. This is what we need amongst ourselves.

And now I close with a few remarks about steadfastness in service, for which I quote the text in 1st Cor. xv. 58. "Therefore be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Christian, have you taken up some little service for Christ? Don't give it up lightly. Don't be weary in well-doing. Your labour will not be in vain, you will reap if you faint not. There is a verse in the Psalms that connects itself with what I have been saying, it says, "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed trusting in the Lord, he shall not be greatly moved." O, if we had our hearts fixed trusting in the Lord, we should not be so easily moved by the ill-disposed attitude of our brethren, or the slighting reports of men ; it would lead to

steadfastness in service. We are here for a little while, presently we shall be gone.

May God in the riches of His grace help us to occupy the few fleeting days or years we have here in view of eternity, to live time for eternal gain. This is possible, dear Christian friends. May God bless His word to our souls, is the desire of the one standing before you. I am thoroughly sure of the lack of this steadfastness in us all, in its different phases. But I am quite as sure that, where it exists in the fear of God, where faith is the groundwork of it, that it is most honouring to God Himself. But we can rejoice at least in the two points we began with, that "God is steadfast," and His word is steadfast, that is the groundwork, the immovable basis on which we stand.





V.

Christian Joy.

Philippians iv. 1-17; John xv. 9-16.



LOVE, joy, and peace, are the three great actuating principles of the Christian life. Love is the very origin of Christianity—of the gospel—there would have been no gospel, had it not been true that “God is love.” And this could not have been known to us apart from the gift of His only begotten Son; and in the same way we learn that, “God is light.” These two truths should never, never be separated, “God is light” and “God is love.” These are not spoken of as the attributes of God. Righteousness, holiness, and so on, are the attributes of God, but these are what God is in Himself—they are most abstract—and love it is that has called us into fellowship with Himself and His Son.

It is impossible to live the Christian life without the exercise of love. No matter what a man does;

the very best thing—the most heroic deed—in the eyes of men is nothing before God if divine love is not the motive spring of it, because then it is certain that some selfish motive is. 1 Cor. xiii. makes this perfectly clear; and I am sure it is impossible to live out practical Christianity as taught in the Scriptures, apart from this love that seeketh not her own. Alas! alas! how much we lose by our selfishness! I hesitate not to say (paradoxical as the phrase may seem), that we are losers in proportion as we seek our own, and we are gainers as we seek the good of others.

There cannot be a richer blessing known to man than the blessing that flows into the soul when he does others good, especially when this is from the motive that guided Christ in all that He did; for this imparts a Christ-like savour, which arises to God in a sweet fragrance. It is a reproduction of the life of Christ in the Christian, and this really is practical Christianity. Christians should be channels of blessing here in this world; and if this is to be, the channel, if I may so speak, must be clear each way. There must be the supply channel before there can be the outflow to others. In simple words—there must be communion with Christ Himself. For really you cannot give to others except there be this overflowing of the heart—whether in worship or service—if it is to be acceptable to God, it is the

outflow. And then, when filled to the full with the joy and blessing of God as it flows forth, the supply still increases—that proverb becomes true in the Christian's life (I mean morally), "There are that scattereth and yet increaseth."

Have we begun to know yet what real practical Christianity is? For the most part we seem to think it is made up of just deliverance from a dreadful hell; or a happy place to go to instead of an unhappy one when we die, and that we are to make our way through the world doing the best we can for ourselves. May God open our eyes to see what losers we are when this is the case. Now, in John xiv. 27, the Lord says, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you." Two characters of peace—peace I leave with you. That is the peace procured by the blood of the cross. When the Lord left the world He left peace as a legacy to all who believe. Then He adds, "My peace give I unto you." Here is another character of peace. This has to do with time and circumstances here; the other, with eternity, with conscience, and our acceptance before God.

Many of us have peace with God as to the salvation of our souls; and yet when it becomes a question of circumstances here in this world, there is nothing but turmoil, and a continual boiling up in the breast. We do not know what peace is in the midst of circumstances here. "My

peace give I unto you." What is that? It is the peace that characterized Christ in this world. Did anything ever ruffle Him? Did anything ever overbalance Him? At one moment they were seeking to cast Him down headlong from the brow of the hill, and He went through the midst of them and so passed on His way in perfect peace. At another moment they come to Him saying, "Herod will kill Thee;" and He answers, in holy calmness, "Go tell that fox, Behold I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected." I think we should be a little upset if we were told the king was going to kill us. But the secret with our blessed Lord was, as the psalmist says, "He shall not be greatly moved, his heart is fixed trusting in the Lord, he shall not be afraid of evil tidings."

The Lord would have us to know His peace. Peace and joy are twin sisters. They are begotten together and they live together. Now I want to dwell a little upon the latter. One would gladly dwell upon "peace;" it is an immense—a wonderful subject—but having shown its relation to joy I now go on to the latter, and I am going to make five parts of the subject. 1st, The true source of Christian joy. 2nd, The true nature of Christian joy. 3rd, The expression of Christian joy. 4th, The sustenance of joy; and lastly, The hindrances to the joy.

Now, what is the true source of the Christian's joy? There are many people who think Christianity is a melancholy thing, and that they will have to give up everything in this world that is happy if they become Christians. This is the sort of wrong impression the unconverted around us have of Christianity. Do you know, dear brethren, I think we have done a good deal toward giving that impression, for when we should go about a happy, rejoicing people, we go in and out amongst our neighbours with a heavy heart. We meet people with our heads hanging down, with a morose, mournful countenance; and if we speak at all, instead of being in a voice of gracious tone and kind words with balmy accents, we make some rude, repulsive sort of expressions that often make people turn away and say, "I thought that man was a Christian; I do not call that religion," and so on.

Christianity, beloved friends, is a joyful thing in its real sense. Joy is one of the greatest characteristics of it, as we shall see by looking into a few Scriptures before us.

Now, the Lord Himself is the source of this joy. The Christian is not dependent upon anything here in this world for the satisfaction and joy of his heart. Are you not glad of that? You can turn away from all around as you say, "Change and decay in all around I see." And you can turn to

the blessed Lord Himself and say there is no change in Him, He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, and His joy is my joy. This is what every child of God in communion with Christ can say.

There is nothing beneath the sun can fill the cup of the human heart—nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit all around us. I do not care what it is—wealth, fame, pleasure, or any other thing that the hearts of men are seeking, it is all vanity and vexation of spirit. Solomon says so. What does he know about it? He knows a little more than people do who have lived since his day. He tried it all. He had the capacity to enjoy things beneath the sun beyond any man before or since. He had the means to obtain it too. He was in the position to enjoy them, and his verdict is “all is vanity and vexation of spirit.” Then he adds, “What shall the man do that cometh after the king?” Is there any other man will suck more honey out of the flowers of this world than Solomon did? Now, the book of Ecclesiastes shows us the definite nature and character of everything beneath the sun.

There, in that book, we find the heart is too large for the object. There is no object beneath the sun that can fill the heart of man. When we get to the Song of Solomon we get the reverse, we find the object is too large for the heart, for Christ is the

object, and the heart needs enlargement for the enjoyment of such an object. And there it is we find such an expression as this, "I sat beneath his shadow with great delight." You do not find anything like that throughout Ecclesiastes. There the man is seeking delight and mirth, but never gets it. Here in the Song of Solomon he says, I sat under His shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. Christ Himself is the never-failing source of true Christian joy, and you have a right to rejoice in Him ; He belongs to you with all that He has—all His glory, His power, His grace. You can say, Jesus is mine and I am His. You have something worth rejoicing in now —

" Thou treasure inexhaustible,
Thou source of true delight,
What care I for the world's applause
Or for its diamonds bright ?
More prized by far one smile from Thee
Than all earth holds most dear,
I want for nothing man can give,
For I have Jesus here ;
Yes, yes, this loved one is my own ;
Can any richer be ;
For all He is and all He has,
All, all belongs to me."

What a source of joy is yours, dear Christian. He loves you with an unchanging love. You are the object of His solicitude ; and He desires that you should be filled with joy. I do not know a more

blessed expression, showing the rich grace of Christ, than this one that I have read in John xv. We find the Lord is felicitating joy to His people. "These things have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full." Think of that, Christian. Jesus desires your joy to be full, and He tells you the way it may be brought about. Love, as we have seen, is the secret of it all, and He commands us to love one another, to abide in Him, etc., and by obedience to these our joy becomes full—by making His joy ours.

"That My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." When the Lord was here on earth He found no joy in this world. We find Him at one time, *looking around* upon the hard-hearted Pharisees, sighing deeply in His spirit. At another moment we find him *looking up*, rejoicing in His spirit, and saying, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes."

Heaven was the source of His joy. On earth He was the Man of sorrows—His acquaintance was grief. The world has been full of sorrow since the day that God drove out the man, and said, In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Therefore, when Christ came into it, He came as the Man of sorrows. But heavenly

regions are now opened up as the true source of the Christian's joy. There is He who was once the Man of sorrows, but now the Man of joy at God's right hand.

I pass on to the second point, which is the character of joy; but these two aspects really go together. The character of the joy, being derived from heaven, is heavenly joy. It is deep in its tone. It is not that mere effervescent thing we see in men around us, who talk about being jolly. It is not that effervescent thing found in the ball-room, the theatre, the exhibition, or the sporting field. All these things are only witnesses to the craving in the heart of man, and witnesses to the fact that he that drinketh of this water shall thirst again. But the true nature of Christian joy is deep in its tone. The world does not give it, nor can the world take it away.

There is a verse in 1 Peter i. 8, which reads thus: "In whom, though now ye see Him not, yet, believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." That is—I do not see Christ with my natural eyes, but I lay hold of Him by simple faith. It does not say "having" believed, but *believing*—it is continuous. I behold Him by faith. I become filled with joy. The character of that joy is deep—it is full of glory. Mark the expression—joy unspeakable and full of glory. What is the secret of it? It is occupation of heart

with Christ where He is. Do you know what it is, Christian, to be filled with the joy that is of such a nature that you cannot tell it out to others? All you can say is, Well, thank God I am happy. I have a portion—yea, I have a Person in whom I may and do rejoice. As to the real character and tone of the joy, you cannot tell it out—it is ineffable. And as if it were not enough to say that the joy is ineffable, the Scripture goes on to say—“and full of glory.” You get no joy like that among men. No, it is only in Christ. It is a holy, a heavenly, an unutterable joy, and full of glory.

Then, as to the expression of Christian joy, there are—I was going to say ten thousand ways in which it will come out. We will note a few of them in the Epistle to the Philippians. It is pre-eminently the epistle of joy. You find the word joy or rejoice no less than 16 or 17 times in those four short chapters. This shows indeed that the Christian's experience should be filled—crowded—with joy, and joy of the character of which we have been speaking. The first expression of it is praise to our God. It is this that fills the heart with holy melody. You cannot sing unless you are joyful—especially to sing in the heart. I am not much of a singer myself. I wish I could sing better. However, although you may not be able to sing much with your lips, yet there is not a Christian but what can make melody

in his heart to the Lord. You cannot do that without divine joy.

Then we find, in the apostle it found expression in praying for others. So he says—I have made request for you with joy. Do you know what it is to pray for God's people with joy. I think we know very little of it. O, how much better it would be if, instead of running about with reports about our brethren—about the Lord's people—any of His people, no matter where they are—I do not mean the few brethren within the circle that we call, “our fellowship”—but brethren generally; all who are saved by the blood of Christ—united to Christ—the living head in heaven. For when the Lord says, “A new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another,” it does not say it in a sectarian spirit, I am sure. Without going into the state of things as they exist now, I am sure the Lord means we should love all who belong to Him, and that this love should be shewn in whatever Godly way we can express it. So when I speak of our conduct among brethren I mean the whole family. Would to God there were more of the family character amongst us!

The apostle here rejoices in the preaching of Christ by others; even though by contention or in a spirit of opposition to him, he says, Christ is preached, and I will rejoice in it. Then in the beginning of the 2nd chapter he says as it

were, If you want my joy to be full, then be ye of one mind. To see you of one mind fills me with joy. "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded." Now we often talk of one-mindedness, and I think sometimes in a most selfish way. We often say, well we ought to be of one mind, let us try to be of one mind, and I think the only thought we have is to get others to be of the same mind as ourselves ; and if they are not, we sometimes carry it so far as to say we will have no fellowship with them.

Now, here in this chapter the apostle desires that we should be like-minded to Christ. Christ's mind is the standard, not mine or yours, or that of a brother of the very highest attainment. I am sure if we are occupied with Him who is filled with bowels of mercies and kindness (mark the expression, it is like-mindedness to One whose inward spring of action is mercy and kindness, that the apostle here desires), there will be grace and forbearance with those who cannot think just as we do in every detail ; as there is in the heart of Christ towards us, though we are often so cold in heart towards Him, and stray so far from Him ; and nothing will bring about like-mindedness to each other so effectually as like-mindedness to Christ—to have the bowels of mercy and compassion of Jesus Christ. It gives the apostle joy to see the saints like-minded to Christ.

Further down in the chapter we are told,

even if he (the apostle) is offered up on the sacrifice and service of their faith—if he falls a martyr in his service to them—he says, *i.e.*, I will rejoice in that. O, but would not they be sorry if the apostle should fall a martyr through serving them? They need not be, so he says directly—for which cause also ye joy and rejoice with me. A divine joy in the heart was the secret of all this. And in this same chapter we read of a man whose name was Epaphroditus—he was in the assembly at Philippi, a bright rejoicing assembly who had fellowship in the gospel from the moment of their conversion, till the time the apostle wrote to them. And there in that assembly was a desire to send some help to the apostle Paul, but how could they get it there? There were no mails and steamers such as we have in the present day, not even coaches such as there were two or three hundred years ago. They wanted to get help to the apostle at Rome—how could they get it there?

They were willing to give, but the question was how to get it there, and Epaphroditus, one who loved the Lord Jesus Christ, loved His servant too, and loved the work of the gospel, came up and said, I will go, I will take it. What, Epaphroditus! will you undertake a journey of 700 miles? Are you prepared for that? You can only go part of the way by water, you will have a long part of the way to tramp. Will you under-

take such a journey? Yes, I will go. O, but it might kill you. Never mind, I wont regard my life? So he set off to the apostle and reached him, and the journey nearly killed him. He was nigh unto death when he got there. And was he not sorry for it—sorry that he had undertaken the journey? Read the end of the chapter at your leisure, and see if it wont stir your hearts. He was sorry. But what for? Lest the Philippians should hear that he had been sick; and then they would reproach themselves for allowing him to go.

Here the Spirit of Christ comes out so beautifully. And divine joy in the soul is the secret of it all. So chapter iii. goes on exhorting the saints to rejoice in the Lord, and so does chapter iv.

But I must pass on, and dwell a little upon the sustenance of Christian joy. We have said, the Lord Himself is the source of it, and He Himself is the sustainer of it too. Only *in us* it is sustained by the principle of simple faith, faith which lays hold of Christ, and rests in Him at all times. Hence we may say, communion, abiding in Christ, is the real sustenance of divine joy. Joy is seen in the very countenance the moment a man is converted.

When I was preaching in Worcestershire a few years ago, and was having some successful meetings, at which souls were getting converted, after the first few nights I got a gentleman in whom

I was very interested, but who had been careless about his soul, to come into the meeting. He sat down just before me. In the first part of the meeting he was sobbing bitterly; but at the latter part the tears were wiped away, and his countenance began to glow, and after the meeting he went home rejoicing in the Lord. Here is the beginning of divine joy. It is a joy of such a character that cannot be known any other way—by any other means. If he had had the largest fortune left him that could be left to any man, he could not have known the character of joy that he had that night by the reception of Christ.

Well, now, it is often said, I have lost my joy. That joy is gone. I knew it when I was first converted. I often long for more of that verdant freshness of joy—that fresh, powerful joy I knew when I was first converted. Should this joy cease? It should go on, beloved; it should increase; it should grow, and become deeper. It may not be so demonstrative, but it will be deeper in tone. How did you get the joy in the first place? By the reception of Christ; the first acquaintance with Him filled your heart with joy. Then, if such be the case, what must it be to go on growing in grace and in the knowledge of Himself! The more I learn of Him, the more I shall know of the joy. So it is. Communion with Christ is the sustenance of Divine joy.

If you have lost your joy, it is because you have ceased to enjoy His company. You have ceased to go on having "a little talk with Jesus;" going on without interchange of thought with Christ—called in the Scripture, "abiding in Him." Don't have any reserved corners in your heart from Christ. That is communion. Then you will be filled with joy. You will say then, My joy is of a deeper tone. Thank God, I can say honestly my joy to-night, as I stand before you, is deeper than it was 18 years ago, when I was converted. Quite a youth then, I went home fresh, bright, and happy; and as soon as I got into the house I said, I'm converted, thank God for that; I was full of joy. At the same time, I thank God to-night that the joy in my soul is deeper than it was that night. And it is communion with Jesus that sustains this joy in the soul.

Then, if you don't want to lose your joy, go on learning of Christ. You need not get occupied with your joy. Nothing makes people more wretched than self-occupation in any shape or form. If you want to be distracted, look around; if you want to be miserable, look within; to be happy, look above. When you cease to be occupied with Christ, self becomes the object, and you will very soon become impoverished in soul.

Let us pass on for a few moments to the latter

part of our subject, viz., Hindrances to Christian joy.

Now, if you have lost your joy, what has taken it away? "O," you say, "it is trying circumstances, the cares of this life; you do not know what cares I have had, what trials and troubles." You may have had trials and troubles, indeed I know you have, and I should pity you as a Christian if you had not. At the same time, I do not believe that trying circumstances must necessarily take away your joy. Read a verse in 2nd Corinthians, 7th chapter. At the time this scripture was written the Apostle was tried indeed. Even the Corinthians, amongst whom he had laboured for two whole years, were now denying his apostleship. But in the midst of it all he can say in verse 4, "Great is my boldness of speech toward you; great is my glorying of you; I am filled with comfort; I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation." Do not say that tribulation must rob you of your joy. Look at the apostle again, and another Christian man with him—Silas, in the gaol at Philippi, with smarting backs, feet fast in the stocks, and in a dark dungeon—a melancholy position in itself, yet I hesitate not to say they were the two happiest men in the world that night. They prayed and sang praises to God, until the foundations of the prison were shaken, and their prayer and praise resulted in the conversion of the gaoler and his house.

Do not say that circumstances *necessarily* hinder joy.

But I do not want to be one-sided, the cares and trials of this life, as also the pleasures, may be used of Satan to turn the heart away from Christ. It is turning from Christ to *occupation* with circumstances around us, instead of retaining His company and thus securing His comfort, makes the joy go. Divine joy is not dependent upon circumstances. Its source is Christ in heaven, therefore whatever my circumstances here are, I may go on rejoicing in Christ, if only in communion with Himself. Only keep Him with you in the fire and it cannot burn you.

But trials and troubles are real things, stern facts. I fancy I hear you say ; yes, they are. The speaker knows something about it. But, my friends, let me ask, are not the love of God, the power of God, His tender compassion, His mercies and loving-kindness stern facts too ? Of course they are. Let us then, by simple faith, lay hold of Him ; then we shall be able to say, like the prophet Habakkuk, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines ; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat ; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls : yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength."

Thank God, whatever Satan can rob us of, he cannot rob us of Divine joy. You may take away the Christian's property, you may take away his life if you like, you may beat Him, you may thrust him into prison, and make his feet fast in the stocks, yet he will be happier there than the king on the throne, under whose authority the thing is done.

Now then, there *are* real hindrances to Christian joy. But they are such hindrances as have to do with the state of one's own soul. Then see to it beloved, that you are kept near individually to Christ. Guard the condition of your own soul in self-judgment before Him. Feed upon Him, bathe your soul in His own word; then you will be made to triumph in the midst of all the adverse circumstances that would otherwise drag your soul down and make you sink beneath the surging waves. May we know more, what it is in the present state of things, to be above them all in the superiority of faith—that we may joy in the Lord. This joy finds expression in service too.

One complaint against the children of Israel in Deuteronomy says, "Because ye served not the Lord with joyfulness and gladness of heart." It does not say they did not serve the Lord—but they did not do so with joyfulness and gladness of heart. Let us go on our way rejoicing. Let us, by

the rich grace of our God, decide from this night to be more real and true, for (though I do not exactly believe in vows), yet I do believe in holy dependent resolutions before God. I believe in going to God with fixedness of heart and purpose, and saying, "I am determined by Thy grace and help (without which I can do nothing) to live more devoted to Christ and His cause," and thus earnestly seek grace to support the resolution, and I believe God will honour it, that is, if you do it with a sense of weakness in yourself, and dependence upon Him. May we know more of this.





VI.

“River that Flowed from Beneath the Temple.”

Ezekiel xlvii, 1-12.

WE have often observed that you cannot say of any particular scripture that it means just this one thing, and no more—nothing else. The scripture has various bearings. Some passages have an historical, a typical, a prophetical, and even an illustrative bearing. We may legitimately use the scriptures in this way. For instance: No one would say that the incidents of the Lord's life, the miracles which He wrought, are given us in the scripture just for the historical account of them. Each of those miracles serves as an illustration of something greater, and they are *intended* to serve as such.

Take the cleansing of the leper, the giving sight to the blind, especially to the two blind men

by the way side, the casting out of devils. All these are beautifully illustrative of the way God cleanses sinners from their sins, opens the eyes of blind and guilty men, and delivers man from the power of Satan. So here in this scripture before us we have what we might call a primary application, which is literal, that is, there will be a literal river flowing from under the temple which will be built in Palestine at the beginning of the millennium, and the waters will issue from under that temple, and deepen as they run toward the east; into the desert, and into the Dead Sea. A sea in which nothing can live at the present time. But when these waters from beneath the temple reach that sea the waters will be healed immediately, and fish of every kind will live as well in the Dead Sea as in the Great Sea, or Mediterranean, which is so noted for fish. I am about to use the prophetic account as a type of something more near, and perhaps more dear to ourselves.

We begin with waters issuing from beneath the sanctuary—beneath the throne of God—from His very presence. What a beautiful type we have here of the water of life which issues now from the presence of God, and flows forth into a desert world, life-giving and fructifying (as we shall see) wherever it goes! But I want especially to mark the stages of progress here, after first speaking a little of the obtaining of the life.

The waters of life flow now from the presence of God. The throne of God is turned into a throne of grace by the sacrifice of Christ ; and now that throne, which must have been for us a throne of judgment, is turned into a throne of real blessing. And from the presence of God—from the right side of the altar (for the altar is the ground of it all)—flows forth this river of life.

Now the first thing for us is the possession of this life. How is it to be possessed? We get it just in the way the Lord Jesus Christ makes known in John iv. He speaks of it as a gift. Water is often used as a figure of the word of God in its cleansing and life-giving power, and in John iv. the Lord speaks of eternal life as the gift of God under the figure of living water. So He said to this poor, thirsty woman : " If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water." Then He goes on to describe the character of this water. It is a water that satisfies. It is a water that becomes a well within the soul. It is eternal life planted within the soul of man as a free gift from God Himself. This is the first thing in connection with this water. We must have it—we must be made the recipients of it—before we can live it out, and we receive it as a free gift consequent upon the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we have got life in the true sense of the word from the presence of God, and we should go on now to live that life. We are in it, and though at first it may only reach our ankles, yet we are in it. The prophet measures a thousand cubits ; and the water is up to the ankles. The first thing affected by this life is *the walk*. It is no use for any one to say they have eternal life, if it does not affect their walk, because this is the way the life comes out. If you have got the life, you should live it. So the apostle says, "If ye live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit," for what we have here is life in the power of the Spirit of God. Walk in the living power of the life which you have. This is what God looks for, and this is what men look for, intuitively. If you profess to be a Christian ; men look for a change in the walk, a change in the life, and different conduct altogether. It is the most convincing thing in this day of infidelity. These are days when words are worth but little. There is a confusion of tongues, a host of conflicting theories all around, and if we want to bear a testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ, if we want to exalt our blessed and glorious Christianity, it must be by our conduct. We must commend the truth by our lives.

And the greatest philosopher or the most advanced theologian cannot question that. He may speculate and descant upon your theory, upon your doctrine, he may seek to gainsay it ; he may bring all his

learning, all his research, all the power of his intellect to bear upon it, until you may become so perplexed that you do not know what to do, and may not be able to maintain it before him—but when the Christ-like life is lived out in the walk down here, the greatest philosopher and theologian can say nothing against it. What can they say to the graces of Christ; however much they may be against the truth of Christ. Only let a man go forth and live the graces of Christ, such as are implied in the words, "resist not evil;" "if a man smite you on one cheek, turn to him the other;" "in all meekness, gentleness, and longsuffering, forbearing and forgiving one another."

What can the infidel or the erroneous theologian say to all this? They can only admire it. It was said 50 or 60 years ago by a man who did not believe in Christianity, whose words are still in print, and who is considered one of the greatest philosophers of the day, concerning a young man who became well known in the Christian cause and conflict after. "I never saw Christianity in practice till I set eyes on that man. I had reasoned effectually against the theory of Christianity for some years, but when I set eyes on that man, who would lay aside his respectability and dress himself up in a shabby suit of clothes in order to get to the Irish peasantry with the Gospel because they were prejudiced against the ministers, I seemed to have no more to

say." Such is the substance of what this gentleman said concerning a young minister who lived Christ as well as preached Him. He would go on with his Bible and bundle of tracts to those poor and needy souls who would not be likely to hear the Gospel by any other means. He was really living Christ and not only professing Him. This is what we need in the present day.

We are so prone to be given over to certain theories, or to be brought under the influence of certain parties, and so in this way, unwillingly it may be, find ourselves bound to maintain certain party dogmas, rules, and regulations. Nothing is more impoverishing to the souls of God's people. O that we could persuade one another of the mischief of such party influence and sectarianism, as our hearts are often enslaved, unwittingly and unwillingly, to. We need to face things, and exercise our own judgment upon what God Himself has said ; with the sense of dependence upon Him, which He will honour. And if you would be fearless and independent of man, you must know what it is, in a true and real sense, to fear God and to be truly dependent upon Him.

I am not speaking against sound doctrine. I would spend the few days that the Lord gives me down here in the maintenance of sound doctrine. I have already spent part of my time in the defence and propagation of it, according to the ability the

Lord has given. I have said before the doctrines of Christianity have to do with the person of Christ Himself. Guarding His dignity, setting forth the value and efficacy of His finished work, and the awful results of rejecting the Gospel on the part of those who die in their sins. But these are real, eternal, and living truths; when known in power in the soul, they affect the whole life and conduct.

If we want to be more practical, more devoted, more earnest, more zealous, it can only be by living in the power of this life, living in the spirit, and walking in the spirit; and then it is that all the blessed fruits of the spirit, as enumerated in Galatians v., will adorn our lives. If you want those blessed fruits, if you would have your life adorned with them you must live and walk in the spirit. You cannot bring forth such fruits by trying to do so. How can they be brought forth? By abiding in Christ. Then these blessed virtues become spontaneous.

The Christian life is not made up of legality. It is not that I abstain from this and that by rigid rule, and do this and that by legal effort; no, that is not proper Christianity. But if I live in the enjoyment of the presence of Christ, and the life I possess from Him is nourished by Himself, and so lived out in this world, all that I do is fruit. I serve Him because I cannot help it. It is not because it is my duty, that is a low idea of the

Christian life. What should we say of a wife who only cooked her husband's dinner out of a sense of duty? A servant would do that. No; it is the power of love in the soul. The power of love to the person that makes me his willing slave. It is the only thing the life delights in, and this, beloved hearers, is practical Christianity. Then the ankles, that is the walk, is the first thing affected by this life.

And he measured another thousand cubits, and the water was up to the knees. We get another stage of progress here. This brings us to prayer and worship; and so the young convert when he gets the life the first thing is to walk in that life, and the very next thing you find is that he is a worshipper. The Father seeketh such to worship Him. And so the convert who walks in the power of the life that he has, becomes a worshipper. There is progress. As we go on living in the power of this life we get deeper and deeper into it, if I may so speak, in the power of the spirit. And it should be so—we ought not to stand still—indeed we cannot, if we are not going forward we shall be going backward.

I have been in a rowing boat sometimes pulling against the current, and I have not found that when I left off pulling the boat stood still, but began to go back again directly. So it is with the Christian life, if you are not pressing forward

you will be going back. And the way to press forward is to get deeper and deeper into this blessed life that flows from the presence of the Lord, not to live a poor grovelling life here on the earth—grovelling after the white and yellow earth of this poor terrestrial scene.

Brethren, let it be known around that we have a higher and nobler object in life than any thing that can be presented beneath the sun. Let it be seen that we have truer and more lasting riches than the gold, silver, and treasures of this passing world. That we have an unfading crown of glory that makes all the fame of this scene sink into utter insignificance before it. O how blessed when the great concern of our lives is an eternal concern, when the object for which we are living is of infinite value! And I pity the man who has not got some object in life. The most wretched man you can find is the one without some sort of an object in life. It may be gold, it may be fame, it may be pleasure; but man must have some object. The Christian's object should be the glory of Christ. There is nothing so noble as this. Angels value it; I was going to say they envy us of having such an object in such a scene.

But we have got into the life, I trust, thus far up to our knees; we are worshippers before God. So John iv. again shows that the one who has the life has in him a well which springs up into everlasting

life. Here we get worship. Thus the life I receive from Christ springs up again to Him. Water will always find its level; so I get the life from the presence of God. It flows forth from Himself, the One who is at His right hand; it becomes a well in me; then it overflows and springs up to everlasting life, to the source from whence it came. How does it go back again? It goes back again in praise, adoration, and true worship. That is how this life springs up to its heavenly level again.

But there is something more than just a channel, if I may so speak, through one. There is a well within. Christian, are you going about in this world to wring out a draught for your thirsty soul? Surely you do not know what it is to have a well within. The Christian who has got this life, and every true Christian has, is independent of the world, with all its joys and pleasures. The Lord said to the woman, He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again. The Lord took the well there as a figure of the pleasures of this scene, as He takes water as the figure of life from the presence of God. That is the water that He would give.

People talk now-a-days about seeing life, and so on, and their only idea of it is to draw from this well the pleasures of *this* world: they do not know of any other. The Lord says, "You will thirst again." So it is; the more people drink, the more the thirst becomes augmented. The well is deep.

There are people who work hard for six days to get a draught—if I may so say—out of this deep well. It takes six days to get two or three hours of what they call pleasure on Saturday, and they are as thirsty, or rather a little more thirsty, after it. Money which it has taken months to earn may be spent for vain pleasure in a few hours. This well is deep, and the water is unsatisfying. That is the nature of this water. But the Lord contrasts the water that flows from the presence of God with "this water."

And with a well within you, Christian, are you going to the world for your enjoyment? Are you going to the world to satisfy your heart? Surely it is because the channel has become blocked. There is not a free flow from the holy presence of God into your own soul, or you would not wish to go to the world's table. The world has its table spread with all its dainties, everything that may be called pleasure or amusement, with all the witty inventions of men, and now-a-days some men spend greater part of their time in inventing pleasures to amuse others.

But the Christian has got a table spread too, spread in the presence of our enemies, spread with all the dainties of heaven, with all the good things of the land.

In Jeremiah we find that the children of Israel turned away from the fountain of living waters, and

hewed out for themselves cisterns that held no water. And that is what Christians do now when they turn away from Christ. And in the same scripture we are told they turned away from all the good of the land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Now, Christian, we have our table spread with all the good of the land. I am not now speaking of the Lord's table, the "sacrament" as people call it, or the Lord's supper. I am speaking of the table mentioned in Psalm xxiii. He has spread a table for me in the presence of mine enemies. that is, He has given me a rich provision in the presence of all who despise His name.

We should let the world know we have such a provision, and we are independent of the pleasures of sin, which are as transient as the morning vapours, which leave the soul more barren and thirsty than it was before they were partaken of. Well, I trust you know what it is to have got into this river, into this life, so far that you are worshippers here to-night. All Christians should be worshippers. As we have seen, "The Father seeketh such to worship Him."

I have observed that Christianity has to do with a person; and so has worship. We worship the Father in spirit and in truth. People talk about places of worship, and we are so local in our ideas that it is difficult to avoid this; so limited that we get occupied with a certain place of worship and

cannot think of worship outside it, and like the woman of Samaria say—"You say that is the place of worship. We say, this is the right place," and so on. The Lord would settle that question for us if we would allow Him as He did for the woman.

He said—"Woman, *believe Me.*" If you are going to listen to what people around say as to places of worship, you will be in a complete muddle. But *believe Me.* Then He makes a clean sweep of all the places. She did not expect it, but so it is. He says—"The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." The only recognised places of worship God ever had on the earth were a tabernacle in the wilderness, afterwards at Shiloh, and the temple at Jerusalem. But now the Lord shows that these places are owned no longer, and they that worship the Father shall worship in spirit and in truth. Here God the Father is brought before us as the object of worship. You must know Him as your Father in order for true and spiritual worship.

If it be a question of a place, it is heaven. Our place of worship is where our priest is. We may need places of convenience, and it does not matter whether it is a grand fabric or a barn; or, if the weather permit, we could worship the Father in spirit and in truth as well in the green fields. But let us pass on.

He measured another thousand cubits, and now

the water is up to the loins. Here we have something else. As you go on in the enjoyment of this life ; as you get deeper into the river you begin to buckle up your loins to serve Him. The life flows forth in service as well as springing up in worship. So in John vii. the Lord says : "He that believeth." Mark, it is continuous. It is not he that has believed, but "he that believeth on Me," as the scripture hath said, "Out of His belly shall flow rivers of living water." He shall be a channel of blessing. The life he now possesses shall be active toward others, and he will go forth in the power of this life and stand up before the congregation, or go to one soul ; or he will speak to his brother as Andrew did to Peter, and the waters of life will begin to flow forth. God is the source of it. The Spirit of God is the power of it ; but the life-giving words may flow from your lips, and be carried home to the heart and conscience of the poor sinner, and the sinner be brought into this life that you already possess.

Have you got so far into the river ? Have your loins been affected ? Are you here in this world girded for service to the Lord Jesus Himself—and service, mark you, in the power of this life ? It is not merely service out of a sense of duty. It is not merely service in obedience to a law. It is service in the power of the life that I possess in Himself. O to get more deeply into the

enjoyment of this life! And I am sure, beloved, then it will come out in worship, and it will flow forth in service. If we are poor worshippers and poor servants, it is because we are not in the power of the life we possess. If we are cold, dead, and formal, it is because this life is not cultivated within us—not fed and nourished on the true bread of life. But I want to say a few words about the next stage, as it is the best.

He measured another thousand cubits, and the waters were too deep to cross over—waters to swim in. Now as you get on in this life, as you begin to explore the character, the nature,—the sphere of the life, as well as the source of it, you become lost in wonder, lost in love and in praise. You cannot bottom it. It is unfathomable to you. There are depths you cannot know. If I may so speak, we are now brought to Ephesians iii., where the apostle prays that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, and we, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints everywhere, the heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths, and to know the love which passeth knowledge. Here is where we are now, thoroughly bathing ourselves in a fathomless ocean of life and love. Note the expressions in that 3rd of Ephesians. There are heights, depths, lengths and breadths. I am brought into an infinitude of blessing. There are heights unattainable, depths unfathomable, lengths and

breadths unexplorable. We are brought into the counsels of God, deep and wise as unfolded in the first three chapters of the epistle to the Ephesians. Heights, depths, lengths, and breadths of all the rich grace and blessing the gospel has brought us into, and to know the love which passeth knowledge. Here we have infinitude again. It is a peculiar expression, what does it mean? That I am to know something that is unknowable. It means that I know the love, but I do not know its measure. In more simple words, I know that Christ loves me, but I do not know how much He loves me, and that is a blessed thought. The measure of His love passes knowledge. No matter how deep my sense of the love of Christ, His love is greater—stronger than my highest conception of it.

The apostle John had a very great conception of the love of Christ—but there is more love in that heart than John ever knew — for it passeth knowledge. Such is the love of Christ to all His people. Have we got thus far into this blessed life which is given to us, out of the presence of God, from the right side of the altar? Let us ask ourselves. Have we plunged as it were into the life, until we find it a fathomless ocean, a river that cannot be passed over—a river to swim in? And this should be the state of the Christian now—bathing himself, as it were revelling in the wondrous unfoldings of the counsels of God con-

cerning a redeemed people. And you will very soon find if you come to the blessed truth of God, where all the good things of the land are spread before you. You will, I say, soon find yourself in a beatitude beyond expression, and a state of ecstasy such as expresses itself in holy veneration ; which leads you to say, " Well, how wonderful ! whether I look this way, that way, or the other way I see nothing but rich, rich blessing, and all mine in Christ Jesus."

Have you got to this stage ? There are many Christians who have not, even those who may have got into the river up to their loins, and they are perhaps serving the Lord in the power of this life with a sense of His love ; but they have not found that the river of life in which they find themselves by the grace of God is fathomless, that is, they have not reached its fathomless depths, that they may swim and bathe their souls in the rich unfoldings of His counsels ; and that all that this life involves is theirs, and theirs for present enjoyment by faith. Don't think that we have to wait till we get home to heaven before we can enjoy the life we have, and the blessings that are ours. Granted, our joy shall be more full and unalloyed there. But by simple faith it is our privilege to enjoy the life with all its blessing now.

If there is one thing I value more than another for my own soul, it is what I call spiritual enjoyment. Enjoyment of the truth of God ; for it

is something to enjoy as well as to know. If you want your soul to grow fat, beloved, dwell in His presence—swim, if I may so speak, in this river, that is, live in the atmosphere of the blessings that accrue to the life which you possess. There may be conflict and turmoil all around, there may be much that would intrude itself. But in the power of simple faith let your heart lay hold of Christ. Place full confidence in Him, and you will then find you have a heart at leisure from all the distracting influences of present things to serve Him. May we know more what it is to live in this holy atmosphere—the presence of our God.

Just another word or two. You will find the next paragraph gives us this river still flowing forth in all its life-giving and fructifying power. So there are trees on either side of the banks of the river. And as the river goes forth into the Dead Sea the waters are healed. I believe this carries us on in a very special way to the millennium, when this river of life shall spread and go forth to all the nations, and every one from the lowest to the highest shall know the Lord. And the world at enmity against God—the dead world—with no life toward God, shall be made to live before Him in that glorious day.

Meanwhile, the life is flowing over this barren, thirsty, wilderness world, and one here, and another there, are made to drink of its waters; and to go

on in the power of this life, to press on through all the stages of progress that are figuratively illustrated in the picture that has been before us this evening.

God grant that we may know more of the reality and power of what we have been saying, in our inmost souls, in such a manner as would affect our outward life before men. And O! who can describe this, the blessedness of the fact, that you have got a life capable of enjoying God? We joy in God. Such is the fulness of His salvation, the power, the purity of the life which we possess, that we are made so at home in the presence of God, that we can enjoy Him.





VII.

Paul's Journey to Rome:

ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE CHURCH'S HISTORY.

Acts xxvii.



ALL who believe in the inspiration of the scriptures will admit that there is something in this wonderful description of Paul's journey to Rome, with all its romance, beyond the mere account of the events—something for us to gather from the narrative—some special lessons. Just as the incidents and miracles of the Lord's life afford illustrations and real figures of some greater and more permanent blessing than that secured by the miracle itself, which we have before shown. But perhaps, with this passage before us, it is necessary to repeat it, lest anyone should think we are a little fanciful as we go on to view a few points here of practical bearing, not only upon the Church in ages past, but upon the Church at the

present moment, because after all this latter is of most importance to us. Now, I believe, if we have anything in this chapter—if anything is illustrated by this wonderful voyage—it is the outline of the history of the Church.

I will give you my reasons for thinking so. In the first place, the one great subject of the voyage is the apostle Paul—the one unto whom God had committed the special dispensation of the Church—the one who was the administrator of this dispensation. He is now taking a voyage, and this voyage in detail is given to us by God (and as I am going to seek to shew), to illustrate His purpose finally concerning His people.

I want you now for a moment to look at the apostle Paul—the one who has the revelation of the Church of God to communicate to men—the instrument of this revelation—on this voyage as a figure of the whole voyage of the Church through this world until it is landed safely on heaven's eternal shore. And surely nothing is more romantic than the history of the Church of God, especially when viewed from God's point of view. Now then, Paul launches forth. He is the prisoner of the Lord. He is rejected by the world—just what the Church should be, and would be, if she were faithful to Christ. And the first thing we learn is that the winds and currents were contrary.

I am not going to say that you may find

something in the Church's history to answer to every point and every detail here—that is not necessary in an outline history. But you will, I think, if you never have before, be surprised to see how very much does answer. The Church is launched forth. The revelation has been given by God Himself. A people are called by the Gospel and gathered to Christ, and they sally forth as a despised and rejected company in a world which has rejected their Lord—launched into a rough sea. Seas, in scripture, are often used as a figure of the unformed masses of men. The Church is launched forth into the sea of the world, only to find, the moment she takes a stand for Christ, that the winds are contrary. Everything around tends to impede the progress of the Church of God.

The next thing, therefore, that we find is that the progress was slow. And so in verse 7 it says, “And when we had sailed slowly many days.” And in the early days of the Church the progress may not appear to have been very great, but it was real and sure. Christianity was still a small thing in the world; and I believe it ever should have been, and ever would have been, if there had been faithfulness to Christ. You remember one illustration the Lord gives of the Church, or the people who compose it. In Matthew xiii. is the grain of mustard seed, which is least of all seeds, but it grew up into a large tree,

and the fowls of the air came and lodged in the branches thereof. Thus it grew out of its natural proportion, and afforded shelter for the fowls of the air; that is evil spirits. They had been already spoken of as evil spirits in the same chapter. The fowls of the air came and took away the good seed that was sown. So, also, they came and lodged in the branches of the mustard tree when it became great. That is just what befell Christianity when it became a great thing in the world. Then it afforded protection and shelter to all kinds of evil doctrines and spirits.

I am not going to stop to show now that Church and State should not go together: that is not my object. I would only add, in reference to it, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, and He is rejected by this world, which is His by right. He is rejected as King. The kingdoms of this world are the kingdoms of Christ. But the world would not have Him. His own people, the Jews, cast out their Messiah, the true King. He will come back again presently, and He will have to take the kingdom by force. Meanwhile the world has rejected Him. Surely it is not for the Church to ally herself to that world that cast Him out.

But so it has been, for just where the Lord overcame, the Church broke down. The devil came to the Lord and showed Him all the kingdoms

of the world and the glory of them, and he said, "If you will fall down and worship me all shall yours." Of course the Lord withstood him effectually and entirely overcame him. He would not have the kingdoms at the enemy's hand or in any way acknowledge his power. Four hundred years after, or a little more, the same arch enemy came to the Church with the same temptation, and showed her all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. And the political power from that moment became her ambition. If you will only fall down and worship me, acknowledge my power, only give me a place, then all shall be yours. Sad to say, that is what the Church did. And it was very soon seen when she clothed herself with political power, the enemy had very much his own way. But while she sailed slowly through these contrary winds she was at least safe, and I believe when the winds were thus contrary, and she was going against them, they helped to keep her safe.

The contrary winds of persecution preserved the Church in the first two centuries from the very danger I have been speaking of. When the world persecuted the Church she was faithful to her Lord, in measure at least. But when the world opened its arms to the Church, when the Church became amalgamated with the world, and began to go with circumstances, then she was unfaithful to her rejected yet faithful Lord.

The next point is, sailing became dangerous. Notice the steps : first, the winds were contrary. This was true enough in the beginning of Christianity. You know how contrary the winds were at that time. It is true in our own time also. Next, sailing becomes dangerous, and we get the caution of the word of God. His servant advises to wait and thus avoid loss ; but this is a most difficult thing for the flesh. And here comes the test : Will the people obey God's word or follow their own will ? For I am looking at this scene as an illustration of the Church's voyage through the world. The ship may serve to illustrate the ecclesiastical order of things. But the people are in it. Paul is there and the word of God comes forth as a caution. Paul stood forward and said, "Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives."

Here is the word of caution from God, illustrating most forcibly the warning words of the apostle so often raised in reality to the saints themselves, just as he said here in the ship to these people, the voyage will be with much damage. So we find him in the individual epistles, such as the epistle to Timothy. We find him there telling the saints that sailing will become dangerous, difficult times will come, men will be lovers of their own selves, boasters, proud, covetous, and so on. There will

be a form of godliness but no power in it; sound doctrine will not be endured.

The apostle thus cautioned the saints about the evil and difficult times that were before them. But just as the centurion and the captain of the ship here would listen to other words, and be guided by circumstances rather than the word of God, so also the Church turned from the word of God to the traditions of men, and the influence of present things, the point of divergence, the very point that landed the Church into all her difficulties and dark days, is here figured forth. So the captain of the ship refused the word of God through Paul. Hence the next thing we find is that he is committed to circumstances. "And when the south winds blew softly."

The word of God said—The voyage shall be dangerous; it shall be with much damage; be cautious; stay; wait on God; don't be in a hurry; stop here till you get the word of God to move on. No! says the captain. No! says the centurion. The south wind blows softly; everything seems in favour; we will launch forth. So they get under the influence of circumstances which seem in their favour for a moment. And this is just what the Church did. It is often what individuals do too. The Church's history is reflected in the history of individuals often.

When the word of God would tell us to be

cautious and to have no confidence in the flesh or circumstances around, but listen to the voice of scripture, then, instead of doing so, we see circumstances are in our favour, or seem to be, and we just float along with them. That is the one great mistake the Church made in the days of Constantine. That is the one great mistake she made when, after the contrary winds, after the threatenings of danger, after the persecution, the wind blew softly—the genial south wind blew softly, everything seemed favourable to progress, the persecution all subsided, and the political power was now in favour of the Church. So the word of God was set on one side and began to lose its power over the Lord's people from that moment. They launched forth under the influences of circumstances which were in their favour, as they thought. What was the result? We very soon find the ship in the greatest danger, and simply left to drive before the wind. As we learn here, they let her drive, they could not keep her up against the wind.

Now the one great thing that a captain has to give attention to in a gale is to keep the head of the ship to the wind; the moment her head gets out of the wind she drives before it. The thing is to keep her head straight in the wind. I would make an individual application here as well. When you find the wind of circumstances contrary, keep

your face, as it were, full in the wind ; face things like a good soldier of Jesus Christ ; “quit you like men, be strong.” The moment you turn your back to the persecution, the suffering, the trial, you will drive before it and break down under it. You will be thoroughly committed to the influence of it. The word of God is the only thing that will support you in that.

So, once the Church committed herself to circumstances, she was left to the power of the same, and she began to drive before the wind. They had to “let her drive,” and what was the result ? Nothing but darkness and trouble, for the next thing we find is that they had to cast out the precious cargo, or part of it to lighten the ship. And so it was with the Church, after she in this way had committed herself to favourable circumstances, after she had joined affinity with the world that rejected Christ.

Did she not have to cast out the precious cargo ? Did not the precious things of God have to go ? Were they not cast overboard ? And not only was the precious truth that she had possessed given up, but idolatry was substituted for it. It were easy to shew that in the first three or four centuries, the Church retained the truth of the gospel, and proclaimed it, and guarded the dignity of the person of Christ, and the value of His finished work. And it was not without great struggles that the evils of

image worship, and saint worship, were brought in, and the precious things of God cast overboard. This was all the result of committing themselves to circumstances, instead of going on in obedience to the word of the living God.

And now the tackling has to go too. That which is so necessary for progress—necessary for sailing through the boisterous gales and over the heaving waves. So it was with the Church, the heavenly treasure—all spiritual blessings, with which the Church is blessed were lost sight of; and then the spiritual power and holiness that are essential to progress in the things of God were soon wanting.

What a loser the Church became by wandering from the word of God in those early ages!

Now what is the result of all this? The “dark ages,” with all the superstition and ignorance that characterized them. So, as we read here, after this, neither sun, moon, nor stars appeared for many days. So in the history of the Church, after she had turned from the word of God, and committed herself to favourable circumstances in this world, she was driven by those circumstances into utter darkness. Hence we have what are known to us as the “dark ages.” All was gross darkness for several centuries. We have no idea of the ignorance of those ages. We are told that there were priests in this land who could not read their Bible; you can perhaps scarcely credit it. Yet it is true. I cannot

go into that state of affairs now; but I carry you on to a more interesting point. Read verse 21, "But after long abstinence, Paul stood forth in the midst of them and said, sirs, *ye should have harkened unto me*, and not have loosed from Crete, and not have gained this harm and loss."

Now you see the word of God to them was to stop at Crete till further orders—to wait upon the word of God. But no, they would not listen to the word of God. They would rather be guided by favourable circumstances; and now the apostle brings it home to them. It is Paul, mark you, the same one who spake before, he brings it home to them. Sirs, ye should have harkened unto me, and not have gained this harm and loss. And so too, obedience to the word of God, through the apostle Paul, who gives directions for the Church, would have saved all the harm and loss of the dark ages. And so it is in the history of the individual soul too. I thought of this the other day when a young man came and told me he had been a backslider. He was bright and happy at first, but he wandered from the word of God. The word of God was no longer used by him as a directory, and he became thoroughly dark, and had been so for some years. But now, having turned again to the word of God, he saw that all the darkness and perplexity was the result of wandering from that word, and acting under the influence of circumstances around. The verse

applies well to such. "Ye should have harkened unto me, and not have gained all this harm and loss." Then the apostle goes on to say : " Now I exhort you to be of good cheer : for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship."

This seems to me to bring us on in the most clear manner to what we call the "Reformation." The word of God had been lost amid all the rubbish of Rome ; and through the "dark ages" the light of its blessed page was not allowed to shine. But that word, spoken through the apostle Paul, at the Reformation is brought to bear upon His people. For it was especially the apostle Paul's writings, perhaps particularly justification by faith as taught therein.

It was the apostle Paul's writings brought down to the people, teaching such truths as the following, after showing that the harm and loss was gained by turning from the word of God, the completeness of the work of Christ, and justification by faith, among other things, were brought out to the joy of many souls. The eyes being open to the state of things the comforting voice of Scripture now is, "Be of good cheer." The ship may go. The ecclesiastical order of things may all break up, but there shall be no loss of any man's life. This illustrates the gospel of God as brought out at the Reformation in all its fulness, in all its security and certainty, honouring the work of Christ,

honouring the word of God, made sure to the soul by simple faith and confidence in that word. So the apostle says, "Be of good cheer, there shall be no loss of any man's life." Only the ship may break up, but the life of everyone in it shall be sure.

Now here is a comfort. The ecclesiastical order of things may break up, but everyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ shall reach the shore safely ; there shall be no loss of any man's life. While the Church outwardly may go to ruin, yet all who are truly in the Church, by vital union with Christ, shall be safe. So in verse 25, in accordance with this, we read, "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." That is a splendid verse, especially at such a moment. God had told him, though the ship may be lost, yet everyone on board should be saved.

And so with the gospel, God has clearly and definitely shown through the apostle that though the ecclesiastical order of things may break up (and it is clearly shown in his writings that it would be so), yet not a saved one who truly believes—who is truly in the Church as before God, should lose his life—that is hid with Christ in God, it is secure, it is certain. What a comfort in the midst of ecclesiastical confusion ! What a comfort in the midst of all the strife and contention and division in the Church of God to-day, to know—and to know with the certainty of His own words, that every believer

who is in the Church objectively, that is, in its real and absolute character, shall reach the shore safely.

People have got very much to confound these two aspects of the Church—what I might call the objective and the subjective. We have been seeking to show this difference in regard to our individual standing and relationship. The same thing is true of the Church. As to my individual relationship, I have seen that my standing before God is thoroughly absolute, consequent upon what Christ did and not upon what I am or what I do. My living as a child of God does not make me one, but gives evidence to all around that I am one. The same principle applies to the Church of God, as to her standing, in her real and vital unity before God, she is one and all perfect; so that Christ can say, There is not a spot in thee, My love. She is perfect through His comeliness—because of what He has done on Calvary's cross. That is what I call the Church objectively.

Now then, if we are to bear any testimony at all, we are to bear testimony to what God is doing. We are one in Christ, and that is why we should be "one" practically. But our being "one" in Christ, does not depend upon our being one practically, though our being one practically does depend upon an apprehension of this blessed truth, and then bears witness to it. And so we come to the conclusion that if God looks for

a testimony down here to what He is doing—He looks for a testimony to the fact that all Christians are one.

Some people try to make a difference between the Church which is His body, and the Church of God. Now I fully admit there are different aspects of the Church as well as the Kingdom of God. The Church of God, the Temple of God, then the Church locally, the Church generally and so on. But here we have a distinction which we do not find in the scripture, because the scripture says the Church which is His body. What is His body? The Church! What Church is it? God's Church. O, but some people tell us when we have the possessive—the Church of God—it only means the local Church. Nay, it only means those who meet in a particular way, who as we are told are in obedience; these only are the Church of God according to these people: then, we reply, it must be the fact that they gather thus that makes them such. The Church which is His body. Well, is not that God's Church—the same that is called in another scripture God's Church? The Church of God is God's Church. Then we clearly see from the text, "Jew, Gentile, and Church of God," that it is used in a general sense—only I know it will be immensely helpful to you if you get hold of this one distinction I am dwelling upon, that the Church in England, in

Glasgow, in relationship is one. Now God would have us bear testimony to that.

We can but own we have failed to bear testimony to it. Who would say we have borne faithful testimony to the fact that the Church of God in Glasgow is one? We are all conscious of failure in this respect. Where is the failure? Not in the Church objectively (*i.e.*, as God is building it; the gates of hell shall not prevail against it in this character); not in our standing or relationship. It is in the Church subjectively (*i.e.*, in her visible character as a testimony in this world). We have failed to bear out before the world subjectively, what the Church is objectively.

So we can but come to this conclusion, that if we would in the midst of a ruined state of things bear testimony, it must be a testimony to what God is doing, as far as is compatible with the break up state of things. And though it would take all believers to give an adequate expression or testimony to what God is doing, yet a few may act upon the principles laid down for all, in obedience to the word of God. Although the very fact that only a few do it out of the many, is a testimony to the ruin and failure of all. A remnant testimony proves general failure. I pass on now to the next point.

We have arrived in our illustration at the time when God began to work among His people that wonderful deliverance known as the Reformation. He

brings out at this time the truth of the gospel—assuring those believers—surrounded as they were with ecclesiastical difficulties, of final deliverance, final victory. So every child of God must be a final victor—no matter what the surging billows, the trials, sorrows, and perils of the way.

Now the figure shows a turning to the word of God in some measure ; and when they find themselves in a difficulty again, as is the case in verse 29, they waited for light. Read verses 28 and 29. Here then we have that patience and dependence that waits for light from God, beautifully figured forth, fearing lest they should fall upon rocks. There should be a holy fear in us lest we should run unto the rocks—lest we break down—lest we be caught in any snare. So unless our course is thoroughly clear we should wait for light. Do not think you have light enough at the present moment to determine what your course is going to be for the next 10 years. You do not know what rocks, shoals, and difficulties may lie in your way. If God has shewn you one step you can well afford to wait for another, and if you do not know what to do, stand still and wait for further light, and He will give it to you—He will honour your waiting.

But there is one thing you may do while you are waiting. You may feed. So the apostle got up and began to minister food to them while they waited. Then we find they were all of good cheer.

So a verse (33) further on says, "Paul besought them all to take meat," and verse 36 says, they were all of good cheer and took some meat. So while waiting, you may feed upon God's word, and that is how the light itself comes.

But one other point I want to notice now, which comes out in verse 30, and that is, while the ship kept together, all were responsible to remain in it. I take the ship as an illustration of the ecclesiastical order of things. But as we go on a little further, we find the ship herself runs into a place where two seas meet, and is fastened to the ground, and broken up into pieces. Does not this give us, by illustration, most forcibly, what took place in Germany and in England, Bohemia and other countries? Did not two seas meet? Did not they cause a break up of the whole ecclesiastical order of things? Of course they did, and since then, I hesitate not to say, that the scripture indicates a different course for the children of God individually. I believe this is taught in the addresses to the seven churches in the 2nd and 3rd chapters of Revelation—in their prophetic aspect, they give us the history of the whole Church, and the first three in successive stages. But the last four begin successively and run on together unto the end afterwards. So you get mention of the Lord's coming in the last four, while you do not in the first three. So that it takes four states to give us

the different phases of the history of the Church after the "dark ages." Before it only needed Pergamos, amalgamation with the world, succeeded by Thyatira, in which we have the idolatry of the "dark ages" figured, as seen in Romanism.

After the break up, there are different features added. Then it is that saints are cast more upon their own individual responsibility. Then it is that the exhortations of Timothy would come in. The Church, as it were, or Christendom rather, became a great house. There are vessels to honour and dishonour all around. Now, as an individual child of God, I am responsible to purge myself from the vessels of dishonour, without being bound by an ecclesiastical order whatever. Though I should unite with all who call on God out of a pure heart, and this is what has taken place since the Reformation, God appeals to the responsibility of His children to come out of the unclean—to act individually. The state of things has become so bad that each one is responsible to act for himself.

Before this, history does not show any such special working of the Spirit of God. I do not mean that His people were not responsible in those days, but they were in thorough darkness; such was the fact, and if God gives us in prophecy the state of things He gives us the facts as they actually exist. That does not say they are suited to Himself, but He gives us the history of things as they occur.

However, here the whole vessel is broken up. Whether you see the analogy or not it is true of the ecclesiastical order of things also, broken up since the Reformation, just as the ship here was broken up.

Therefore the people of God are all the more responsible on account of this.

They were sure of reaching the land. How did they do it? Some began to cleave to broken pieces of the ship. They can cleave to the ship itself no longer, it is broken up. It was possible before the Reformation to point to the ship in the whole ecclesiastical order of things. Whether it was right or not, is not the question. All that was good and valuable was cast out, but still there was the ship. Since then, it is not possible. Where would you point to it and say, There is the ship, there is the Church intact, or there is one ecclesiastical order of things? You cannot do it. You find all is division—all is broken up. It answers clearly to the illustration here.

The ship is broken into many pieces, and there are a few here, and a few there, cleaving to broken pieces, and even some have to swim. Some hold one part of church government with much, may be, that is human mixed with it, and some another part, and some go on in isolation, wading their way through the waters of trial and difficulty by individual faith and energy. We are not justifying

the state of things, but speaking of them as they are.

Thus it is with the people of God in the present day—not one shall lose his life. All shall reach the shore safely. God has said it. And shall we not each one say, “For I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me?” At the present time we see nothing but a broken and divided state of things, some going on this broken piece, and some on another broken piece of the ship, and some even wading their way alone. Do not let us say, because we are getting along on a broken piece of the ship—it may be the biggest piece, the best piece of the ship—that it is the ship. If I cut out a piece of the tablecloth and hold it up, I cannot say, strictly speaking, it is the tablecloth. It is a remnant of it. So with the Church in the present day. There may be a few of God’s people gathered to Christ as a remnant, but if we begin to say we are the ship—we are the Church—surely our presumption becomes manifest.

If we maintain we are the ship when it is broken up all around into pieces, we only give evidence of ecclesiastical pretension. What God looks for now in the state of things is a *remnant* testimony. You cannot say there is a corporate testimony. A corporate testimony requires a testimony by the whole body. A corporate testimony of what God is really doing would require the outward unity of all the

children of God in any given place, and the exclusion of all others (unbelievers), from their midst ; for what God is doing is gathering out a bride for His Son, and all believers in any place form part of that bride—members of the body of Christ. Now that is what all admit who are instructed in the scriptures.

As I have said, we have failed collectively—as a whole ; but as a remnant we may act in obedience to the word.

Though if we, while a remnant only, begin to pretend to be the whole, and ignore the failure, I believe from the moment that such is the case we shall be wanting in power. God will blow upon such pretension. We have seen many instances of this the last ten or twelve years, and as sure as the same cause will produce the same effects everywhere and at all times—that is, supposing the circumstances are the same—so it will be. The cause that has brought forth many divisions, and much scattering among the children of God in times past, will also bring forth divisions in time to come if the Church is left here, and is doing so at the present time. The same seed will bring forth the same fruit. We have seen the principle at work. We have followed it, watched it, and suffered from it. I am sure it will bring forth the same fruits wherever it is allowed. How shall we designate the principle that works such evil amongst us, that we might detect

and judge it? The only true designation is ecclesiastical pretension.

If we would in the present state of things bear any testimony for God, let us own with humiliation the failure, and with a contrite heart come to the word of God, and gather to the Christ of God, as a few people did early in this century, and God was with them, and wrought wondrously amongst them. "Unto this man will I look, unto him who is of an humble and contrite heart, and trembleth at My word." In Zechariah we read: "Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered, and I will turn My hand upon the little ones."

It refers, in its primary application, to Israel. Smite the Shepherd of Israel, and the sheep shall be scattered all over the face of the earth. But there shall be a feeble remnant of that people presently. And the Lord will turn His hand upon them. But it is true of the people of God now. The sheep are scattered, and the Lord's hand will be with the little ones, those who own their weakness, dependence, and failure, who take this place of littleness before God.

And let me say there will be signs of it if it is so. It is no good to say so much about Christ being in our midst if there are not signs of His presence. Where He is He makes His presence felt. And it should be, so much so that if a stranger comes in he will say, "There is a power here; God is here."

This is what we want, instead of taking a high place before our brethren and fostering this ecclesiastical pretension. Let us take a low place before God and man, and bear a testimony to men around that will tell upon them. This is what God looks for at the present time. May He by the mighty power of His Spirit beget it in the souls of His people, that there may be a real humbling before Him, and I am sure He will bless us and use us collectively and individually in proportion to our humility and dependence upon Himself.

But if you are going to foster the spiritual pride and pretension of which we are speaking, you will find both God and man against you. The Lord grant that these few scattered thoughts may at least exercise our hearts and consciences before Him to more real fidelity to Christ, and adherence to His own blessed word and real moral condition of soul, such as will make us fit to be used of Himself as a blessing to our brethren and to all around us. This is the desire of one's heart at the present time.



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